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LOCATION > MALAYSIA CATEGORY > FAMILY

## The garden city of lights

THE slating afternoon sun sends a crimson ray to the heart of the golden triangle before slipping down the horizon. The Petronas Twin Towers, majestically dominating the Kuala Lumpur (KL) skyline standing only a few metres away, flash in a rainbow of slowly changing colours. Standing near Mega View Banquet Deck in the 421-metre high Menara Kuala Lumpur, better know as KL Tower, I marvel at the breathtaking beauty of the seemingly divine display of light and shade on the skyscraper strewn landscape of bustling KL. But the highlight of a cityscape was yet to unfold before me.

We, eight journalists and a media official from Bangladesh, formed one of the 17 Asian delegations that visited Malaysia from July 21-28 at the invitation of Tourism Malaysia and Malaysia Airlines to attend the Mega Sales Carnival, 2004. The carnival signifies a six-week spree of discounts and bargains for most goods and services in the Southeast Asian country.

After the dinner hosted by Deputy Minister for Tourism Datuk Ahmed Zahid Hamid at the Mega View, he leads us to the fifth floor of the KL Tower Head. The nighttime KL, the garden city of

lights, appears before us with its murderously beautiful spectacle.

As far as the eye travels, lights of different colours, brightness and shapes come to the view, illuminating a panoramic view of the KL landscape, surrounded by hills on two sides and buildings of all descriptions on others. I wonder at the rapid uplift of the city, a shanty-mining outpost for the tin trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a virtually sleepy town before independence in 1957.

"The KL Tower is the best place to see the Petronas Twin Towers and the KL," said Zulkifli Mohamad, chief executive officer of KL tower, who likes to identify himself as the chief entertainment officer of the tower. The night view of the cityscape instantly erases all my doubts about his comment.

Standing boldly atop the Bukit Nanas (Pineapple Forest), the tower, the fourth tallest telecommunications building in the world after the CN tower in Canada (553 metres), Ostankino Tower in Russia (540 metres) and Shanghai Tower in China (468 metres), is no doubt a proud iconic symbol of KL. Launched officially on October 1, 1996 by former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the tower, a wholly owned subsidiary of Telekom Malaysia Berhad, also boasts gift shops and a top-class revolving restaurant.

On July 24, we visit the 88-storey twin towers, currently the world's second tallest building after Taipei 101 Tower (509 metres) in Taiwan and the tallest twin towers that soar to a dizzying height of 452 metres above the skyline.

A tower staffer guides us to the 44<sup>th</sup> floor sky-bridge of the landmark, constructed by 8,000 workers on each of the three eight-



hour shifts a day in two years before launch in 1998, also by Mahathir.

The gleaming architectural delight inspired by the five pillars of Islam is the centrepiece of the modern KL, showcased by Mahathir, father of Malaysia's modern development, as a world-class yet culturally steeped city.



The sky-bridge linking the two independent towers 170 metres above street level also offers us a kaleidoscopic view of a large swathe of the 243 square km cityscape, the architecture of which is an opulent blend of history, culture and diverse ethnicity.

After descending down the bridge, the highest point open to visitors, I stroll with a few of our delegation along the fountain-dotted park of the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC), home to the towers, an art gallery and one of the capital's busiest shopping malls that houses two true department stores, 280 specialty stores and a raft of restaurants.

The towers are not the only things in KL that make the capital of the southeast Asian a gem on the tourist map. It is a vibrant blend of sites and shopping, dining and entertainment facilities to offer.

A tour of the Chinatown, a quaint cluster of makeshift shops in the middle of the town that bustles with life and bargains from noon to night, will give you cheap copies of brand watches, shoes and clothes and a range of other

goods at throwaway prices. You can buy a Gucci watch at only 10 ringit that equals to Tk 160. You will get a hang of the lifestyle of ethnic Chinese people, who constitute 24 percent of the country population.

Also interesting is the Little India, the thriving neighbourhood of wholesale and retail Indian traders, who sale virtually all sorts of goods available in India from colourful saris to incense.

A galaxy of Indian restaurants cater to customers with Indian delicacies in a country 7 percent of whose population is ethnic Indians who migrated mainly from India's Tamil Nadu state to work in Malaysia's tin and rubber industries in the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The predominantly Malay (51.9 percent) Malaysia protects its religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous people to keep up its tourism edge.

One can take a taxi to Sultan Abdul Samad Building (SASB), the Moorish inspired building built in 1897 to house several government departments of the British administration or to the Merdeka Square, facing the SASB where the British flag was lowered for the last time on August 31, 1957 and replaced by the flag of independent Malaya (now Malaysia) to catch a glimpse of the nation's history.

The National Mosque, a multi-fold umbrella-like roof symbolising the aspirations of an independent nation, is also a unique embodiment of contemporary expression of traditional Islamic art, calligraphy and ornamentation.

For lovers of nature, the city houses an orchid garden that

boasts over 800 varieties, a Hibiscus Garden with 500 varieties of the queen of tropical forests, a deer park for spotted deer from Holland, a butterfly park with about 6,000 of the flying beauty and the world's largest covered bird park with more than 300 winged creatures.

Hundreds of shopping establishments, including modern air-conditioned five-star shopping

malls, department stores, hypermarkets, arcades, specialty stores, handicraft centres, duty-free shops, bazaars and nightmarkets dot the cityscape to cater to every taste and budget. Any transport -- prepaid taxis, express coach, monorail, buses and trains -- will drop you to any market in minutes.

Story: SHAKESPEARE SHIL

