

Rustic Malaysia

A PICTORIAL JOURNEY





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Rustic Malaysia

A P I C T O R I A L J O U R N E Y



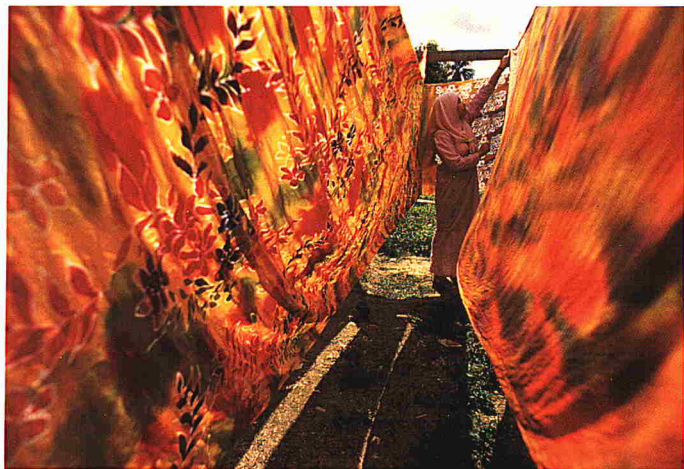
by *Arthur Teng*

Tropical Press Sdn. Bhd.
Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia





Dedicated to my wife and son



Many thanks to Low Jui Liat for writing the original text and for encouraging and supporting this journey into publishing.



Foreword

Most of us are content to take pictures that turn out fairly well—or even pictures that turn out at all! But there are those who will take the time and make the effort to study a place or subject carefully, planning their shot in great detail and then waiting patiently for the right conditions to photograph it. These are the people who are almost always rewarded with pictures that have design, whose elements appear to balance one another. Pictures with impact.

The way a photographer 'sees' and uses props in and around a subject makes all the difference between a work that is merely adequate and one that makes a statement. Arthur Teng Gin Wah is a photographer who 'sees' beyond the obvious and delivers interesting combinations of subject and cast. His pictures sublime the ordinary. Haunting and melancholy at times and peaceful and uplifting in other instances, they reflect the thoughtfulness of a sensitive photographer. Perhaps it is the training that Arthur has received as a graphic artist that has given him such a discerning eye. But there is no doubt that his choice of photographic subjects grew out of his love for the countryside and its rustic values. He was brought up in a typical village environment and this is, I believe, where he learnt to 'see' and appreciate rural settings.

I am impressed by the collection of images Arthur has assembled in this book. It is a valuable collection for those of us who have left the more modest things in life for the ponderous trappings of the city. In *Rustic Malaysia: A pictorial journey*, Arthur takes us through a Malaysia very few of us see.



Eric Peris



'Going to work' takes on a new meaning when the journey involves crossing a wooden bridge to a sun-drenched beach. There are no traffic jams or time clocks here, just sun, sea and lots of salt. The villagers of Merchang, Terengganu, produce salted fish, a piquant condiment that is well-loved in Malaysia. They make their way across the bridge daily to the huts on the beach where they salt their fish and leave them to dry in the sun.

Landscapes

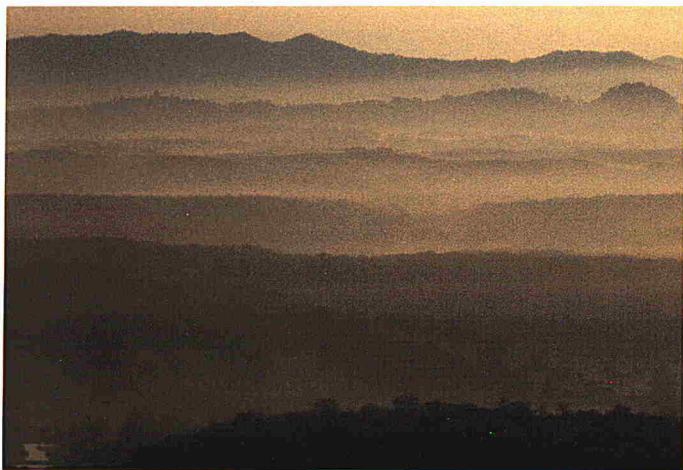
Malaysia has a rural face that has never been fully explored, neither by the legions of photographers who have made her a subject of countless books, nor by her own large urban population.

Her bustling cities usually commandeer the spotlight and cause us to overlook the fact that she has much to offer beyond city limits. There are serene panoramas of paddy fields to discover and rustic fishing villages to visit; there are cool, calm rivers to follow and primeval rain forests to explore.

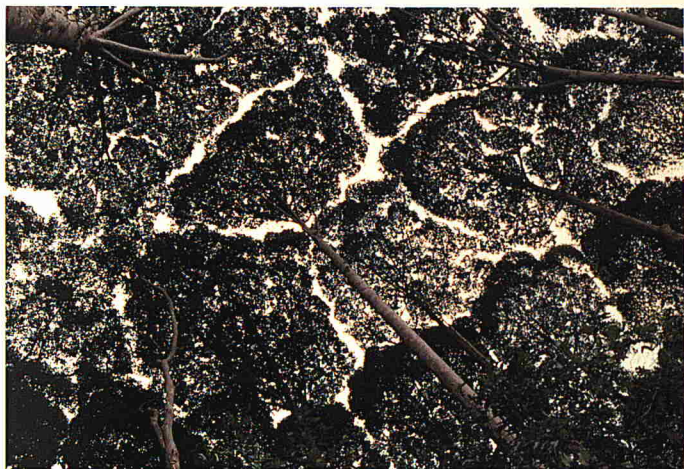
Her lands lie on either side of the South China Sea. To the west is the more developed but smaller peninsula, and in the east are Sabah and Sarawak—sometimes referred to as Borneo—two of the more exotic of Malaysia's thirteen states.

These lands can be gentle, a place where warm lowlands bestow bountiful harvests and surrounding seas provide boat-loads of glistening, silvery fish. But the lands can be cruel too, searing inland villages with wilting heat in the dry seasons and lashing the coasts with merciless storms during the monsoons.

These are lands that have many remarkable images to offer the discerning observer, many more than this book can contain. It is hoped that this pictorial journey will encourage readers to explore the remarkable countryside that Malaysia possesses and discover for themselves the beauty it has to offer.



Rolling hills, softened by a verdant carpet of tropical forest, form a dramatic backdrop in many parts of rural Malaysia. Early morning mist, coloured pink by the sun, turns the landscape into a scene out of a Chinese brush painting.

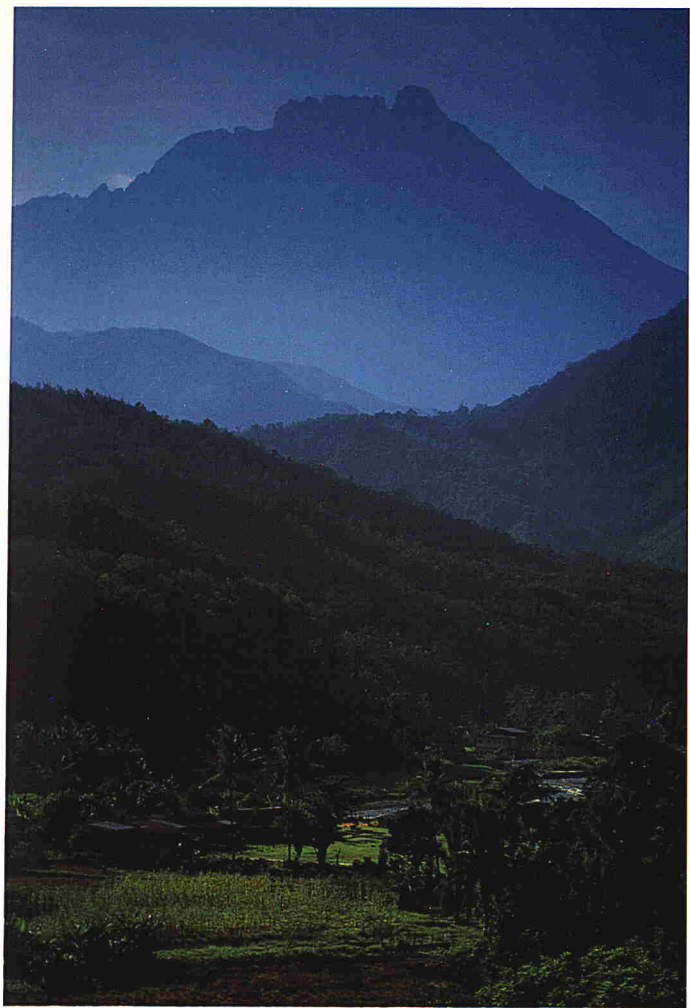


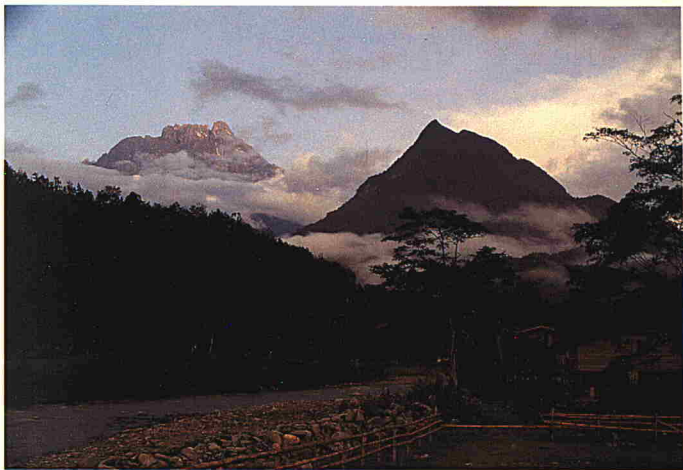
The delicate, lacy pattern created by the tops of these kapur trees offers a rare sight within the canopy of a tropical rain forest that is usually dense and tangled. Governed by a natural phenomenon known as 'crown shyness,' kapur tree crowns fit together without overlapping—like a giant jigsaw—ensuring that each tree receives the maximum amount of sunlight.



