

TRAVEL // LANGKAWI

NEW LANGKAWI



ERIK FEARN



There's a lot of new to Langkawi the last few years with new resorts, new restaurants and new bars opening all the time. Let us take you on a guided tour of the best of the fresh that the island has to offer

Words Laura Webb



The new of the old: even Langkawi's Geopark is a recent addition having been deemed a UNESCO heritage site in 2007

THE NINETY NINE ISLANDS OF THE Langkawi Archipelago are no strangers to change. Blighted by a curse some two hundred years ago that 'Langkawi shall not prosper for seven generations to come,' the island has now well and truly shaken free. According to legend, Mahsuri was accused of adultery and executed despite her pleas of innocence. Her spilled innocent blood was white and with her dying breath she laid the curse on the island. Generations later after WWII, pirates laid claim to Langkawi, hiding their stash among the hills and jungle. But now, with the curse lifted and pirates set sail, what remains is an idyllic haven of beaches and stunning hotels just a short hop from Kuala Lumpur.

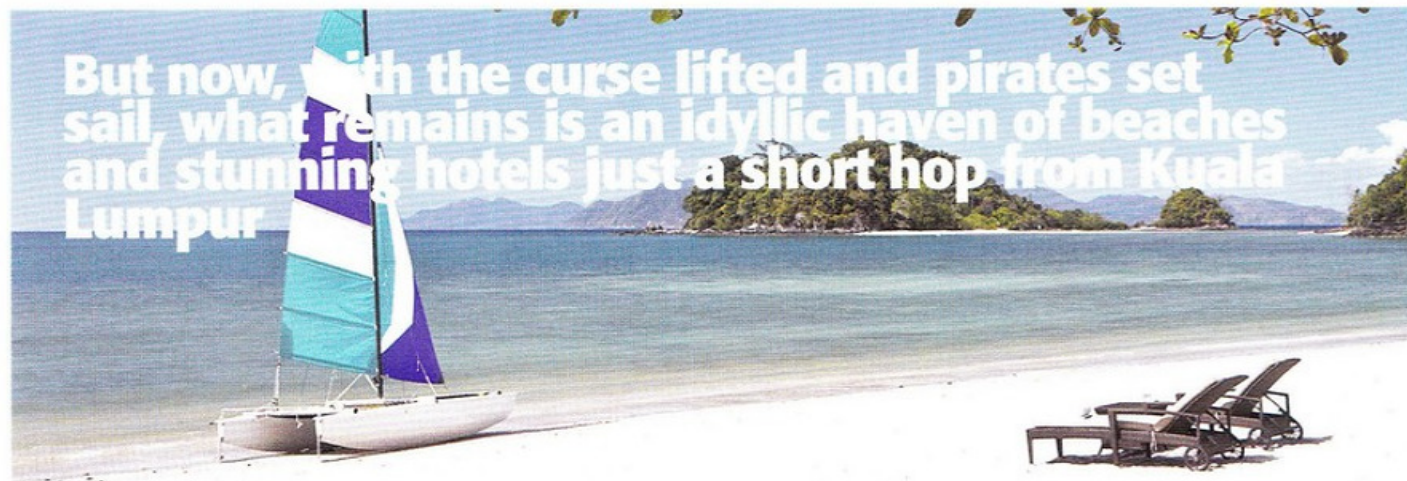
Langkawi is still changing; whether it is the arrival of a new hotel, a new restaurant or bar or just a new buzz in the air, both Langkawi regulars as well as first timers will be treated to new discoveries.

quirky antique furniture. Wooden verandahs, elegant coloured walls, lofty ceilings with wooden beams, shuttered windows and billowing mosquito nets conjure up the past. The houses were crafted piece by piece from the originals. Narelle explains, "We bought a house, we took photos, and then we took the house to pieces, marking each piece and then we put it back together like a jigsaw puzzle. It's like IKEA!" I gaze at my own wobbling IKEA stool, comparing my efforts to that of taking apart a colonial house in Ipoh or Penang and putting it back together in Langkawi ...

