



School's out!

It's time for parents and their children to reconnect with these family-friendly holiday ideas around the country.

By **CHESTER CHIN**

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AFTER almost a year being cooped up at home, Anna Tan is looking forward to a family holiday. Or rather, her six-year-old daughter Olivia is the one who is most excited.

"Both my husband and I just want to go somewhere with our daughter. Our family really needed a break to recharge after a crazy year," said Tan,

who lives in Selangor.

The family managed to have a short vacation in December last year when tourism activities were allowed under the recovery movement control order phase. But like most people, they have been mostly confined at home this year.

According to Tan, her daughter frequently asked about this year's family holiday ever since they started planning in early November. "My daughter really loves the

beach, so we are planning a trip to Penang," said the pharmaceutical executive. The family also plans to stop by Ipoh, Perak for a quick detour.

Tan says she will try to avoid places that are too crowded during their holiday. While Tan and her husband are fully vaccinated, Olivia isn't.

The Health Ministry has reported that vaccination for children under the age of 12 in Malaysia will only begin in 2022.

The ministry added that only the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine is available for use in children below 12 and it is awaiting regulatory approval from the European Union and the United States.

"A total of 5.9 million children are expected to be inoculated against Covid-19, involving an estimated 11.8 million doses of vaccine," said the ministry.

> TURN TO PAGE 2



There are many interesting detours along major highways in the peninsula where travellers can do some sightseeing or go food hunting. — PLUS



For families that prefer urban comforts, a city escapade is a great vacation idea. — ART CHEN/The Star

Time for some family fun



Graphic: freepik

> FROM PAGE 1

Continue to be careful

The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) cautions families to remain vigilant when travelling amid the pandemic.

"Travelling is a part of life for families across the globe – be it for necessity or recreation. But the Covid-19 pandemic is not over, and travel continues to be risky and complicated in many parts of the world," the agency said on its website.

Even with the vaccine, Unicef said families should observe all safety and hygiene measures to curb the virus.

"The good news is that having the required number of doses and giving time for the vaccines to take effect, significantly reduces your risk of becoming seriously ill and spreading the virus to others," said Unicef.

The agency also recommended that travellers stay away from crowded venues.

"Try to avoid travel where physical distancing may be difficult for prolonged periods. Plan (well) to avoid travelling at peak times and take routes that are less congested wherever possible," Unicef said.

Universiti Sains Malaysia virologist Dr Kumitaa Theva Das said it's important that parents manage risks for their young children.

"If you go on a vacation with them, might it be possible to go in off-peak seasons or on weekdays so that your kids encounter fewer people?" she said in an interview.

The silver lining is that global data suggests that younger children are naturally better at dealing with Covid-19 infections.

"Young children and older adults are typically more vulnerable to other respiratory viruses, but based on global data, that's not what we see with Covid-19 in the younger population. It mainly remains mild for them (young children)," she explained.

On her part, Tan will make sure that her family follows all standard operating procedures to stay safe during their vacation.

She has also been in contact with a friend from



Penang for off-the-beaten-path travel recommendations that are also family-friendly.

Tan added that she is aware Penang will likely be packed during the school holidays. However, she chose the island as it has great touristic appeal.

In fact, a recent survey by Agoda revealed that Malaysians are still keen on going to well-known domestic tourist spots such as Penang and Kuala Lumpur.

The company's booking data also revealed that Malaysians are going to off-the-beaten-track destinations for their travels. Some of these destinations included Kuala Rompin (Pahang), Kuala Selangor and Manjung (Perak).

Tan said she did consider visiting Perlis, as she has heard that it's not as packed as compared to other destinations in the country. However, she feels there are more kid-friendly things to do in Penang.

"We will try to visit attractions during off-peak hours. If all else fails, we will just take away some of Penang's famous hawker food and eat at the hotel," Tan said.

Now that school's out, it's a great time for families to reconnect on a much-needed vacation. Just remember to adhere to all SOP and never let your guard down.

Remember to stock up on your hand sanitiser and masks, too.

GOING on a family holiday is always a great idea. Not only does it boost your mood, a vacation with loved ones will also strengthen relationships.

Studies have shown that parents tend to have more engaging conversations with their children during a holiday. And taking a break from your daily family routine may help you rethink your regular patterns (both good and bad) at home.