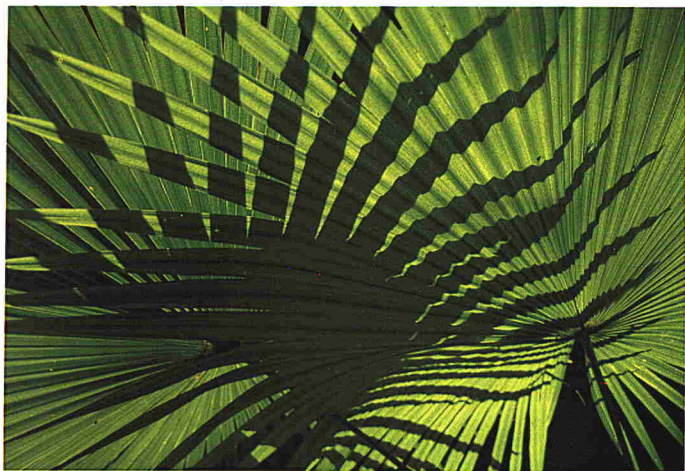
When the steamy lowlands become too hot, the Cameron Highlands are a cool retreat at 1,219 metres above sea-level. Fertile hill farms (*above*) produce temperate crops such as cabbage, carrot, strawberry and Blue Valley tea. Flowers and ferns (*right*) thrive in the cool climes too, flourishing in amazing varieties all over the highlands.







Gunung Kinabalu, Southeast Asia's highest mountain at 4,101 metres, is visible from all corners of Sabah on clear days. Visitors often make the two-hour drive from the State's capital, Kota Kinabalu, to Kinabalu Park, an ideal location to catch a glimpse of the mountain's serenely blue face early in the morning (*left*). Most people visit the bigger and more well-known Gunung Kinabalu, often unaware that it has an 'offspring.' Viewed from Tambatuon, where its overwhelming parent is relegated to the background, Anak Kinabalu (Son of Kinabalu) has its own quiet beauty to offer admirers (*above*).





If you only look at your surroundings with an appreciative eye, magical patterns of light, colour and shape become apparent among the simplest of Malaysian flora and fauna.

The round-leafed fan palm (*left*) with its large, patterned fronds—which can reach one hundred and thirty centimetres in diameter at times—is a natural decoration found all over the country.

Little details and simple elements go a long way to creating interesting images. Here, for example, a backlit banana leaf and a resting butterfly (*above*) make for an exquisite image.



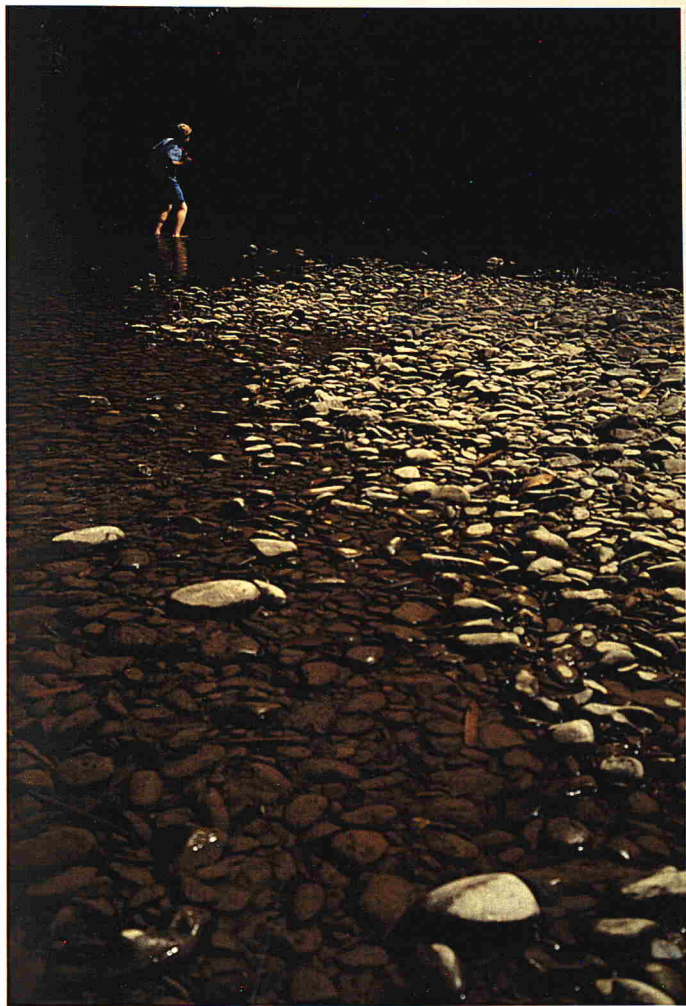
For eons the rushing waters of the Tahan and Tembilang rivers in Pahang have worked on the rugged rocks that form their beds. When the sun strikes the water and rocks at a certain angle, eye-catching patterns are created.



The rapid Tahan and Tembling rivers empty into the massive Sungai Pahang, one of the most efficient 'highways' in the interiors of Pahang. Little motorised boats criss-cross the placid river, ferrying villagers to work and back, and at times, to school and town.



At the end of a two-hour boat ride from Kuala Tembilng, Pahang, explorers will find the extraordinary world of the tropical rain forest waiting for them in Taman Negara. This national park offers nature-lovers all sorts of experiences, ranging from an energetic trek through shallow rivers (*right*) to a peaceful camp by still waters (*above*).





On cold mornings mist veils a forest of tree stumps protruding from the water in Kenyir Dam, giving the place an eerie, mystical atmosphere. Surrounding three hundred and sixty islands, this dam in Terengganu is the largest man-made lake in Malaysia; it was built at a cost of seven hundred and fifty million ringgit. Generously stocked with fish such as toman, sebarau, lampan, kelah and buang, the dam is popular with local anglers.



This tranquil spot is the site of two of the many legends of Pulau Langkawi, Kedah. This particular lake is said to be the home of a fabled white crocodile. It is taboo to swim here in the nude, for doing so would anger the fearsome creature, claim the elders of nearby villages. According to another legend a woman who had been childless for nineteen years conceived after drinking from the lake—hence the lake's name, *Tasik Dayang Bunting* or Lake of the Pregnant Maiden.



Idyllic scenes such as this await the traveller in the most unexpected places. This quiet little pond, chosen as a convenient resting spot by a flock of egrets, is right beside the busy Kota Kinabalu – Kota Belud trunk road in Sabah.



At low tide on the appropriately named Pulau Ketam (Crab Island) in Selangor, hundreds of male crabs scurry out of their homes in the mud, frantically waving their claws trying to attract mates. This peculiar ritual adds a welcome dash of colour to the grey mud of the island's mangrove swamps.



Black storm clouds reflected in the still waters of the Sungai Besar canal, Selangor, threaten a torrential downpour. However, thanks to the canal, farmers in the area will not have to worry about flooded paddy fields. The Sungai Besar canal is one of numerous irrigation schemes that have helped improve rice yield and increase farm incomes in many areas of the country. Most of these canals are also stocked with fish that are caught by villagers armed with large dip nets.



Despite their beauty, these water plants growing along a canal are not a sight that is welcomed by farmers. If the plants are allowed to continue growing, they can disrupt water flow and eventually choke the canal.



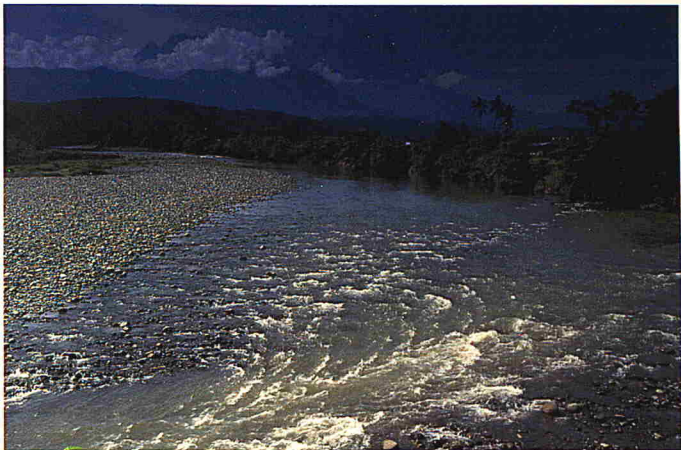
This green wilderness of weeds used to be a paddy field before it was left fallow. Farmers have learnt that even rich Malaysian soil needs to be 'rested' seasonally to ensure better yields in future.



When paddy fields lie fallow, these wickedly-horned water buffaloes are released from the plough's harness to lead a life of leisure. In the past, these ugly beasts determined a farmer's wealth; now these animals can still fetch up to a thousand ringgit each. In Sabah, buffaloes remain a popular dowry item, and when the time comes to slaughter one, the entire village can expect to enjoy the ensuing feast.



It is a warm afternoon and the grass is soft underfoot—what better time for mother duck and brood to venture out for a walk?



The shallow Sungai Tempasuk, meandering along the left slope of Gunung Kinabalu in Sabah, is said to be the route followed by the first people to approach the mountain.



