

GOURMET RETREAT

Ten minutes from TTDI lies Bayan Indah, an idyllic cooking resort where Kong Wai Yeng finds peace in the city

I chop a few cucumbers, slice some more onions into my *Kerabu Timun* and steal a glimpse at the brambles sprouting waywardly outside the window. So, this is how it feels to cook in a breezy open kitchen and be so unconfined to nature. Bayan Indah – a pristine culinary school cum resort owned by Cordon Bleu-trained chef Rohani Jelani – is perfect for frazzled city slickers seeking a less touristy, homey vacation. Cooking classes, which are almost four hours each, are RM200-300 per person but we recommend you combine it with an overnight stay.

Rohani has an expansive professional kitchen that will make chefs cringe with envy. There's a slew of cooking hobs, sinks, pots, pans, ovens and fully-fitted refrigerators. And as if that's not enough, the brightly-lit kitchen extends all the way out to the bowery garden laden with herbs, vegetation and plump fruits swelling on trees. Cooking classes at Bayan Indah are not mere demonstrations and I cheerily dip my fingers in everything – from preparing, cooking to serving.

Rohani doesn't instruct much as she prefers her students to experiment and learn the

nitty-gritty of cooking on their own. However, watching this bubbly chef in action is so much fun because she's genuinely passionate about cooking. With a flick of the knife, she shreds the bunga kantan to pink smidges, tosses them with my *kerabu timun* and turns it into a pungent colourful salad. But, Rohani doesn't tolerate imperfection. 'Ah, these kaffir lime leaves are not fragrant enough,' and she darts out to the garden to pluck some new ones and chops them swiftly into my *kerabu*.

When I'm not coddling my pot of *ayam pongteh* or tearing over onions on the chopping board, I sometimes sleuth behind Rohani, just to glean some cooking tips. It's the best way to learn,

really. She's unerringly well-versed and provides terse advice, which is extremely useful to amateurs like me. In the end, I (and my very, very patient cooking partner) cook up a decent Nyonya spread of *ayam pongteh*, *inchi kabin*, *kerabu*

timun and *kuih ang-ko* to be served as lunch for other students as well.

Cook, eat and sleep – that is exactly what I do at Bayan Indah. Kitted out in white, this two-storey bungalow (also Rohani's former residence, which is repurposed into a resort) rests at the far end of a village in Sungai Penchala where kampung houses and lush foliage surround. Draped by a sloping forest at the back (with a woody hiking trail, if

you're keen), Bayan Indah is enclosed enough to let you enjoy maximum

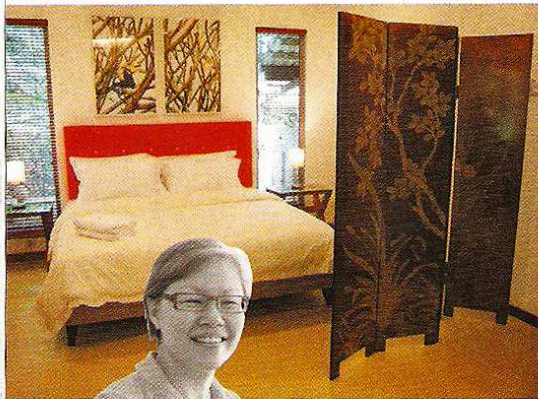
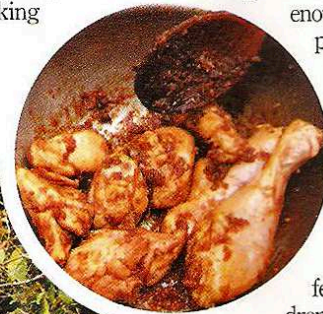
privacy. The façade on the other hand has a bricked walkway – flanked by bouquets of spider lilies, banana trees and crimson blossoms of *Roselle* – leading to an inviting alfresco dining area.

Rohani has put in a lot of thought to making her guests feel at home. Upstairs, a sun-drenched patio abuts the grassy lawn where you can snag a table and indulge in an undisturbed afternoon tea with some home-baked cookies. Of course, I adore my room the most. The natural light streams in through the floor-to-ceiling windows – giving the illusion that you're slumbering (and bathing) in the forest. The king-sized bed, fit-for-two bathtub, fluffy pillows as well as the floral upholstery are comfy enough to lock me away from civilisation.

When it's time to leave (unwillingly), I linger on a swing near the koi pond shaded by sturdy trees. Discovering Bayan Indah is like a found treasure and I'm glad that I can still revel in peace just within the perimeters of the city.

Bayan Indah 3343 Kg Palimbayan Indah, Sungai Penchala, KL (03 7729 0122/www.bayanindah.com). Pick from more than 70 cooking themes and sign up for the cooking class plus accommodation package at RM425-850 per pax.

This two-storey bungalow rests at the far end of a village in Sungai Penchala where kampung houses and lush foliage surround



Rohani has an expansive professional kitchen that will make chefs cringe with envy.