However, going on a holiday can be a complicated and confusing affair amid the pandemic. This is further compounded by the fact that children under the age of 12 in Malaysia will only be vaccinated beginning next year.

The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) said that preparation is key to travelling amid Covid-19.

"If you do choose to travel, check for any travel restrictions, stay-at-home orders, quarantining and

Safe and sound

testing requirements in your local area, and all places you're planning to visit," the agency said on its website.

Unicef added that families should also brace themselves for unexpected changes.

"Keep in mind, these policies may change with little advance notice and your travel plans may be disrupted," the agency said. If you do decide to take a trip this school holiday season with your kids, here are some tips from Unicef to stay safe and healthy.

- Avoid visiting crowded spaces, poorly ventilated enclosed spaces, as well as attending any mass gatherings.

- Avoid travelling at peak times and take routes that are less congested wherever possible.

- If travelling in a private vehicle, try to keep stops to a minimum by bringing sufficient food and drinks, for example.

- Bring your own food and drinks where possible.

- Make sure you and your family are up to date with your routine vaccinations as recommended by health authorities.

- At your accommodation, disinfect any high touch surfaces in your room. These include keys, doorknobs and remote controls. If possible, open windows to help ventilate the room upon arrival.

- Consider requesting for "no room cleaning" or other room services to minimise the number of people outside your family in the room during your stay. — **Chester Chin**



Families should plan their holiday properly this school break to stay safe and healthy. — FAIHAN GHANI/The Star



There are many educational attractions in the city that kids may enjoy. — AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

If you're thinking of going on a family trip this holiday season, here are some options to consider.

GO OUTDOORS

Many people have been heading to the great outdoors amid the pandemic. It's a trend that was noted by the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry too.

In fact, minister Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri earlier this year said that Malaysia will promote family-oriented nature tourism as the country recovers from the pandemic.

"Visitors want to travel and reconnect with nature for recreation. This will be the trend of tourism moving forward which has been caused by the pandemic. The future of global tourism will be about family fun in the form of wellness," she said at a virtual event.

The national parks in the country provide many great outdoor activities for the whole family. However, the rainy season will make it harder to explore these parks, especially if you have kids in tow.

A more kid-friendly alternative is to go to botanical gardens instead. Places such as the Penang Botanic Gardens, Labuan Botanical Gardens and Perdana Botanical Garden in Putrajaya offer outdoor pursuits within an urban setting.

The beach is also great for families and Malaysia has many pristine beaches to picnic at. Islands aside, many popular beaches are located close to the town or city centre.

Examples include Batu Ferringhi (Penang), Mersing (Johor), Cenang (Kedah), Port Dickson (Negri Sembilan) and Tanjung Aru (Sabah).

STAY IN THE CITY

For families that prefer urban comforts, a city escapade is a great vacation idea. In fact, you can even stay close to home by doing a staycation at a nearby hotel or vacation rental.

Staycations have been gaining popularity amid the pandemic and hospitality companies have responded accordingly. Many hotels locally and globally have enhanced their hygiene and safety measures, to give guests peace of mind.

During your staycation, plan a trip to the spa for some family pampering and self-care. You can always bring some sheet masks from home too! While you're at it, pack some board games to keep the kids entertained in the room.

Cities also provide many educational opportunities thanks to the presence of museums and galleries. Over in KL, places such as Petrosains and Muzium Negara will ensure kids have a productive school holiday.

Here in Malaysia, an urban escape is also an opportunity to dive into culture and history. Melaka is a fine example of a city with rich heritage. Visit venues such as the Stadthuys, St Paul's Church and A Famosa.

Perak, too, has much heritage to discover thanks to its tin mining history. Taiping for one, is notable for having many "firsts". These include the country's first railway, telegraph office and prison.

ROAD TRIP ADVENTURE

In the wake of the pandemic, many people are now hesitant about taking the public transport. It was something that was noted by academician Muhammad Abdullah and his team of researchers.

"People tend to use less pub-

lic transport and more private cars during pandemic," the researchers wrote in the journal titled *Exploring The Impacts Of Covid-19 On Travel Behaviour And Mode Preferences*.

For families who are still cautious about travelling by plane, bus or train, they can take their own car and go on a road trip instead. The drive along scenic Malaysian highways (or trunk roads) can be a rewarding experience.

