

## MEDIA CLIPPING

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**The hills of Malang, home to dairy farms, coffee and tea plantations, offer a cool getaway**



**T**he hill stations of Malaysia – Genting Highlands, Cameron Highlands, Fraser's Hill among them – are familiar to Singaporeans. These retreats from the heat were set up by the British colonialists fleeing the mugginess of the lowlands.

In Indonesia, the Dutch were none too fond of spending their holidays in steaming cauldrons of the plains either. They too built high-altitude hideaways.

Their sanctuaries are not as easy to get to for Singaporeans, but one in particular could be worth the effort.

A couple of hours by air to the East Java city of Surabaya and another two hours south by taxi is Malang, a city of about one million inhabitants, situated about 500m above sea level.

When I went there last month, I was expecting sweeter weather, but with the mercury hovering around 25 deg C in the day, it was only slightly cooler than Surabaya. Although compared with Singapore's average of 30 deg C, it was a definite improvement.

To see temperatures of around 22 deg C or lower, I would have to head out of Malang and into the surrounding hills, home to the region's famed dairy farms and coffee and tea plantations.

Malang might be too sleepy to qualify as a destination city in its own right, but it is the sort of place someone from Singapore might visit if in need of a quick interlude before or after a trip to Bali (Wings Air has a daily flight between Malang and Denpasar), or if on the way to see Mount Bromo, two hours by car to the east of the city.

Another reason to visit Malang is the idiosyncratic Hotel Tugu Malang (+62-341-363891, [www.tuguhotels.com](http://www.tuguhotels.com), starting at US\$130 or S\$160 a night, up to US\$1,100 for the Apsara Suite).

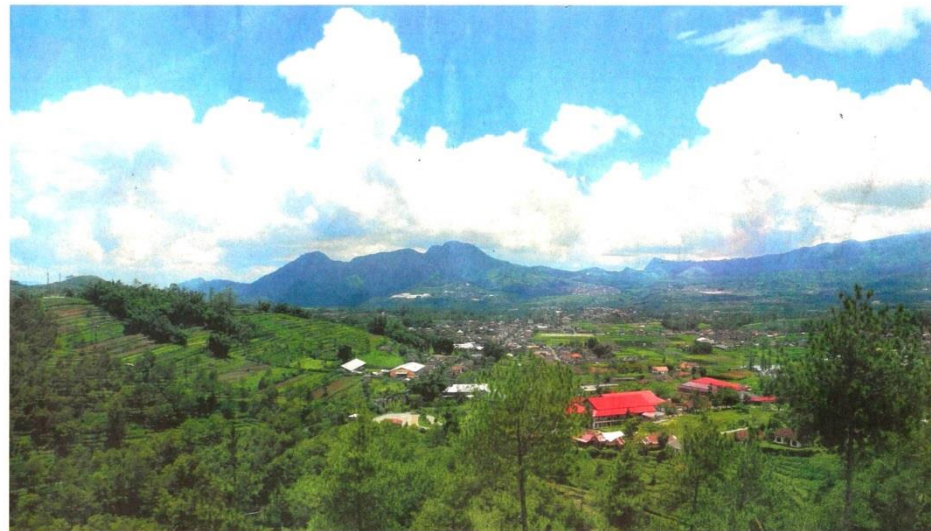
Built by Indonesian tycoon Anhar Setjadibrata, it houses both guests and his astounding collection of Asian antiques and art, possibly the largest in a personal collection in the country. His vast holdings are spread across four Tugu hotels (in Malang, the nearby city of Blitar and in Bali and Lombok) and in various private homes and warehouses.

I stayed there for two nights and each evening was spent exploring the hallways and niches of the 44-room, two-storey building. Each corner held a surprise. There might be a Buddha behind a mysterious red veil or a glass case filled with turn-of-the-century Chinese street theatre puppets, or sculpture from Chinese dynasties a few centuries in the past. Mr Setjadibrata's taste in art runs to the gothic and makes little concession for the sweet or quirky. It is also why some guests love it, while it gives others the chills.

There is not much to do in Malang after 9pm, but luckily the bar at the hotel – dimly lit and plushly decorated in masculine red velvet and animal trophy heads – is a cosy place to down a few drinks before bed.