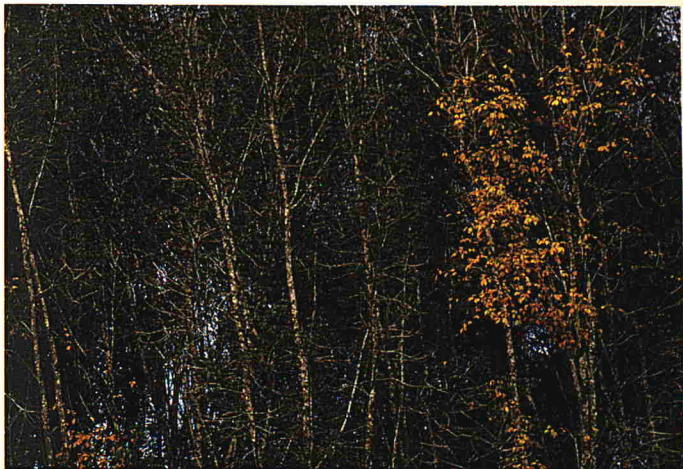
Nature is bountiful in Malaysia; given the chance she never leaves an inch of space bare. This fallow field in Tuaran, Sabah, did not remain empty for long. Wild flowers soon covered it with a magnificent carpet of blooms.



Storm clouds loom over a field of ripening paddy in Parit Empat, Sekinchan. Although it rains heavily in the area, modern machines and irrigation schemes have turned Parit Empat into one of the most productive rice growing districts in Selangor.



The morning sun paints the skies over Tuaran, Sabah, turning newly-planted paddy fields into pools of molten copper. Scenes such as this are what tourists rave about and travel writers extol. And they are what the villagers have the chance to see almost every day on their way to the fields.



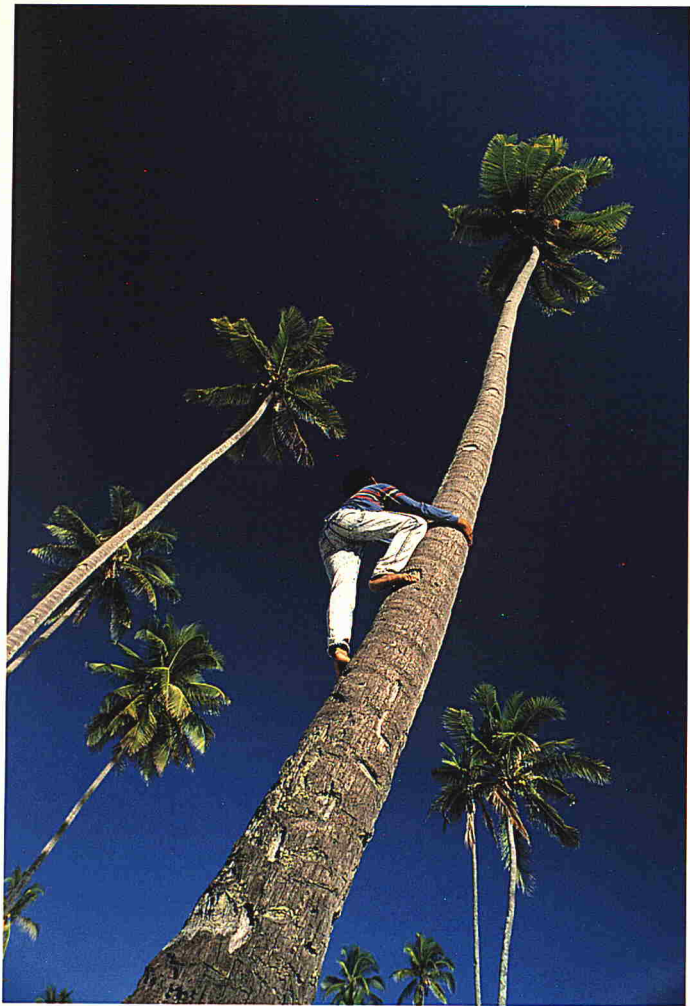
'Autumn' arrives in Malaysia's extensive rubber plantations at the beginning of the dry season in March. For a while, the plantations resemble temperate orchards as leaves turn brown and trees begin shedding. As this is the trees' most vulnerable period, plantation managers usually curtail tapping, the method used for drawing latex from the trees.



Blessed with a nurturing climate almost all year round, these flowers thrive practically untended.



The Flame of the Forest is a large tree that provides shade, and when it blooms, explosions of colour as well.





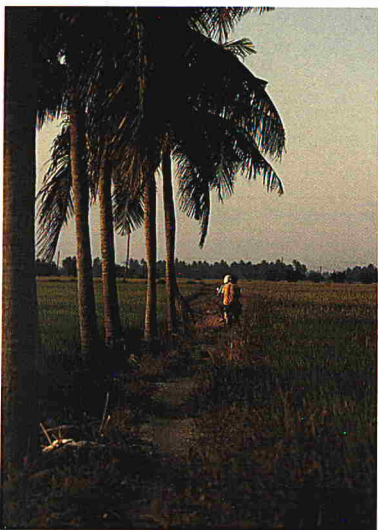
Coconut palms swaying in a balmy breeze—to visitors this is an exotic image from travel brochures about the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. To the boys of Pantai Chendering, Terengganu, the palms are a prop in their natural playground. They often perch themselves on a conveniently positioned palm for fun (*above*) or clamber up a tree in search of young coconuts to quench their thirst (*left*).



A mother and her child enjoy the idyllic solitude of a sandy beach along the busy Kuala Abang road in Terengganu (*above*). There are many such spots, equally beautiful and as easily accessible, along the east coast of the peninsula.

Going off the beaten track in search of remote locations such as Pulau Talang Talang, Sarawak, has its appeal too. This island (*right*) is open to the public only once a year as it is a sanctuary for a species of green turtle that lays its eggs on the shore.





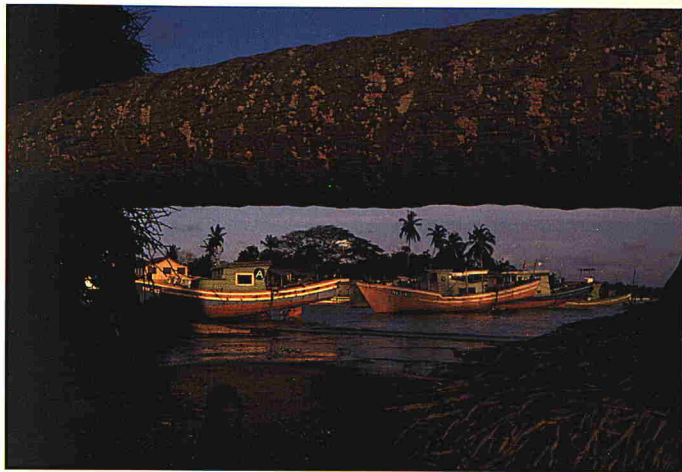
Motor cycles are the only means of motorised access to an unusual village that lies in the centre of a vast paddy field in the rice growing district of Yan, Kedah.



A serene lagoon in Marang, Terengganu, is steeped in rich, golden light at every sunrise.



From afar, the paddy fields of Sekinchan, Selangor, seem to be a vast green carpet that changes colour as the seasons turn. But take a walk in them and look carefully; you will discover exquisite details.



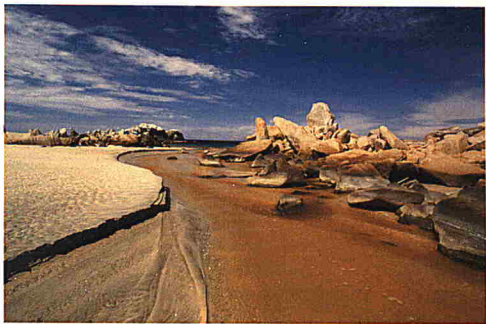
Along the east coast of the peninsula, fallen palm trees are a common sight during the monsoon. Heavy rain and strong winds uproot dozens of trees every season. Large rivers, such as the rapid Sungai Terengganu, add to the damage by eroding banks and dislodging the trees there.



At certain times of the year the sea off the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia teems with the translucent shapes of squids. Entire villages will flock to the shore at night with flickering pressure lamps to lure the animals in. The catch is usually so large that most of it has to be salted and sun-dried.



Sun-drenched beaches and brilliant blue skies—they are the reason the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia is sometimes called paradise on earth. But this idyllic scene can change in an instant when the monsoon arrives and lashes the coast with torrential rain. That is why fishermen always take the precaution of sheltering their *sampans* (boats) during the monsoon even if the day seems perfect.



This fanciful formation of rocks in Kampung Kijal Penunjuk, Terengganu, is a curiosity along the usually sandy beaches of the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

Delicate cottonballs of clouds rise above the peak of Gunung Santubong in Sarawak. The folk from nearby villages have many stories to tell about this mountain. One popular myth claims that the mountain derived its name from a tale of sibling rivalry: the legendary Puteri (Princess) Santubong and her sister, both famed for their beauty, fought over a handsome prince on the mountain, and Puteri Santubong was mortally wounded. When the beautiful princess fell to the ground she became a part of the mountain and now, if you look at the mountain on a clear day and from the correct angle, the shape of a woman lying on her back is visible claim villagers.





Dazzling images of golden sand, sea and early morning sun are common along the coasts of Malaysia.



Along the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, idyllic *kampungs* (villages) such as Kampung Merchang, Terengganu, draw visitors in search of peace and quiet away from the usual tourist spots.