There are many interesting detours along major highways in the peninsula where travellers can do some sightseeing or food hunting.

Stop by Temerloh (Pahang) to feast on the ikan patin dishes, especially the tempoyak if you're a fan of durians. After a hearty meal, head to the Kuala Gandah Elephant Conservation Centre to see some gentle giants.

Kemaman (Terengganu) is also a great town to visit on a road trip. There are many beaches here — Kemasik, Teluk Mak Nik, Telaga Simpul Beach, Cagar Hutan Beach and Ma'Daerah — thanks to its coastal location.

If you're planning a trip down south, stop by Ayer Keroh in Melaka. The Mini Malaysia & Asean Cultural Park located in this town showcases replicas of traditional Malaysian and regional homes.

There's also the Kota Tinggi Firefly Leisure Park in Johor (about 40km from Johor Baru), which offers a night river cruise for firefly watching, as well as a small animal farm featuring cute goats and turtles.



Snow tourism in China's Heilongjiang province can last up to seven months! — AFP

Boost for China's snow tourism

WANG Qiushi, a former tourist guide, joined a swarm of live streamers in northeast China's Heilongjiang province, as a popular local wintertime attraction opened for snow and ice tourism.

Standing outside snow-covered dwellings in Xuexiang, which literally means "Snow Town" in Mandarin, live streamers spoke about culture, folklore and local history.

"Welcome to my live streaming chatroom. I can show you all the fun happening in this fairytale," Wang told her fans during a live streaming session on China's short-video platform Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok.

The snow town, formerly known as Shuangfeng Forest Farm, kicked off the snow and ice tourism season in late November. The winter tourism season can last up to seven months when the average snow pile on the ground reaches 2m.

As international tourism was hit hard by the global spread of the coronavirus, Wang had to look for other sources of income.

She said she planned to stay in the snow town for over a month to seize the opportunities brought about by the public craze for snow and ice travel.

Gao Xiuli, a native of

Xuexiang, uses live streaming to showcase the characteristic of her homestay as well as local specialties such as wild vegetables and dry fruits.

Her live streams attract many tourists to make online reservations for guestrooms in her homestay.

Gao said when she and her husband first started the homestay business in 2006, there were only four guestrooms but with Xuexiang gaining popularity they have now expanded the homestay to nine guestrooms.

The forest farm area was officially established as the Xuexiang National Forest Park in 2001, and a complete ban on commercial logging in the area was imposed in 2014.

"It is the popularity of snow and ice tourism in China that has helped transform the remote region into an invaluable tourism asset," said Liu Shubin, chairman of Heilongjiang Dahailin Forestry Bureau, which administers the farm.

There are over 200 businesses in Xuexiang. Local authorities have been allocating funds to improve communication facilities and regulate the tourism market in order to achieve sustainable development of the tourism industry. — Xinhua

Developing new areas

THE Sungai Ambat plantation in Mersing, Johor has the potential to be a new agro-tourism attraction in the district in the next five years.

The 1,956ha land operated by Koperasi Ladang Bhd now has integrated cattle farming and feedlot (in stables) as well as local vegetable and fruit farms.

Deputy Agriculture and Food Industries II Minister Dr Nik Muhammad Zawawi Salleh said apart from developing the palm oil industry in the country, the cooperative now raised about 1,500 cows there.

"One of the co-operative's priorities is looking after the destitute (among cooperative members), besides planning to develop the area which not only focuses on the agricultural sector but also agro-tourism.

"In Indonesia, cattle farming is considered a national resource, so the produce improves living standards, econ-

omy, and offers employment opportunities for the local community," he said at a recent event.

Nik Muhammad Zawawi said the agro-tourism project would adopt the concept of a one-stop centre where visitors could enjoy local fruits at the estate during the fruit season.

Cooperative chairman Mohd Damanhuri Mohd Jamli said until now, his team had also worked on crops such as pandan coconut, Musang King durian, mangosteen and petai to accomplish the mission.

"We have a total of 3,300 members nationwide who are smallholders, including those from the B40 group," he said.

Koperasi Ladang which was established in 1970, also channelled aid to its members affected by the Covid-19 pandemic besides schooling assistance and funding to universities. — Bernama

