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BY VATSALA DEVI

Hit the Trail!

An Expat Guide to Hiking in Malaysia

Going out on nature trails and hiking is not only an inexpensive way to keep fit, but it also de-stresses the mind and the body. The adrenaline rush fuels the energy, and the sights, sounds, and smell of nature does wonders for the soul. These hiking spots and nature trails make waking up on the weekends worthwhile:



CANOPY WALK IN FRIM

Located in Kepong, the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) is perhaps one of the Klang Valley's best-kept secrets. It is a government-based forest reserve that has been around since before Malaysia gained independence, and is responsible for biological, botanical, and other scientific research and development relating to the preservation of Malaysian rain forests. Despite being a centre for forestry-based research and education, FRIM also opens its doors to visitors who want to experience a walk through a Malaysian tropical rainforest, without travelling too far from the city. FRIM also caters to the adventurous and outgoing, as there is an array of nature trails for enthusiasts to go jungle trekking within the forest reserves that surround the establishment. These trails encompass plantations, wetlands, and hills among others, and most of these paths and the nature that surround them date back to the 1930s. The highlight of FRIM that no visitor should miss is, of course, its canopy walkway - a 150-metre long walkway suspended from trees, 30 metres above ground level. Originally built for researchers and scientists to study above-ground flora and fauna more effectively, this walkway is open to



the public. Visitors will feel like they are hovering above the forest floor, all while taking in views and landscapes unseen from ground level. You can even catch a glimpse of Kuala Lumpur's famous city skyline if the skies are clear. The idea of walking at "treetop level" may be unnerving to some at first, but it is certainly a spectacle that should not be missed.

BUKIT NANAS FOREST RESERVE TRAIL

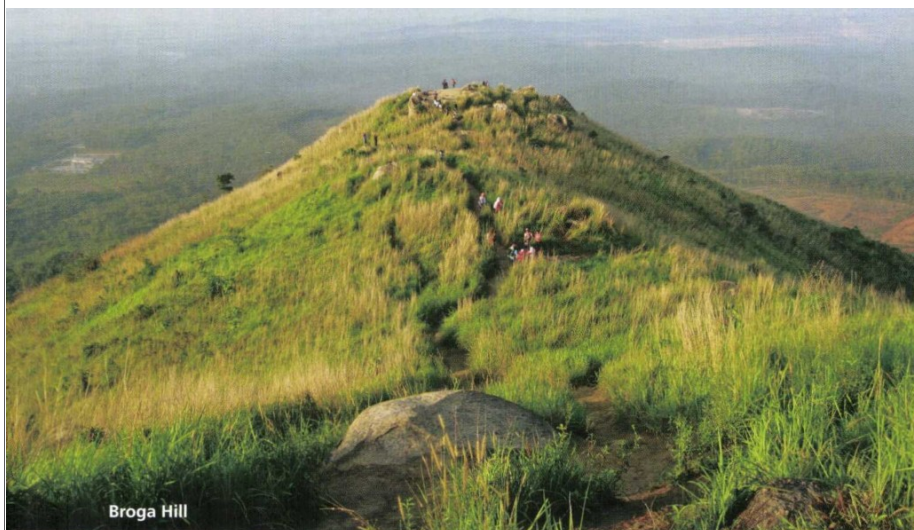
The Bukit Nanas Forest Reserve Trail is the most convenient hiking trail in Kuala Lumpur, due to its central location. Situated near KL Tower, it is one of the oldest permanent forest reserves and was formerly known as Bucket Weld Forest Reserve. Gazetted in 1906, Bukit Nanas serves as a green lung of Kuala Lumpur and is home to an abundance of flora and fauna unique to the country's tropical rainforest. Bukit Nanas is recognised as a heritage land for two reasons. Firstly, it is the only remaining patch of tropical rainforest that still stands in the middle of the city. Secondly, it is one of the oldest permanent forest reserves in the country (it celebrated its Centennial Anniversary in 2006). The 10.5-hectare forest reserve was also classified as a Wildlife Reserve and a Bird Sanctuary in 1934 and 1950,

respectively, with a section of about five hectares dedicated as Virgin Jungle Reserve. Bukit Nanas as it lies just beside the entrance to the tower and requires no admission fee. It offers nature lovers a good opportunity to learn more about the ecology of the local forest and is a great spot for shutterbugs, with plenty to see and photograph. A rich variety of flora can be found within the forest reserve, which includes rare herbs, creepers, ferns, climbers, and giant bamboo grasses. A campsite is also available for nature lovers who wish to pitch a tent and enjoy the lush greenery of the jungle, all free of charge. Joggers can enjoy the forest trails, and there is an outdoor obstacle course for those who want to do a little stretching and exercising. Nature guides are also available to explain more about the various types of flora and fauna in the jungle reserve. The daily guided tour runs at 11am, 12:30pm, 2:30pm, and 4:30pm.