The rooms come equipped with an abundance of charm and those little extras that lift the Temple Tree into that 'special' category. Is it the fresh fruit and homemade delicacies delivered to your fridge every evening for breakfast the following morning; or the beautifully wrapped pot of gamat balm; or lading the bath salts into the huge colonial

a beautifully landscaped tropical garden. This has since burgeoned into four other glowing offerings: the Sun Café, Sunutra, Sunkarma and Sunba.

The Sun Café is a great place to take a break from the blistering Langkawi sunshine and to have a quiet and casual bite to eat. It's worth noting that it comes recommended by the exclusive *Mr & Mrs Smith* travel guide too. And venture on to the next Sun offering for dinner. Sunutra's funky art deco contemporary interior and extensive menu make it a great choice for a delicious dinner. And then on for drinks at Sunkarma or the Sunba Retro Bar (the second member of the Sun group that has made it on the heady heights of recommended party venues from the notorious *Mr & Mrs Smith*). The mastermind behind the Sun group is Jeffrey Leung, who arrived in Langkawi over 15 years ago with the intention of adding some glamour and finesse to the dining and drinking scene.



The Temple Tree at Bon Ton resort is a striking example of a new arrival in Langkawi. Many are familiar with the highly acclaimed Bon Ton, which (among other accolades) featured in the 'Best 101 Hotels in the World' in the *Tatler Travel Guide 2009*. It is in every sense of the phrase, a 'boutique' experience, both stylish and intimate. Bon Ton has just accomplished something that few boutique hotels seem capable of; it has created the adjoining Temple Tree resort but has not detracted in any way from the intimate and serene experience at either.

The new project was conceptualised by owner, Narelle McMurtrie, to help her extend and fund her other passion, LASSie (Langkawi Animal Shelter & Sanctuary Foundation). You literally step back in time at Temple Tree. The heritage chic concept has been completed beautifully and eight antique Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian buildings make up this 'villa' hotel. Each house has a very distinct feel, full of character and steeped in history with

style wooden bath or the staff telling us tales of night fishing as we sampled the local brews at the bar?

Temple Tree has two pools; long, narrow and elegant, they fit perfectly into the sleepy 'barefoot chic' atmosphere. The Straits Club provides Temple Tree with a fantastic restaurant of its own, but it is worth remembering that Bon Ton's Nam restaurant is renowned as one of the best in Malaysia (and from personal experience, it is one restaurant that is certainly worthy of all the praise it receives).

A WORTHY CONTRIBUTOR TO THE new buzz in Langkawi, and certainly to that of Pantai Tengah, is Sun group. The story of Sun group epitomises the growth and change that Langkawi has been through. With a lowly beginning as a backpacker haunt, it has blossomed into its own mini empire as the heart and soul of Pantai Tengah. The first element of the group was the Sunset Beach Resort, rustic Malay-style wooden chalets nestled in

He succeeded. Be warned, I asked whether more Sun outlets were in the pipeline: "I'm always looking..." he replied.

Pantai Tengah seems to be attracting the fine dining restaurants, with the Italian L'Osteria, owned by Lorenzo Zecubi, loudly acclaimed as the best Italian on the island. Another character who has bought something new to Langkawi is Dorothy Ang, part of the team behind Langkawi Yoga. When I asked how she had found her way from completing a law degree in the UK to teaching yoga on the beaches of Langkawi, Dorothy's effortless answer was, "Langkawi keeps me sane." Teaching classes in many of Langkawi's hotels, Dorothy also offers weekend yoga retreats with classes taught, "on the beaches, by waterfalls, overlooking padi fields ... all outdoors." A long way from the hectic bustle of KL, sunrise yoga on the beach might be just what your body and mind needs.

An old and trusted favourite, the Andaman, is under new management; what



The Andaman Langkawi

are we to expect? Shifting from one highly esteemed hotel management to another, it will be interesting to see what changes are put in place. Previously managed by GHM, managers of the Datai, the Chedi and the Serai Club in Bali (among others) now the Andaman has shifted to the capable hands of Starwood Hotels whose management includes Le Meridien and Sheraton hotels. Marketing and Communications Manager, Karen Kang told me, "Any change in management will inevitably bring in changes to an organisation. Some of the big picture changes include the tools and resources, systems and best practices a global brand like Starwood brings, having had a strong foothold in the industry for so many years. We've instantly introduced our loyalty programme—Starwood Preferred Guest—which is something new for the many regular guests who make the resort their annual holiday destination."



