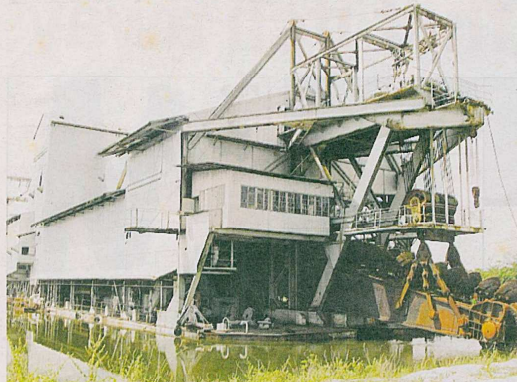


# Go around in Pusing

Catch a meal in the former tin mining town of Pusing and relive a bit of history in nearby Batu Gajah and Tanjung Tualang.



**Rare relic:** Perak's remaining tin dredge, at Desa Perlombongan (The Mining Village) near Tanjung Tualang, is secured on a paddock upon a man-made lake. - Filipic

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**P**USING, the once bustling mining town just 25km from Ipoh, is a little known paradise for food lovers willing to make the drive a short distance from the city.

One of its best-kept secrets is Chin Yoon Keow's *yong tau fu* (stuffed bean curd) stall at the Yuen Yee corner coffeshop on the town's main road.

For 15 years, Chin has never taken the day off in serving her recipe of various *tau fu* merged with fish paste, long beans, bitter gourd or green vegetables.

Rain or shine, the 48-year-old woman can be seen manning her humble stall from 6am to noon, which she started during the days when the Kinta Valley's tin industry was still going strong.

"I remember starting the stall all those years ago when many visitors came to Pusing at its busiest."

"Since then, it has quietened down but I decided to stay on," said Chin, admitting that her stall was "a labour of love".

One of her most sought-after dishes is her pan mee-like noodles served with *tau fu*, sotong (squid), pork skin, long beans and cockles.

Another speciality is her curry prawn noodles dish, which she prepares with sea prawns from the fishing village of Pantai Remis.

One must-try lunch destination in Pusing is the Ming Fong Restaurant run by Chook Hing Ho and his wife, Liew Siew Heng.

Chook, 66, had started the restaurant when he was an enterprising 20-year-old keen on whipping up his own recipes.

A Pusing-born local who got his first experience selling *wan tan mee* (dumpling noodles) at a young age in Ipoh, Chook's most renowned dish is arguably his stewed claypot duck.

The dish has chunks of duck, leek, spring onion, strips of ginger and a touch of Chinese wine for flavour.

"Everyone has their own way of preparing it but I choose to stew it for over an hour until the duck meat is sweet and tender."

His 35-year-old son Siew Mun has fittingly taken over as the restaurant's chef six years ago after learning the ropes from the old man.



**Gastronomic offering:** Life in Pusing may be a little laid-back from its former bustling tin mining days, but the town has quite a few gems for food lovers. - Photo by LEW YONG KAN / The Star



**Symbol of love:** The century-old Kellie's Castle, near Batu Gajah, was built by Scottish planter William Kellie-Smith as a gesture of affection for his wife. - Photo by ZABIDI TUSIN / The Star

Another simpler but no less sought-after dish is Chook's self-made noodles with Tanjung Tualang freshwater prawns and choi sum (mustard greens).

Choice fare like fried freshwater fish with ginger and sweet and sour sauce, dumplings, mooncakes have also been known to attract diners from far and wide.

"We seem to get a lot of Japanese, Koreans and Taiwanese stopping here for lunch," said the good-natured restaurateur.

The restaurant opens every day from 11am to 4pm and 6pm to 10pm, even on holidays and weekends. It closes for two unspecified days each month.

When in town, try not to miss the line of kuih muih stalls visible from the main road.

The stalls offer visitors a colourful spread of green, white, black and red *ang koo* (sweet bean paste kuih), nyonya cakes, sesame cakes with red bean filling and fried prawn savoury cakes.

After breakfast, Pusing is the perfect starting point for a day trip to several spots of interest in the Batu Gajah and Tanjung Tualang areas.

From Pusing, make your way to Batu Gajah town and follow the road signs pointing to Perak's famed Kellie's Castle.

Situated 5.5km from Batu Gajah, the century-old castle was built by successful Scottish planter William Kellie-Smith as a gesture of affection for his new wife.

According to Aqfast Enterprise director Tajuddin Yaacob, who manages the site, Kellie-Smith's wife was a British heiress unused to the hot Malaya.

"She preferred to live in Cameron Highlands or Maxwell Hill (Bukit Larut) instead."

"So, in 1904, Kellie-Smith started building the castle next to his existing home to woo his wife into staying close to him," said Tajuddin.

