

Putting geopark on world map

Selangor is pursuing Unesco recognition for Gombak-Hulu Langat Geopark to promote the area's rich geological heritage and support eco-tourism development. >2&3



Rising to the challenge: Gua Damai Extreme Park, located within the Gombak-Hulu Langat Geopark site, offers rock climbing for thrill seekers. — AZMAN GHANI/The Star

Global geopark bid gains pace

Selangor preparing dossier on Gombak-Hulu Langat site for Unesco status

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SELANGOR is making a major global push next year by applying for Unesco Global Geopark designation for the Gombak-Hulu Langat Geopark (GHLGp).

The bid aims to showcase the region's unique geological heritage, biodiversity and cultural significance on a global platform, boosting sustainable tourism efforts led by Tourism Selangor.

The agency's chief executive officer Chua Yee Ling said they were in the midst of preparing the necessary dossier.

"Next year will be a crucial year for Selangor's tourism," Chua said during an exclusive interview with *StarMetro*.

"To apply for Unesco Global Geopark designation, we must first satisfy the national geopark evaluation criteria.

"Following GHLGp's recognition as the seventh national geopark by the Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Ministry in 2022, the site must now undergo rigorous re-evaluation every five years."

This assessment measures progress against criteria such as promotion, community engagement, management, facility development, scientific research and the geopark education programme, she added.

"Should we fail, the national geopark status for GHLGp could be revoked."

GHLGp was declared as the state's first national geopark on Nov 16, last year, by Selangor Ruler Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah.

Tourism Selangor is currently in the fourth phase of implementation, which includes preparing for national geopark re-evaluation.

"Unesco recognition will be the way forward.

"Following the recognition of Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) Forest Park Selangor as a Unesco World Heritage Site, we are hopeful that GHLGp will be the next destination in the state to receive this honour.

"Preparing the application dossier involves establishing a professional academic body, improving infrastructure and intensifying engagement through international conferences and local meetings," Chua said.



Gua Damai frequently sees local and international climbers. — Photos: AZMAN GHANI/The Star and courtesy of Tourism Selangor and MPS

She projected that the entire process from application to announcement could take up to two years, potentially concluding in 2028.

Reinforcing this commitment, Tourism Selangor signed a memorandum of understanding with Lenggong Geopark, Perak, in September, marking a significant step in national geopark collaboration and sustainable tourism development.

State local government and tourism committee chairman Datuk Ng Suee Lim affirmed Selangor's drive to position tourism as a key economic engine.

"This collaboration is not just about sharing expertise; it's fundamentally about driving sustainable development that benefits the people.

"With GHLGp now officially gazetted, Selangor has identified 31 geosites, 20 of which demonstrate strong tourism potential.

"This push aligns seamlessly with the goals of Visit Selangor Year 2025, which targets eight million visitors through the

promotion of innovative, inclusive and sustainable tourism products," he said.

International profile

Chua said achieving Unesco Global Geopark status would significantly enhance Selangor's international profile.

"It not only bolsters Selangor's reputation with global guests but also grants us access to an international network that actively promotes sustainable tourism," she said.

Drawing parallels, she said the existing Unesco status in Penang and Melaka served as a strong unique selling point, attracting substantial inbound tourism.

"The Unesco benchmark provides crucial guidelines for sustainable development and establishes a framework for improved city planning," she said.

"Maintaining the status is an ongoing commitment that requires fulfilling criteria like scientific research, conferences and deep community engagement."

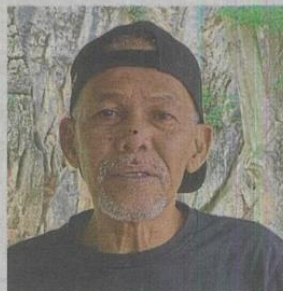
Beyond the prestige, the Geopark designation offers direct economic benefits, citing substantial spillover effects on essential services like food and accommodation.

"Geopark status also creates vital job opportunities in eco-tourism and roles like guides should be elevated and professionalised," added Chua.

Geosites driving tourism

A unique feature of GHLGp is its location, largely in the heart of Selangor, close to residential areas.

This distinguishes it from most



Mustapha says he will be adding 20 bolted routes at Gua Damai.



Chua says Selangor has identified 31 geosites.

of Malaysia's other geoparks, which are typically in rural settings.

Chua said for the 20 geosites with significant tourism potential, the state would push for eco-tourism and geo-tourism packages (see chart).

"The geopark should be promoted because it is part of our living environment; you don't need to travel far.

"Promotional efforts should encompass packages featuring forest trails, mountain climbing, rock climbing and hiking.

"Areas like Selayang, known for its numerous hot springs, can be branded as dedicated hot spring destination," she said.

The geopark spans the jurisdictions of three municipalities namely Selayang, Ampang Jaya and Kajang.

Several sites are currently undergoing development.

For instance, the Selayang Hot Springs is being upgraded while the Batu Arang Gallery will soon feature a cafe.

"We are aiming to activate these points of interest for

visitors," she said.

