




UNFORGETTABLE RETREAT – KENYIR LAKE

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Lake Kenyir one of the popular eco-tourism destinations in our country as it offers nature at its best, including rainforest views and experiences. In the last retreat staff of the Faculty of Entrepreneurship spent valuable time there and enjoyed nature at its best.

Malaysia is blessed with many tourist attractions, ranging from million years tropical rain forests, white sandy beaches, crystal clear tropical islands to stunning mountain's sceneries. As for us in Kelantan, Tasik Kenyir or Kenyir Lake, situated in our neighbouring state of Terengganu is one the favourites, not only because it near, about two- hour-drive but it also offers a lot of excitement and happiness for visitors. We heard stories about house boat there from our UMK's colleagues from other departments. They said once you are you enjoy the nature at the fullest; the world is yours! You would feel free and at ease with the nature and can easily forget hassle and bustle of the monotonous of busy daily life which can be so boring as it is predictable thing to do. Spending and experiencing one or two days on a boat house in the middle of the lake is an unforgettable experience. Going here and there with no worries. Fresh and crispy winds gently slapping your faces as the boat chugging on the serene lake, unlike in the ocean no strong current there so the boat ride with be easy enjoyable. You would not be hungry as you can bring a chef with you and fresh water fish are also in abundance, throwing fishing line and waiting for the luck. With beautiful surrounding views of water with grey rolling hills and clear blue sky dotted with fluffy clouds and with full tummy you can sleep soundly. Honestly speaking, the news about FKP excursion in the lake during the faculty retreat we welcomed by the staff as a reward for us, we were looking forward to the excursion.

If you drive from Kelantan as well as other parts of Malaysia, Kuala Berang Town which is located about 30 km from Tasik Kenyir is the launching pad for visitors to the said lake. Whatever necessities that you needed or your forget to bring with you in the excursion mostly



clock as many already left and went back to office. As for hungry persons, after more than 2 hours ride from Kota Bharu, the meals on the table looked delicious and tempting. We chose a plate of fresh Sebarau Gulai Tempoyak, cooking with fermented durian in a traditional Terengganu recipe and a plate of Gulai Ikan Patin and crispy fried Ikan Lapan where we could eat with their bones. Such a kind of dishes is not easily found in our place, eating together, we enjoyed the food like that was the only thing left in our world.

We were told altogether 80 houseboats in operation in Tasik Kenyir. A houseboat is a special type of catamaran boat cruiser designed by local boat makers. Physically, one is different from each other as it is designed according to its owner. But in general it is a rectangular in shape and double-deck boat. Its length is roughly 40 feet long and 20 feet wide. The below deck has a common room in the middle section, skipper area, a multi-purpose front deck that occupies half of the front area, a small kitchen and two restrooms situated in the rear of the boat. The upper deck consists of rooms for passengers as well as a restroom. Handrails made of steels on the open deck areas of the upper and below the decks. Its roof made of zink. One or two fiberglass boats tie at the rear of the boat and a dozen of kayaks stripe on its flank. As for safety requirement, this boat is equipped with safety jackets of various sizes which neatly overhanging on the rope just above the head and can be easily reached when in need. Since we arrived in the late afternoon we spent our first night on the boathouses which moored next to each other at the edge of the lake which tied to concrete poles. In the morning on the following day, prior to an excursion one of the crews gave a briefing of dos and don'ts during the excursion as for safety requirements. We couldn't wait to explore Tasik Kenyir and to spend a few days on the boathouse.

Kenyir Lake with the total water surface area of 260km square is the biggest man-made lake in Malaysia as well as in our region. The construction of Kenyir Dam which was completed in 1985 supplies water for Sultan Mahmood's hydro power plant that produces electricity for the whole state of Terengganu. It nestled in the hilly areas in Ulu Terengganu at the border with Kelantan and Pahang where our National Park is situated. A few old Malay villages and their fruit orchards as well as forested areas now submerged at the bottom of the lake. In the early days of the completion of the lake, underwater logging activities were quite active here, we watched a few documentaries on television that showed this kind of activity which were performed by well-experienced divers from Thailand equipped with submersible water-proof wood-cutting equipment. Apart from supplying renewable energy, nowadays this lake is a popular tourist destination among Malaysians as well as international tourists including Singaporeans. It is one of the popular eco-tourism destinations in our country as it offers nature at its best, including rainforest views and experiences. Apart from leisure boating, kayaking, bird watching and fresh water fish angling activities are common activities. This place is also a sanctuary for mammals like elephant and Kelah fish. As for some local people they sustainably harvest honey and source medical plants around the area. Lately, government servants and private institutions also come here as a gateway place where they can concentrate and conduct their strategic meetings which they are unable to do in other places. And at the same time they can strengthen their relationships as they stay together and enjoy leisure activities like kayaking or just relaxing watching sunrise and sunset in the middle of the lake, barbeque moment and other activities together. If you want to engage in writing it is not an exaggeration to say this place is perfect choice for you.

In the mid-sunny morning, two houseboats chugged slowly and steadily leaving the docking area overlooking the new white bridge that connects to the island where almost completed hotel standing majestically on the higher ground. Seemingly we were in Putra Jaya. On one of the boats, the young skipper, who hails from Marang, Terengganu confidently steering the boat, looking relaxed but his hands on the steering wheel and he was in full control as he knows the lake, islands and its surrounding areas like the back of his hand. Prior to the departure; in the early morning we had a light exercise together with ice-breaking session where each and every of us gathered in each respective group. After brief discussion, we named our groups and taglines. The introduction of the groups was hilarious with cackling laughs as we came up with funny names, taglines and introduction which involved all to show our commitments. As for many of us this boathouse excursion in Tasik Kenyir was our first experience and we couldn't help to experience all the scheduled activities. This kind of retreat was unique on its own way as we used to have strategic planning activities in hotels and resorts. Sitting on plastic chairs on the front deck; gentle breeze slapping on our faces, looking forlornly at distance of small islands and rolling grey hills, the moving boat created seamless waves and white foams, occasionally, splashing on us. The constant monotonous sound of the engine of the boat was the music to our ears. The surface of water simmering like molten silver as the sun reflecting its rays. A flock of birds flying to the nearby island. The boat journey itself was an enjoyable moment. We felt fresh and enveloped by the serenity and vastness of the nature.

