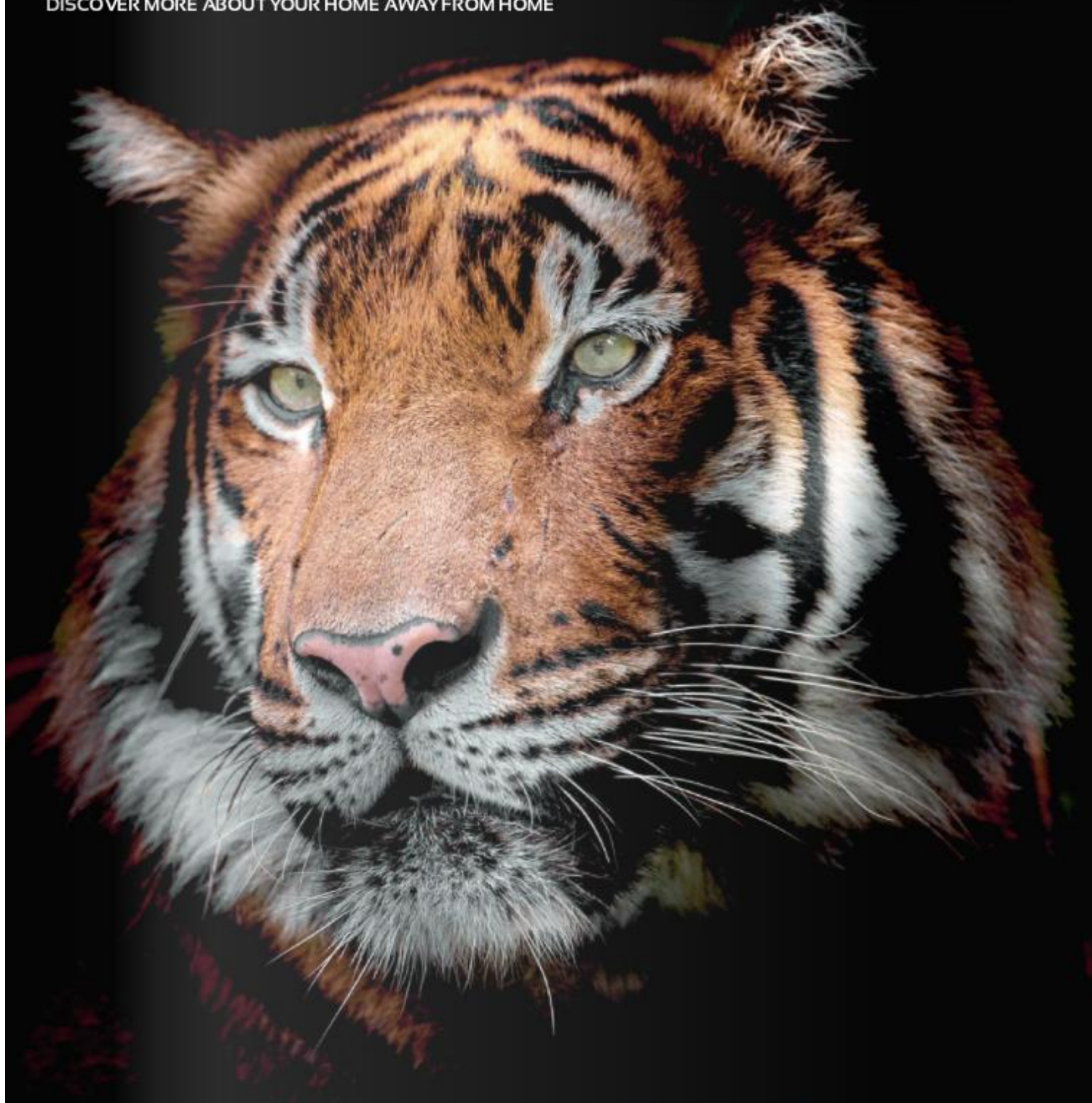


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*Welcome the
Year of the Tiger*



Port Dickson by the Sea



Beachfront, Port Dickson

I think it's fair to say that with international travel largely off the agenda for the next few months at least, local destinations we may have neglected are now looking more appealing by the day. The closest beaches to Kuala Lumpur are those along the Port Dickson strip in coastal Negeri Sembilan facing the Straits of Malacca. This waterway is one of the world's busiest shipping passages, perhaps an attribute in conflict with destinations normally associated with seaside holidays. However, several resorts all with pools and associated holiday infrastructure help to make the beaches here quite popular, especially with local holidaymakers.

