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## Many wonders of Paya Indah

Shanti Gunaratnam

A VAST wildlife park, an African savannah of sorts, will be the newly opened Paya Indah Wetlands' winning formula. The masterplan for this RM600 million nature sanctuary is being finalised.

The park could become one of Selangor's biggest attraction. It currently has an exploration centre, Palm Gardens, heritage house and is home to hippopotamuses, riverine crocodiles and cranes from China at 460 hectares of the 3,100-hectare tourism park opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Oct 13.

"Believe me when I tell you that are other things in the pipeline," says the wetlands senior corporate communications officer Shalizahanim Shukor.

There are plans to have a tin mine museum on the far end of the wetlands where an old five-storey dredge, D9 donated by Petaling Tin Bhd, awaits renovation and should be able to receive visitors next year.

The D9 is said to be the last dredge in the Kuala Langat district. Since the dredge sits on the other side of the lake, visitors to the museum will be required to take a boat there.

Come February, 34 Balinese-style chalets will open their doors to wetlands visitors keen on spending a few nights there star gazing amidst lakes, swamps, calming greenery and wildlife.

"We are also looking into providing camping sites at the meadows. Nature education camps for students can be held at the camping ground for a variety of activities," says Shalizahanim.

Children can also attend jungle survival courses conducted by experienced guides, trek through the peat swamp forest and go on nature trails.

They will also get the opportunity to go canoeing through the lakes and canals and learn more about aquatic plants and wildlife.

"Pre-schoolers can also enjoy scooping out micro-organisms and tadpoles from very shallow ponds," says Shalizahanim.

For anglers, freshwater fishing will be introduced soon and they will be able to catch haruan, baung, patin or even lampam jawa at the Typah Lake.

One of the current attractions at the park, that encompasses a myriad of ecosystems, is Palm Gardens which has some 1,000 palm trees comprising 83 species from six different climatic zones of the world.

Paya Indah also aims to establish Palm Gardens as an important centre for education and research for palms.

Then there's the Exploration Centre displaying the natural resources of the wetlands, its flora and fauna and a brief history of the tin mining activities in Malaysia.

Also check out the four hippopotamuses recently brought in from Botswana and soaking in one of the nearby lakes.

Take a peak at another nearby lake and visitors will encounter 15 crocodiles donated by the Langkawi Crocodile Farm.

The degraded peat swamp forest at the park is used for jungle trekking.

Overlooking the Chalet Lake is a heritage house made from seraya khitam. The Rumah Melayu was prefabricated in Besut, Terengganu before it was assembled at its present location.

Paya Indah has some 210 species of birds. Common species found include purple swamphens, purple herons and egrets.

Some RM60 million was spent on rehabilitating Paya Indah, which was once devoid of all life due to extensive mining and logging activities.

In 1997, a masterplan to rehabilitate and conserve a swath of degraded, barren land in the Kuala Langat district was submitted and subsequently approved by the Government.

The project received support and assistance from various private and public entities.

There are 14 lakes in Paya Indah and most are disused mining pools. The total volume of water in the lakes is about 43 million litres. Naturally, the sanctuary has its own water treatment plant. Paya Indah is managed by the Malaysian Wetlands Foundation.

Admission fees are RM2 for adults and RM1 on week days. On weekends and public holidays, the charges double.

For enquiries, call 603-83187006 or visit website [www.payaindah.org.my](http://www.payaindah.org.my).

#### GETTING THERE

About 50 km from Kuala Lumpur or a 45-minute drive. Those going from Putrajaya and KLIA, it's only a 15-minute drive.

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