The houseboat was sailing further and further in the human-made lake, we sat on the sunny wooden deck, looking at the surface of green turquoise water, vegetative but inhabitable islands loomed out of the lake where water marks etched on their fringes showing changes of high and low water levels. Our two-store houseboats, were tied together and they were stable enough, sailing graciousl





moments and to share with families and friends when we had a WiFi connection. If we wanted to drink hot coffee, tea and instant premix coffee or 3 in 1 also available. There was nothing more enjoyable than sipping hot coffee on the moving boat where fresh winds gently slapped our faces. Snacks also plenty. The front decks would be our main spots for 3 days and two nights, all the planned activities would be here. Red and white Malaysian's flag and white and black Terengganu's flag were flapping in the air. Our destination was about less than an hour.

Amongst other leisure activities you can indulge during your excursion are; kayaking, swimming in Lasir waterfall, fishing, bird watching, visiting Kelah sanctuary as well as exploring flora and fauna when you hop on islands and if you lucky enough you can spot an elephant or a herd of this shy and elusive beast roaming freely in an island and its vicinity areas. Soon when our boathouse docking some of us walked uphill through the concentrate path leading to Lasir waterfall, meanwhile a few of us opted to go there with the boat. About 15 minute-walk under the thick canopy of lush tropical forests we arrived at the destination after we crossed the suspension bridge to the foot of the waterfall. Wearing life jackets we joined other groups, swimming in the plunge pool of the waterfall. Swimming here and there, in the edge and middle of the pool which is deeper and relaxing by sitting on the slippery rocks perched above the water, catching our breath. Swimming requires a lot of energy as you need to move your hands and feet to move. For a young person, you have no problem at all, the older you are, the more difficult for you. Thank to life jackets, without them we unable to do so. Perching on the slippery stones with wet clothes after a difficult swimming, we looked upward and heard of the plunging and tumbling sound of water on the rocks below. Everybody enjoyed swimming, splashing and giggling; making a happy moment together especially during the midday when the sun was above our heads, what a relief; being in the water could cool bodies from the scorching hot sun.

Not all our activities related to water; apart from kayaking, swimming and fishing we also learned and get exposure about the medical plants or herbs available in islands around the lake. These plants have been harvested, consumed and used for many generations amongst our people. The state government of Terengganu established Taman Herba or Herbs Park in Pulau Sah Kecil. It is one of tourist attractions here. It is looked after by a score of staff who are knowledgeable and skillful in their areas of expertise. In the trip, we managed to discern a few new medical plants together with famous and sought after Tongkat Ali, Kacip Fatimah and Mahkota Dewa. The staff briefed us about them, showing the plants and were kind enough to let us sampled them; taste very bitter, hardly could go throw our throats. Justifying their functions, all medicine are bitter in taste. If you wanted to buy, they are available. The establishment of this kind of centre is paramount important for conservation and preservation of our national heritage and treasure. Kudos to the state government, a laudable move.

As for you who aim to hire a boathouse in Tasik Kenyir during a vacation or a retreat; three options you can consider. Either you hire a boathouse with a cook provided by a provider or you can cook on your own or to get someone to prepare foods for you. We opted for the third option. We were indeed lucky, Chef Abdullah and his best mate Chef Hadi who were more than happy to join us during the excursion around the lake. Menus for breakfast were fried rice, fish crackers alternate with fried noodle. We ate rice with chicken tomyam, salt fish and omelets for lunch and around 4 o'clock both of the chefs cooked light meals. After the sunset, they prepared grilled chicken and various species of fresh water fish that we caught with our fishing rods. As both of them are experienced chefs, cooking comes in handy; sometimes we went to the kitchen; observing them cooking, exchanging ideas and simultaneously our hands pinching fish crackers and slices of watermelon. Delicious foods that they served hardly we could resist, no wonder we gained weight during the short excursion. They got two thumbs ups.

A blend of joy of water-related activities, sailing on the houseboat around the vast lake and a brief island hopping to learn about our heritage plants and herbs making our trip at Tasik Kenyir were unforgettable. Playing with hundreds of tame Ikan Kelah at the fish sanctuary was indeed the icing of the cake of our visit. Kelah is one of the most expensive fresh water fish in Malaysia. This fish can only survive in clean river and in Malaysia where only a few areas this fish thrive. So this fish which is often called or got a nick name as "King of Fish of Malaysian river" is a treasure trove of Tasik Kenyir. No wonder this place is under twenty-four-hour surveillance. No fishing activity is allowed and a certain number of visitors are allowed per visit at one time and prepaid fees for the entrance is a must. Our houseboats moored at the edge of the water and after waiting for about twenty minutes we were ferried by small boats to a small river and had to pursue on foot on a long concrete path where a few pit stops named after fish available in the lake to take rest. A briefing of dos and don'ts by a tall and lanky officer at the halfway through to the said sanctuary provided valuable information about the fish and its conservation. No free lunch saying is not applicable for this clever fish. They came when you had food pallets and ran away when you had none. We had a wonderful time, the fish had quick and easy foods, no wonder they looked so happy and healthy.





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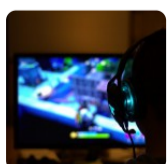
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