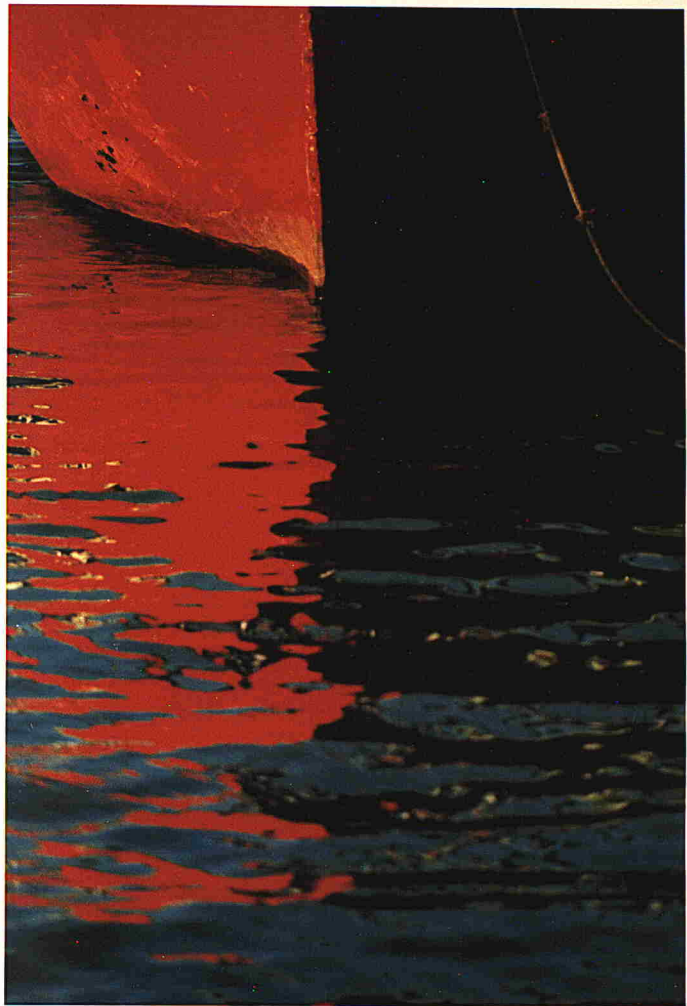
Despite its relatively small size, Kuala Perlis, Perlis, has always been a busy place because its position at the mouth of Sungai Perlis places it at the beginning of the shortest sea route to Pulau Langkawi and Setul, Thailand. Sadly, most people pass through this little riverine town unaware of its charm.



The protected waters of this lagoon in Marang, Terengganu, are a calm haven where the village's fishermen can moor their boats beyond the sea's reach.



A bright tropical sky, a clear blue sea and colourful fishing boats —three disparate elements come together on rivers and seas to create a kaleidoscope of colours and mesmerize the eye with hypnotically abstract patterns.

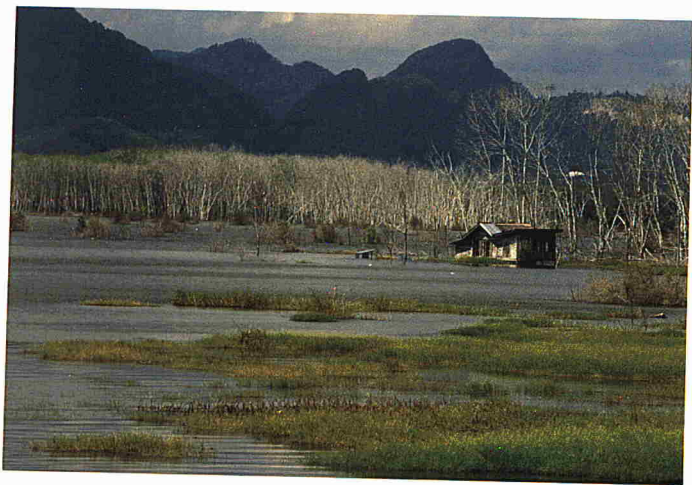




Paddy fields are a common sight in rural Malaysia. Interesting lines and designs emerge from the paths cut by farmers as they patrol the fields in search of feathered thieves.



Daybreak at many of the tiny villages that dot the coasts of Peninsular Malaysia is as much an artistic experience as it is a natural phenomenon.



Progress leaves its mark on the face of rural Malaysia; its benefits are welcomed, but at what cost? This area in Taso, Perlis, used to be a green rubber plantation. Now the solitary estate house and the dead rubber trees are the only reminders of the past. They too will soon disappear, for the area is the site of a newly built dam and is being submerged.



Things are changing all over the country. In Sekinchan, Selangor, for instance, farmers once patrolled their paddy fields on foot; now they do so on their bicycles.

The brilliant colours of a sugarcane field under the bright skies of Chuping, Perlis, will soon disappear when the cane fronds are burnt off to prepare for the harvest. This is the traditional method for clearing the fields of pests and getting rid of the fronds before they flower and draw sugar out of the canes.

Perlis is practically the only producer of sugar in the country as it is the only state that has a dry season long enough to allow the canes to develop the correct levels of sugar.





Under darkening skies over Seberang Takir, Terengganu, a young fisherman gives his precious boat a fresh coat of paint. A fisherman's boat is his pride and joy; he would not be caught dead with a shabby boat if he can help it.

Lifestyles

Modern machines and new agricultural techniques have had an enormous impact on rural lifestyles. In some areas of the country farming and fishing are big business now and not just what the grandparents used to do to feed the family.

But the old ways are not completely gone; farmers are still bound by the slow turning of the seasons and fishermen still have to confront formidable monsoons. Life remains intimately connected to the land, moving at a pace that affords ready smiles and warm greetings.

The following pages feature the friendly people who inhabit Malaysia's countryside. Farmers in their fields, fishermen casting their nets, craftsmen wielding their tools, women at work, children at play and natives celebrating colourful festivals—they have all been captured on film as they go about their business amidst extraordinary surroundings.



In the depths of Sarawak's interior a crystal clear river becomes a 'highway' for an Iban family from Batang Lemanak (*above*). Rivers provide the most common route through the nearly inaccessible interior, and the boatmen who know these watery highways (*right*) are an essential link between isolated tribes and the outside world.





A shaft of bright morning sun lights the way of an Iban woman preparing to visit her pepper farm in Sarawak. Like most of her people, the woman prefers light-weight boats in which to travel the shallow rivers of the interior so that she can manhandle the craft over obstacles by herself.



Whether they are tucked away under a house or parked proudly in front, almost every dwelling in Merlimau, Malacca, boasts at least one of these—the trusty bicycle that does not cause traffic jams or produce choking fumes.



These 'paths in the sky' are a common Kadazan solution to the problem of getting across a wide river or ravine in the interior of Sabah.



These nonchalant Sarawakian natives make it look easy, but visitors might have more than a few qualms about crossing a bridge that is barely wider than their feet.



With several native families living communally in one *rumah panjai* (longhouse), there is always someone to keep an eye on baby. An Iban woman (*above*) rocks her grandchild in a traditional bassinet made from a sarong attached to a spring and suspended from the ceiling.

Though this solemn little lad in Kemasik, Terengganu, does not live in a longhouse, several generations of his family live under one roof. This is a common arrangement in most rural homes; it means that there is always an adult around to keep an eye on the little children.





A shortage of pipes in Sarawak's interior means that clothes – and people – are washed the traditional way. So 'wash-day' still means a communal trip to the river, fun in the water for the children and a chance to exchange the latest news.



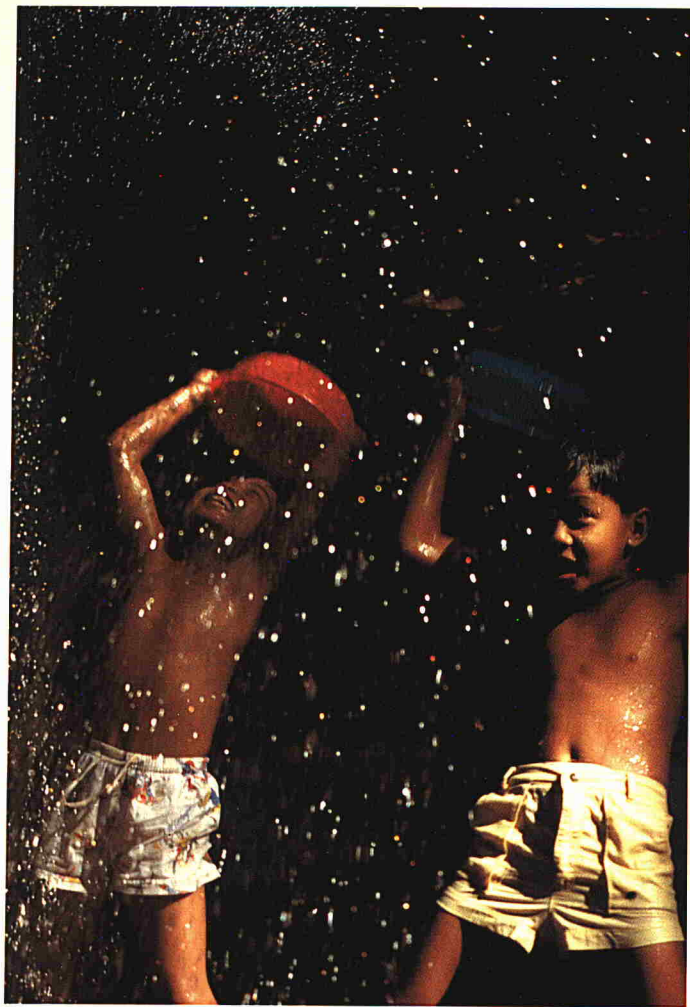
When your house stands in the sea, it is a good idea to learn to swim as soon as you can. Under dad's close supervision, these two little boys of a 'water village' in Pulau Gaya, Sabah, are learning to feel at home in the water. Soon, like the older children of the village, they will have the rest of the sea for their playground.



The Ibans of Sarawak are introduced to their environment early in life. Babies just over a month old are taught not to fear water when they endure a special ceremony in which they are dipped in a river. After the mother's confinement period (usually a month) is over and the *miring* (a ritual offering) has been made, a relative takes the baby down to the river for the ceremonial dip.