Rebak Island Resort

The hotels strive for perfection and the bars and eateries have stepped it up a notch

AND IMPORTANTLY, "FROM THE GUEST perspective, we've put together a number of new experiences including opening up new dining options as well as adding more personalised touches to service delivery. In line with the Luxury Collection philosophy that places emphasis on the cultural elements of each destination, we've also launched a daily programme of live dances and musical performances using traditional instruments at various times of the day. Other changes we have in progress include upgrading guest amenities, facilities and services to the standards required by any Luxury Collection hotel."

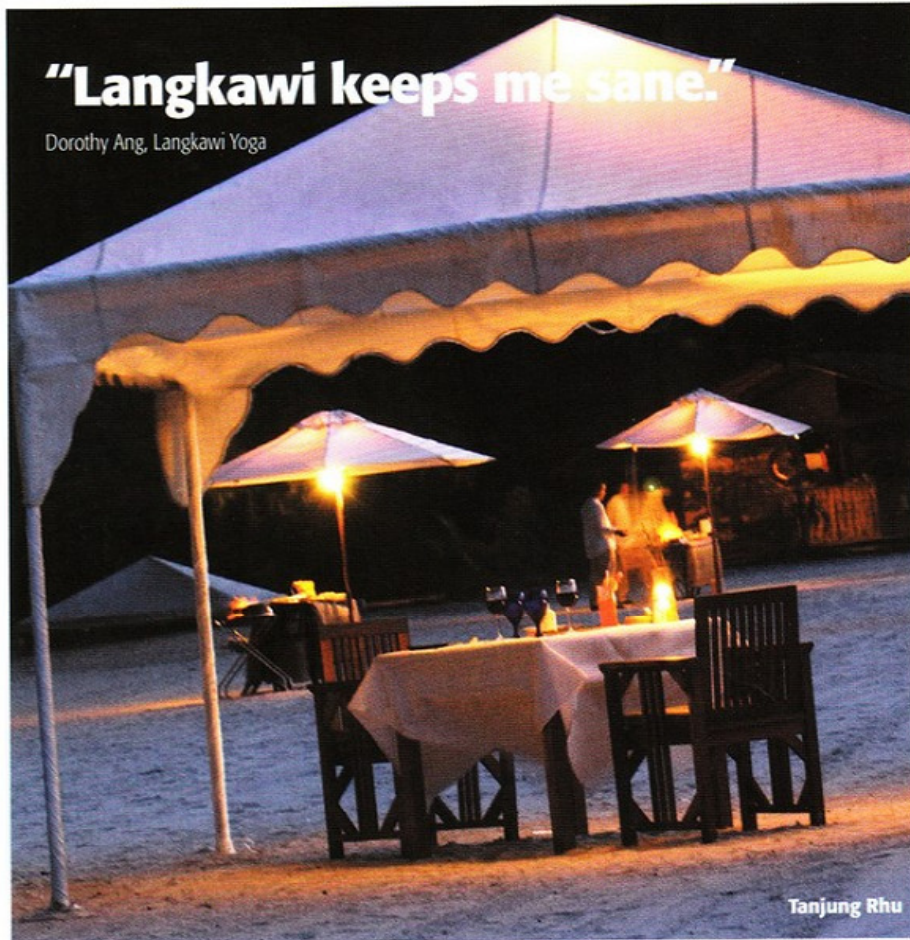
Having mentioned the Starwood group, it was impossible not to dwell for a moment on their Westin Langkawi Resort and Spa which opened on Langkawi's east coast in December 2006. With a fantastic stretch of private beach, the glittering ocean, the fresh water ocean pool, the endless infinity pool, or even one of twenty ultra luxurious villas that each have their own pool to chose from, the Westin is another fine addition to the Langkawi hotel scene.