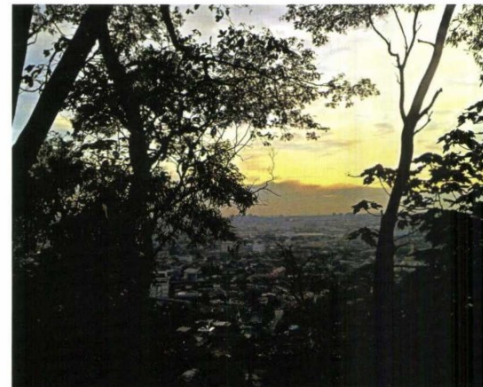
BROGA HILL

Nestled between the borders of Selangor and Negeri Sembilan is a small town situated 50 km from the city centre of Kuala Lumpur called Broga - a word believed to originate from *Buragas*, a mythical creature living in the forest. Nowadays, the popularity of Broga

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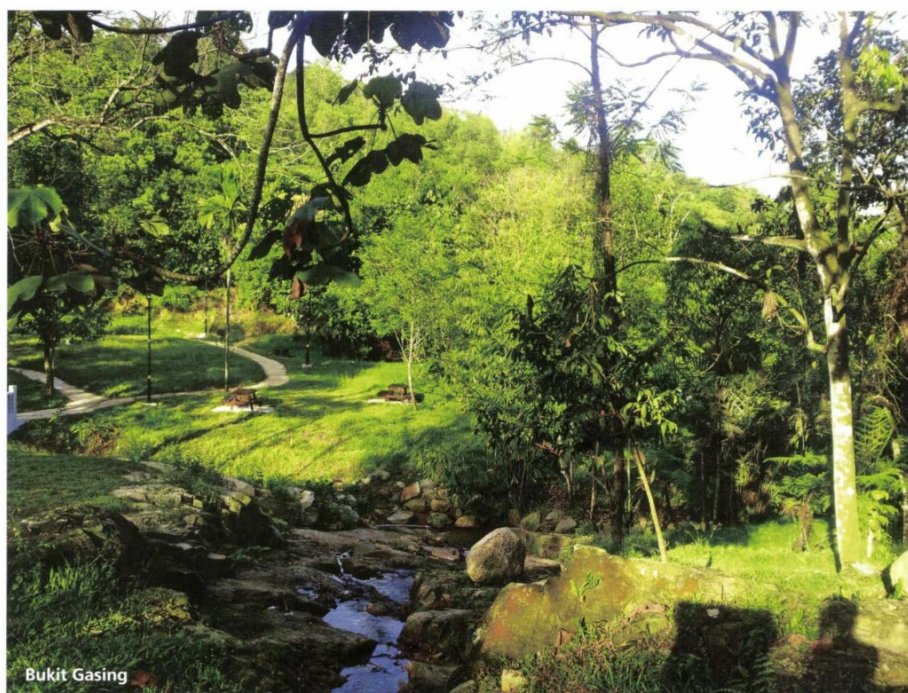
Broga Hill



is largely associated with Broga Hill. Set in a lush tropical forest, Broga Hill is at the edge of the Titiwangsa Range and is also known by the locals as Bukit Lalang as this type of grass grows in abundance on the hill top. For those who like outdoor activities, Broga Hill is a great destination for getting those fitness levels up. What is truly appealing about hiking up to the peak is the panoramic view of the landscape. The view from the top of Broga Hill offers one of the best sights around, especially from such a relatively low hill. Lush valleys of green rainforest and a few towns can be seen vibrantly on a clear day, all with the backdrop of several mountains in the far distance. During the mornings, mist sometimes envelops the landscape, providing an almost surreal atmosphere. There are actually four “peaks” on Broga Hill and the climb up the first can be daunting, but the view at the top is well worth the climb. The hike itself is a relatively easy one, taking between 20 to 45 minutes to reach the top, depending on your fitness level. There are a few steep ascents, but nothing too hard to conquer, and the trails are clearly marked, making it easy for you to navigate you way to a magnificent view.

BUKIT GASING

Bukit Gasing is a green oasis surrounded by dense civilization right at the border of Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur. A popular spot for weekend trekking, Bukit Gasing covers an area of over 100 hectares, and offers the perfect setting to hike, walk, or jog. The grounds at the Petaling Jaya entrance are a popular playground for exercise buffs and *tai chi* enthusiasts. It's also a favourite with nature lovers who come here to view the leaf monkeys and do a bit of bird watching. Bukit Gasing's



Bukit Gasing

highest point at 160 metres gives a panoramic view of both Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya.

Once a rubber tree plantation, but left idle for 50 years, the course of nature has overtaken the hillsides to produce a lush secondary forest brimming with woody herbs and large tropical trees. Bukit Gasing has a good mixture of easy and difficult paths to cater for all abilities. It is a very good hiking spot for beginners, as well as for those who want to train for more strenuous mountain climbing. The trail, which is well-maintained and has sufficient signage to guide visitors, can be completed within three hours.

Two of the highlights at Bukit Gasing are the *Menara Pandangan* (watch tower) and *Jambatan Gantung* (suspension bridge). After the climb, stop by the watch tower and take some time to relax, and enjoy the view of the KL and PJ skylines.

There is also a suspension bridge – a short plank bridge over a small stream – which is a narrow pass allowing only several people to cross from one direction at any time. From the bridge, you can still get a good workout in, as there are a couple of trails that are relatively steep, giving you a good leg-strength workout and some practice at keeping your footing steady as well. 📸