

LIFE & TIMES TRAVEL

Fun but relaxing break

A short retreat to Pulau Desaru restores balance to mind and body, writes **Peggy Loh**

SOME chill-out time and a short retreat from the city is just what I need. The soothing sound of waves breaking on sandy shores helps me recharge and a pampering spa treatment adds to that.

Driving to Desaru from Johor Baru is a breeze since the expressway opened two years ago and soon I am at Pulau Desaru Beach Resort & Spa.

I feel like I'm coming home because I've been here a few times and, from the refreshing colours and new fittings, it's obvious that the resort has been recently refurbished. The decor may have changed but I'm happy that the friendly and attentive service remains.

RESORT BLISS

I pull back the curtains and open the sliding doors to enjoy the sea breeze and view of the South China Sea. In the distance, I hear laughter and loud cheers as a group enjoys beach-front activities,



The lobby's **high ceilings** and **spaciousness** exudes a warm welcome.

probably in a corporate team-building retreat.

After a satisfying lunch at the Palm Brasserie, I curl up in bed with a book to relax till it's time for my appointment at Pulau Spa.

There, I surrender myself and let the therapist pamper me with an eclectic

combination of Asian and European treatments to undo the knots in my shoulders and restore balance to my mind and body. I can feel the tension melting away as aromatic oils and her healing hands work together to rejuvenate and ready me for my stay at the resort.

It's almost dinner time when I leave. There is a little rumble in my stomach, reminding me to go in search of some food. The enticing aroma of sizzling garlic and fried meat from the Teppan Japanese Restaurant convince me to join the diners seated at the counter for a freshly cooked teppanyaki dinner.

Strolling musicians provide live entertainment. After washing down the meal with a final cup of green tea, I'm all set to catch up on some sleep to prepare myself for tomorrow's activities.

DAY FUN

Several women join me on the agro tour and our first stop is Desaru fruit farm where guide Henry Goh shares his knowledge of fruit and trees. It's fun to walk among the trees and then get a ride back to the reception area in a modified truck. After learning so much about the orchard, it's seems right to end the visit with a glass of refreshing chilled passion-fruit juice and fruit buffet.

The tour continues with a drive to



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In addition to a king-sized bed, the **deluxe room** also features a couple's lounging bed and a balcony that opens out to a panoramic sea view.

Pengerang for a taste of home-cooked kampung food in a 70-year-old family house in Kampung Batumas.

The host and cook, Mahya Mohd Yusof, has prepared *ikan selar masak lemak cili padi* (yellowtail scad in spicy coconut milk gravy), deep fried chicken, stir fried vegetables, fried salted fish and a side of spicy sambal belacan. For dessert, it's banana fritters, followed by sweet black kampung coffee.

In true kampung tradition, we sit on the floor and eat with our hands. We have pandan infused sweet tea and refreshing coconut juice!

The drive back to the resort takes us through another scenic route and our driver points out various places of interest en route. I'm particularly fascinated by the World War II relics left behind by the British in the Pengerang Battery.

NIGHT TREATS

I keep an eye on the time because I've signed up for the night adventure to see fireflies, so I have a quick dinner at Palm Brasserie before assembling at the Tour Desk. The adventure starts with a drive to a jetty built on the edge of the river. We hop into a wooden barge for a cruise along the river in pitch darkness.

We sit on stools as Bujang, the barge operator, gently pilots the vessel downstream and upstream. His assistant splashes water on overhanging branches of the trees and we gasp to see shimmering clouds of tiny lights as fireflies rise and move in the darkness!

The rare and exciting experience is unforgettable and, as the night is still young, I take a moonlight walk along the beach.

The sound of live music from the Beach Bar draws my attention and I join the crowd for a drink. As I sip my attractively adorned drink and listen to the constant swish of rolling waves in the background, I'm feeling very much like myself again.

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FAST FACTS

HOTEL
Pulau Desaru Beach Resort & Spa, P.O. Box 29, Bandar Penawar, 81930 Kota Tinggi, Johor. Tel: 07-8222 222. Fax: 07-8222 223. Email: reservationpulaidesaru.com

GETTING THERE
It's a 45-minute drive from Johor Baru via the Senai-Desaru Expressway that links East and West Johor.

ROOM
Recently refurbished spacious

guest rooms in standard, standard superior, deluxe and loft rooms feature contemporary designs and comfortable elegance in a palette of fresh green shades and signature floral motif.

MAIN ATTRACTION
Family beach resort.

FIRST IMPRESSION
Laid-back and leisurely.

OVERALL SERVICE
Friendly and attentive.
F&B OUTLETS

Palm Brasserie, Teppan Japanese Restaurant, Lobby Bar and the Beach Bar.

FACILITIES
Pulau Spa, function rooms, recreational facilities like gymnasium, swimming pools, a range of water sports and Kid's Club indoor children's playroom.

PLACES WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE
Panoramic views of the South China Sea and 22km stretch of sandy beach.