Port Dickson extends for some 18 km of shallow coastal waters dotted with shady vegetation dominated by casuarinas and banyan trees. While the beaches may not be Malaysia's finest, they're nevertheless where many Kuala Lumpur-area residents enjoy relaxing at the weekends and on public

holidays. Admittedly, sea breezes and the setting sun do create an appealing backdrop.

Much of the coastal strip is lined with tall hotel and condominium blocks although there are still extensive

sections of beachfront for public access. Teluk Kemang is the most popular stretch and is well-equipped with almost every watersport imaginable from canoeing to parasailing, jet-skiing, speedboat rides, and stand-up paddleboarding. Blue



Steam train, Army Museum

Lagoon, 15 km south of Port Dickson town, is a more secluded cove which offers coastal fun in a more relaxed setting.

A LINE TO THE PORT

This coastal settlement began as a small fishing and charcoal production village. Port Dickson was named after Sir John Frederick Dickson, the Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner to Malaya. A branch rail line from the main West Coast Line once extended from Seremban to Port Dickson and there has been some discussion on reinstating this line but this would appear most unlikely.

In 1891, the Sungei Ujong Railway Company began operating the railway from Seremban to the Port Dickson wharf in the state that what was then known as Sungei Ujong (now Negeri Sembilan). Extending some 40km, the railway was the second to be laid in Malaya after the line from Taiping to Port Weld (now Kuala Sepetang) in Perak. The main purpose of both railways was to facilitate the export of tin ore that was mined in the interior and previously transported to their respective ports by bullock carts. Over time, passengers were also accepted on the railway. Initially, there was just one daily train in each direction but frequencies increased over time. It was referred to as a zig-zag railway because it initially traversed a circuitous route but realignments over time created a straighter line.

In 1908, the line was taken over by FMS Railways after maintenance lapsed despite the line operating profitably. Passenger services were suspended in 1930, but freight trains continued operating. In the mid-1960s, the Esso oil refinery (now Petron) opened and oil was transported from the port to various West Coast destinations. The line closed in 2008, and in some places, it's still possible to see the old rail line



Avillion Port Dickson

and some associated features such as signs, signals and stations. It must have once been quite thrilling to make the train journey from Kuala Lumpur to the Port Dickson beaches, and no doubt the area would once again bustle with tourists in the unlikely event of the line being revived.

RECREATION ON THE WATER

Day trippers normally head to a Port Dickson beach and spend the time in

the water and beneath shady trees along the foreshore. Visitors staying the night tend to check in and chill out, rarely emerging until it's time to join the inevitable afternoon traffic jam back to the city. Those who venture beyond their pool, however, can enjoy various recreational activities from team building adventures to banana boat rides, kayaking, canoeing and increasingly, stand-up paddleboarding.



Fighter jet, Army Museum



The marina at the Royal Port Dickson Yacht Club

Yachting enthusiasts are catered for at the Royal Port Dickson Yacht Club, where visitors are always welcome. The Club offers an extensive selection of recreational activities, including a swimming pool and tennis courts, and young sailors can learn to sail here on

various small boats. Ye Olde Nook Restaurant and Sunset Bar are open daily and onsite accommodation is available with eight rooms. Admiral Marina and Leisure Club within Avillion Admiral Cove Resort caters to a handful of luxury yachts, sailors and

watersport enthusiasts. The marina appeals to international yachties sailing through the Straits of Malacca and local residents who frequent the bar overlooking the marina (the Sailor's Drink Shop). There are clubhouse facilities, recreational outlets, a restaurant and accommodation as well as marina berths.

Stand-up paddleboarding is making its presence known on Malaysia's lakes and along its coastlines. Leading the charge is Coach Amir and his crew of friendly assistants. Every weekend, they teach those new to the sport or lead groups practicing their newfound skills on Lake Widi, just one hour north of Kuala Lumpur. This fun activity is as safe as it is affordable, and boards and life jacket can be rented for those without equipment. Once a month, Amir's team leads enthusiasts new and old on day-trips to Port Dickson or elsewhere so everyone can enjoy paddling on the open sea. Lifeguards are always part of every group.

Triathlon is another sport conducted along the beachfront near the Avillion Admiral Cove. Comprising swimming, cycling and running, the Port Dickson International Triathlon is keenly contested by local and international athletes. Olympic and sprint distance course are contested by age groupers



Stand-up paddleboarding

and professionals and while the race is normally staged in April, athletes need to stay in touch with the organiser for the latest Covid-19 updates.

