

18 Rest & Relax

Weekend

STORY & PICTURES BY CHRISTINA KOH

RESIDENTS of Pulau Pangkor, Perak, are relieved to have been spared the tsunami of Dec 26, but the tourism industry in the Manjung district, where Pangkor and the coastal town of Lumut are located, has been dealt a heavy blow with dwindling visitor numbers.

Overnight, dozens of families and tour groups cancelled their reservations. In many hotels, foreigners dominate the holiday scene with barely a Malaysian family in sight.

"It has never been this bad, even with the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) scare," says Pulau Pangkor resident Tan Gek Fong. "We can only hope things will pick up soon."

Jimmy Yeo, general manager of the Pangkor Island Beach Resort, says the resort had been quick to inform tour operators that the island was not affected by the tsunami.

Even so, the resort received cancellations from over 10 tour groups. Most of the time, he says, foreigners are unaware of the regional geography and so mistake Pangkor for tsunami-affected places like Phi Phi Island, Khao Lak and Phuket in Thailand.

"Thanks to Sumatra, Pangkor seems to be the only island on the west coast spared by the tsunami," he says.

"On our side, there was not even a tremor. The only thing we noticed on Dec 26 was that the sea was a little choppy."

"I would say Pangkor is one of Malaysia's few unspoilt islands and its natural beauty is a huge selling point," says Yeo, who has 30 years of experience in the hotel industry.

A tourist who agrees with him is Dutch postal truck driver Eric Bras, 38, who visited Malaysia to escape winter in Holland.

His friend Erica Hansma, 35, a medical secretary, says they heard from local television that Malaysia had not been affected much.

"We're not scared. It's lovely here and the people here are so nice," says Erica, who is staying at Pangkor



Still intact

(Clockwise from top) ... but Pasir Bogak remains quite; Guus and Margareth; and Eric and Erica.

Island Beach Resort.

Another vacationing couple on the island, Guus Tieleman ter Metz, 53 and his wife Margareth, 50, also from Holland, admit to being a little nervous following the tragedy.

Says Margareth: "I was afraid to come here when we heard the news. We might have cancelled the trip but my husband and I had already planned this trip half a year ago."

Their fears were allayed after they visited Kuala Lumpur, Cameron Highlands and various other places in Perak.

"The people are friendly and there's a lot to enjoy here, the culture, the climate, the food," she says during a visit to Pangkor's Dutch Fort or Kota Belanda, built over 300 years ago in Kampung Teluk Gedung.

Peter R. Walterbusch, general manager of Swiss-Garden Resort & Spa Damai Laut near Lumut, is optimistic tourist arrivals will pick up once people realise it is safe to visit.

The resort, which is on the mainland near Lumut, had received cancellations for about 100 rooms. A seasoned hotelier with 34 years

of working in Canada, Europe, Hong Kong and South-East Asia, Walterbusch believes tourism could be improved by promoting Perak in international trade and travel fairs, and building more infrastructure such as roads or even expressways.

"Perak has a lot to offer holiday-makers. Besides Pangkor, there are Taiping, the Leaning Tower of Teluk Intan and the Lumut naval base, for starters," he says. "And from here, it's just a short trip to Cameron Highlands where you can taste the strawberries." **W**



"We have found our paradise," says a smiling Kari Agaard, 85, the sea breeze blowing gently through her hair at the Pasir Bogak beach on Pulau Pangkor.

Every year for the past four years, Kari and her husband Leif, also 85, have been coming to the island to escape the winter in their native Oslo, Norway.

They always stay at the Sea View Hotel & Holiday Resort, which they fell in love with the moment they arrived here.

This time the couple, who arrived in early January, intend to stay until April.

Paradise found

"Oh, they spoil us here," says Kari. "The food is excellent, they clean for us and do our laundry. They don't let us do a thing!"

"When we came back, they even gave us our old room with a big fruit basket. They know us so well they call us 'Grandma and Grandpa'."

(Kari and Leif are, in fact, great-grandparents. They have three children, seven grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.)

Leif, a retired shipping employee whose job involved travelling all over the world, first came to know about the island and the hotel through a friend when visiting Kuala Lumpur years ago.

Their room is just a few steps away from Pasir Bogak beach, with the mainland in the distance. When the sun sets, the sky seems to be on fire.

"Our room may not be luxurious, but it is nice and clean. It's perfect," says Kari, a retired secretary.

Rather than just lie around all day, the couple keeps busy swimming, kayaking, canoeing, jungle trekking, taking walks along the beach and even "fighting" with the occasional monkey.

"Once a week, we go to the mainland where we just sit and watch the people," Leif adds.