This much-tattooed native elder from Gesit, Sarawak, still likes doing things the old way. No showers or bathtubs for him; water from a clear river will do just fine.





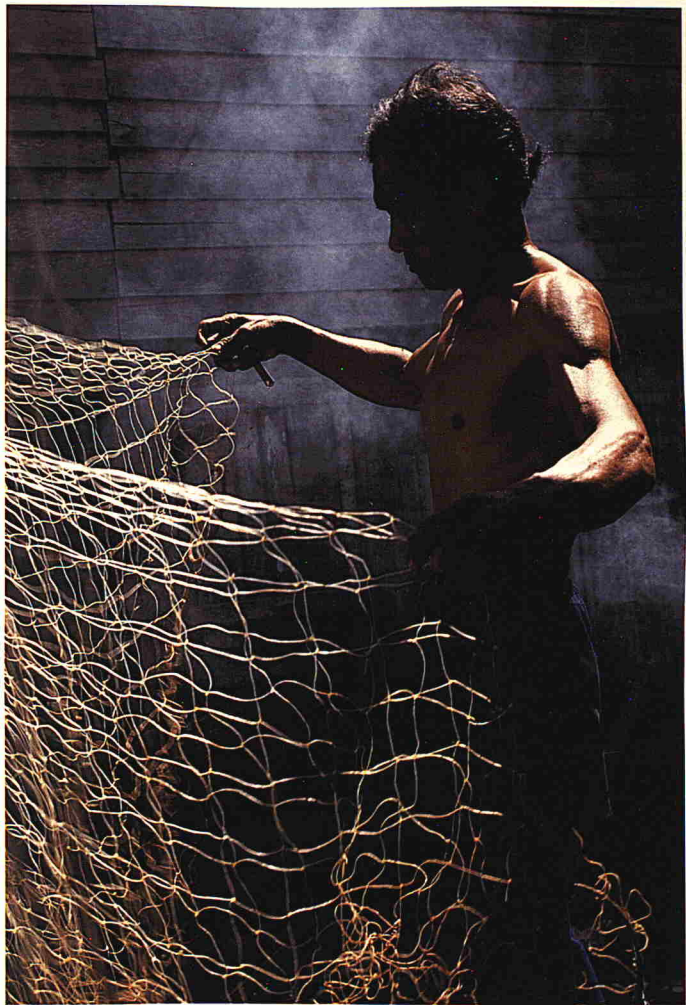
Bath time is play time for these brothers at a waterfall in Semenyih, Selangor (*left*).

There might not be any waterfalls in Tumpat, Kelantan, but an irrigation canal can be just as much fun when it is time to have a bath (*above*).



The golden light of a setting sun casts an enchanting glow on everything, including the mundane task of catching prawns in the mangrove swamps of Semariang, Sarawak (*above*).

When they are done with hauling in the catch, the fishermen will check their nets (*right*). It is a routine that is performed by every fisherman, whether he works at sea or in a river.





In the shadowy world of Sarawak's interior, rivers teeming with fish are harvested by Iban fishermen who are skilful at casting nets from their narrow boats. The Iban of Batang Lemanak, Engkilili, use nets that are weighted at the edge for a wider cast.



A lone fisherman rows out to check his dip nets. In the little fishing village of Kampung Buntal, Sarawak, dip-net fishing is one of many traditional methods used by the villagers to harvest the sea's bounty. This particular method involves hanging nets on stilts one hundred to two hundred metres from shore and lowering them to scoop up fish when the tide comes in.

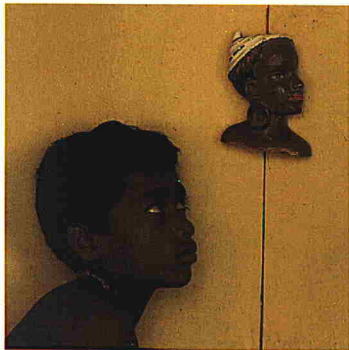


Tamus are seasonal open air markets held in different areas in Sabah. They are noisy affairs full of colours of every shade and hue, from rainbow-striped food covers (*above*) to pitch black salted eggs with yolks of brilliant orange (*right*). Unlike century eggs, these have been soaked in brine and covered with black earth. They need to be boiled before they can be eaten; they are traditionally eaten with rice porridge.





The dark depths of Gua Charas, Pahang, houses an old Siamese Buddhist shrine, faithfully guarded by an elderly man for the past twenty years. He comes every day and sits by the entrance, ready to assist the rare visitor with lamps and sell his religious artefacts.



Religion is often a strong thread that binds a rural community. Beliefs are inculcated at an early age, becoming very much a part of life. This young Indian boy in Selangor is receiving a thorough grounding in his religion by helping to care for the temple in his district after school every day.



The simple beauty of this Iban woman hardly needs embellishing but she, like her people, loves elaborate hand-woven traditional costumes and grand headgear. Her head-dress is made of pieces of silver that tinkle when she moves; old silver coins hanging at her waist and hem add to the music. Costumes like the one she is wearing are handed down from mother to daughter. Each owner will further embellish her costume when she can, making each garment an intricate work of art, before she passes it to her daughter.

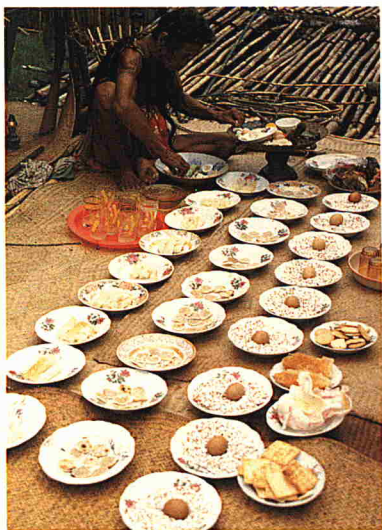


Dressed in full hunting gear, the Iban *Tuai Rumah* (head of the house) of the Serubah Longhouse in Sarawak prepares for a ceremony (*right*). Though he no longer hunts regularly with his blowpipe, the *Tuai* still knows how to use it. The old days might be gone, but they are not forgotten by men like him and his tribesmen (*above*). These men still follow the painful custom of tattooing their bodies with marks that denote rank, tribe and other information. Though the tattoos are more decorative than functional nowadays, they are still worn with pride in remembrance of the past.





Bathed in the soft light of candles and lamps, an Iban family in Sepedir, Sarawak, gathers in the *ruai* (common corridor) of their *rumah panjai* (longhouse) to celebrate a bountiful harvest. Gawai Dayak or Harvest Festival is one of the most important native festivals in Sarawak.



The harvest festival in Sarawak is a time when ancient beliefs are revived among native tribes. One important ritual carried out by the Ibans involves appeasing the spirits with a *miring* (a ritual offering). The food prepared for the festival is laid out before the medicine man who will wave a cockerel over it before allowing the feast to begin.



No festival is complete without a glass or two—or perhaps three!—of *tuak*, a sweet wine made from glutinous rice. *Tuak* was served as a welcome drink in the old days; now it is made only during festivals. There are complicated taboos to observe while making *tuak* to ensure that it does not turn bad. The best kind is aged until it is clear and tastes almost like champagne; be warned however, the fermented drink packs quite a kick.



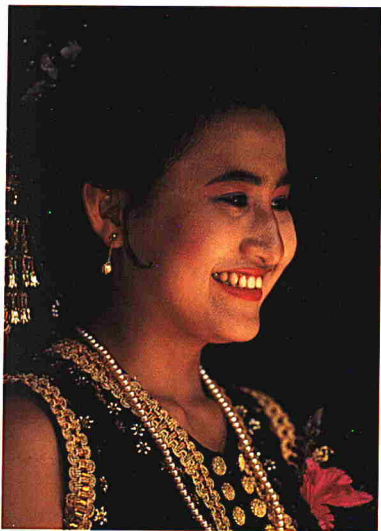
The highlight of Gawai Dayak is the Kumang Gawai contest from which the festival queen is chosen. Young ladies dress in their finest traditional costumes to vie for the title.



Like her Iban sisters, this Dusun Tempasuk girl in Sabah takes the opportunity to show off her elaborate traditional dress and silver jewellery. In the past, the large silver ornaments around her neck would have contained betel nuts and leaves.



When the somber *Bobohizans* (priestesses) wearing their hooded ceremonial robes gather to give thanks for a bountiful harvest, the Kadazans of Sabah begin their version of the harvest festival. It has a different name, Pesta Kaamatan, and is celebrated a day before Gawai Dayak.



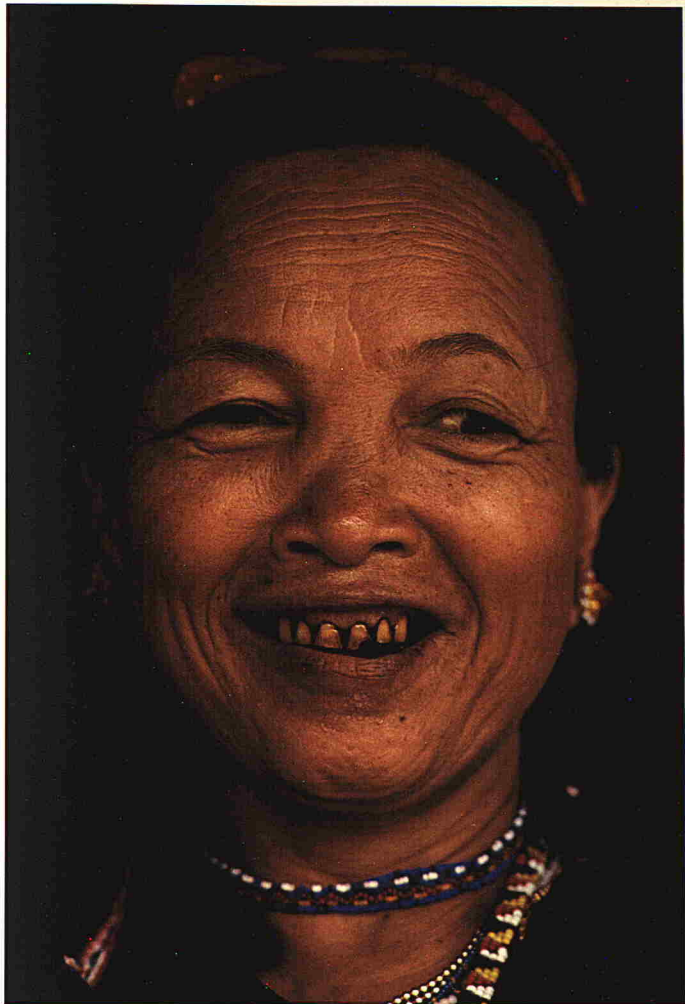
Wearing her best dress and a beaming smile, this Kadazan/
Dusun woman prepares for the harvest festival in Kota Belud,
Sabah.



