

YTL'S

# NATURAL WONDERS

Nº.1

VOICE OF CONSERVATION

APR '23



## TURTLE WATCH

Near Tanjong Jara Resort is a protected beach where, between April and October each year, green turtles and painted terrapins come ashore to lay their eggs.

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# A WELCOME MESSAGE

FROM JUSTIN JUHUN

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Dear guests,

It is with great pleasure that we bring you this newsletter, with heart-warming updates of YTL Hotels' key sustainability and environmental initiatives.

On Gaya Island Resort - located within the 4,929-hectare Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park, we are seeing the fruits of our continual efforts - since 2014 - in repopulating mangroves. In total, over 3,000 mangrove saplings have been planted on the island with a 75 per cent success rate. Our work on protecting

the mangroves which ring the island has helped prevent erosion of its coastlines. These mangroves are also a useful carbon sink for the atmosphere and encourage a flourishing bio-diversity where guests will be able to spot crabs, hornbills and other beautiful creatures while kayaking through the serene mangrove forest.

When in Gaya Island Resort, please stop by our Marine Centre and say hi to our resident green sea turtle. It was rescued during the height of the global pandemic and was hence given the name Covid. Over time, rehabilitation has helped it regain its strength and we look forward to the day it will rejoin its brothers and sisters in the open sea.

The unique locations of YTL Hotels continuously provide plenty of opportunities for us to support conservation as well. On the east coast of peninsular Malaysia, Tanjong Jara Resort sits along a beautiful sandy coastline that has been the preferred hatching grounds for turtles since time immemorial. Our partnership there with the Lang Tengah Turtle Watch allows us to establish turtle nests, protect breeding sites from poachers and natural predators, and effectively increase hatching and survival rates of baby turtles, all of which are endangered.

Off the western coast of peninsular Malaysia, the ever-popular Pangkor Laut Resort is also a hotbed of activity with regards to reef restoration. In the waters off this beautiful private island, our efforts to rehabilitate the coral reefs began in 2011 with Reef Check Malaysia. We have continued the effort of populating these waters with coral fragments and to great success! Over 88 per cent of the corals are thriving and now offer a mini ecosystem for the teeming marine life (which you will encounter on a dive or snorkel).

With this, I wish you happy reading and hope that we will welcome you soon to our resorts, where you can also enjoy our conservation activities and connect with nature in a meaningful way, creating your own treasured moment in the most authentic way.

Yours sincerely,

Justin Juhun  
Director of Conservation



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## ENRICHING THE MANGROVE FORESTS FOR THE FUTURE

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The shorelines of Gaya Island Resort are fringed by rare mangrove forests that are at least a century old. Mangroves are tropical shrubs and trees that thrive in muddy, salty conditions, and are often found along coastlines, rivers and estuaries, near sandy beaches and coral reefs.

They support a rich bio-diversity, with their underwater roots providing a valuable nursing environment to the juveniles of

many marine species. They also act as a form of natural defence against erosion, rising sea levels and storm surges. More significantly, mangroves are able to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store vast amounts of carbon for many thousands of years in their waterlogged soils.

Cognisant of the many environmental benefits of mangrove forests, Gaya Island Resort established a mangrove nursery in

