

LENGGONG VALLEY WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Heritage wonders of Lembah Lenggong

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THE Lenggong Valley in Perak, recognised as the nation's fourth World Heritage Site, is set to place Malaysia on the world's archaeological map and generate revenue from tourism.

It received the honour from Unesco on June 30 this year, with the instrument of recognition presented to Malaysia in a ceremony on Nov 3.

A copy of the instrument was presented to the Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abdul Kadir yesterday where a celebration to commemorate the listing was held.

The Lembah Lenggong World Heritage website was also launched at the event, which brought together the residents of Lenggong, a sleepy town located 100km north of Ipoh, the state capital.

Malaysia's other heritage sites are the Mulu National Park, Kinabalu National Park and the cities of Malacca and George Town.

The recognition by the world body is particularly meaningful for National Heritage Commissioner Prof Emeritus Datuk Zuraina Majid, whose discoveries in the archaeological valley for more than two decades brought the one-street town to world attention.

She says the area must continue to be protected, given its significance as the oldest known place of human activity in Southeast Asia.

The listing is beneficial to Malaysia and the local community. Besides international recognition, the tourism industry will also benefit as more tourists make a beeline for the valley.

"Local residents should make full use of the opportunities from the expected influx of tourists. One area that can be looked into is providing homestay packages."

Among the immediate plans for the area include a visitor's centre which will incorporate the existing gallery at the site. There will also be an auditorium and demonstrations on stone tool and pottery-making as well as an area displaying information on the Perak Man, the world's only prehistoric skeleton born with a deformity known as *Brachymesophaletia* type 2A.

"It is of utmost importance that the site is protected and promoted without destroying its outstanding universal value," says Zuraina, adding that a sustainable management of the area would ensure its continuation on the list.

However, some time is needed to equip the area with the necessary



Deputy Prime Minister **Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin** handing over the instrument of recognition of the **Lenggong Valley World Heritage Site** to Information, Communication and Culture Minister **Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim** (third from right) after the site was recognised as a **Unesco World Heritage Site**.

infrastructure, especially for tourism.

"The public must understand that it is not a matter of protecting for nothing. It is a case of protecting the goose which gives us the golden egg, the economic returns," adds Zuraina.

The development of the area will be handled by the state government while promotional activities come under the purview of the state and federal governments.

There are six archaeological sites in two clusters in the valley which span close to two million years. It is one of the longest records of early man in a single locality, and the oldest outside the African continent.

There are open-air and cave sites with palaeolithic tool workshops. The number of sites found in the relatively contained area suggests the presence of a nomadic population with cultural remains from the palaeolithic, neolithic and metal ages.

These sites have been chronometrically dated from 1.83 million years to 1,000 years ago, making the valley one of the longest archaeological culture sequences found in a single locality in the world.

It also contains a large number of undisturbed in-situ palaeolithic sites, making it unique outside of Africa and of importance in the study of the culture of palaeolithic man.

In-situ sites are extremely rare especially in tropical regions because over a long time period natural fluvial processes, such as soil erosion and human activities, can disturb the original archaeological context of the area.



National Heritage Commissioner **Prof Emeritus Datuk Zuraina Majid** and the **Perak Man**, Southeast Asia's oldest most complete human skeleton.

Palaeolithic tools in Bukit Bunuh, located in the first cluster, were found preserved in suevite rock formed by a meteorite strike, which occurred 1.83 million years ago.

The hand axes found in these suevite boulders are among the oldest so far discovered outside of Africa, indicating early hominid presence in the Lenggong Valley.

Kota Tampan, also in the first cluster, is a rare example of a prehistoric tool-making site, revealing prehistoric tool technology that was known before.

Also, the cause and date of site abandonment can be determined. Scientists found evidence of ash from the last catastrophic volcanic eruption of Toba in between the tools, clearly suggesting that man had to suddenly flee the site around 70,000 years ago, leaving behind the tool-making equipment and both finished and unfinished tools in the workshop.

Another significant discovery was



with an application to be placed on the tentative list. Once accepted, only then can the nomination dossier be prepared. The dossier can take three to 10 years to prepare because it requires detailed research information.

"Two volumes have to be submitted — the main dossier volume and another on the management plan."

However, for Lenggong Valley, this process took only nine months because the area had been thoroughly researched for 20 years and books and articles were readily available.

Once the dossier is submitted, there is an 18-month period of evaluation. Once there is a formal approval from the World Heritage Centre, begins the evaluation mission, which is handled by the Unesco Advisory Body.

The evaluation period involves a site visit by an expert mission; desk reviews by the advisory body and submissions of additional information and feedback before a final evaluation is made by the World Heritage Committee, made up of 21 member states who will evaluate the report by the advisory body and decide on the listing.

A crucial part of the process also involves meeting the stakeholders of the proposed site.

"This is an important aspect because the actual site protection depends on the locals. They are the custodians, and they must have a sense of pride and belonging over the site.

"They must be prepared to follow the dos and don'ts of the site protection and promotion," says Zuraina, who heaps praises on residents of Lenggong who came out in force to support the cause.

This year, of the 38 submissions, only 26 nominations received the nod from the committee.

Sites are made up of cultural and natural sites and those listed for natural and cultural values. Lenggong Valley is the 953rd, out of 962, of which only seven per cent are made up of archaeological sites.

Other archaeological sites include Angkor; the Pyramids of Egypt; the Peking Man site at Zhoukoudian in China; the Acropolis in Athens; the mausoleum of the first Qin Emperor in China and the Borobudur temple in Indonesia.

the Perak Man, Southeast Asia's oldest and most complete human skeleton, which was discovered in the Gua Gunung Runtuh cave, located in the second cluster.

The skeleton, dates back to about 10,000 years, has several significant facts. Firstly, scientists found out that he suffered a congenital deformity rarely found in human populations, and he died at a ripe old age of 40-45 years in a period where the average life expectancy was about 20 to 25 years.

This meant that he could transmit knowledge on how to survive several generations. From his longer life span and the elaborate manner of burial, scientists also concluded that the Perak Man was a respected member of his society.

Zuraina says getting listed as a World Heritage Site involved a long and complicated process, which the department first embarked on in 2010.

Elaborating, she says it begins



Unique handaxe found in Bukit Bunuh.