During the harvest festival elaborate headdresses and iridescent gowns are worn by the native tribes of Sabah. With only minute variations to distinguish between the costumes of more than thirty tribes in the state, matching costume to tribe can be difficult. These Irranun women, for instance, can easily be mistaken for Bajaus who have a similar style of dress.



This elderly Sabahan lady in Kota Belud shyly covers her smile to hide her teeth (*above*). Like this Tabilung woman (*right*), her teeth have been blackened from years of chewing *sireh* (betel nut leaves) with slices of betel nut and *gambir* (gambier).





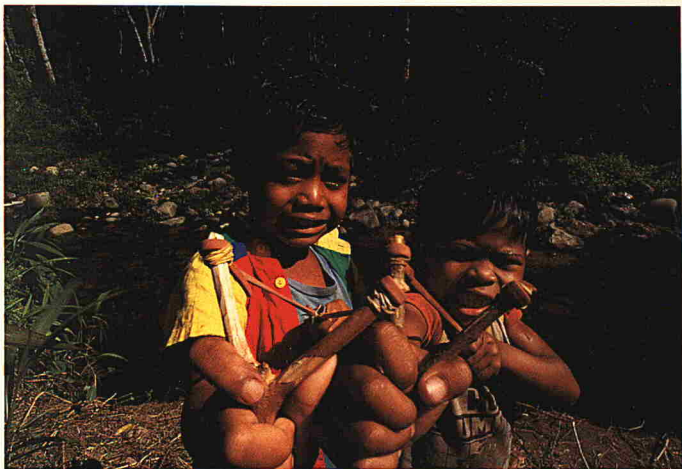
They might be a little shy in the beginning, but once the Kadazan children of Tambatuon, Sabah, get to know you, they are quite forthcoming with their smiles.



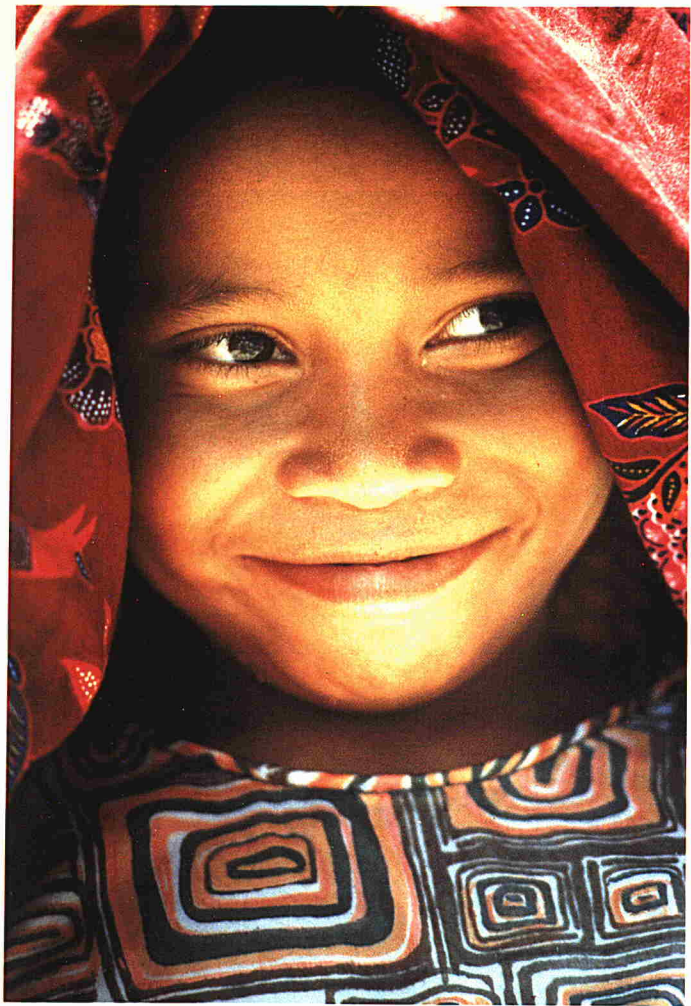
Two tired, charcoal-marked boys from Kampung Semariang, Sarawak, take a break from their job at a charcoal-making kiln near their village while their younger brother entertains by making faces. He too will soon be doing odd jobs to contribute to the family's income.



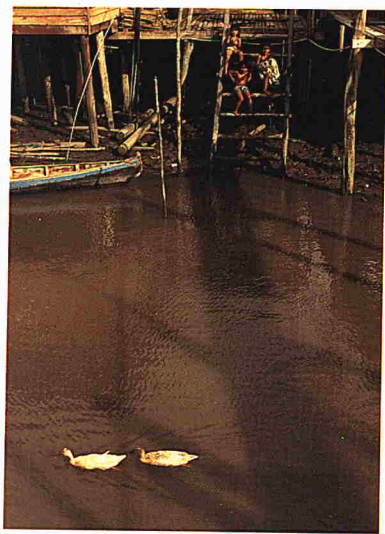
Who needs showers and baths when you can have this much fun
bathing the old fashioned way?



Swimming, fishing and hunting in the jungles around their village with their ever-handy catapults, Orang Asli children quickly learn to be at home in their environment, be it forest or river.



This Orang Asli girl from Ulu Langat, Selangor, was a little shy at first. She did not want to smile, she absolutely refused to ... but eventually her eyes sparkled and her lips curved as her natural inclination to grin got the better of her.



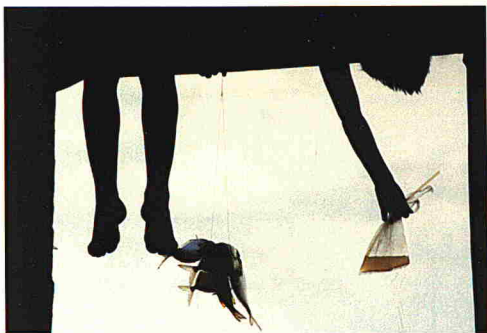
With a furry friend for company, a little boy whiles away the hours as he watches over the family's precious store-bought blanket in Kampung Buntal, Sarawak (*right*).

Children in the countryside enjoy themselves doing the simplest of things. This Bajau trio, for instance, love sitting in the evening sun to watch ducks swim by their water village in Mengkabong, Sabah (*above*).





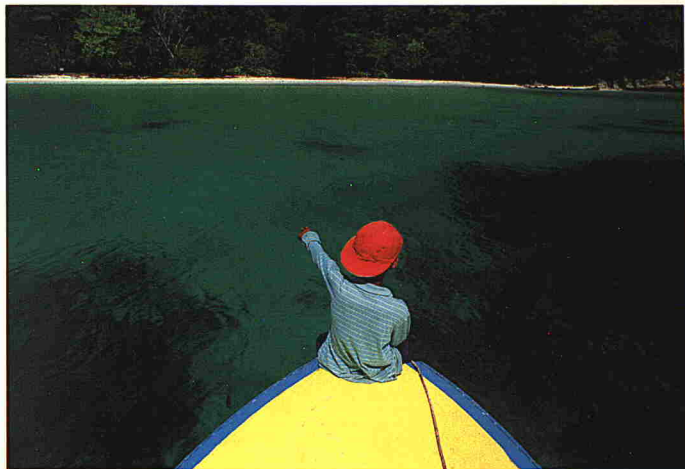
School's out, worms are plentiful and the water has been transformed into a pool of liquid silver—four young boys from Bachok, Kelantan, could not resist the urge to go fishing.



