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Tok Penghulu's abode in Langkawi

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IF the volume coming from the CD jukebox at Warong Tok Mat could be turned down a bit, then one could have a decent conversation right through the night.

But the young people frequenting it would have none of that as they slot in more coins to enjoy the latest pop songs.

Warong Tok Mat is part of the facilities available at Kampung Tok Senik in Langkawi. The word warong means stall but Warong Tok Mat is no ordinary stall and Kampung Tok Senik is no ordinary kampung, or village.

Kampung Tok Senik is actually a resort atop a small hill along the road one takes to visit Makam Mahsuri.

It consists of several wooden houses built in the traditional Malay kampung-style but these houses were built to provide visitors, especially foreigners, the experience of kampung-style living without compromising on modern amenities.

Abu Sahid Mohamed, executive chairman of Maju Holding Sdn Bhd, the owner of the project which opened last year, took several newspaper editors on an impromptu tour of the resort last week.

The editors had gathered in Langkawi on Sunday to attend the exclusive briefing on the Multimedia Super Corridor by its proponent, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Later in the night, we trooped to Warong Tok Mat for our regular dose of teh tarik, without which most of us would not be as creative as we want. The sea front in Kuah used to be a favourite spot for late night teh tarik in Langkawi but Warong Tok Mat has drawn away some of that crowd.

We didn't expect anything special that night but Abu Sahid happened to be at the warong and insisted on taking us for a quick tour of the premises.

Kampung Tok Senik is located amid rubber trees which are no longer tapped, except for several which are reserved for visitors to try their hands on.

Down the hillslope lies hectares of padi fields, flat and dry, waiting for the next planting season. The people of Langkawi plant their padi once a year compared with their counterparts on the mainland, most of whom could plant twice a year.

Insufficient irrigation and manpower shortage are the restrictive factors on the island.

If one is to visit Kampung Tok Senik in the day, especially during the padi harvesting season, then one can see the golden carpet from the padi fields. One can easily fall in love with the island, as many did in the past.

Abu Sahid's guided tour led us to a house which he said copied the style of the residence of the village headman, or Tok Penghulu.

Dr Mahathir had stayed in the house and so Abu Sahid decided to make the place a permanent residence for the Prime Minister.

"Each time the Tok Penghulu visits Langkawi, he can stay in his house," Abu Sahid said.

The house was built mainly to allow a Tok Penghulu to administer his kampung. It is built on stilts as an added security measure. A verandah is located at the top of the stairs which is a sort of a waiting room for those who wish to see the village headman.

The living room is furnished with wooden furniture, resembling those in

the 1940s.

The living room is extended into a fairly large hall where the womenfolk can sit cross-legged on the floor during kenduri.

The walls in the living room and extended hall are decorated with pictures of Dr Mahathir in his younger days, besides family portraits recopied from the family album.

As in most kampung houses, pictures of famous film stars adorn the walls. This house is no different. One can see framed pictures of Seniman Agong Tan Sri P. Ramlee with his pencil-line moustache, director Omar Rojik, actors Kuswadinata, Omar Suwita and his then famous curry-puff hairstyle, actresses Sarimah, Latifah Omar and several others.

Abu Sahid tries hard to make the house as authentic as possible. At one corner of the hall is a gramophone with a pile of records from the swinging 1950s.

Next to it is an old violin, suggesting that someone in the Tok Penghulu's family, or the Tok Penghulu himself, is a musician.

The kitchen is fully equipped too. The cups and saucers also reflect the 1950s era with its flowered sides. The house has one bedroom.

Abu Sahid said all the houses had modern bath facilities.

Foreigners don't mind staying in wooden kampung houses provided the sanitary facilities are adequate.

As we were about to leave the house, I saw a small hen resting comfortably at one corner of the verandah.

Abu Sahid said he was also puzzled as to how the hen kept coming back to sleep at the same corner every time she was removed.

After a while, Abu Sahid said he had decided to allow it to share the comfort of the Tok Penghulu's abode.

We left the house and Kampung Tok Senik about 4am. We made our way to our rented cars at Warong Tok Mat. The crowd was still there and the pop music just as loud.

I will make it a point to visit Warong Tok Mat again in the future, this time to find out a little bit more about Tijah, one of the Filipino waitresses in charming baju Kedah.

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