

can expect a fascinating time when they spend the day with Mahya Mohd Yusof and her family

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“WOW! Today I saw the man cut the rubber tree and the white water came out!” read the message written by a 9-year-old visitor to Kampung Batumas in Pengerang, here. The “white water” was just his way of describing the latex that flowed out from the rubber tree. A brief tour of the village plantation and first-hand experience in a Malay village must have been a fascinating eye-opener for city folk and overseas visitors.

In another part of his message penned in the guest book, this youngster said: “It was also the first time I used my bare hands to eat food.” Coming from another culture, he was understandably shocked when he was not given a spoon or fork to eat with and had to use his hands. Another visitor wrote: “I’m glad to have exposed my 4-year-old girl to something she’ll never encounter anywhere else.”

Mahya Mohd Yusof, 53, and her family have been opening their fam-



Mahya Mohd Yusof with some of her family members.

ily home for kampung tours for 10 years. While the men folk guide visitors around the plantation to get them acquainted with the local flora, Mahya cooks and serves a typical kampung meal. After the plantation tour, guests are invited into their living room to sit on the floor and enjoy lunch the traditional Malay way, by

eating with their hands.

There are no ceiling fans or air-conditioning in the wooden house but surrounded by shady trees and built with strategically-positioned windows, it feels naturally cool inside the house. With the cotton curtains pulled back, a light breeze streams through open windows with



Japanese visitors observing how rubber trees are tapped in Kampung Batumas.

good cross ventilation to keep the house cool. A wooden trellis on the upper reaches of the wooden wall also enhances the natural coolness.

Before eating with hands, they should be washed and this is done with a traditional hand-washing pot called *kendi* that comprises a teapot and a receptacle that catches the water used for rinsing. There is an art to using the *kendi*, where fingers should be held within your palm while rinsing to avoid a big splash.

After the meal, it is all right to lick one’s fingers as it is believed that this is how one can benefit from vitamins and enzymes, before using the *kendi* to rinse the hands clean.

The meal at Mahya’s home starts with sipping black tea brewed with fragrant pandan leaves and ends with black kampung coffee, both of which have already been sweetened. These are served at room temperature, but it’s interesting that fresh whole coconut served as part of dessert is chilled in its husk. After drinking its refreshing juice, just ask Mahya to split the coconut apart for the tender flesh inside.

A typical menu in the kampung set lunch is white rice eaten with dishes like ikan masak lemak chilli padi, fish cooked in spicy coconut milk, fried chicken, fried salted fish and mixed vegetables with sambal belacan. Locally-grown bananas are used to make the dessert of fried banana fritters. During the various fruit seasons, guests will be able to sample a variety of local fruits.

“Some Korean visitors liked my sambal belacan so much that they even asked for a refill,” said Mahya, adding that she happily obliged their request. At first, she was surprised they could appreciate the spicy condiment, but soon realised

that the traditional Korean kimchi is also a spicy dish.

Mahya said her family started to open their home to visitors after encouragement from friends in Pulau Desaru Beach Resort and Spa who were seeking nearby attractions for their guests to experience a taste of local culture and heritage. The drive to the kampung, which takes about 45 minutes from the resort, allows guests to enjoy a scenic view of the area before they arrive for the authentic kampung experience.

She recalls that their largest group of guests comprised 40 Russians who had to be separated to accommodate one group for lunch in the house and the other in an outdoor gazebo.

As dessert is served, guests are invited to write comments about their experiences in the guest book. A flip through several guest books reveal pages filled with amusing comments and interesting messages from visitors on their memorable kampung experiences here. While a range of cultural activities are usually organised for large groups, reservations for kampung and sightseeing tours for a minimum of four guests can be made by calling the resort’s sports and recreation desk at 07-822 2222.

