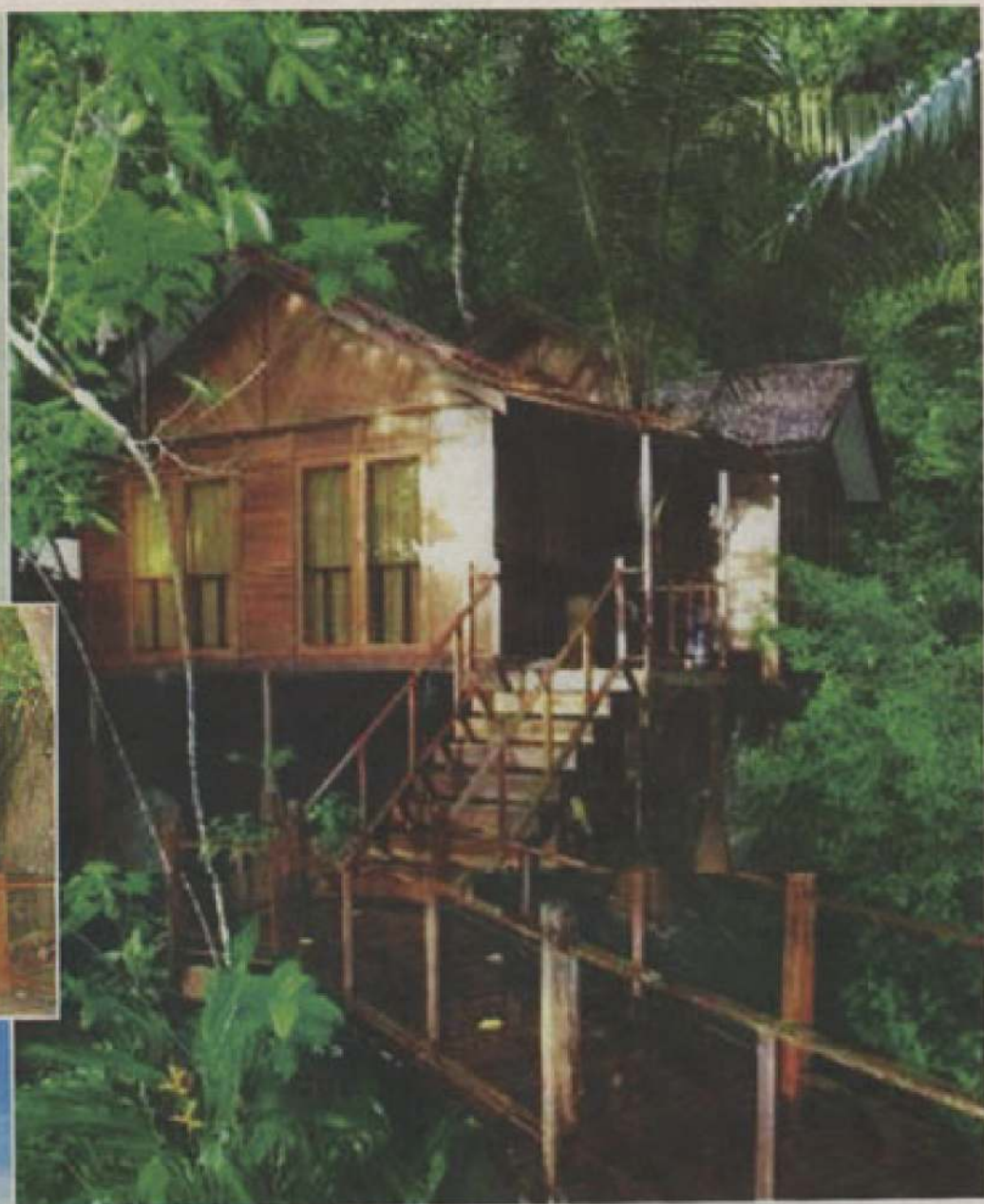


A place of bliss



Clockwise from top left: A Tree Top Chalet; a Sarang Villa offers privacy; pavilions by the sea.

By LIM GIA YING

NESTLED on the shores of Pulau Tioman, some 15 minutes boat ride from Kampung Tekek airport, is JapaMala resort, the only boutique resort on the island.

A sturdy wooden bridge from the water leads guests to the main check-in area. The place is a celebration of the Asian way of life: it incorporates Malay, Chinese, Balinese, Indian, Thai and Vietnamese influences — all evident in the background music to the façade and ambience of its lounge and restaurant.

Accommodation consists of three Sarang Villas, three Sea View Chalets, three Tree Top Chalets and the Hillside Plunge Pool Sarang Villa. The chalets are tucked away amidst lush greenery with decades-old trees providing shade.