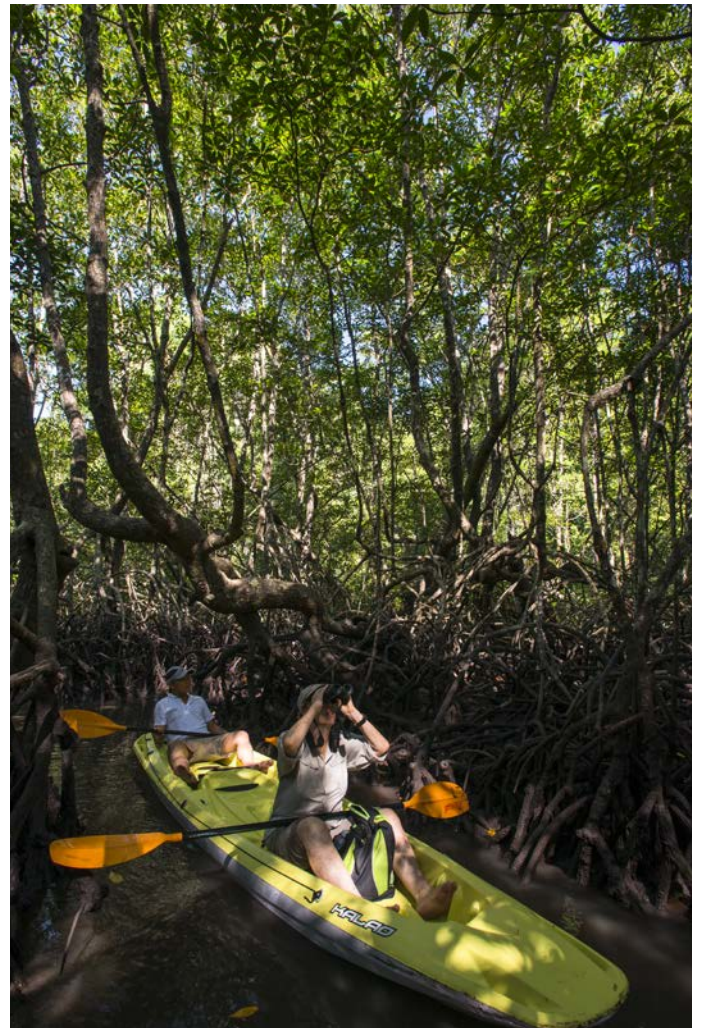




2014 and developed a box planting method for the saplings. Initially, the boxes were constructed from recycled plywood. Later, they were replaced with concrete hexagonal blocks for greater durability and stability. In total, 3,000 mangrove saplings were planted, and over the years, they have grown into shrubs at a 75% success rate.

In line with its commitment to ecological conservation, the Resort launched the Gaya Island Resort Wildlife Centre in October 2016. Headed by Justin Juhun, the Resort's Resident Naturalist, the Centre carries out nature and wildlife preservation initiatives, including research, study and rescue or care of wildlife species at the biological station, as well as educates visitors on the diverse species of wildlife and botanic reserves found on the island.

The Resort's visitor programmes include unique kayak expeditions into the mangrove forests where guests may catch glimpses of mangrove crabs, oriental pied hornbills, monitor lizards and many other beautiful creatures; and nature walks in the ancient rainforests with the Resident Naturalist as guide to point out the flora and fauna of Gaya.





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## TURTLE WATCH AT TANJONG JARA RESORT

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In 2016, Tanjong Jara Resort established the Turtle Watch at Tanjong Jara Resort in an exclusive partnership with Lang Tengah Turtle Watch, a turtle conservation organisation. The Turtle Watch at Tanjong Jara Resort embodies the Resort's commitment to live harmoniously with its natural surroundings and to protect and conserve its local fauna. The Turtle Watch team incubates the turtle nests in the hatchery to protect them from poachers and predators, thus increasing their hatching success rate.

Since the inception of its turtle conservation project in 2016, the Turtle Watch at Tanjong Jara Resort has rescued 94,809 eggs from 1,094 nests and released more than 73,000 hatchlings into the sea. Originally located on the beach near the Nelayan Restaurant in the Resort, a new hatchery was built next to the Turtle Watch's Visitors' Hut in April 2022. This was necessary and unprecedented due to the prolonged monsoon season, which had made the beaches unsuitable for incubating nests. Later when the tides receded, another hatchery was built on the beach.



The Turtle Watch at Tanjong Jara Resort entered its seventh year this year, and as the COVID-19 pandemic drew to an end, conservation efforts shifted into higher gear. In the past 12 months, 21,500 eggs were rescued from 293 nests and 17,441 hatchlings were released into the sea, with an average 81% hatching success rate. Furthermore, 16,369 endangered green sea turtle hatchlings emerged from the 20,066 eggs that were incubating in the 206 nests; while 1,072 critically endangered painted terrapin hatchlings emerged from the 1,434 eggs incubating in the 87 nests.

A double-headed green turtle hatchling called Faith & Hope was also born in August 2022. Under the tender care of the team at the Turtle Conservation and Information Centre, it grew to a length of 50cm and weight of 42g, before it sadly died in November. The chances of survival for double-headed hatchlings are extremely slim due to various health implications arising from the fact that they share the same lungs, heart and other vital organs.





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## COVID, THE GREEN SEA TURTLE

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Covid, an endangered green sea turtle, was found floating in the sea by a staff member of Gaya Island Resort in May 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a large open crack across the rear part of its shell, probably the result of a boat strike, and the gaping wound was severely infected.

