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Three-day carnival to mark first anniversary of Paya Indah Wetlands

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DENGKIL, Mon. - The Paya Indah Wetlands celebrates its first anniversary next month, proud of the fact that in the short span of 11 months it has established itself as a premier ecotourism park and a great place for wholesome family fun.

A 45-minute drive from Kuala Lumpur, the park sits on 3,200 hectares of what was once rehabilitated peat swamp and former tin and clay mining land.

Surrounded by peat swamp mangroves, it comprises a network of 14 lakes and had at one time suffered from illegal logging and peat fires.

The park was restored through a RM60 million rehabilitation project after years and years of mining and logging activities.

Paya Indah was officially opened on Oct 13 last year by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Since then, more than 70,000 visitors have passed through its gates, proof that the wetlands is more than just a theme park.

"We've discovered that our strength lies in education and recreation," says its senior corporate communications manager, Shalizahanim Shukor.

Educating the public, both the young and adult, to appreciate nature and the wetlands specifically, is the focus of the park management.

Its Education Department started six months ago with the "Show and Tell" programme which continues to draw the crowds.

"Without Show and Tell, visitors have learnt that they don't get to learn much about the wetlands. The programme is so popular our education officers have to use microphones now," she says.

The educational programme guides visitors through the flora and fauna of the park and gives them an opportunity to interact and observe the park's many attractions.

Of the 70,000 visitors, 30 per cent are children. The park has been very popular with teachers planning school excursions for their students.

Shalizahanim said the majority of the visitors are families, and the park is usually packed during weekends.

"In the past month, we've seen at least 300 to 400 visitors during the weekends," she says.

What seems to be popular are the bicycles, with all the bikes taken up daily. Bicycles are the best way to explore the park.

Watersport activities at the jetty area such as kayaking and paddle boats are beginning to catch on too.

Among the popular attractions are the four Nile hippopotami and crocodiles (especially during feeding time), the Palm Garden featuring 1,000 palms of 83 species from six different climatic zones of the world, and the Rumah Melayu - a heritage house made in Besut, Terengganu, and assembled at the park.

For its first anniversary next month, the park will celebrate by holding a three-day carnival from Oct 11.

Entrance fees for the three days will be waived, and visitors only need to purchase a RM20 coupon each for food and beverages, or to participate in games and activities.

These exciting games and activities include street soccer, beach volleyball, hot air balloon rides, sports, kite flying, fishing, face painting and sand art.

On Oct 13, a cross-country run will be held, and the highlight of the

carnival will be the cake-cutting ceremony by Dr Mahathir who will also be handing over three electric trams from Tenaga Nasional to the park.

The park, accessible through the Elite and LDP highways, is open from 8.30am to 7.30pm during weekdays (except Monday) and from 7.30am to 7.30pm on weekends.