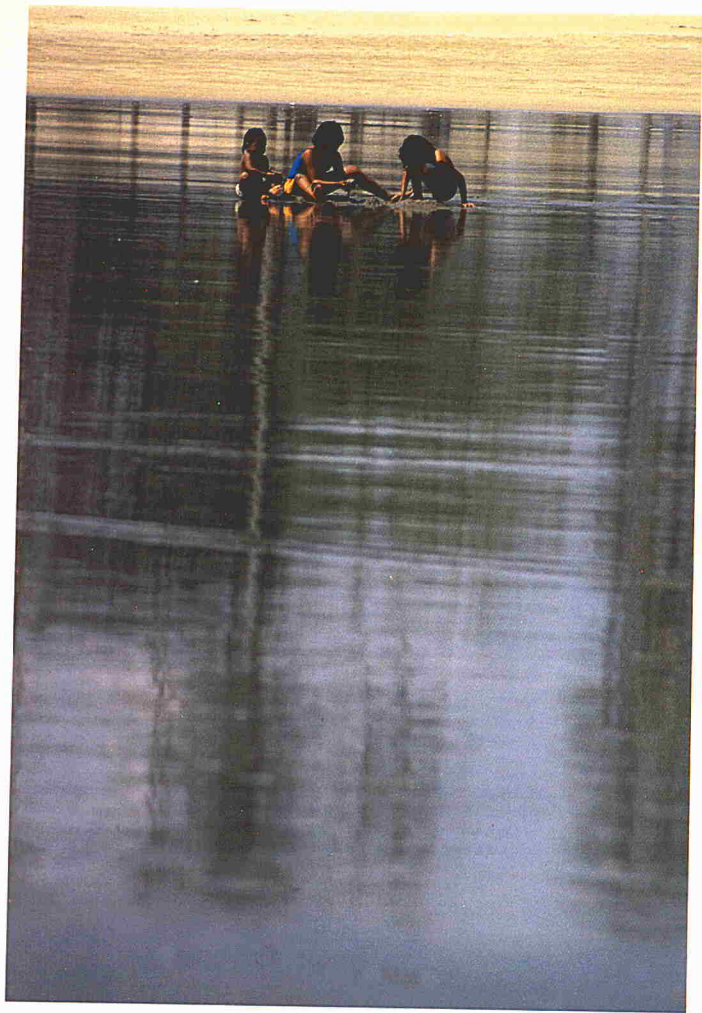
A stilted platform is a convenient spot for some boys who want to try their luck angling for *ikan kikek* with a hook and line.



Wearing a bright helmet to keep the sun off, this old man from Sabah paddles out to look for the best spot to indulge in his favourite pastime, fishing.

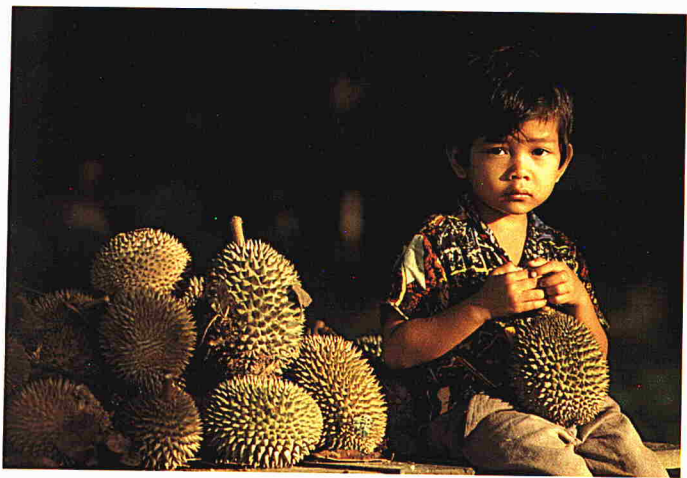


Picturesque playgrounds are a part of growing up in rural Malaysia. This little boy points the way to one of his spots, Pulau Gaya, the largest island in Sabah's Tunku Abdul Rahman Park, just twenty minutes by boat from Kota Kinabalu.

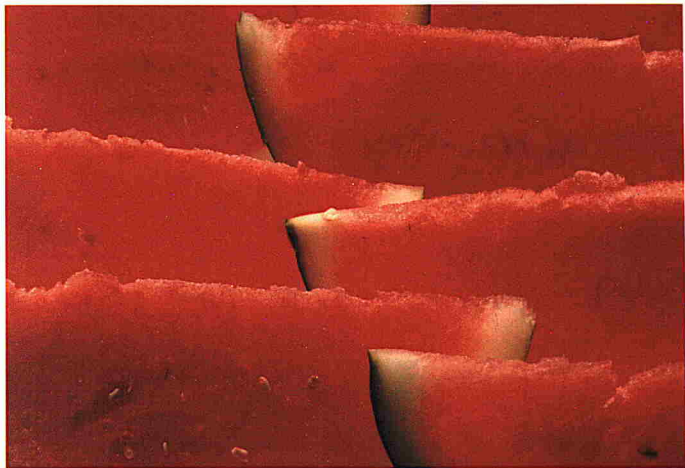




From magnificent beaches, such as Pantai Chendering, Terengganu (*left*), to a backyard with a stream running through it (*above*), places to have fun with friends are easy to find in the countryside.



The young boy solemnly guarding a pile of thorny, strong-smelling durians in Kampung Belimbing, Pahang, is well aware of his responsibility. This is a valuable crop that brings cash to the rural areas when city-folk come hunting for bargains at the orchards. Braving the odour to enjoy the rich taste of the durian's creamy flesh is an experience that people either love or hate!



Bright slices of watermelon beckon with cool, sweet promise, especially on those extra hot and humid days. Among the wide variety of fruits Malaysia has to offer, the ubiquitous watermelon is thought to be the best thirst-quencher.



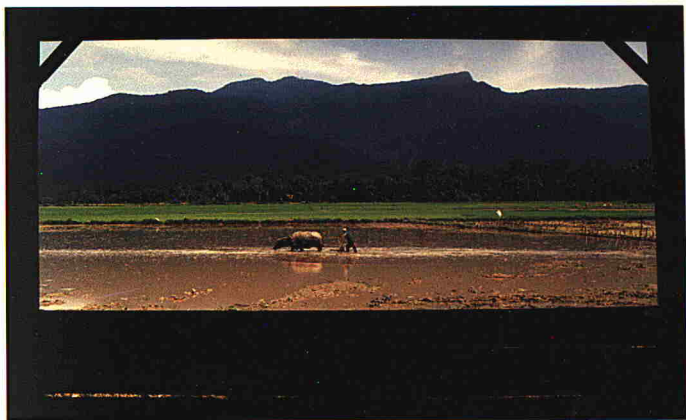
Wash-day in a village sees colours blossoming everywhere as women hang their washing out to dry. While waiting for her load to dry, this woman benefits from the effects of a traditional beauty mask she has applied to her face. Made from pounded rice and called *bedak sejuk* (literally translated as 'cool powder'), the mask is a popular home-made beauty treatment.



Succulent leafy vegetables in bright green rows are a common sight in the outskirts. This old man is tending *kangkong* (water convolvulus) plants on his vegetable farm in Malacca. Many market gardeners cultivate this vegetable as it is almost guaranteed to sell well anywhere in the country.



Carrying her tub whimsically on her head, this woman in Pantai Sabak, Kelantan, is off to buy herself some fish to make *keropak* (fish crackers) for sale. *Keropak* making is a popular cottage industry among the business-savvy Kelantanese women, who are also involved in batik printing, garment making and gold trading.



If we could have looked out a window by the foothills of Gunung Jerai, Kedah, last century, this is what we would have seen. Such a sight is now rare of course, as machines are beginning to replace the toiling buffaloes in the fields. While the more sentimental among us might bemoan the loss of traditional paddy planting methods, the use of modern technology has earned Kedah the title of 'the rice bowl of Malaysia.'



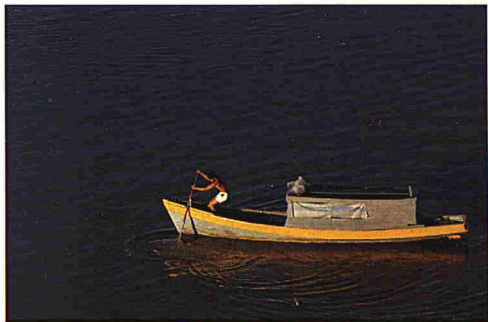
Under the blazing sun at Gunung Keriang, Kedah, paddy farmers painstakingly transplant their seedlings by hand. It may be the time-honoured way of doing things, but with back-breaking positions and leeches to contend with, farmers all over the country are welcoming the new machinery being introduced to take over this task.



Some things stay the same however, as this cyclist discovered. Cows still roam the fields, and if you are wise, you will not dispute the right of way with any of them, even the most placid looking ones!



The barely risen sun lights a muted golden path for these fishermen at Pantai Sabak, Kelantan, picking out colourful paint work on boats that are famous for their brilliant hues.



A fisherman paddles up the wide Sarawak river in his all-purpose boat; he works and travels in it, and when his family needs to go anywhere, it too will use this boat. In the river a fishing boat is the more pleasant and much quieter equivalent of a car.



Clear blue skies can be deceptive along the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. An innocuous sky belies the angry sea that keeps these fishermen ashore—they know enough not to court the sea's wrath. So they sit under make-shift canopies, catching up on the perennial chore of mending their nets (*above*), or work on the all-important fish-drying platforms (*right*).





After a hard day's work fishing in the water, there is still the chore of getting the boats safely to the beach and out of the sea's reach. Along the east coast of the peninsula where each little fishing village is a close-knit community, it is not uncommon to see the entire able-bodied population of a village turn up to help haul in the boats.



Elegantly-shaped vases make a sensuous pattern of curves as they stand in rows, waiting to be glazed. Sarawak's hand-crafted pottery has long been acknowledged as the finest in the country and within the state, the trade is dominated by the graceful patterns and designs of the old Chinese master craftsmen.



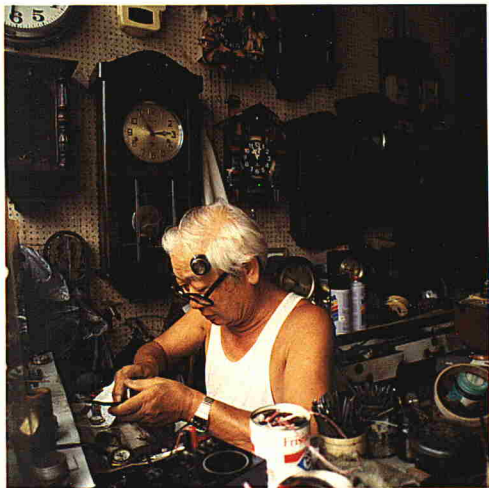
In the coastal town of Seberang Takir, Terengganu, fishing boats deliver a silvery treasure, the tiny anchovy, or *ikan bilis*, caught in the South China Sea. The fish are left in baskets in the river mouth to make sure they are fresh when the women from the town arrive to collect them. The women will boil the fish in salted water and dry them in the sun; the dried fish will keep for months if stored properly.



