

A RIDE ON THE WILD SIDE



Descending the cascading waterfall



Rafting down Sungai Itek

SCALING DOWN TREACHEROUS WATERFALLS, BATTLING SWIFT RAPIDS AND EXPLORING DEEP UNDER GROUND. **GIGI IVANNA** STRAPS ON A HELMET AND TAKES A DIVE INTO MOTHER NATURE



A guide conquers the rapids

Malaysia is one of the most blessed countries in the world, especially for adventure-seeking junkies as there are an abundance of rivers, waterfalls, mountains, jungles and caves to conquer and explore.

In a quiet little town called Gopeng in Perak, My Gopeng Resort, a small resort nestled beside the swift flowing Sungai Itek, is taking advantage of all Mother Nature has to offer by providing accommodation and adventure packages for the eager thrill seekers to enjoy.

Lodging is pretty basic, simple yet comfortable. A group of us booked ourselves into their Kampung Chalets, individual kampung-style huts for four people that come with an attached bathroom below. There are a range of activities from jungle walks to rafting and caving that can be arranged by the resort so no worries about being stranded in a godforsaken place with nothing to do, although that is actually not too bad compared to the madness of city life we have to face each day.

We decided to book ourselves on an AquaAdventure package by MMAventure which included a spot of waterfall abseiling, white-water rafting and caving. Oh boy, were we in for a ride.

Michael, MMAventure founder, took us in his 4x4 along narrow dirt roads to the site of the waterfall a short distance away from our resort. We passed an Orang Asli village in which Michael stopped to pay a token fee to the village chief for allowing us to conduct activities within the villagers' area.

The waterfall was amazing! All 15-metres of it. I can't believe we were about to scale down the cascading waters. "It looks dangerous. Are you sure it's safe?" I cautiously asked. "Don't worry, once you

...I quickly found out that I was no match for the ferocious currents as I tumbled through the rapids...

begin your journey down, you will see that it is not as difficult or scary as it looks," smiled Michael.

We were given a safety briefing on how to abseil down the waterfall safely. Michael's team helped us with our harness and showed us how to use our Stops (gadget used to stop the ropes) as we descended.

Being an eager beaver, I volunteered to be the first to attempt the feat. The first few steps to the edge of the waterfall was the worst as I have a fear of heights and I didn't know what to expect but when I actually got to the edge, I found out that it wasn't that hard to make my way down after all.

I started off with small baby steps but as my confidence grew, I made my way down in bigger leaps and bounds with the refreshing waters splashing all around me. As bad luck would have it, I did slip on

the mossy rocks but it didn't matter much as the ropes held perfectly well.

I reached the bottom in less than 10 minutes, giddy from the excitement and feeling exhilarated from the rush. After unhooking myself from the safety rope, I climbed all the way to the top just so that I could have a go at the waterfall once again. Told you I was an eager beaver!

White water rafting along the swift rapids of Sungai Itek was next. The rainy season meant the water level of the river was high, meaning higher-grade rapids and a faster, more exciting ride for us. As always, a safety briefing on the rafting commands and how to use our equipment was given to us before we were even allowed in the water. We were taught how to pull someone who has fallen overboard back into the raft and what to do when the raft gets stuck or capsizes.

After our briefing was over, we made our way down to the river where a couple of guides were waiting for us. "Let's do body rafting first," said a cheeky Sabahan guide. Body rafting is actually when you throw yourself into the river with nothing but a life jacket on and allow the current to sweep you down the rapids. This activity was to simulate a rescue operation in a controlled environment when someone has fallen into the water.

One by one, participants jumped into the river and managed to make it safely out the other side. It doesn't look that difficult, I thought but I quickly found out that I was no match for the ferocious currents as I tumbled through the rapids. I was dunked under the water several times and I think I drank quite a lot of the swirling liquid.

What you actually have to do during these situations is to relax, lie on your back, keep your feet straight up in front of you and let the current take you to safety. Swim to the sides once the current has subsided or look out for someone with a rope. I missed the rope the first time and only caught it after the second attempt. Place the rope over your shoulder, turn around to lie on your back and allow the guide pull you to safety.

We were blessed with 14 grade three and four rapids and managed to put our



Interesting drawings in the Rolls-Royce Cave



A smaller waterfall

skills to the test manoeuvring the bends and dips of the river on our rafts. There were no capsizing incidences but we did witness many other rafts overturning at a few rapids. It was all in the name of fun and the occupants were safely hauled back into the raft.

Two hours on the river was just too short. We rode back to our resort standing in the open back of a one-tonne lorry soaking wet but happy. We retired to bed exhausted but contented.

We checked out of our resort the next morning and headed out to Gua Tempurung for our spelunking adventure. Michael has been spelunking the many caves around Asia for almost two decades and is very passionate about these underground caverns.

The first part of the cave was colourfully lit and there was a proper walkway built as most visitors explore only this part of the cave. A fascinating section that caught our interest was the 'Rolls-Royce Cave', named after some intriguing drawings supposedly drawn by the communists. It depicted an ambush of a car that looked like a Rolls-Royce with a clock hand at seven next to it. The only event in history that had a connection to this drawing was the murder of British High Commissioner in Malaya, Sir Henry Gurney, who was killed back in 1951 after his motorcade

on their way up to Fraser's Hill was ambushed by communist guerrillas.

We knew that we were about to begin our wet underground adventure when we reached the end of the walkway and people were turning back. We followed the underground stream which grew bigger as we headed deeper in. It was pitch dark in there and the ceiling was getting lower. It was not too long before we found ourselves crawling on our bellies and wading through the cold dark waters.

Michael told us that the river has trapped many explorers as it fills the cave very quickly when it rains so it is very important to go with someone who knows how to read the water levels and determine the safety of the route.

After wading our way through the dark passageways, we saw a light at the end of the tunnel that opened up to the other side of the mountain. You could even see the highway if you have the energy to trek a short distance through the jungle. We had a nice picnic lunch before heading back the way we came, making sure we didn't leave any rubbish behind.

It was a good exciting five hour-long adventure, perfect for those who want to explore the mysterious underworld and don't mind getting wet and dirty in the process. Definitely recommended.

Contact

My Gopeng Resort
UGM 4/1 Kg. Geruntom, 31600 Gopeng,
Perak, Malaysia

Tel: +605.242 3777

Email: mygopengresort@yahoo.com
Web: www.mygopengresort.com