According to managing director Tan Yee Khan, Sea View Hotel & Holiday Resort was the first hotel on Pangkor.

The two-star hotel boasts 60 rooms and chalets, a swimming pool, a tennis court and a badminton court.



If Tan's name rings a bell, that's because he and his doubles partner Ng Boon Bee won the Thomas Cup in Jakarta in 1967.

Both Ng and Tan represented Malaysia 35 times from 1960 to 1968, winning in Canada, Denmark, England, Germany, Tokyo and Singapore, among others.

Tan, 64, has since retired from badminton. Today, framed photographs of his wins can be seen on the walls of his office at the hotel.

He started managing Sea View in 1984 after taking over the reins from his elder brother.

The hotel used to be a bungalow estate belonging to the British. Tan's family

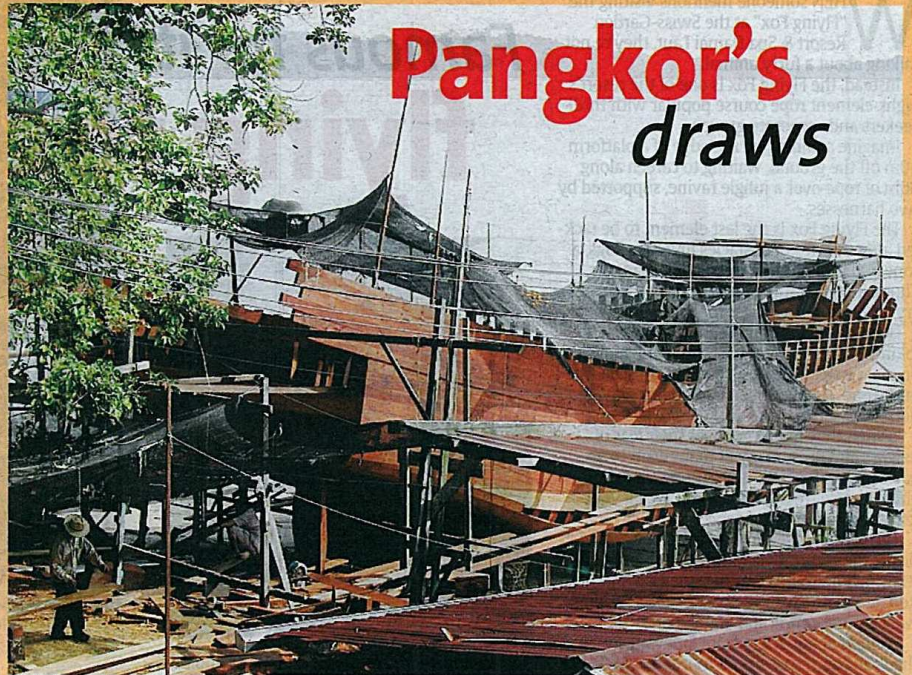
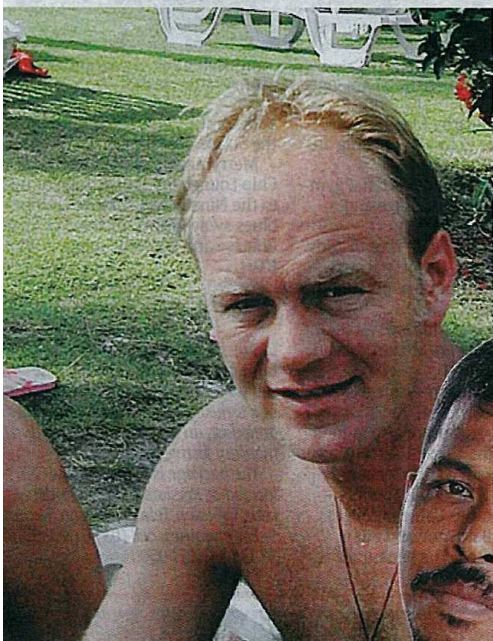
bought it over in 1957, just before Independence.

"We started out with just four chalets and five rooms after my family renovated the estate. Since then, I've added the swimming pool and game courts, and the rest is history," he says.

● TURN TO PAGE 20



(Top) Tan Yee Khan with pictures of his wins. (Right) Leif and Kari.



Pangkor's draws

(Clockwise from top) Fishing boats being built at Sungai Pinang Kecil; Foo Lin King temple; and a Green Turtle from the Pantai Pasir Panjang hatchery.

ONCE said to be frequented by pirates, Pangkor was the site of the famous Pangkor Treaty of 1874, signed by British Governor of the Straits Settlements Sir Andrew Clarke and a group of Malay chiefs.

