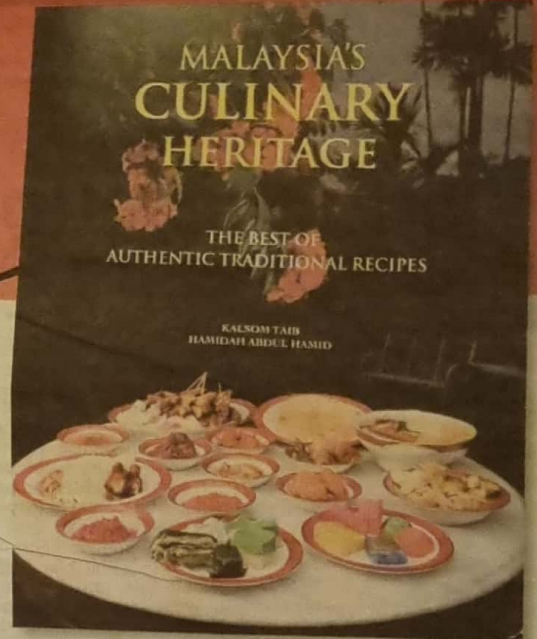


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The authors (from left) Datin Kalsom Taib and Datin Hamidah Abdul Hamid.



'Malaysia's Culinary Heritage: The Best of Authentic Traditional Recipes' features 230 recipes of heritage food, with 17 additional recipes by the authors.

## A taste of heritage

Malaysian cuisine, like its people, is a melting pot of spices and flavours. **Silas Low** rounds up some of the country's best heritage food

**U**NTIL three years ago, 230 Malaysian cuisines that are near extinction or "long forgotten" have been gazetted as National Culinary Heritage by the National Heritage Department.

The recipes for these heritage food (*makanan warisan*), as they're called, are traditionally passed down from generation to generation orally without any systematic records and documentation.

To save Malaysian heritage food, the department takes on an active role to preserve, document and research on various aspects of the food, which can be used as a reference for society.

One of them is the winner of The Best Book of the Year Award under the Best of Asia category in the recent Gourmand Awards 2021, the 320-page *Malaysia's Culinary Heritage: The Best of Authentic Traditional Recipes*.

A collaboration between two award-winning authors, Datin Kalsom Taib and Datin Hamidah Abdul Hamid, the

book features 230 recipes with 17 extra ones added by the authors, who are cousins and culinary enthusiasts on a mission to preserve our nation's disappearing food.

The duo won top honours in the culinary heritage section of the Best in the World Gourmand World Cookbook Awards 2016 for their maiden cookbook outing, *Johar Palate: Tanjung Puteri Recipes*.

Efforts have been made to submit the department's compilation of Malaysia's culinary heritage to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) for recognition as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

### HAVE YOU TASTED THESE?

Here's a pick of Malaysia's heritage cuisine, courtesy of the National Heritage Department. Have you heard of them or tasted them before?

Silas Low is an assistant executive in the communications unit at the Islamic Tourism Centre.

### PACERI AMRA OR KEDONDONG

*Paceri*, or relish in English, is a type of Malay dish related to sauces like chutney and salsa, usually made of fruits and vegetables.

The *kedondong* fruit, or ambarella (*amra* for short), is commonly found in Southeast Asia. Sour in taste, it is commonly served as juice and also an ingredient in a local salad called *rojak*.

For this dish, the selection of *amra* is crucial. The *amra* should be ripe with a tender texture.

Owing to the sweet-sour kick that the dish has, *Paceri Amra* is commonly enjoyed as a side dish.



### NASI ULAM 44

This dish gets its name due to the number of herbs and vegetables used to prepare it.

*Ulam* in Malay means raw vegetables, and the herbs used in this dish are usually the ones that grow wild in the jungle.

Some of these are rare plants known to have medicinal or nutritional values.

It is an aromatic combination of rice and 44 herbs, which includes sweet potato and pumpkin shoots, mint, basil, turmeric, pennywort, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves and torch ginger.

The dish is usually served during Ramadan, besides being a regular serving for women in confinement.



### KERABU SARE

This famous dish is unique to Kelantan and Terengganu in the northeastern coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

What makes it different from other *kerabu* is the addition of seaweed or locally called *sare*.

The *sare* is prepared with much care. It has to be soaked overnight, with the soaking solution changed every seven hours to ensure that the salt contents are removed. Only then, the seaweed is toasted.

Other ingredients in the *kerabu* include grated and toasted coconut flesh, and mackerel floss (*serunding ikan kembung*).



