



The Keepsake We Share

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Hopping and skipping around as a little girl in our local mall in Saudi Arabia almost every week, I used to pass by a tourist office's dozen wallpaper advertisements depicting various places all around Malaysia. From Kuala Lumpur's skyline to Langkawi's island hopping, I stood before the monumental displays in awe and pretended I was sightseeing those places; studying every printed pixel of a leaf and branch as if I were in a deep forest expedition; discovering the unknown. For a girl raised in a drier country built on vast desert landscapes, the unknown to me was coastal planes dressed in evergreen, lined with stupendous flowing rivers, waterfalls, and crashing seas; sights so breathtaking I didn't believe they could exist. "Those sights are only made up of plastic leaves for the set of Jurassic Park and movies of the like." I insisted, but a faint voice tugged at my heart's strings whispering: "Go for it, uncover if those leaves are real or fake." Since then I've always day dreamed about visiting an emerald of the Earth, and before I slept, I leaned against my modest window looking up at the one star visible through the rooftop's cracks longing for adventure.

Fast forward to October, 2016; I couldn't believe I was finally travelling to study overseas at the very land I doubted was real because of its natural beauty. I felt joy, excitement, happiness, and fear to be stepping into a whole new world with a drastic environmental difference, but the feeling I recall the most upon stepping out of Kuala Lumpur's International Airport is falling in love with the crisp wind carrying the rustle of the trees. It was like a soft welcoming melody that gently caressed my cheek and told me that it'll be alright because nature will take care of me. As a foreigner whom had recently departed

from her parents' arms to a new land, that gush of reassuring wind was all I had to lead me to my own adventure. Not long after, I followed the wind to new places; got lost on my way to university and almost ended up in another city on the first day, I've climbed grassy hills, mountains, waterfalls, walked without aim in bustling cities then got lost again and again and again. But no matter how much I drifted astray, I've never lost my cool nor broke down because I thought to myself: "How could I be upset at discovering new corners of this world? This is what I've always wanted more so than anything." Whenever the locals asked me what I like the most about Malaysia, my answer had always been the same: "I love Malaysia's nature."

I love Malaysia's nature that welcomed people from all walks of life and provided a home for them.

I love Malaysia's nature that reminds people to calm down and take a deep breath whenever life seemed to move at a breakneck speed, making visitors and locals feel laid back in an anxiety filled world.

I love Malaysia's nature that did its best for the country, boosting its tourism and motivating people far away to come and witness its marvel.

I love Malaysia's nature that awes us with its exquisitely painted sceneries of turbulent rivers, grounded highlands, floras, faunas, and tropical exotic animals that reverts you back to a wondrous child with sparkles in your eyes no matter how many times you witness the miraculous gift nature has to offer.

However, should the very nature that raised us, shaped us, and welcomed us be treated as a gift?

Should we live our lives enjoying what it has to offer to the fullest, leaving nothing behind for the future generations?

What Malaysia's nature had gifted us; its citizens both foreign and local should not be treated as a gift we bask in then discard after we get old, it is a keepsake we should maintain; to preserve the land, its culture, and its beauty for generations to come.

Over half of the forested lands in Malaysia have disappeared and continues to deplete at an alarming rate due to large scale agriculture that shaves off the green in order to grow livestock and crops for the population according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 2021. Picture this alternate scenario: In the year 2030 a young girl skips across a mall and looks at posters advertising travelling to Malaysia in the process of being discarded due to the places advertised no longer existing. The girl continues skipping ahead, knowing that this natural scenery doesn't exist and that the green hills advertised have been long replaced by smoky industrial workplaces. Wastelands have become what flows across the veins of the country instead of fresh rivers, and the evergreen Malaysia had become a thing of the past.

In this scenario, the life of Malaysia's nature had been sucked out of its marrow, and the country is no longer the same because the nature which made it so special had died out.

Citizens are no longer laid back, and are residing in anxiety inducing, compact metropolitan cities. Everything is no longer wondrous, and news about climate change and the end of the planet has dominated the world more than ever.

Close your eyes for a few seconds and picture a world where Malaysia is like that.

How do you feel about it? Pretty bleak right? So you may be wondering what one can possibly do to avoid this future, what is our responsibility as Malaysian citizens?

Each of us should start by challenging and changing our habits. The most basic thing we can begin with is avoiding littering the natural environment. We should watch where our trash goes and make sure nothing spills on the grounds to avoid the formation of mini, neighborhood wastelands. We should also combat food wasting as it produces green gases that contributes to climate change and causes arable land to be exploited further by agriculture to keep providing food for the population, even though 3,000 tons of edible food is wasted every single day in Malaysia; according to a 2018 research done on "Household Food Wastage Prevention In Malaysia: A Issue Model Perspective" in The Economy and Technology Management Review Journal.

Once we've managed to keep our personal places clean and take measures avoid wasting food, we could inform our loved ones to change their wasting habits as well, and

encourage them to inform other people and so on. All we need is to work on ourselves and shame poor habits to put them to rest, and just like that we could preserve Malaysia's nature for years to come and could provide our children and future generations with a healthy environment to grow up in.

Whenever the topic of sustainability and our responsibility as citizens of a nation comes up; our natural reaction is to tense and run away from the issue because we can't handle any more responsibilities than the ones we shoulder in our daily lives. When such topics comes up, people imagine they have to fight billionaires and stop tractors from deforestation in a comical superhero fashion way, when in reality all we need to do is watch ourselves and mend our habits individually. If a large portion of the population avoids overconsumption and littering, then tons of food will be saved and acres of land will be preserved in its original natural shape which made Malaysia so iconic and gave it its name.

That's right! Did you know that multiple historical sources state that Malaysia got its name from its mountains and highlands, thus being named Malay Land in reference to The Himalayas; which are high areas? While other theories state its derived from the Tamil words "Malai" and "ur" meaning mountain land respectively, and in Javanese the country earned the title "Sungai Melayu" meaning Melayu river; yet another description of Malaysia's nature, it's only fair to give credit to Malaysia's spectacular environment for earning the country its name.

Malaysia's nature is not a gift, but a precious keepsake each one of us is responsible to preserve as long as we live, learn, grow, and reside in it no matter where we come from, our background, and our age; for we shall hand its blessings down for generations to come.