

An island to fall in love with

Malaysia may not be everyone's first choice for a honeymoon destination, but **Gemma Collins** discovered the spectacular island of Langkawi really makes it stand out from the rest



'NOTHING much happens in Malaysia, there are no terrorists, no floods and the weather is always good – it's quite boring really," joked our taxi driver as we travelled through the bustling streets of Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur.

It was our honeymoon and we had already spent two days in KL, as the locals call it, embracing the city break and enjoying the height of luxury at the Hotel Ritz Carlton.

There was nothing boring about it – we drank cocktails at the Traders Hotels overlooking the city with a perfect view of the hotch-potch of old buildings and sky-scrapers and the glistening Petronas Towers poking through the haze.

We enjoyed the hustle and bustle of a night market in China Town and souvenir stalls at the Central Market on Jalan Hang Kasturi.

We took advantage of the hotel's Spa Village – a tropical-themed retreat with both indoor and outdoor treatment rooms, and an outdoor pool with palm trees and waterfalls.

And I had already piled on the pounds after enjoying an array of delicious curries, a mix of Chinese, Indian and Thai influence.

As we left KL behind and landed on the beautiful island of Langkawi, we concluded the taxi driver did not know what he was talking about.

Luckily there were no terrorists in sight but the island had seen the worst weather in 30 years, with non-stop rain for five

days and the paddy-fields flooded with water.

But luck must have been on our side as we awoke the next morning to sunshine and one look at the white sand and blue waters as we stepped out of our room, we knew we had arrived in paradise.

The Langkawi archipelago consists of 99 islands located off the North-West coast of Malaysia and just south of the Equator.

More than 60 per cent of Pulau Langkawi, the largest of the islands, remains covered in rainforest, which helps to make it one of the least spoilt tourist spots in South-East Asia.

The island is for luxury-loving Tarzans, with the lavish hotels being one of Langkawi's best assets.

We stayed at the intimate Casa Del Mar on the Pantai Cenang beach, on the west of the main island, which unlike the rest of the large resorts has only 34 rooms and its own spa.

A sense of serenity hung over the hotel and we certainly felt Home by the Sea as the Spanish name suggests, with the friendly staff ensuring we were always looked after.

And the highlight was our own private seven-course dinner on the beach while taking in the breathtaking sunset.

We decided to embrace the island's most preserved treasure – the pristine wildlife reserve which is home to some of the rarest creatures on the planet, including 226 species of birds and 354 recorded species of butterfly.

We booked ourselves onto Dev's Adventure Tours and explored the rainforest's mangrove trees, bat caves, fish farm and abundant wildlife.

We were led by mangrove-expert Aida who had once lived around the corner from us in London, but had opted for the peaceful life – and who could blame her?

As we slid through the water on our canopied boat with the mangrove trees surrounding us, all I could hear were the call of the tropical birds.

"You're in luck there's a mangrove pit viper" enthusiastic Aida announced "If you get bitten you will die within five hours".

Wanting to see more of the island, we spent another afternoon with the fantastic Eva and her crew on her beautiful sailing boat, the Damai Indah.

Eva and her husband had sailed around the world on her 'pride and joy', visiting the likes of Barbados and Thailand, but they had chosen

to stay in Langkawi.

We moored in calm water, used kayaks to explore the area and found ourselves on a beach surrounded by monkeys before heading back to the boat for a delicious meal and to enjoy her full-stocked fridge of alcohol.

Back at the hotel that night, as we sat and drank a cocktail on one of the sun loungers on the beach and listened to the waves sweep gently onto the beach, I decided "boring" was enough for me.

FACTFILE

HOW TO GET THERE

□ Malaysian Airlines flight from London Heathrow to Kuala Lumpur and then another flight to Langkawi.

WHAT TO DO IN MALAYSIA

□ Central Market on Jalan Hang Kasturi
□ Night Market, Petaling Street, China Town

WHAT TO DO IN LANGKAWI

□ Boat tour of the Mangrove, including a look around bat caves, fish farm and lunch, with Dev's Adventure Tours. www.langkawi-nature.com – from around £33
□ Sunset cruise around the island with Blue Water Star Sailing – enjoy dinner and a full-stocked bar on the boat, swim in the sea and take the kayaks out to explore the area. www.bluewaterstarsailing.com from

around £67

□ Hire a car from £23 a day and explore the island, visiting the Telaga Tujuh waterfalls and taking a trip on the Langkawi cable car
□ A game of 18-hole golf between the northern foothills of Mt Mat Cincang and Datai Bay, the 6000 meter long course is made up of fairways of Bermuda grass and greens of Tidwarf grass. Datai Bay Golf Club. From £65

WHERE TO STAY

□ The Ritz Carlton, 168, Jalan Imbi, Kuala Lumpur 55100 Malaysia - (603) 2142 8000 <http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/KualaLumpur/>
□ Casa Del Mar Langkawi, Jalan Pantai Cenang – www.casadelmar-langkawi.com (604) 955 2388



Hilarious portrayal of marriage

HETTY FEINSTEIN'S WEDDING ANNIVERSARY
New End Theatre
Hampstead
★★★★☆

HETTY and Harry Feinstein have been married for 30 years and Hetty is determined to have a gala celebration inviting the whole family, even the most obscure ones; all the friends they have made during the years and a few enemies to show how financially successful they are.

Harry is reluctant and tries to make her cut down the list to 300. She cannot understand his lack of enthusiasm and relives the events of

their marriage, trying to find an explanation.

Chris Burgess, though a non Jew, has spent a lifetime studying Jewishness in all forms of entertainment.

Married to diva Sue Kelvin, who became famous with her triumphant recreation of the American singer Sophie Tucker, he is the right person to write a musical about a middle-aged Jewish couple and the ins and outs of their 30-year-old marriage.

He has studied his idols, the Gershwins and Irving Berlin and has come up with a tuneful musical score which fits into every period of their lives. One of those days is the opening

song – a cheeky reference to Sophie Tucker's signature number.

His script is gag-ridden ("marriage is not a word, it's a sentence") with a reverent nod to the works of Neil Simon, and Woody Allen. And some of it is very funny indeed. There is even an echo of American comedy duo George Burns and Gracie Allen in their number Double Act in which they remember the famous duos – Abbot and Costello, Stan and Ollie.

There are occasional touches of Jewish schmaltz – and the tragedy that touches their lives in Act II is handled with dignity and is very moving.

Sue Kelvin is obvious casting for

Hetty and she struts around the stage like a plum partridge delivering her gags and singing up a storm. Harry Feinstein is played by the wonderfully versatile David Burt. He also plays Harry's wicked twin brother Ben, an accomplished rumba dancer, who causes havoc within the Feinsteins' cosy, otherwise uneventful life.

Musical accompaniment and some authoritative extra roles are supplied by Mark Warman and the sympathetic direction is by Stewart Nicholls.

A jolly evening! You don't have to be Jewish to enjoy it!
Until December 6.