With so many top class choices for guests in Langkawi, the hotels have to keep at the top of their game. Competition is rife, and (to our benefit) this means continual upgrading. The Rebak Island Resort shut for six months in 2006 to make way for a RM20 million makeover and the celebrated Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces group took over management in July, 2007. The resort is the only hotel on the privately owned Rebak Island, which is just one of the ninety nine islands that make up the Langkawi archipelago. This is the eminent Taj Hotel's first venture in Malaysia, but the signature Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel in Mumbai is proof that they deliver hotels at the highest possible standard. The dramatic makeover has resulted in eighty two rooms set in timbered clusters amid the resort's



Sunsutra

LANGKAWI



"Langkawi keeps me sane."

Dorothy Ang, Langkawi Yoga

Tanjung Rhu

immaculately landscaped gardens with views over the Senari Straits. Andy Yow, Director of Sales and Marketing, explained that, "The resort has migrated from rustic charm to a contemporary look after the rebranding. It is now a five star resort." Tanjung Sanctuary has also recently had a dramatic makeover to wonderful effect and one is brewing at Tanjung Rhu, where the owners are reported to be planning a simply enormous investment to re-establish itself as one of Malaysia's finest resorts.

Langkawi seems to be ever-evolving; from massive hotel renovations to simple changes like the moped rental stores that have popped up in Pantai Cenang providing a great option for island exploring. The hotels strive for perfection and the bars and eateries have stepped it up a notch. It just gets better. 🍷

RENT A SCOOTER IN PANTAI CENANG, AND SET OFF FOR AN AFTERNOON CIRCUIT OF THE ISLAND TAKING IN (IN THIS ORDER):

- **Go-karting** next to the airport
- **Cable car** for stunning views
- **Four Season's Rhu bar** for a sun downer (and then scoot fast...)
- **Tanjung Rhu** for an epic sunset
- **Wan Thai** in Kuah Town for dinner (roads and traffic become more of an adventure at this point...)
- Back to **Sunba** at Pantai Tengah

STAY

Four Seasons Resort

Jalan Tanjung Rhu
Mk Ayer Hangat
Tel: 04-950 8888
www.fourseasons.com

Temple Tree at the Bon Ton

Pantai Cenang
Langkawi, Kedah
Tel: 04-955 1688/3643
www.templetree.com.my

The Andaman Langkawi

Jalan Teluk Datai
Langkawi, Kedah
Tel: 04-959 1088
www.theandaman.com

The Westin Langkawi Resort and Spa (below)

Jalan Pantai Dato Syed Omar
Langkawi, Kedah
Tel: 04-960 8888
www.starwoodhotels.com



Rebak Island Resort

Langkawi, Kedah
Tel: 04-966 5566
www.tajhotels.com

Tanjung Sanctuary

Jalan Pantai Kok
Teluk Nibong
Langkawi, Kedah
Tel: 04-952 0222
www.tanjungsanctuary.com.my

Tanjung Rhu

Mukim Ayer Hangat
Langkawi, Kedah
Tel: 04-959 1033
www.tanjungrhu.com.my

EAT

Sungroup

Jalan Teluk Baru
Pantai Tengah
Langkawi, Kedah
Tel: 04-955 6200
www.sungroup-langkawi.com

L'Osteria

Lot 2863
Jalan Pantai Tengah Mukim Kedawang
Langkawi, Kedah
Tel: 04-955 2133

REJUVENATE

Langkawi Yoga

Tropical Holistic Wellness Centre Sdn Bhd
Plot J-1-8 Taman Kenari
Jalan Batu Asah
Langkawi, Kedah
Tel: 019-652 0683/012-421 5970
www.langkawi-yoga.com



WIN LUXURY HOLIDAY IN LANGKAWI

We have a 3 day/2 night stay at one of Langkawi's most luxurious and beautiful resorts, Tanjung Rhu. All you have to do to stand a chance of winning is to email editor@expatriatelifestyle.com and tell us the name of the spa at Tanjung Rhu Resort. For a clue, visit www.tanjungrhu.com.my