Community engagement is a cornerstone of the national geopark status.

This includes establishing a "geoschool" in one primary school within each of the three local authorities to equip pupils with knowledge about the geopark.

"The schools involved are SK Batu Arang, SK Taman Melawati and SK Dusun Tua.

"Unlike preservation models, the geopark status encourages and permits development, provided it is environmentally sensitive and involves significant community engagement, fostering community-based tourism.

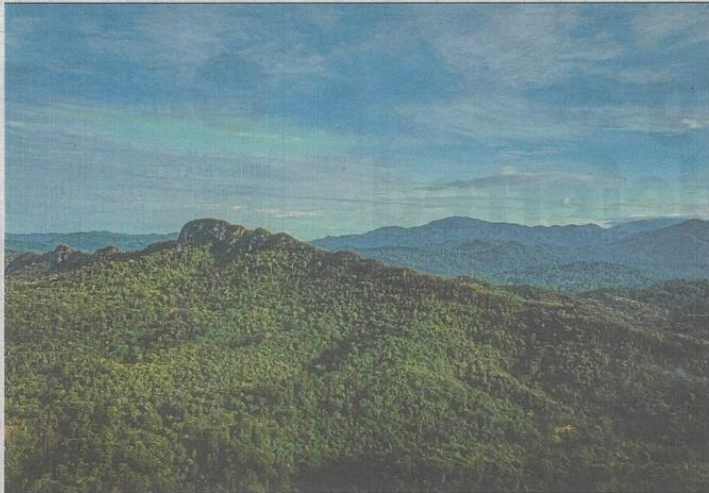
"This approach encourages tourists to try our local food and, in turn, drives regional economic activity," Chua said.

Site upgrades underway

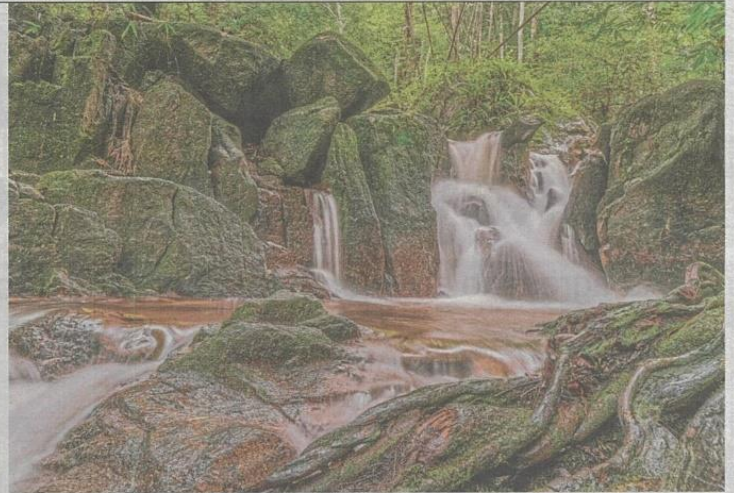
Two major geosites managed by Selayang Municipal Council (MPS) – Selayang Hot Springs and Batu Arang Former Coal Mine – are undergoing



An artist's impression of Selayang Hot Springs, which is being upgraded.

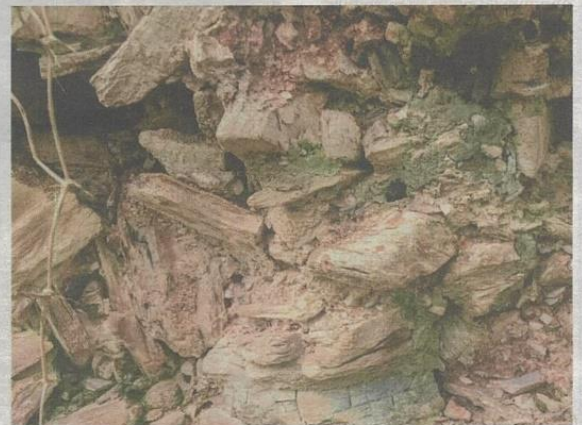
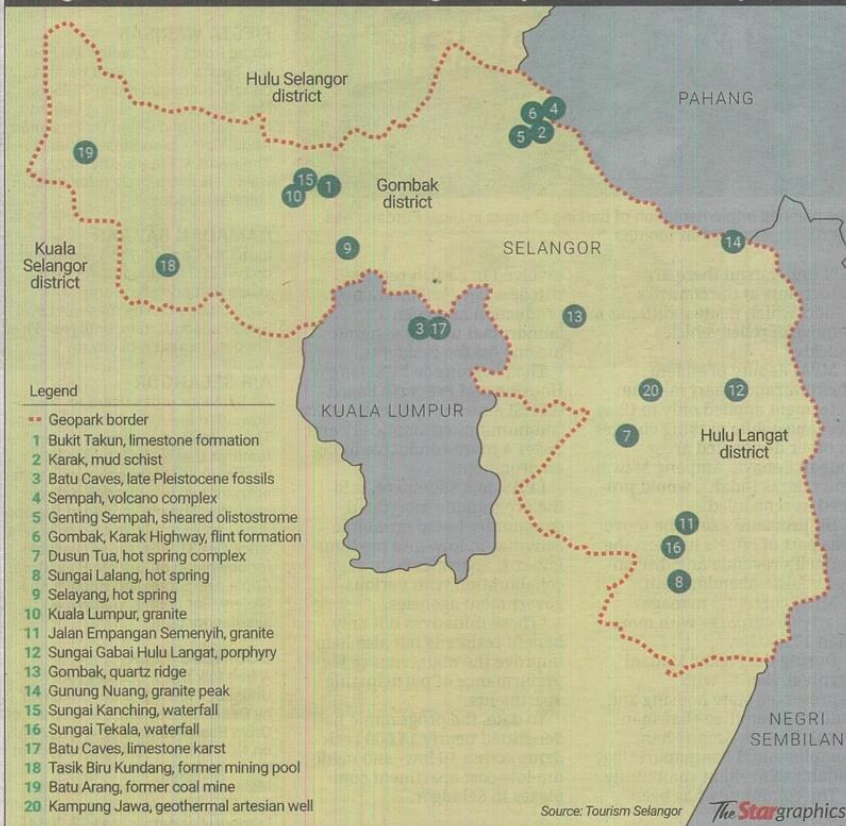


