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Passion for Langkawi spurs enviable resourcefulness

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IT'S like a scene from a movie - swaying palm trees and a white sandy beach. The Coco Beach restaurant along the beachfront not far from the Kolej Legenda in Langkawi offers just that to diners.

Billed as a seafood paradise, the restaurant provides an idyllic spot for a quiet, romantic dinner. The sound of the waves along the beach will surely help improve one's appetite, as I found out last week.

Except on Thursdays, diners are entertained to an hour of cultural performance and this has been well-received especially by foreign visitors. The cultural troupes perform on a raised platform facing the beach with simple but effective lighting.

S.C. Teoh, the restaurant operator, started the outlet believing that visitors would be attracted to fresh seafood cooked by gourmet chefs. The food my friends and I had last week was really good and the cool sea breeze was a bonus.

Teoh was working with the Public Works Department before opting to join the private sector as a contractor. He was also involved in a fish farm which he had to close due to some bureaucratic problems. Having sorted them out, Teoh is set to re-open the fish farm later this year.

The Coco Beach boasts of fresh lobsters, tiger prawns, crabs, fish, mussels and vegetables grown nearby. Teoh employs workers from Nepal and Myanmar and they are provided living quarters next to the restaurant. One gets the impression Teoh is not only an enterprising businessman but a caring employer as well.

As we disposed of the soft shell crabs and steamed fish, we got to learn a bit more about Teoh. Apparently, he's not your average restaurant operator. Judging by what he says, Teoh is also a one-man Langkawi tourism promoter.

Using his own funds, Teoh has been printing and distributing maps of Langkawi free of charge. Some 200,000 copies are distributed. He has stationed his staff at the airport and the jetty terminal in Kuah to distribute the maps.

Asked why he is doing this free of charge, Teoh simply said: "It's good for business and visitors. Not everybody can find their way around Langkawi without a map. I did the map because tourists need to be guided as they wander about on the island."

The map is not the best produced, but it provides a lot of useful information. I believe Teoh produced the map on his own probably because the Langkawi Development Authority is not producing one. Teoh's map also contains a list of the major hotels on the island.

Asked if the hotels shared the cost of printing the map, Teoh replied in the negative. I thought that this was strange. Surely the big establishments would want to chip in, after all they also benefit from the exercise. "Then why do it?," I asked.

"I have a passion for Langkawi. The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has done very much to develop and promote the island. What I do is nothing compared to what he has done. Producing the map is my way of trying to promote the island as a tourist destination.

"I intend to expand my business here. If I were to promote only my business, there's a limit to it. My business depends on the number of tourists coming to the island, so I might as well help promote the island. I'll only profit if the island profits."

One can fall in love with Langkawi easily. I've heard countless stories of people wanting to buy a plot of land on the island for their holiday retreats. Teoh, who has two boys and a girl, is on the way to realising his dreams. Good luck!