Its only restaurant, Tamarind Terrace, serves Thai and Indochine cuisine, and comes alive after dark, lit by candles that resemble twinkling stars!

Then, there is the pavilion that fronts the open sea where you can read novels all day long.

The resort opened two years ago after it was bought over from a Kelantanese member of royalty.

"There were more rooms then but they were not properly maintained. We decided to tear down several rooms to project the exclusive image of a boutique resort and later did the refurbishments," recalled JapaMala Resort marketing communications director Maple Leo.

The resort is built of recycled timber and bamboo, designed with nature in mind.

Leo swears that not a single boulder was removed or a single tree cut throughout the re-construction of the resort.

"We did not disturb the natural surroundings; therefore, every room is different in terms of arrangement and design to accommodate the natural landscape."

JapaMala is a Sanskrit word meaning 'praying beads', which are used by Buddhists, Hindus and Yogis (people who practise yoga). It is to project the resort's symbolic image of holistic healing and peaceful mind.

"JapaMala is not just a place, but a state of mind. We want guests to experience total

DATIN Seri Tiara Jacqueline's sigh said it all. "I've been longing to come to Pulau Tioman. Now that I'm here, my biggest disappointment is to be greeted by the construction of a marina upon landing at the airport.

"It kind of shattered my whole idea of a holiday!" exclaimed the actress ruefully.

Famed for its marine life and natural assets, Tioman attracts snorkellers, divers, and trekkers who flock to its shores in search of an idyllic getaway.

But now that tranquility is under threat with the development of a marina. And plans are in the pipeline to build an airport in Kampung Geriting — both of which promises to affect the lives of the kampung people.

In light of this, a five-month-long programme of workshops was drawn up this year to educate and equip Tioman's local community with skills in preserving their island and heritage.

Since February, they have been given English lessons and participated in workshops on basic trail guiding and proper snorkelling, part of the Tioman Island Fest 2006 project initiated by the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) Selangor branch and sponsored in part by Ford Motor's Environmental and Conservation Grant.

"We hope that through these workshops, villagers will learn to appreciate Tioman's stunning beauty, and, in turn, get excited enough to care for the island's natural assets," said MNS marine scientist Saras Kumar.

The fest, to be held on May 27, is aimed at sustainable, low-impact tourism. All seven villages in the island are

Ours to care for



participating in a competition which draws on the karaoke skills of the locals.

"But Impian Tioman is not just about

singing. Participants need to be able to talk about Tioman's environment and what they can do to protect it," said JapaMala Resort

marketing communications director Maple Loo.

"Two winners will be selected from each village to compete in the grand finals on the fest day where they'll be judged on their vocal abilities and also level of environmental awareness.

"The champion will be crowned Tioman Environmental Ambassador," enthused Loo.

She said the ambassador would work closely with the Tioman Development Authority (TDA), MNS and JapaMala to educate people about coral reef protection, tree conservation, and even proper garbage disposal.

"The ambassador must be able to lead and be a role model to youths. Artists from Akademi Fantasia (AF) were flown in to motivate more locals to be part of the fest."

Among them were Adam and dancer/choreographer Boy. While he was the guest judge during the audition in Kampung Tekek along with Tiara, Boy conducted a dance workshop for the locals to learn dance moves as part of the fun.

Vince, Sahri, Adi and Nana will also be there. The festival will take place at the Marine Park Grounds in Kampung Tekek and all are welcome.

The island is still very much unspoilt with its azure blue waters and reefs teeming with fish.

"It'll be a shame if we took for granted something that is given free to us to enjoy, only to see it disappear in the next few years," said Tiara. — By LIM CHIA YING

From left: Akademi Fantasia's Adam, Maple Loo and Boy.



Look out onto the azure waters of the South China Sea from your chalet.

relaxation and bliss when they're here," said Loo.

The rooms exude rustic warmth and feel with its clever use of wood and glass, while furniture, lamps, and fabrics were sourced from Thailand. The bathrooms are pebbled to give it a contemporary feel.

I left the sound of lapping waves behind as I climbed the wooden walkway to my room with only the chirping of insects to accompany me. What a lovely day to do nothing at all. In the evening, I hopped onto the resort ferry for a tour down Kampung Tekek, the biggest village of seven on the island.

Curious onlookers stared at us as we docked. Kampung Tekek is the biggest village of seven on the island.

Shophouses and coffee shops were filled with friendly locals going about their daily routine. Life here continues at an unhurried pace. That's Tioman's charm. **W**

Q Berjaya Air flies two times daily and 14 times a week to Pulau Tioman. Holiday packages and flight tickets can be booked via www.Berjaya-Air.com

The Tamarind Terrace. — Pictures by JapaMala Resort

