

Stories by **JOLEEN LUNJEW**
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You want me to bathe in that?" my friend asked, aghast at the dirty floor of a dark public toilet which stank to high heaven.

There were no lights, the sink was filthy and there were no shower facilities. If we were to bathe here, we would have to squat on the floor and use a short hose attached to a tap.

After a whole day of caving at the Gunung Senyum Recreational Forest, Pahang, we were looking forward to a nice hot shower. So much for that.

"OK, let's look for something more decent. I'm sure they have shower facilities here," I assured, as we combed the camp grounds hopefully.

After a bit, we stumbled upon some abandoned hostels at the back which had some sort of shower facilities. It had bare cubicles with a plastic pipe at the top, but no shower head. There was dirt all over the floor, cobwebs on the ceiling and frogs perching on the walls.

The slimy creatures looked annoyed.

"I will kill you if a frog jumps on me," said my friend, who has a phobia of frogs. But it was this, or we go to bed smelly. We chose the shower.

Perhaps the rough conditions were only to be expected, since I wanted to do a spot of caving for the weekend and didn't want something too commercial.

To this end, I had made a call to cave enthusiast Michael Manivanan, founder of outdoor adventure

Cave of smiles

A delightful trek through the forest, amazing underground wonders and questionable toilets are all part and parcel of the fun at Gunung Senyum.

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company MMAdventure, for advice.

Michael, who takes groups to commercial sites like Gua Tempurung and Mulu, and does a lot of caving of his own as well, suggested Gunung Senyum. He was there a decade ago to do some cave surveys and mapping for the Malaysian Nature Society.

"Why don't I bring you there?" he suggested. "I've been meaning to go back and it would be interesting to see if the place is as I remembered it. There are more than 20 caves for us to explore, so it'll keep us pretty busy. We can camp the night there."

And so we headed to the town of Temerloh, Pahang early one Saturday morning to meet up with Michael, his business partner Ng Shan Wee, and Ng's girlfriend.

We reached Gunung Senyum at about 10am, and Michael went to look for the forest rangers for information while Ng prepared the equipment.

Being experienced spelunkers, they came prepared with full caving suits, caving shoes, helmets, head torches, carbide lamps, ropes and bolts. These caving experts were clearly excited about the adventure ahead.

"Caving is a passion. It is not for everyone, but my greatest joy is to discover an unexplored passageway or uncover a whole new cave," said Michael.

The first part of our adventure was pretty mild as the caves were dry and easily accessible. It was actually a cluster of smaller caves linked together by passageways with names like Gua Terang Bulan, Gua Angin, Gua Gajah and Gua Taman.

You could walk easily into them, and there was a beautiful garden in

Gua Taman, the cave with a "garden".



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