

## MEDIA FEATURE

# A POLISHED GEM



No one would share a treasure island. When a friend asked for recommendation for an island holiday with his students, I almost blurted out Gem. This rare jewel shouldn't be exposed. It shouldn't be shared.

Definitely not with a group of hot-blooded schoolchildren. Having them screaming at the top of their lungs and running around the tiny island isn't exactly my idea of a soothing island escapade.

I suppose many visitors echo a similar sentiment. I certainly wouldn't want to be responsible for sending them there.

So, off they went screaming and frolicking on a bigger and more happening island in Terengganu.

Blessed!

Located in a Marine Conservation Park, Gem Island or Pulau Gemia in Malay, truly befits its name. Urbanites who have to endure numerous pressures daily would long for such a perfect getaway. Just think; an escape from hours of traffic jams, environmental pollution, bosses and colleagues from hell, insane drivers, grumpy frontliners, etc.



Most of us are desperate to have the break that we very much deserve. To refresh...to rejuvenate...to regain our sanity.

Gem Island's proximity to the mainland, merely 15 minutes by speedboat, adds to its attractiveness as a weekend holiday spot. A blessing definitely for those prone to seasickness.

After countless unpleasant boat rides contributed by unpredictable weather, at least this short journey spared God my incessant prayers for safe arrivals.

Personally, I love Gem Island for its simplicity. Whenever the need for an affordable relaxing holiday on an idyllic island in Malaysia arises, it always comes to my mind.

Devoted party animals might beg to differ though. But for someone who cringes at the thought of attending New Year's Eve celebration at Bukit Bintang in the midst of a massive crowd, Gem Island is truly a haven...a private sanctuary.

Perhaps, it has to do with the fact that I'm always there during low season. Apart from my group, I've never seen more than five guests there. Perfect!

I remember holidaying on a famous resort on a beautiful island in Malaysia not too long ago where the crowd during buffet dinner reminded me of the Prime Minister's Hari Raya open house.

If the food at the buffet spread, enough to feed a hungry T. rex can be devoured in less than 10 minutes, it is certainly not my kind of a holiday!

Though easily accessible, the 1-km long Gem Island has remained exquisitely pristine. It has all the main requisites that I need for an island escapade. Sun, sand, beach, clear turquoise sea, as well as clean and comfortable accommodation offered by its only boutique resort – Gem Island Resort & Spa.

It provides the perfect setting to catch up with close pals and great surroundings for a romantic rendezvous. Throwing a birthday party there, or better still, a wedding, would be really fantastic.



In a nutshell, it allows us to be away from our daily hectic schedules for a few days to rekindle friendships and relationships.

Gem Island Resort & Spa has been in operation for over 10 years. It underwent a refurbishment and re-branding exercise sometime in 2006. For a tiny island like Gem, its accommodation, all fronting the South China Sea comprising 39 Water Villas, 4 Premier Villas, 4 Hideaway Villas and 2 Hideaway Suite, gives a reason good enough for repeat visits.



Its Water Villas, the least expensive of the bunch, are simple yet highly comfortable. The best thing is the room opens out to a spacious balcony with an amazing view of the ocean.

Lazing at the balcony with a book in hand, entertained by the sound of pounding waves with the sea breeze pressed against your face is the perfect way to spend the afternoon.

Those who are lucky can even get a glimpse of the black-tip sharks from the balcony early morning. Sadly, my luck is only good enough to spot a huge monitor lizard. Anyhow, love the balcony!

As the resort is island-based, the electricity supply is switched off between 3pm and 5pm daily. Most visitors would be out of their rooms during that time to enjoy the many activities on the island.

No holiday in Gem would be complete without basking in the sun and enjoying a swim at its secluded beaches. Other activities include snorkelling, scuba diving, kayaking, jungle trekking and beach games.

Normally, after enjoying all these activities, hitting the spa is probably the next best option. Tusita Spa offers a range of massages and spa treatments that will leave guests de-stressed and rejuvenated.





Gem Island Resort & Spa also plays a part in turtle conservation. The resort has established a turtle sanctuary and works closely with the State authorities to protect turtles.

The staff of the resort seeks out turtle eggs on the secluded beaches of Gem and the nearby Kapas Island. The eggs are collected and transferred to the turtle sanctuary for incubation.

Young hatchlings are kept in a specially constructed pool near its jetty before being released into the open sea. So, visitors who are lucky might get a chance to release the hatchlings.



Upon returning from Gem Island, I found out that the one thing I sorely missed about the island was the delicious food prepared by Chef Nor Zam Zam, who heads the only restaurant there – the Samudra. Having been with the resort for

eight years, he can dish up a truly satisfying meal, be it Malay, Chinese or Western, to complete a truly memorable holiday.

I should start to plan my next trip there...

### **GETTING THERE:**

Getting to Gem Island is really simple. Both Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia fly to Kuala Terengganu from Kuala Lumpur. From the airport, take a cab and head south for Marang jetty (*not Merang jetty*). The journey is about 45 minutes.



If you choose to drive, the journey from Kuala Lumpur to Marang jetty takes approximately six to seven hours via the Karak and East Coast Highway.

From the jetty, it takes another 15 minutes by boat to Gem Island. Suria Link Boat Service operates frequent and regular services to Gem Island Resort & Spa.

Due to the monsoon season, Gem Island Resort & Spa is closed for four months from November to February. However, it is advisable for visitors to check with the resort.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE STATE OF TERENGGANU**

Occupying 12,955 sq km, Terengganu has the state of Kelantan on its north border and Pahang in the south and south west. This land of long sandy beaches has a coastline of 240km facing the South China Sea. Its capital town is Kuala Terengganu.

Like Kelantan, Terengganu is one of the states in the country with strong Malay culture and traditional pursuits such as kite flying, top spinning and batik printing.

Terengganu is blessed with beautiful beaches and islands. Famous islands in the state include Pulau Redang, Pulau Perhentian and Pulau Kapas.

### **CONTACTS:**

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### **BOAT SCHEDULE & CONTACT:**

**From Marang Jetty to Resort:**  
9:00 am; 11:00 am;  
1:00 pm (not available on Friday);  
3:00 pm

**From Resort to Marang Jetty:**  
9:30 am; 11:30 am;  
1:30 pm (not available on Friday);  
3:30 pm

**Suria Link Boat Service**  
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