Other sorts of fish are also dried in preparation of the months when the monsoon rages off the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and the fishermen are shore-bound.



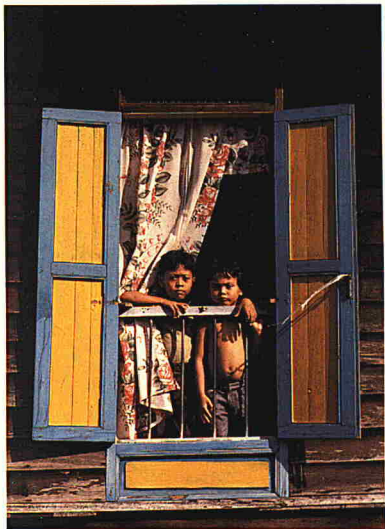
A symphony of woven shapes and textures greets the customer in this shop in Sibul, Sarawak. Mats, sieves, baskets, flower-pot holders and food covers are among a wondrous variety of household and decorative goods that are made from *rotan* (rattan), *mengkuang* (screw-pine) and bamboo. Obtained from plants, these materials can be woven, spliced, joined and otherwise put together to form almost any shape. The mats are particularly popular with native tribes of the interior who use them to cover the floors of their *rumah panjai* (longhouse).



These shops can be found in any small town in the country. In places like this there are no fancy glass showcases or slick salesmen, just ailing clocks waiting to be repaired by the shop owner himself.

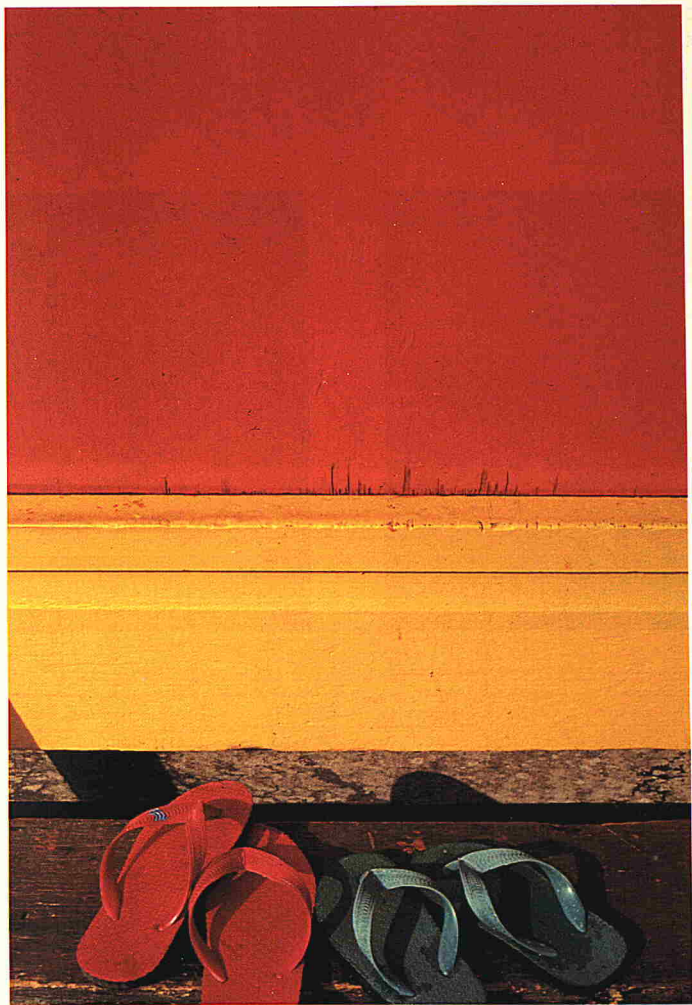


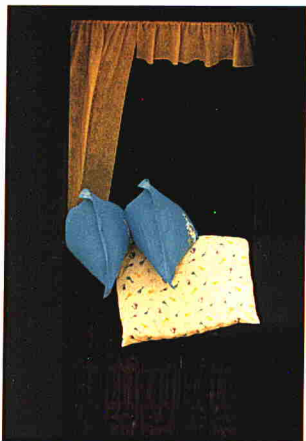
In many *kampungs* (villages) on the outskirts of large towns you will find these rickety wooden shops where hair is cut and news exchanged. The barber is an elderly man with remarkably steady hands. He makes no claim to being 'London-trained,' and he has no lack of customers. They are usually men his own age who now bring their grandsons with them just as they had brought their children decades ago.



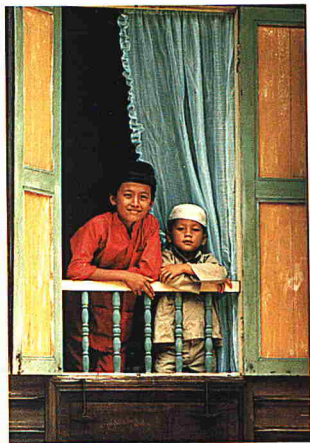
Unexpected splashes of colour often bring a touch of cheer to weather-beaten wooden houses in *kampungs* (villages), especially during festivals. These young brothers in Kapar, Selangor, stare out of a window that has been gaily painted and hung with bright curtains for a special occasion.

In spick and span rural homes footwear is always removed before entering the house; in the old days, there was even a jar of water outside houses for guests to wash their feet before entering.





Window ledges are put to practical use as the best spot to air bedding and clothing. And it is the best spot for the family *ku-ching* (cat) as well as its young mistress to enjoy some sun.



Windows are great for simply gazing out of. The two Malay boys in Jeram, Selangor, dressed in their festive best (*left*) stare boldly, unlike their bashful Iban counterparts who peek out from a window in their *rumah panjai* (longhouse) in Serubah, Sarawak. In remote areas like theirs where visitors are uncommon, children are rather shy until they get to know you better.



In the dark recesses of a coffee shop in Batu Arang, Selangor, the old ways prevail. These large smoke-stained pots sit on coal-fired clay stoves all day, producing endless amounts of Chinese soup. That is the way grandmother used to do it, and some say it is still the best way to make lip-smacking, nutritious soup.



Like many of his fellow villagers, the thrifty owner of this house does not like throwing anything away. His walls are decked with an odd collection of old shoes, spark plugs and motor cycle licence plates. He might not need these items right now, but who knows, he might find a use for them someday.



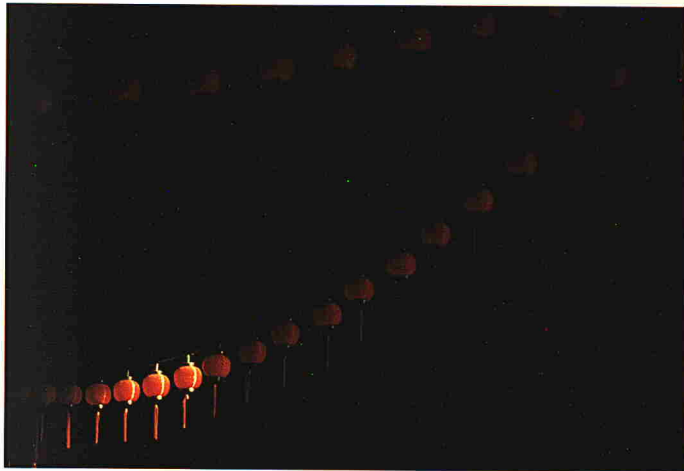
When the harvest is over and the winds are blowing strong, the *wau bulan* (moon kite) rises in skies over the east coast of the peninsula where kite-flying is far from child's play. In quaintly-named Pantai Cinta Berahi (Beach of Passionate Love), Kelantan, old men expertly manipulate the graceful kites, sometimes keeping them aloft all day. Though the *wau bulan's* shape is traditional and the most popular, many other shapes are made from the bamboo and light translucent paper used to make these kites.



The urgent throbbing of the *rebana* (a type of drum) was a powerful 'voice' in the old days, communicating important messages and linking isolated villages. The *rebana ubi*, the giant drums of Kelantanese villages, are now only heard on festive occasions when they are played by trained men. Using their bare hands at first, teams of drummers begin with a slow rhythm, gradually increasing the tempo and switching to large drumsticks to heighten the intensity of the drumming.



Silhouetted against the dramatic morning sky, these tall poles look like the masts of strange land-bound ships. These poles however, have never been to sea. They are used to hang bird cages that contain *merbuk* (doves). Cared for tenderly, these birds are treasured for their soft coos and calls. They bring hours of listening pleasure to their owners, not to mention prize money from competitions held regularly all over the country.



Chinese lanterns hang high in the air, lighting a path towards the area where a travelling Chinese opera troupe will stage its loud show. In the little towns and villages that the troupe visits, the little globes of red light are all it takes to draw aficionados to its performances.



In make-shift quarters back-stage, members of a Chinese opera company don their make-up in an elaborate process that can take hours (*above*). When the all-female cast finally steps onto stage they are transformed into warriors in magnificent costume (*right*) and beautiful ladies of a royal court, ready to dazzle the audience. Sadly, these colourful spectacles might disappear soon as the demand for live Chinese opera decreases; villages and small towns are now the only places where opera troupes can draw large audiences regularly.



This kindergarten in Kampung Hujung Tanjung, Kuala Perlis, provides rather unusual playmates for its young pupils!



Dressed in traditional splendour, these young ladies represent
(from left) the Ibans, Indians, Chinese and Malays, four of the
many ethnic groups that make up Malaysia.



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