The treaty marked the beginning of British intervention in local state policies at a time when the booming tin trade was grinding to a halt due to conflicts between secret societies.

Interesting places to visit

● **Pantai Pasir Panjang:** Located just 2km from Segari town, this is the longest beach in Manjung and a popular fishing spot.

There is a turtle hatchery here run by the Perak Fisheries

Department where visitors can see a variety of turtles like Penyu Agar (Green Turtle), Penyu Lipas (Olive Ridley Turtle) and Painted Terrapins.

● Teluk

Batik: Located 6km from Lumut, it has food stalls, chalets and handcraft booths. The Teluk Rubiah Beach and Resort is located nearby.

● **Lumut:** There is a clock tower built in 1960 by the Malayan Flour Mills Company and an eight-metre high windmill set against the backdrop of the Royal Malaysian Naval Base. The town is also famous

for its souvenirs and handcrafts. Visitors can drop in at the handcraft centre in Jalan Titi Panjang. A new waterfront jetty and marina with a children's playground and hawkers stalls has been built.

● **Sungai Pinang Kecil:** You can see fishing boats being built right on the docks here, or visit the Hai Seng Hin Satay Fish Factory.

● **Pangkor Town:** Famous for its satay fish, anchovies, cuttlefish, seafood and jellyfish. The Hai Seng Hin factory here is a good spot to buy these snacks and see how they are processed.

● **Sungai Pinang Besar:** A walk or a short taxi ride will take you to the Foo Lin King temple. This Taoist temple, with its striking red pillars, dragon-motif arches, gardens and peacock and snake enclosures, is a must-see for any tourist.

● **Kampung Teluk Gedung:** The Malay houses here are often strikingly decorated with bright painted walls, potted plants and bushes of lovely bougainvillea. The main road leads to the Dutch Fort or Kota Belanda, a fort built in 1670. It was used not just for storing tin, but as a stronghold against pirates.

● **Pasir Bogak:** This popular seaside is described by locals as the "world's biggest swimming pool" because of its crescent-shaped beach.

Speedboats operators wait along the two-kilometre stretch to take customers snorkelling, sailing, fishing and island hopping. Accommodation is easily found as hotels, chalets, huts and campsites abound.

● **Teluk Nipah:** This narrow street is jam-packed with taxis, backpacker huts, foreign tourists and stalls selling souvenirs, floats and snorkelling equipment.

Popular with students or backpackers because of its budget accommodation.

● **Coral Bay:** A quiet beach popular with foreign tourists.

● **Pulau Sembilan:** A cluster of nine islands described as an angler's paradise, about an hour's boat ride from Pangkor.

Websites

Here are some good websites to check out on Pangkor Island and Lumut.

The website: www.pulau-pangkor.com, has usefu! information on how to get around the island and where to find accommodation.

Other good sites are www.cuti.com.my/Sub/Perak/guide_pangkor.htm, www.asiatravel.com/malaysia/pangkorinfo.html, www.perak.gov.my and www.molon.de/galleries/Malaysia — **BY CHRISTINA KOH**



WHEN someone mentions visiting the "Flying Fox" at the Swiss-Garden Resort & Spa Damai Laut, they're not talking about a furry animal.

Instead, the Flying Fox is one of the resort's eight-element rope course popular with thrill-seekers and corporate groups.

Imagine standing on the edge of a platform 10m off the ground, waiting to career along 30m of rope over a jungle ravine, supported by two harnesses.

The Flying Fox is the last element to be tackled after a series of obstacles involving logs, a rope and rubber tyres. Recreation manager Thong Keng Tong says that he has seen people cry when they finally get to that platform.

He even knows of one company boss who jokingly threatened to take away her staff's bonuses unless they did that last obstacle. Yet in the end, she was unable to go through it herself.

"When they finally get over their fear of heights and do it, many of them want to go back and try it again," says Thong, an experienced jungle trekker. "It's about facing your fears and gaining confidence."

The rope course is one of numerous activities at the resort, which include archery, golf (the 18-hole course was designed by American Ronald Fream), fishing, speedboat rides, jungle walks, game courts and watersports.

Located about 20km from Sitiawan, Perak, the four-star resort sits on more than 160ha of land and comprises 300 rooms and 180 holiday apartments.

Besides the usual island hopping and

Famous for its flying fox



(Clockwise from top) The resort's famous Flying Fox; a peaceful place; general manager, Peter R. Walterbusch.



snorkelling, there are sunset cruises, a Dinding River cruise that takes you past the Royal Malaysian Naval Base, Malay villages, vegetable farms, oil palm estates and a cave. A city

tour of Taiping and the nearby Matang Mangrove forest reserve in Kuala Sepetang are also included.