At most times of the year, the walk down to the secluded Monkey Bay with its very pleasant and remote setting could well be a highlight for those seeking a swim in solitude.

FEATHERED FLIGHTS

The Straits of Malacca are an important link between the West and the East, and this is no more evident than at Tanjung Tuan where the first lighthouse – then known as Cape Rachado – was built by the Portuguese in the 16th century. The current and newer lighthouse remains an important navigational aid for ships passing along the straits. There's a short stroll through Tanjung Tuan Recreational Forest to the lighthouse with panoramic views across the Straits of Malacca.

Just 38 km wide at this point, this is the narrowest stretch of the Straits between neighbouring Sumatra in Indonesia and Peninsular Malaysia, a fact clearly not lost on the migratory birds that pass over here and rest on

their long journeys from the northern to the southern hemisphere and back some months later. Squadrons of honey buzzards, hawks, and eagles cross here during the spring migration from mid-February to mid-April, and the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) organises birdwatching events and activities to celebrate Raptor Watch normally staged annually in mid-March. The best time to witness the migration is during the heat of the day from 11am to 3pm when the birds lazily ride the hot air thermals over the Straits. This is a wonderful display for bird enthusiasts, as well as children with an interest in nature.

SEASIDE STAYS

Large hotels and apartments tend to be the norm along coastal Port Dickson, although there are also some budget hotels and numerous homestays. Covid-19 has not been kind to many Malaysian hotels, and some now face some unfortunate staffing and maintenance issues. (A few also have very unusual guest arrival and departure times, such as 4pm check-in and 11am check-out, which adds new meaning to the word 'day' and will interfere dramatically



