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Preserving and conserving Tasik Chini

Malaysia's First UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

On the east coast of Malaysia in the state of Pahang, lies Tasik Chini, an intriguing lake filled with enchanting legends and myths. According to the Orang Asli, the sanctity of Tasik Chini is guarded by a Loch Ness type monster called Naga Sri Gumum, adding to the mysterious charm of the lake.

Tasik Chini comprises a series of 12 lakes, which the Orang Asli communities call "Laut" (Sea), a reflection of the lakes' greatness and vastness. In May 2009, Tasik Chini made history by becoming the first ecological site in Malaysia to be recognised as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve under the "Man and Biosphere" programme.

The UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status is highly important, as it paves the way for more research-driven conservation and preservation efforts. Additionally, the status has placed Tasik Chini on a global spotlight and increased its potential as a premier eco-tourism destination.



The Iconic Lotus of Tasik Chini.



Orang Asli children going to school on boats.



Visitors can enjoy a scenic view and explore the Orang Asli villages by taking a boat ride.



New tourism projects saw participation of Orang Asli villages through homestays and the sale of local handicrafts.



The water quality in Tasik Chini is ensured through seven water monitoring stations.



Improving the fish population via aquaculture approach.

PROTECTING TASIK CHINI TOGETHER

While environmental sustainability is an essential part of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve's framework, it also places equal emphasis on the socio-economic development in Tasik Chini and how the community can co-exist harmoniously with the environment.

"Tasik Chini is a breathtakingly beautiful natural heritage that is home to a large variety of flora and fauna. It is also home and a source of livelihood to the Orang Asli community from the Jakun and Semai tribes. As such, Tasik Chini needs to be protected. This is why the Federal Government through the East Coast Economic Region Development Council (ECERDC) has embarked on the Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) for Tasik Chini together with the Pahang State Government as well as all stakeholders including the local communities in Tasik Chini. This SIP reaffirms our commitment to conserve and preserve Tasik Chini," said Datuk Seri Jebasingan Issace John, Chief Executive Officer of ECERDC.

The SIP covers key initiatives

"The concerted efforts to rejuvenate Tasik Chini will ensure that this natural heritage will be protected for generations to come"

and strategies up to 2025 via a three-phased approach. The Federal and State Governments and agencies are collaborating under the SIP, including the Pahang State Government, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), the Department of Town and Country Planning, the Pusat Penyelidikan Tasik Chini (PPTC) by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), the Forest Research Institute Malaysia, the Department of Environment, the Department of Irrigation and Drainage and Department of Fisheries Malaysia, as well as the local communities and non-governmental organisations.

One of the key measures under the SIP is the establishment of three management zones of Tasik Chini according to the Biosphere Reserve framework, namely the

Core, Buffer and Transition zones, each with varying levels of protection and human activities allowed in each zone. "The zoning efforts are important as they allow for appropriate planning for sustainable development of Tasik Chini whilst safeguarding the communities' livelihood. In addition, measures have been identified by the State Government with stakeholders to protect and re-establish Tasik Chini as a premier eco-tourism destination," said Dato' Sri Diraja Haji Adnan bin Haji Yaakob, Pahang Menteri Besar.

REJUVENATING TASIK CHINI

While conservation and preservation initiatives are still within the first phase of rehabilitation, much progress have been achieved in Tasik Chini. Lotus are blooming again in Tasik Chini following rehabilitation works.

"The fish population in Tasik Chini is also increasing and thriving with selected native fish species including lampam, sebarau and kelah introduced through an aquaculture approach," said Professor Dato' Dr. Mushrifah Idris, Head of PPTC.

"In addition to this, the water quality in Tasik Chini has improved to Class II from the previous Class III in 2008. This is thanks to the continuous efforts and monitoring via the seven water monitoring stations, river cleaning and river bank erosion initiatives that have rejuvenated Tasik Chini," she added.

More is being done to further improve the water quality at Tasik Chini. "A Special Task Force



Visitors experiencing Orang Asli culture and heritage.



Researchers at PPTC conducting studies to monitor the water quality.

led by the NRE was established to oversee the enforcement, education and implementation of initiatives in Tasik Chini. The Task Force via its four sub-committees, together with the solid support of other stakeholders, will combine efforts to improve the water quality in Tasik Chini to Class I by 2018," said Dato' Sri Dr. Haji Wan Junaidi bin Tuanku Jaafar, the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment.

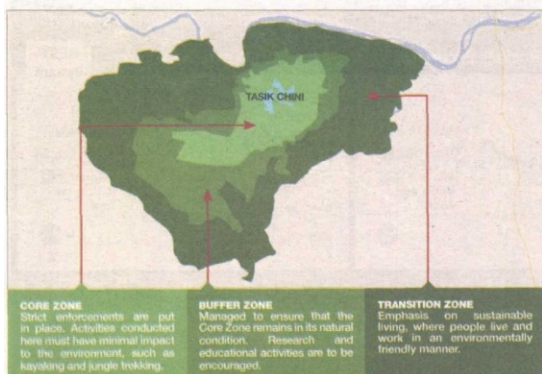
The Class I water quality is an important achievement as it enables the water in Tasik Chini to be safe for consumption without any additional treatment required. This will greatly improve the overall ecosystem in Tasik Chini while benefiting the Orang Asli community who depend on the

lake for their livelihood.

Meanwhile, efforts to replant the forest surrounding Tasik Chini are also taking shape. In fact, another 350 trees will be planted today by the community together with the Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak today, which helps to reduce the overall carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in line with the Government's green agenda.

Given the benefits it brings to the Orang Asli, the importance of protecting the lake for the future generations takes on greater significance. The ongoing efforts are the first step forward to protect and conserve Tasik Chini, and rejuvenate this natural heritage as a premier eco-tourism destination.

-Brought to you by ECERDC



The three management zones of Tasik Chini to balance environmental protection and sustainable development.

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE ENGAGEMENT

The ongoing preservation and conservation efforts in Tasik Chini will help to grow Tasik Chini as a premier eco-tourism destination. In fact, sustainable development projects including an Orang Asli Cultural Village and Handicraft Centre are in the pipeline.

ECERDC has also initiated two human capital development programmes to engage the Orang Asli communities, including:

- **empower ECER:** The Skills and Entrepreneurship programme is aimed at uplifting the communities' livelihood

through entrepreneurship. Handicrafts and motorcycle workshops are currently provided for the local community. For children in Tasik Chini, there is the Academic Training programme with tuition and motivational classes provided for them to achieve better results in their studies.

- **entrepreneur ECER:** A programme aimed at elevating small and micro entrepreneurs to improve and expand their business.