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Island's interesting past

PANGKOR Laut has an interesting history. A top British commando Colonel Freddy Spencer Chapman and his compatriot Major R. Broome made their last escape out of Malaya through the Pangkor Laut Emerald Bay during World War Two in 1945.

The colonel had before then experienced 3 1/2 years of extreme danger and endurance in the wild jungles of Malaya fighting against the Japanese army during the war.

His final task was to get out of Malaya by submarine before the planned major offensive against the Japanese was carried out by the British rendezvous on Pangkor Laut island.

On May 13, 1945, Chapman and Broome escaped from Emerald Bay, which was their last destination where they had spent 36 hours before their escape. They swam 45 metres out to the sea in the dark of the night before they were rescued by the Royal Navy submarine and later sent back to England.

Chapman's short sojourn on the Pangkor Laut island left a great impression on him so much so that he detailed his discovery in his book entitled the Jungle Is Neutral.

He wrote: "The truth is that the jungle is neutral. It provides any amount of freshwater and unlimited cover for friend as well as foe - an armed neutrality, if you like, but neutrality nevertheless. It is the attitude of mind that determines whether you go under or survive."

The Chapman's Bar at Emerald Bay is named after this famous colonel.

Another interesting fact of Pangkor Laut island is that it was originally owned by the late Sultan of Perak, Sultan Idris Iskandar Shah.

Sometime in 1960, the Sultan discovered the beautiful island with its tranquil beaches and mystical tropical forest. Although he never had the chance to live on the island, he made frequent day trips to enjoy its beauty.

In 1982, the Sultan approached Yeoh Tiong Lay Corporation (YTL) with the idea of building a resort on the island. YTL, to whom the island was leased, embarked on the development and on July 18, 1985, 90 rustic chalets were officially opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

As the popularity of the resort flourished, YTL managing director Datuk Francis Yeoh improved on the original concept and over the next few years, remarkable reconstruction and refurbishment took place which resulted in the resort winning several international awards which in themselves are historic.

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