Covid was immediately taken to the Gaya Island Resort Marine Centre for treatment. Turtle conservation efforts at the Centre are focused on the 3Rs of Rescue (identifying and acquiring turtles at risk), Rehabilitate (providing sick or injured turtles with a safe place for recovery and administration of care), and Release (rehabilitated turtles will be released with GPS trackers to ascertain their progress and contribute to ongoing turtle research). Over the years, the Centre has rescued 23 turtles and released nine.

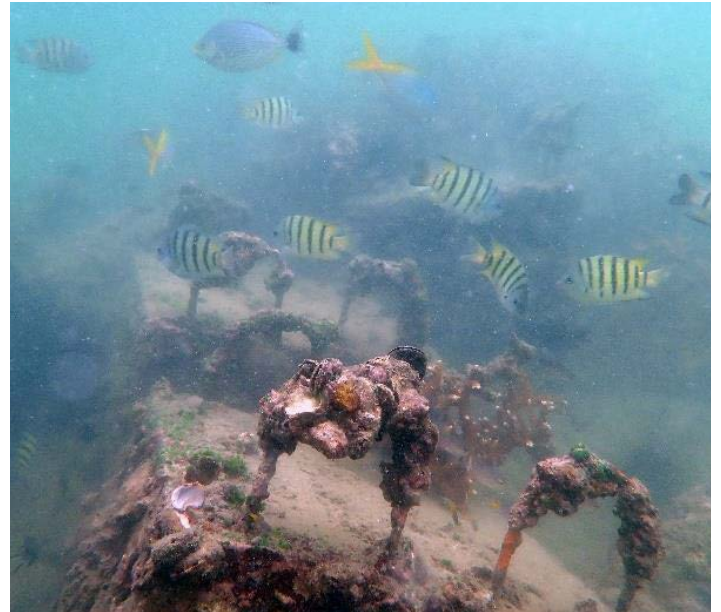
At the Centre, Covid the turtle was found to have had a relatively large growth in its neck area. In addition, its rear flippers did not move, and it was not able to dive. However, the benign tumour in Covid's neck area has since been removed, and its healing is now progressing well. The Centre suspects the tumour was the result of, or had been worsened by, Covid's floating angle, as it always had to look up due to its wounded rear causing it to be pulled downwards.

The Centre's team of experts, led by Resident Marine Biologist, Scott Mayback, also noted that there was no movement in Covid's rear flippers when it swam. Typically, the rear flippers function as rudders. However, in Covid's case, they either hung limp or were closed in a clamping position. This may have been the result of nerve damage from the boat strike. Thus, acupuncturists were invited to examine Covid, and found that its rear flippers still functioned. Despite not being used for swimming, they responded to pin pricks and tugging, with one flipper stronger than the other. Acupuncture to the rear flippers has now been incorporated into Covid's rehabilitation programme.

Covid has also been prescribed weight therapy, where weights are added to and removed from Covid's shell in incremental degrees. The purpose of this is to help Covid regulate the amount of air in its lungs and eventually maintain its own buoyancy.

Covid is growing stronger and better by the day. The crack in its shell has closed naturally. However, it is not yet ready to be released back into the sea. The next phase of Covid's rehabilitation programme is to provide it with sufficient space to dive deeper and reacclimatise to the ocean environment.





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## CORAL REEF RESTORATION AT PANGKOR LAUT RESORT

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Corals planted on the cement blocks next to Pangkor Laut Jetty are doing well. We recorded new coral recruits that have naturally attached to the concrete blocks which means corals are reproducing in the area and the cement blocks are acting as a suitable substrate for the coral larvae to attach on and grow.

This initiative has helped to protect the area and we are now able to see many fish species hiding among the blocks. We recorded Damselfishes, Butterflyfish, Snappers, Groupers and sweetlips in the area. Besides the branching corals that we planted, we also noticed encrusting corals growing on the concrete blocks along with sponges and ascidians.



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# YTL HOTELS

Treasured Places, Treasured Moments

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Published every quarter, the Natural Wonders - Voice of Conservation aims to share the latest conservation news from our collection of Luxury Resorts in Malaysia. Discover the infinite variety, complexity, sheer beauty of the natural environment and the passion of its people that make each resort an exceptional experience.



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