

Headline	Wild benefits		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	26 Mar 2016	Color	Full Color
Section	StarTwo	Circulation	338,368
Page No	4	Readership	1,032,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	862 cm ²
Journalist	V.VIJAY	AdValue	RM 28,752
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 86,257



By V.VIJAY
star2@thestar.com.my

THE year was 2012. At a ripe age of 50, I ventured into hiking to ward off the ills of aging: blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes.

My BP and cholesterol were on the border line (of being unhealthy) and there was pressure from doctors to start on medications. They classified me as being in the high risk group since my dad went through a heart bypass operation.

I was adamant about not wanting to take drugs to control these lifestyle diseases. My journey began by searching for a group which could accommodate me as my fitness level was suspect. It did not take me long to find "KL Hiking" (<http://www.meetup.com/KLhiking>). They have the fastest trail runners in the country yet they could also accommodate slow coaches like me.

Alex Laevaert (who is better known as "Alex KL Hiking") was the leader of the group, and those who know him will vouch how accommodating he is with people from all walks of life.

The group was also great. I began this new adventure under their tutelage – many freely shared their knowledge of the do's and don'ts in the jungle. These included basics like what type of shoes to use.

My interest in hiking developed

Wild benefits

Thanks to hiking, the writer has better health, tasted adventure and savoured nature. And, unlike shopping malls, people greet each other on the trail.

in 2008 when I was on a three-month assignment in Kuching, following the Sai Baba Center there for service activities in the interior of Sarawak. I got close to the Ibans and Bidayus when we stayed overnight with them in the traditional longhouses.

I also ventured out with the Kuching chapter of the Malaysian Nature Society, another group of cheerful and exciting people. I got personal with nature.

And I learned how important it was to keep the jungle in its pristine state.

Baby steps

Fast forward to 2012, and I was again taking baby steps into hiking, tackling small "bukits" (hills) around the Klang Valley, such as Bukit Gasing (Petaling Jaya), **Bukit FRIM (Kepong, KL)** and Bukit Kutu (Kuala Kubu Baru, Selangor).

It was a real torture to my body

and this thought always ran in my head: "What am I doing here?". Over time, as my fitness improved, I could keep pace with the moderate hikers. That's when I started venturing into more challenging mountains such as Gunung Irau (Cameron Highlands), Gunung Bunga Buah (Genting Highlands), Pine Tree Hill (Fraser's Hill), Gunung Rajah (Bentong, Pahang) and Gunung Nuang (Hulu Langat, Selangor).

Every trail, every mountain has its own challenges, but I am always willing to face it since I enjoy the time in the wild.

One hike which was unforgettable was the hike towards Gunung Rajah. It was raining heavily and the rivers were all flooded so I did not manage to get up to the peak. But I learnt a hiking lesson: wherever there is deeper river crossing (above knee level), due care has to be taken, and it's important to have a rope to hang on to.

When one hikes in the jungle in Malaysia, the condition of the trail can differ with the weather. There may also be fallen trees. Trails can have river crossings, portions of rock climbing, muddy stretches and steep climbs. At some hikes, all of these will come in a package, as in Gunung Nuang.

One downside is that some people leave garbage, especially at waterfalls and camping sites. This leaves a foul smell and attracts rodents. It's important to remember that rat urine can lead to the dangerous disease of leptospirosis.

Safe trekking

Never leave anything in the jungle other than your footprints and never take anything from the jungle other than pictures. Thankfully, more and more people are aware of the need to take care of our natural heritage.

Some Malaysian trails are also

famous for leeches and we have also seen snakes. But bear in mind that if we take some basic precautions, we should be fine. As for wild animals, they are residents of the jungle – as long as we are not a threat to them, they will not harm us too.

This is to assure doubters that the jungles are often much safer than city streets. After all, when we're deep in the jungle, there are no cases of snatch thefts. The golden rule is to follow the trail, never stray from it.

Also, do carry basic safety items, such as a whistle, headlamp, lighter (for campfires), penknife and compass.

Another great plus of hiking is that most of the people you meet, no matter what their age, race or status, will greet and motivate each other. This can hardly ever be experienced when we walk through our city shopping malls.

Both my sons have started joining me and we hike either Bukit Gasing or Bukit Puchong (Selangor) on Saturdays. I believe that hiking will make them more hardy and alert to face the challenges of life.

Other than the enjoyment of nature, hiking has given me good health. I am much fitter than before and, for the last three years, I have not fallen sick. My health has never been better, no more high blood pressure, no more high cholesterol.

Headline	Wild benefits		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	26 Mar 2016	Color	Full Color
Section	StarTwo	Circulation	338,368
Page No	4	Readership	1,032,000
Language	English	ArticleSize	862 cm²
Journalist	V.VIJAY	AdValue	RM 28,752
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 86,257