According to popular history, the castle was designed to be a magnificent mansion with Greco-Roman and Moorish designs, a wine cellar complete with its own hidden tunnel, a dungeon-like room and even Malaya's first manually operated elevator.

"However, at some point, the hidden tunnel at the cellar was sealed to prevent dangerous animals like snakes and scorpions from coming in," Tajuddin added.

The castle remained unfinished after Smith died of an illness overseas before it could be completed.

Today, visitors can still explore the empty wine cellar, the many cool and shady rooms of the castle, and even the ruins of the family's old home beside it.

Equally intriguing is the Sri Maha Mariamman temple.

Anyone taking a closer look at the deity figurines lining the roof of the temple would be able to see one of a colonial-looking man dressed in a white topie, green jacket and khaki coloured pants.

Tajuddin related that the figurine was added in honour of Kellie-Smith who ordered the temple to be built after a worldwide epidemic of Spanish Flu broke out in 1918.

"When many of his workers from India died, the Hindu workers suggested to Kellie-Smith that a temple be built to appease the deity that might be causing the sickness."

"Imagine, for building the temple, he must have been treated like a deity in those days," he added.

Another nearby attraction worth checking out is the Kinta Nature Park, located 5km down a dirt track from Batu Gajah's Kampung Pisang.

Nature lovers can easily laze away a few



**Much sought-after:** *Yong tau fu* hawker Chin Yoon Keow preparing an order at her stall. - Photo by LEW YONG KAN / The Star

hours at the park, which is dominated by a majestic spread of ex-mining lakes dotted with green islands and lily plants.

With a good telescope or pair of binoculars,



**A must-try:** Ming Fong Restaurant's signature dish - stewed claypot duck with leek, spring onion, ginger and Chinese wine. - Photo by LEW YONG KAN / The Star



**Sweet treats:** Kuih muih trader Chong Yoo Thal packing *ang koo* (sweet bean paste kuih) for customers at her stall. - Photo by LEW YONG KAN / The Star

visitors can watch families of smooth otters at play or solitary herons wading through the waters at the 950ha park.

Also known as Tamah Alam Kinta, the park is especially popular among nature photographers and birdwatchers.

Before heading to lunch, visitors might want to take a look at one of Malaysia's last remaining relics of the tin industry - the tin dredge of Tanjung Tualang.

From Batu Gajah, take the road leading to Tanjung Tualang and follow the signs for 6km.

Resting on a man-made lake, the three-storey high dredge is still an awe-inspiring sight with its giant-sized parts and great rusty platforms.

Built in 1938, the dredge is open to all visitors every day from 8.30am to 6pm, although the attraction has been in a state of neglect.

Steven Ng, one of the managers of the company recently invited to manage the place, believes that the 75.5m-long dredge is the only remaining one intact in Malaya.

Day and night, the tin dredge had scoured for tin all over Kinta Valley for 44 years until the industry collapsed in the 1980s.

For many tourists, no visit to Pusing would be complete without a lunch stop at Tanjung Tualang town for a taste of its freshwater prawns.

Boasting no less than 10 seafood restaurants, Tanjung Tualang was a busy tin mining town decades ago but the town's claim to fame is the huge crustaceans served there.

Diners from as far as Singapore and Penang have been known to drop by. For Muslims,

there are also pork-free restaurants where they can sample the wealth of the town's fare.

Some interesting dishes of the menu include the ever-popular pan-fried *udang galah* with soy sauce, steamed catfish and ikan *hantu*, satay cuttlefish and steamed kampung chicken with ginger paste.

There are also sweet and sour prawns, baked prawns with oyster sauce, buttermilk prawns, crabs and steamed pomfret with kicap, curry and ginger.

Ask around, and you might even find "drunken prawns", which are uncooked prawns soaked in glutinous rice wine.

As any of the locals might tell you, the best-steamed prawns are those that must be cooked just long enough to retain all of the juices and sweetness of the meat.

Before calling it a day, history buffs might want to drop by Batu Gajah and seek directions to the God's Little Acre cemetery.

It is here that the three British planters - John Allison, Arthur Walker and Ian Christian - are buried among the graves and monuments of soldiers and civilians who fell during the Malayan Emergency.

In June 1948, communist terrorists shot dead the three near Sungai Siput, Perak, and it was their deaths that sparked the declaration of the Emergency on June 28 that year.

For those still hungry, check out some of Batu Gajah's restaurants scattered around town.

Gampathi Restaurant serves Indian food while Public Restaurant is a Chinese restaurant offering a decent all-rounder fare including crabs, prawns and fish.

Besides the local Medan Selera, the Mei Seek Fong restaurant doubles as a kind of food court with noodle stalls, shops selling *tsai* and curries and many more.