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Glowing with success

Increasing number of tourists has placed Kuala Selangor's firefly sanctuary on the map and Kampung Kuantan villagers are reaping the benefits. > 2&3



River guide: Abdul Aziz Abdul Manaf works part-time ferrying visitors along Sungai Selangor to see the fireflies. — AZLINA AHMAD/The Star

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Sanctuary a hit with international tourists

District council notes surge in visitors from South Korea

story by
ELAN PERUMAL

elan@thestar.com.my



THE world's largest firefly sanctuary in Kampung Kuantan, Kuala Selangor, has not lost its glow as it continues to draw visitors from all over the world.

Despite a perception among the general public that the population of fireflies in Kampung Kuantan has dwindled over the years, statistics proved that the sanctuary, which is known as Fireflies Park, is still a top draw.

Kuala Selangor District Council (MDKS) stated that the unique attraction drew an average of 80,000 visitors annually.

MDKS president Noraini Roslan said the data collected showed a steady increase in the number of people visiting the sanctuary over the recent years.

She said a total of 77,212 people visited in 2013, 79,800 in 2014 and 84,838 in 2015.

"There seems to be a gradual but encouraging increase in the number of visitors to the park over the past three years.

"We have seen a total of 33,455 visitors in the first six months of this

year and I believe the total number will surpass last year's figure," she said.

She highlighted that the statistics revealed that the sanctuary was still a very popular destination among both local and foreign tourists.

Noraini said there had been a surge in the number of South Korean tourists at the park.

"There is a continued steady stream of tourists from Japan, the United States of America and many parts of Europe," she noted.

She said the district council had been working very closely with Tourism Selangor and Tourism Malaysia to promote the Fireflies Park among tourists.

"Both the state and national tourism boards have been assisting us by encouraging travel agents to promote the fireflies attraction.

"The result of this collaboration has been positive and we are enjoying the benefits of both in the form of fame and economy," she said.

Besides becoming popular among tourists, she said, the presence of visitors had also contributed towards the villagers' socio-economy.

The presence of the visitors helps to generate additional income for the villagers as 50% of the boat fare collected from ticket sales are apportioned to the Village Security Development Committee and boatmen who operate the boats.

"There are 36 boats providing service, ferrying visitors along Sungai Selangor to view the fireflies.

"We charge RM56 per boat. The boatman receives RM20 per trip, RM8 goes to the JKKK while the council gets RM28," she explained.

She said MDKS was required to spend a substantial amount of money on the maintenance of roads to the park, the information centre, souvenir shops, public toilets and the jetty.

"We have been getting support from various corporations including Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), which had sponsored the boats.

"TNB also sponsored the furniture and LCD television sets at the information centre," she said, adding that the district council hoped that more companies would consider to collaborate with the park as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme.

FRIM, said Noraini, had also offered its support towards conservation of the fireflies so that the area would continue to house the largest population of fireflies in the world.

In its efforts to protect these fireflies from the threat of extinction, she said, the state had taken various measures including acquiring several plots of private land that were being cleared for farming.

"The land clearing along the banks of Sungai Selangor in Kampung Kuantan has been stopped following

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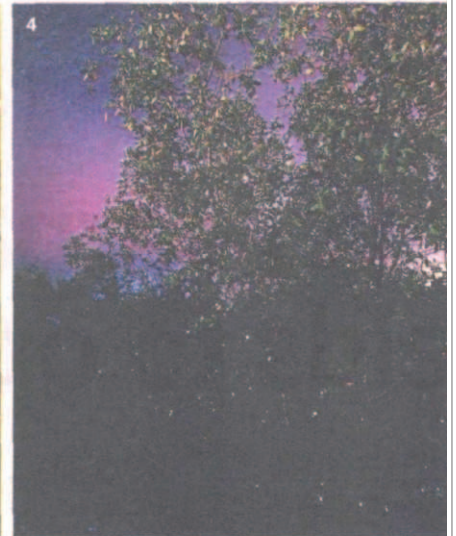
1 Seo and his mother Choh said seeing the fire flies was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

2 A group of tourists all set to view the fireflies while waiting for their boat.

3 Coleman and K. Ashiweeni Kavin having their photo taken at the information centre.

4 Fireflies on a tree at dusk on Sungai Selangor. - filepic

— Photos: AZLINA AHMAD/The Star



the acquisition of those plots of land.

"The state has also gazetted the riverbanks as green zone in order to prevent any sort of indiscriminate development that will threaten the survival of the fireflies," she added.

Boatman Abdul Aziz Abdul Manaf, 48, who has been ferrying visitors up and down the river for more than 20 years, said things had changed for the better in

recent times.

He said the sanctuary had continuously received a good number of visitors, especially foreign tourists, throughout the year.

"The government's efforts are bearing fruit," said the school gardener who makes an average of RM1,200 from his part-time job as a boatman.

American tourist Renne Coleman, 26, from California, said he was fascinated with the sanctu-

ary and seeing the fireflies in their natural habitat.

"It was a wonderful experience and I really enjoyed it," he said.

I. Lovro and J. Eva from Slovenia said they were mesmerised by the huge number fireflies they spotted nesting on the mangrove trees along the riverbanks.

"We hope the fireflies will be preserved for future generations," said Eva.

Donggil Seo, 27, from South

Korea, who accompanied his mother Sunkyoung Choh, 49, said he had never before witnessed such a huge number of fireflies glowing in the darkness of the night.

"The fireflies were amazing," said Choh.

M. Akiko said her visit to the Kuala Selangor firefly sanctuary offered unforgettable memories.

"I have never seen something like this in my life, the experience was beautiful," she said.

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Boats tied up at the Kampung Kuantan jetty on Sungai Selangor at dusk.