**BUAH KETEREH MASAK LEMAK PUTIH**

Ketereh is a more sophisticated name for gajus, or cashews, in English. This dish is prepared by gently simmering ketereh fruit with cut squid in coconut milk and condiments.

Usually eaten with white rice, the dish is said to have health benefits owing to the ketereh fruit itself, which is known to provide relief for sore throat and constipation, while its young shoots can also be eaten raw as an ulam.



**BUBUR ANAK LEBAH**

Its name is reminiscent of the Peranakan's bubur chacha. Nonetheless, bubur anak lebah is essentially a broth-based dish.

Traditionally served during the *Majlis Berendoi*, a ceremony to commemorate the first time a newborn is placed in a cradle, the dish is believed to originate from central Perak.

The glutinous sticky paste is made of rice flour, tapioca flour, betel powder and screwpine essence, prepared by immersing in boiling water and making sure it sinks.

The broth, on the other hand, is sweetened coconut milk with pandan flavours.



**BINGKA BERLAUK**

*Bingka* is a cake-like dish made using wheat flour and other additional ingredients. The recipe is forgiving and flexible enough that one can make this dish into either a sweet or savoury dessert.

Most common *bingka* are the sweet ones made from tapioca. However, the *bingka berlauk*, made with minced meat, is equally popular.

For this savoury *bingka*, the "cake" batter is made using a mixture of wheat and corn flour, with generous helpings of coconut cream.

The suggested meat dish that makes a great filling is minced beef with diced celery, chilli, sliced onions and scallions.

The batter and meat mixture is combined well and baked. Once done, the top is garnished with heaps of extra minced meat.



**KUIH KERING**

As its name suggests, *kuih kering* is a dry dessert prepared by frying wheat-based batter in caramelised sugar.

While the preparation sounds basic and simple, meticulous attention must be given to the size and shape of the dough.

Each dough piece should measure an estimated 0.5cm in thickness, and 7.5cm in length.

Care must also be taken in twisting the dough pieces into a spiral, in which the crevices will make it all the more suitable for the sticky syrup to trickle in and form an evenly sweet coating.

Moreover, the caramelisation process post-frying must be carried out until the pot has cooled down to ensure that the right texture is achieved.

**HALAL FOOD DESTINATION**

HER status as a melting pot of cultural heritage makes Malaysia a famed attraction for tourists.

That includes her colourful gastronomic culture too, of which her 213 heritage food have been gazetted as National Culinary Heritage by the National Heritage Department.

To that, Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) director-general Datuk Dr Mohamed Razip Hasan believes that food, including these heritage food, can be a tourism product for the Muslim travel segment.

"Malaysia stands out not only because of the diversity of food choices, but also the fact that halal food is easily available.

"This is something worth highlighting to Muslims around the world because we understand how important halal food is to them."

He adds: "From a Muslim tour-

ist's point of view, when accessibility to halal food is present in a particular destination, consequently it will make their visit more welcoming, more comfortable, and culminating in a positive experience of Malaysia."

Generally, he adds, two factors are paramount in the Muslim travel market — the availability of halal food and provision of prayer facilities.

"Muslim travellers, particularly those from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which is a key component of the overall segment, are known to stay longer for their visits, besides an inclination to spend more,"

Razip says.

As part of its effort to strengthen the country's tourism industry, specifically the Islamic tourism sector, ITC introduced the Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR)



Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) director-general Datuk Dr Mohamed Razip Hasan



Mövenpick Hotel & Convention Centre KLIA in Sepang is a platinum category hotel in the MFAR programme.



Tamu Hotel & Suites Kuala Lumpur is a gold category hotel in the MFAR programme.

programme two years ago.

To date, the programme has identified 44 hotels as Muslim-friendly, comprising local and international brand hotels.

The hotels are categorised under three categories of Muslim-friendly accommodation premises — silver, gold and platinum.

For a hotel to be listed in the programme's silver category, it has to fulfil four criteria — available information of nearby mosques, halal-certified restaurants and tourist

attractions, in-room Muslim-friendly facilities, which includes *qiblat* direction, prayer mats and an in-site *surau*, and at least one certified halal in-house kitchen.

For hotels to be in the gold category, they must fulfil all four basic criteria, in addition to having a gender-segregated gym and swimming pool, or allocated timing for male and female guests to use these facilities.

The platinum category hotels are recognised as fully *syariah*-compliant. They must offer more than just the

basic needs for a Muslim traveller, and incorporate Islamic practices in its daily operations.

These include having Muslims as the majority of its staff, who must be moderately dressed while working in the hotel premises. The preferred dress code for guests must also be visibly displayed.

There should also be a *syariah* officer or halal executive to monitor the operations of the hotel in the context of Islamic principles, among others.

By Silas Low