

Headline	More to Kukup than its catch of the day		
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# More to Kukup than its catch of the day

Johor coastal town beckons with its homestays among fishermen and a mangrove national park



story and photos by **KATHLEEN ANN KILI**

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A LAIDBACK village by the sea, Kukup has been an increasingly popular destination for a short weekend getaway, attracting both local and foreign tourists.

With more than 75 fish farms along the straits here, the small town is especially famous for its seafood restaurants offering fresh local delicacies.

The town also has an ancient Chinese temple, believed to be more than a century old, within the Air Masin Chinese fishing village.

Unknown to many, hundreds of devotees from far and near usually throng the temple on weekends, in hopes of receiving blessings for success.

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Resident Yeo Jun Quan, 26, who has lived beside the temple his whole life, said many people, including Singaporeans, would seek blessings from the deities in the temple.

"It is just a small temple but at least 50 people would visit it on the weekends and even more during public holidays as it is believed that many had found success after offering their prayers here," he said.

Visitors taking a stroll around the village would be able to see quite a number of chalets and homestays among the homes of the locals.

Fisherman Ang Kok Hui, 60, said many tourists would visit the area for a short vacation to experience the village life.

"Some visitors would request to tag along when we go out to sea for a catch, just to experience the fisherman's life.

"Those who are here now are just in time for the *belacan* (shrimp paste) season," he said, adding that many visitors, especially foreigners, were intrigued by the process of making the paste despite the strong smell.

Singaporean tourist Tan Shi Pei, 32, said she decided to take a two-day holiday in the town, just to de-stress from the hectic city life.

"It is my first time here and I find Kukup a rather safe place for solo travellers like myself but it would have been more fun to

have a bunch of friends, as it can get a little boring at night.

"Nevertheless, I still enjoyed myself, especially the visit to the Kukup National Park, where hundreds of mangrove species can be viewed up close," she said.

The park is just a five-minute boat ride from Kukup.

Nature lover Mahdi Kasiran, 62, who was among the visitors



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spotted in the park, said the large area of gazetted mangroves was the main reason why Kukup had become a tourism destination.

"The mangrove, which has been gazetted as a Ramsar site, is commendable and without a doubt the reason for many including international researchers to travel here.

"I am amazed by the cleanliness and upkeep of the park, especially the detailed signage on the tree species, which helps the public to understand and learn about the mangroves," he said.

Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) researcher Tariq Mubarak Husin, 33, is no stranger to the wetlands, as he visits the

place at least six times a year to monitor FRIM's research plots.

"I come here often to check on the three plots of 2ha areas designated for FRIM research," he said, adding that the conservation efforts were admirable and much better than other parks.

Tariq's research team member Siti Zulaika Mohd Rafi, 22, who is an Environment and Chemical Analysis student from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, said she was excited to be able to view so many tree species all in one trip.

"It is amazing to be able to apply what I have studied in class with just one visit to this park," she said, adding that she was also

keen on dropping by to visit the stretch of fish farms nearby.

A local boat operator, who wanted to be known only as Ah Say, said there were about 75 fish farms along the straits and numbers had been growing due to the lucrative business.

"More and more businessmen have been coming here to set up fish farms because of the good returns," said the 64-year-old who helps ferry visitor across to the national park and the fish farms at just RM5 per ride.

Kukup, which is about 75km away from Johor Baru, is also popular among those travelling to Indonesia via the Kukup International Ferry Terminal.



1 There are many chalets and homestays available at the Air Masin fishermen's village in Kukup, Pontian.

2 A variety of locally packaged seafood products available at a fish farm in Kukup.

3 Ang (left) with his workers who are drying shrimp to make shrimp paste at Air Masin fishermen's village.

4 Boat operator Ah Say ferries visitors to the national park and the fish farms at just RM5 per ride.

5 Entrance fee to the Pulau Kukup Johor National Park is only RM5 per adult and RM3 for students.

6 Hundreds of tree species can be found within the Pulau Kukup Johor National Park.

7 There are many small souvenir shops around the little town.





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8 A fish farm assistant showing a horseshoe crab and sea snail bred at one of the 75 fish farms in Kukup.

9 The International Ferry Terminal in Kukup.

10 A Chinese school within the Air Masin fishing village.





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