The Gombak Quartz Ridge is part of the GHLGp.



The Sungai Tekala Waterfall in Semenyih is identified as a geosite with tourism potential.

20 geosites for Gombak-Hulu Langat Geopark with tourism potential



Batu Arang Former Coal Mine is also a place for geological research.



An educational signboard on GHLGp at Gua Damai.

renovation to enhance visitor attraction.

According to an MPS statement, the upgrade, estimated to cost RM5mil, was due for completion by Aug 21 next year.

"The project aims to integrate a 'wellness tourism' concept by upgrading facilities, the drainage system and landscaping.

"New amenities will include immersion pools with different temperature zones, an integrated water management system to maintain the natural geothermal source quality and educational interpretation boards detailing the geological and local history.

"Visitors will also benefit from eco-wellness-themed walking paths, a special enclosed pool for women and local product showcases," the statement said.

The hot spring itself is a natural phenomenon resulting from subterranean geothermal activity along the ancient Gombak-

Selayang granite rock formation. Last year, the site recorded 213,553 visitors.

Between January and July this year, 128,196 visitors were recorded, prior to upgrading works starting September.

The Batu Arang Former Coal Mine is also receiving significant attention, with several upgrades completed this year. These works include enhancing gallery tourism facilities, landscaping, upgrading the former workers' settlement and improving footpaths.

There is also an ongoing project to upgrade signs and heritage monuments.

MPS stated that over RM2mil had been spent on upgrades between 2013 and 2025, with allocation from various agencies.

Batu Arang town, declared a Selangor Heritage Town in 2011 to commemorate a century of coal mining history, attracts approximately 80,000

visitors annually.

Visitors are particularly drawn to the industrial heritage at the site, cycling activities as well as the popular "roti leleh" (eggs, toast and baked beans) stall and multicultural activities.

"Batu Arang's unique status as Malaysia's oldest geological and industrial coal mining heritage site integrates natural uniqueness with historical industry," MPS stated.

"It offers high potential for education, research and sustainable geo-tourism.

"The area boasts three main geological formations that hold high scientific value – the Boulder Beds, Batu Arang Beds and Kenny Hill Formation."

The council said the Batu Arang Gallery acted as the GHLGp satellite centre, offering visitors historical information from 1913 to the present day.

In a separate initiative, Gua Damai Extreme Park is expand-

ing its natural, outdoor rock climbing area.

Founder Mustapha Al-Bakri Omar announced plans to add another 20 bolted routes, supplementing the existing 120, which range in intensity with grades from 5 to 7.

"Gua Damai is consistently patronised by avid and beginner climbers, both local and international, and the current routes are insufficient to meet the high demand," said Mustapha, adding that new routes would also attract more visitors.

The park, situated within the GHLGp with two nearby geosites, focuses primarily on rock climbing.

Other activities include trekking, caving, zip-lining and abseiling, and it is a popular host for an annual base jumping competition.

Mustapha expressed hope that UNESCO status would place the park firmly on the world map.

"Since GHLGp achieved national park status, visitor numbers have not increased significantly.

"Unesco status would probably draw more international visitors to the park.

"My vision is to see busloads of visitors participating in the activities offered here," he said.

A key aspiration is constructing a *via ferrata*, a protected mountain pathway featuring rails, cables and bridges on the rock cliff face, which would grant visitors access to scenic mountain sections.

"I believe a *via ferrata* would be particularly popular with families, as it is easier than traditional climbing.

"However, budgeting remains a major challenge, with equipment costs estimated at up to RM200,000," he said.

He also plans to organise a dedicated Gua Damai festival to promote the park's activities.