Even if one chooses more affordable accommodation in Malang, the hotel is worth a visit. Outsiders are free to wander around and view its exhibits. It also has a good cafe, bakery and antique shop stuffed with items that reflect the owner's taste for the unusual.

Very near the Tugu is another place teeming with history, the Inggil restaurant ([www.inggil.com](http://www.inggil.com), Jalan Gajah Mada no. 4, +62-341-332110). In this eatery-museum, entire rooms are devoted to exhibits depicting pivotal events in Indonesian independence from



ST PHOTOS: JOHN LUI

# NATURAL HIGH



Highland happenings: (Clockwise from top) View from Mount Banyak; antiques at the Tugu Hotel's store; a food stall at Coban Rondo waterfall selling grilled sweet corn; and a pony cart visitors can hire to take them around.

the Dutch. The walls here are lined with mid-century furniture, fans, telephones, radios and other colonial-era bric-a-brac. One highlight is a fascinating display of old cigarette-brand logos. At dinnertime, a traditional Javanese musical troupe performs.

In the large dining hall, diners can choose to sit on chairs or on floor cushions at old-fashioned low tables. The floor seating, by the way, might look temptingly authentic, but is not recommended for anyone who does not do yoga thrice a week. The mid-priced food is traditional Javanese and the specialties are barbecued fish and satay.

The Tugu, like many of the better hotels in the town, will be able to help with car and driver rentals. While it is possible to travel within Malang and adjoining towns by taxi to really see the hills and nearby towns, it is cheaper and more convenient to hire a car and a driver. Navigation on the

twisty highland roads is best left to those with local knowledge.

It costs from around 500,000 rupiah (S\$64) to hire a car and driver for a day, petrol included. Larger groups might want to hire a van, which starts at around 750,000 rupiah, all in.

The first stop for those seeking the cooler highlands will be the Coban Rondo, ([www.cobanrondo.com](http://www.cobanrondo.com), +62-341-5025147), which means the Rondo waterfall, about an hour west of Malang and on the slopes of Mount Kawi. Dropping 84m off a sheer cliff, it is not the highest in the world, but it thunders impressively and its mist soaks anyone standing on the viewing platform. In case you have not noticed it, a sign tells you that the air temperature there holds at a very refreshing 22 deg C.

Locals come for adventure activities, such as paintball and riding inner tubes down the stream and there is a guesthouse (a three-person room starts at 400,000 rupi-

ah). The food stalls near the waterfall are where people buy tasty locally grown apples – yes, the climate is temperate enough – and order grilled sweet corn roasted over charcoal and basted with a choice of sweet or savoury sauce.

Those of a more adventurous bent can head to Mount Banyak, about an hour's drive west of Malang, near the town of Batu. Standing over 1,300m high, Banyak offers more than breathtaking views of Batu and the region. It has a paragliding centre where several schools offer tourists tandem rides, in which untrained riders are strapped to instructors.

The centre is open all year round and a tandem trip of around 30 minutes, depending on the wind conditions, costs 300,000 rupiah. There are several companies offering tandem rides and your hotel should be able to recommend one.

Before leaving Malang, drop by the

Brawijaya Museum (25, [Jalan Ijen](http://www.brawijayamuseum.com), +62-341-562394, entrance by donation). It houses guns, cannons and uniforms from World War II, the Indonesian war of independence and other wars since then.

It might be tricky here to understand the exhibits as English signs seem to be in short supply. However, for military buffs, it is a treasure. Classic weapons from the 1930s through to the 1970s, used to arm British, Japanese, Dutch and Indonesian forces, are on display and need no explanation.

Like the collection at the Tugu Hotel, the curation can seem haphazard, even eccentric. But that is the charm of Brawijaya and the city of Malang.

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**Masthead**



**SUMIKO TAN**  
Re-evaluating life after  
a colleague's death  
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# sundaylife!

## Hilltop hideaway

Malang, a two-hour car ride from Surabaya, makes for a refreshing weekend trip with its cool climate, national park and adventure activities. **JOHN LUI** reports.

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Rondo waterfall, about an hour west of Malang and on the slopes of Mount Kawi, drops 34m off a sheer cliff.

# the **sunday** times

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**KEEP COOL IN MALANG**  
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**Psy's new moves**

Hips swinging, South Korean pop star Psy launched the dance and video of his new song *Gentleman* at a packed Seoul concert yesterday.  
More than 50,000 fans gathered at Seoul's World Cup