

Headline	Our parks need protection		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	11 Jan 2019	Color	Full Color
Section	Letters	Circulation	201,943
Page No	23	Readership	605,829
Language	English	ArticleSize	475 cm ²
Journalist	Brian Martin	AdValue	RM 25,437
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 76,310



On your side Brian Martin
 @KlangRed

Our parks need protection

Set up the National Heritage Trust as soon as possible so that our green jewels can be managed well.

STANDING next to a giant pulai tree, surrounded by secondary rainforest, with only the sound of a babbling brook and birds chirping to disturb the silence.

Two hours of this and all my work stress melted away. That was the hike I experienced last month. But it wasn't in any remote forest outside the Klang Valley. It was right here in the heart of the city, about 2.5km as the crow flies from the Petronas Twin Towers.

And yet, amazingly, many KLites are unaware of Taman Tugu, a 26.7ha public park, located close to Tugu Negara and Lake Gardens. Opened in September last year, this park is a great alternative for city dwellers to enjoy mother nature while exploring forest trails.

The not-for-profit, corporate social responsibility initiative led by Khazanah Nasional Bhd is also supported by various public, private and civil-society organisations.

I recently had the pleasure of trying out a new trail in Taman Tugu, a 4km route that takes about an hour and a half to finish. As a

regular hiker in Bukit Kiara and Bukit Gasing, I would say that there are differences among the three.

Taman Tugu is an urban forest park. It does not have hilly terrain like many of the other trails in the Klang Valley, but it does have some impressive indigenous tree specimens like the pulai, jelutong, tembusu and gaharu.

In partnership with the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, up to 1,000 trees within the site have been identified and tagged for preservation.

In addition, more than 4,000 trees averaging eight to 10 years old, consisting of 230 indigenous Malaysian rainforest species, are being planted within the site.

These trees, sourced from nurseries, include 1,000 trees that are categorised as "endangered" or "critically endangered" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, such as the keruing, meranti and mersawa species.

One of the criteria in selecting the trees being added is the type of fauna they will attract. An increase

in fauna will enhance the biodiversity of the site and promote the ecosystem, including natural pollination. If this happens well, the site will eventually have more than 200 trees per acre – similar to a rainforest.

It is mind-boggling to think that Khazanah actually contemplated turning the 27ha site into a tourist-attraction theme park. Luckily, saner minds prevailed and Taman Tugu was born.

But as long as this green space isn't gazetted, a part or portions of it could be alienated for development. We have seen this happen time and again in KL. And that is why it is imperative that Taman Tugu as well as other KL parks like Bukit Kiara are put into a trust to be managed and protected in perpetuity as public green spaces.

The National Trust United Kingdom is a good example. It started with one asset in 1884 but today the National Trust UK has been incorporated by six separate Acts of Parliament, owns more than 350 heritage assets (including world-

famous parks like Hyde Park and St James' Park), and is one of the largest landowners in the UK with over 242,000ha of land.

The trust describes itself as "a charity that works to preserve and protect historic places and spaces — for ever, for everyone".

Khazanah has already started the ball rolling by proposing a public trust to own and manage the Taman Tugu park component under an existing legislation, that is, the Trustees (Incorporation) Act 1952, with just one asset.

The hope is that this Trust, envisaged to be called Amanah Warisan Negara (Awan) or the National Heritage Trust, will be able to preserve and conserve other public parks to ensure they are well maintained and accessible to the general public.

But there has been a delay in getting Awan gazetted. It was reported in 2017 that Awan would be incorporated by the second quarter of 2018. A year later, nothing concrete has happened.

I've been told that while the

Attorney General's Chambers is apparently looking at the legal framework, the ball is now firmly in the court of the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry to push the legislation through. Why the unnecessary delay?

For the time being though, KL residents should check out this green jewel. More trails are going to be added in the coming months. The trails are generally suited for beginners and children with way-finding, information boards and rest stops along the way. Also, safety and security officers patrol the site daily.

There are various activities for the public, including guided forest walks, group-exercise classes and conservation initiatives. Follow @friendsoftamantugu on Instagram to get updates on the timing for these activities.

It's interesting to note that (logistics issues aside), if you combine Taman Tugu with Lake Gardens, you would have a green lung almost as big as London's Hyde Park!