You can relax in the Jacuzzi next to the gymnasium, or opt for a Balinese massage and treatments at the Samsara Spa.

General manager Peter R. Walterbusch adds that the Blossom Courtyard, the new restaurant serving Pan Asian cuisine, is popular with European guests.

"We decided to revamp a Chinese restaurant into the Blossom which serves Mediterranean cuisine," he says.

"At the moment, we are refurbishing the rooms for a more resort-like feel," he adds.

Besides the Blossom, guests are also in for a gastronomic treat at the Garden Terrace, an open-air coffee house with a Caribbean-style layout, and the Noodle House which offers steamboat buffets and other Chinese delights.

The Gayam Seafood Barbeque and Bar is another experience in itself. The restaurant is

built on stilts on a rocky outcrop overlooking the Straits of Malacca.

Merrymakers can later head for the Blue Chip Lounge for chilled wine or mocktails, or to the Nineteenth Karaoke Lounge to sing the blues away with a selection of English, Malay, Chinese and Japanese songs. — **BY CHRISTINA KOH**

□ Swiss Garden Resort & Spa Damai Laut is having a Lunar New Year package at RM388 per person which includes two nights' accommodation in a Deluxe Garden View room, daily buffet breakfast, an oriental dinner for two and complimentary festive goodies.

The package is valid until Feb 23. The resort is located at Periaran Swiss-Garden, Jalan Damai Laut, Off Jalan Teluk Senangin, Lumut, Perak.

For enquiries, call (05) 618 3333/(03) 2164 3833/(04) 263 0500.



Improving the situation

● FROM PAGE 18

The hotel now has standard twin rooms, family rooms and chalets with spring beds (RM12), camp beds (RM7) and baby cots (RM12).

Tan feels that tourism could be better improved if the Perak Tourism Association did more to promote the area locally. "For international tourists, Malaysia has strong appeal because of its cleanliness and economic and political stability. We (the smaller hotels) do not have the financial backing to do big promotions.

"The best we can do is serve our guests well, offer more facilities and let them 'enjoy themselves without feeling bored'," he says.

Facilities consist of a bar and restaurant. Activities include beach volleyball, video games, fishing and island trips. — **BY CHRISTINA KOH**

□ The Sea View Hotel & Holiday Resort is located at Jalan Pasir Bogak, Pangkor, Perak. For enquiries, call (05) 685 1711/1605/1705 or e-mail svhotel@tm.net.my.



Sea View Hotel & Holiday Resort guest chalets.

COME sunrise or sunset, black- and white-tipped Hornbills descend to feed just a few feet away from guests at Pangkor Island Beach Resort.

Oblivious to the flash of cameras, the birds pick delicately at pieces of bread in feeders attached to small trees along the beach.

According to the management, Pangkor is one of the few nesting grounds for this species of hornbill.

Fed at 7am and 6.30pm every day, the birds are a popular attraction at this four-star resort.

Once known as Pan Pacific Pangkor Island until it changed ownership a year ago, the resort has the longest stretch of private beach on the island — 1.2km of sandy coves and emerald waters.

The Malay-style resort has 240 rooms, including suites, chalets and bungalows, that come with sea-facing balconies where guests are warned to watch out for wandering monkeys.

Resort manager Jimmy Yeo says they are adding a spa and upgrading their Ocean Wing rooms, bungalows and seaside chalets.

"My idea is to promote the resort as a 'Fantasy Island' getaway, where guests can enjoy the tranquillity of the lovely beaches and nature. We get a lot of honeymooners, golfers and corporate staff here," he says.

Guests can either have romantic dinners on the beach, or tuck into outdoor barbecues or sip sunset cocktails at the aptly-named Hornbill Restaurant.

Guests can also try fresh seafood and Western cuisine at the Pacific Terrace Restaurant and Bar, or wind down with



drinks and live entertainment at the Golden Oriole Lobby Lounge.

From the resort, it's a short hop to the Dutch Fort and Sacred Rock near Kampung Teluk Gedung, Pasir Bogak and Coral Bay beaches, and Pangkor town itself.

Besides snorkelling, fishing, birdwatching and jungle trekking, the resort also has a play centre for children, traditional massage centre and foreign currency exchange.

Also available is a business centre with

Internet access, facsimile, photocopying, translation and secretarial services.

Located on the northern tip of Pangkor at Teluk Belanga, the resort is a 30-minute ferry ride from Lumut. — **BY CHRISTINA KOH**

□ Pangkor Island Beach Resort is now having its 30th anniversary promotion and all rooms are going at a 30% discount until April 30. For enquiries, call (05) 685 1091.