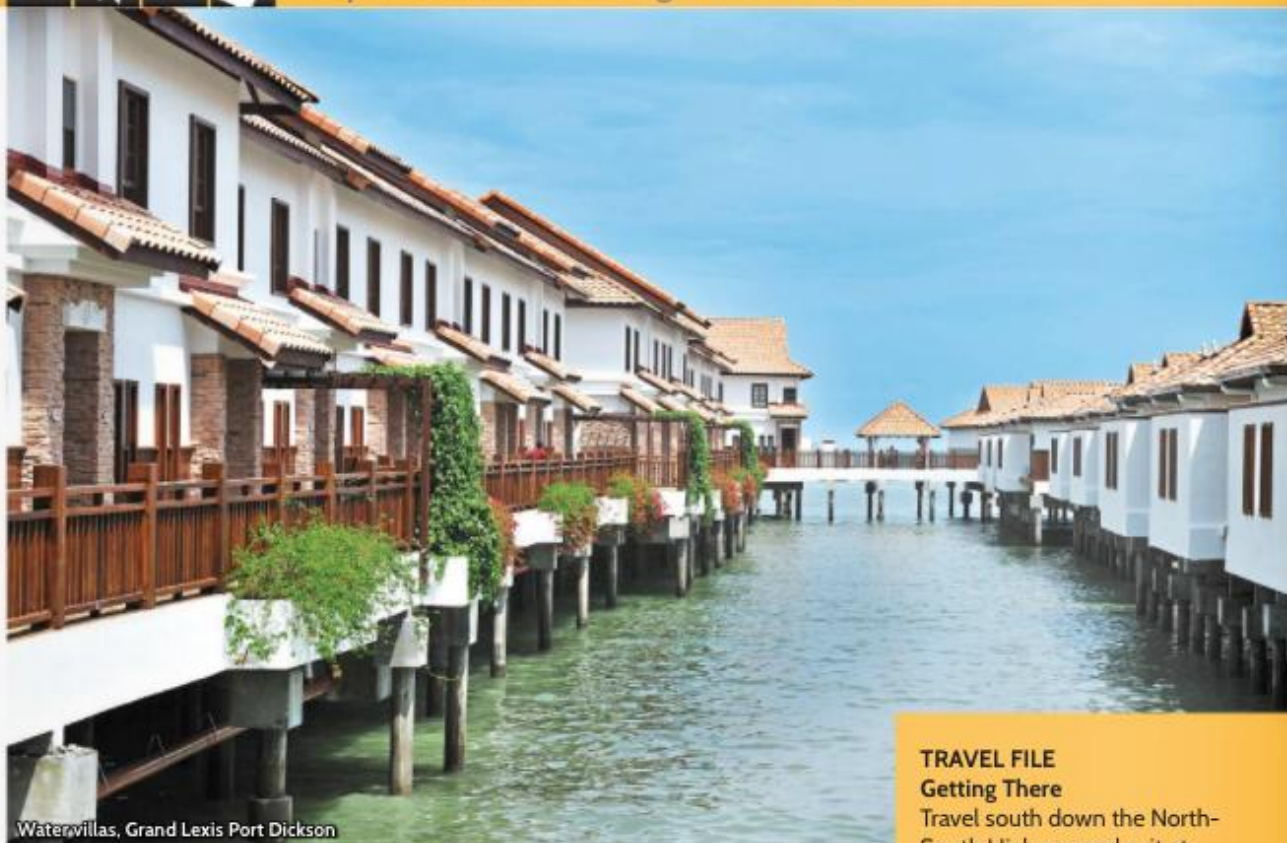
Oriental Honey Buzzard

with a weekend escape.) Some properties rest on their laurels, confident that their pools, sea breezes, and sunsets will appease guests seeking respite from the rigours of urban living. However, here is a selection of some properties to consider.

Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson located on Pasir Panjang is a large water home development with 522 over-water villas and 117 villas along the foreshore. The development resembles a hibiscus flower blooming over the water. Guests enjoy facilities such as private pools and steam rooms on the private balconies of each villa.



Port Dickson Triathlon



Water villas, Grand Lexis Port Dickson

Grand Lexis Port Dickson, located near Lukut Town in Port Dickson, features 305 Balinese-inspired water villas each with a private pool, landscaped garden, sea-facing balconies, and clear glass flooring to admire the water.

Lexis Port Dickson is another Balinese-inspired resort with over-water chalets and sky tower units with views over the Straits of Malacca. All 242 chalets and tower rooms are designed for a relaxing stay on the coast.

SIGHTSEEING SORTIES

Being the tourist destination that it is, there's a range of options for those who want to leave their resort or who are forced from their lodgings at such unfriendly times like 11am. There has always been a strong army presence in the district dating back to colonial days and the Army Museum adjoining Kem Si Rusa is worth visiting (open Wednesday to Sunday from 10am to 5pm). Decommissioned planes, tanks, guns, and military vehicles are on display, visible even from the road. There are also some old rail carriages and steam locomotives in the collection.

The PD Ostrich Farm located near the Ancasa Resort with its birds, reptiles,

and a limited number of other animals, may be of passing interest for children. The 18-hole Port Dickson Golf and Country Club appeals for its affordable green fees and refreshing sea breeze.

Most visitors venture out seeking the seafood that, not surprisingly, features on the menus of most restaurants here. Ones which come with a recommendation include – Restoran Fatt Kee, Weng Yin Seafood, La Playa Bar and Restaurant (beachfront, music, food and beverages), Kafe Kampung Kaw (Malay cuisine including *nasi lemak*), Restoran Yun Long Seafood, Double Queue Thai cuisine (for *tom yam* and pineapple fried rice), and Restoran Seri Mesra Ikan (*ikan bakar*).

It's my recommendation to carefully choose your accommodation, and travel to Port Dickson to relax with fresh breezes and enjoy all the facilities of your resort, especially the swimming pool. Hopefully, as 2022 goes by and the outlook begins to improve, some of the hotels and resorts which have let things slide during the worst of the pandemic will see fit to spruce up their properties and rehire and reinforce their service staffs. ■

TRAVEL FILE

Getting There

Travel south down the North-South Highway and exit at Seremban for the Seremban to Port Dickson Highway that connects to the town some 90 km from the capital. For those using public transport, the connection is via train to Seremban and then local bus to Port Dickson and once at the beach, local transport is via taxis or Grab.

Where to Stay

There are several large seaside properties along the Port Dickson strip. Choose from Avillion Admiral Cove Hotel (avillionadmiralcove.com), Avillion Port Dickson (avillionportdickson.com), Grand Lexis Port Dickson (grandlexispd.com), Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson (lexishibiscuspd.com), Lexis Port Dickson (lexispd.com), and Thistle Port Dickson Resort (thistle.com.my).

Contacts

Coach Amir (stand-up paddleboarding with SUPON Water Sports, +6019.277 8554), Malaysian Nature Society (mns.my), Port Dickson International Triathlon (triathlonmalaysia.com), Raptor Watch (raptorwatch.org), and Royal Port Dickson Yacht Club (rpdyc.com.my).