

wake up to the smell of DURIAN

Evonne Lyn Lee takes a trip to the Bao Sheng durian farm in Penang for unadulterated indulgence in the spiky king of fruits.

TEXT evonne lyn lee | PHOTOGRAPHS chang teik seng, timothy tye (www.asiaexplorers.com) & star archives



1. The two villas overlook the Bao Sheng durian farm, and provide a lovely view of the sunset. 2. Proprietor of Bao Sheng, Chang Teik Seng, taking a deep whiff of the durian to find out if it's ripe enough to be savoured.

MY PASSION for durians was defined by an act of love. We have a lone durian tree in our garden in Kluang, in Johor. I will never forget the time when my father waited for the first fruit of the season to drop, and then boarded a two-hour train journey to deliver a single, whole fruit to me and my sister in Singapore. That was our first taste of freshly-fallen durian, and it had us craving for more.

Many go to great lengths in pursuit of a defining durian moment. During the durian season in Singapore, durian fans arm themselves with torches and head for Mandai or Yishun in the middle of the night with hopes of picking freshly-fallen wild durians.

I had a better idea and headed for

Penang; the island's hilly landscape and proximity to the sea is conducive to durian farming, and an overnight stay at the Bao Sheng farm in Balik Pulau promised to be a bespoke experience for die-hard durian fans.

Here, I got up close with the durian, with a running commentary by proprietor Chang Teik Seng, popularly known as Durian Seng, as we walked around his orchard.

Bao Sheng first started as a pig and chicken farm in 1959. Rubber, spices like cloves, nutmeg and pepper, and some durian trees, were also planted. Chang inherited the business from his father in 1993.

"My father initially cultivated both Thai and Malaysian durians but found



1. Nets are set up around Bao Sheng farm to catch falling durians. 2. Chang takes his visitors on a tour of his durian orchard. 3. The durians at Bao Sheng farm are only available on location.

that demand for the local fruit was higher. He had to axe the Thai durian trees and replace them with local cultivars," said Chang.

That important business decision paid off. Today, five decades on, Bao Sheng is an all-durian farm producing award-winning Penang cultivars like Ang Bak, D600 and Hor Lor. The farm attracts locals, and foreign visitors from Australia, England, New Zealand, USA, Germany, UK, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Singapore.

Good judgment during the pruning process, judicious watering, and close supervision at the flowering stage plus creative ways to ward off snakes, all contribute to award-winning fruit quality, says Chang.

DURIAN FARM VILLAS

Chang invested RM70,000 in two mountain villas sandwiching a small private swimming pool. Completed in February 2010, each 624-square-foot villa is fully air-conditioned and tastefully furnished with a king-sized bed, 32-inch LCD TV and DVD player. Expect hot showers in a spacious bathroom with a rainshower shower head!

Checking into the villa and watching the sun set over the lush landscape overlooking the fishing village of Kuala Sungai Pinang was just the appetiser! The anticipation of sinking my teeth into rich, creamy durian the next morning thrilled me immensely.

The two durian seasons in Penang peak in June, and again from December to January. The best time this year to enjoy Chang's durians is from June to July.

Chang explained that the durians from Bao Sheng are available to visitors to the orchard and villa guests only – they don't sell the fruits to middlemen. Bao Sheng's regular customers also enjoy the privilege of booking their durians at the flow-

Staying at Bao Sheng
 Villa Accommodations: Monday to Thursday @ RM180 nett per night; Friday to Sunday @ RM250 nett per night. Each villa accommodates two adults and two children with a spare mattress.

Durian Buffets
 One Meal: RM25 (ordinary cultivars); RM35 (inclusive of Hor Lor); RM45 (inclusive of Hor Lor and mature cultivars); RM55 (inclusive of Ang Heh and mature cultivars); RM120 per pax (freshly-dropped mature, premium cultivars) with minimum two pax
 Whole Day: RM88.00 (ordinary cultivars)

ering stage, and the fruits from the selected trees will be reserved for them.

According to Chang, a big eater can consume up to seven kilos of the fruit in one sitting – that’s equivalent to about one kilo of durian pulp! The norm is one-and-a-half durian per person, adding up to 1,530 calories, so be prepared to climb the stairs for a good 150 minutes, or mop the floor for five hours, to burn off the calories!

Each durian meal at the villa depends on the day’s pickings. For the best experience, leave it to Chang to assemble your serving. The rule of thumb is to begin with mild-tasting durians, progressing to moderate, and ending with pungent durians. This way, you graduate progressively in terms of aroma, texture, flavour and body of the fruit, much like wine drinking.

On my first visit, my sampling began with the “entry-level” durian, Ang Bak Kia (Little Red) from a 15-year-old tree. The texture of this fruit was coarse, and it was a tad bitter. The Capri, from a 20-year-old tree, that followed was dry, sweet and more bitter. The D604 was next – it was creamy, and the bitterness was more pronounced. I progressed to a Hor Lor from a 20-year-old tree, which had deep yellow-coloured flesh, and was ‘meaty’, smooth, and very good! Then came the D15, the fruit Viagra, which proved to be delightfully smooth and moderately bitter, with mild cognac overtones. Ang Hae from a 20-year-old tree was next for the tasting – silky and milky in texture, it had a mild, alcoholic kick.

Then came the memorable ending: Ang Hae from a 25-year-old tree. My tongue went numb for a few seconds as I bit into it; then, a pronounced aroma accompanied the full-bodied, custardy taste with cognac overtones, making the experience simply sublime!



1&2. The colour of the durian flowers hints at the type of durian it produces – yellowish flowers for pale yellow-fleshed durians, and reddish flowers for durians with an orangey-red pulp. 3. Chang hugging a 60-year-old durian tree to show just how big a mature tree can get.

WHAT IS GOOD DURIAN?

As the two pickings of Ang Hae showed, an age difference of five years can make all the difference in a durian. You can scale up to pickings from a 60-year-old tree for superior mouthfeel, and the *crème de la crème* would be durian from a 100-year-old tree!

“The older the tree, the better the durian,” Chang said. The pulp becomes wrinkly, texture is silky, and it is more full-bodied with rounder flavours and an aroma that’s intense.

At Bao Sheng, ripe durians are from trees aged between seven and 60 years. Harvests from mature 30-year-old trees and above fetch prices from RM22 to RM45 a kilo, compared to only RM8 a kilo for fruit from a seven-year-old tree.

All durians at Bao Sheng are allowed to ripen naturally on the tree. “Durians lose 20 to 25 percent of their full aroma and flavour if harvested,” said Chang.

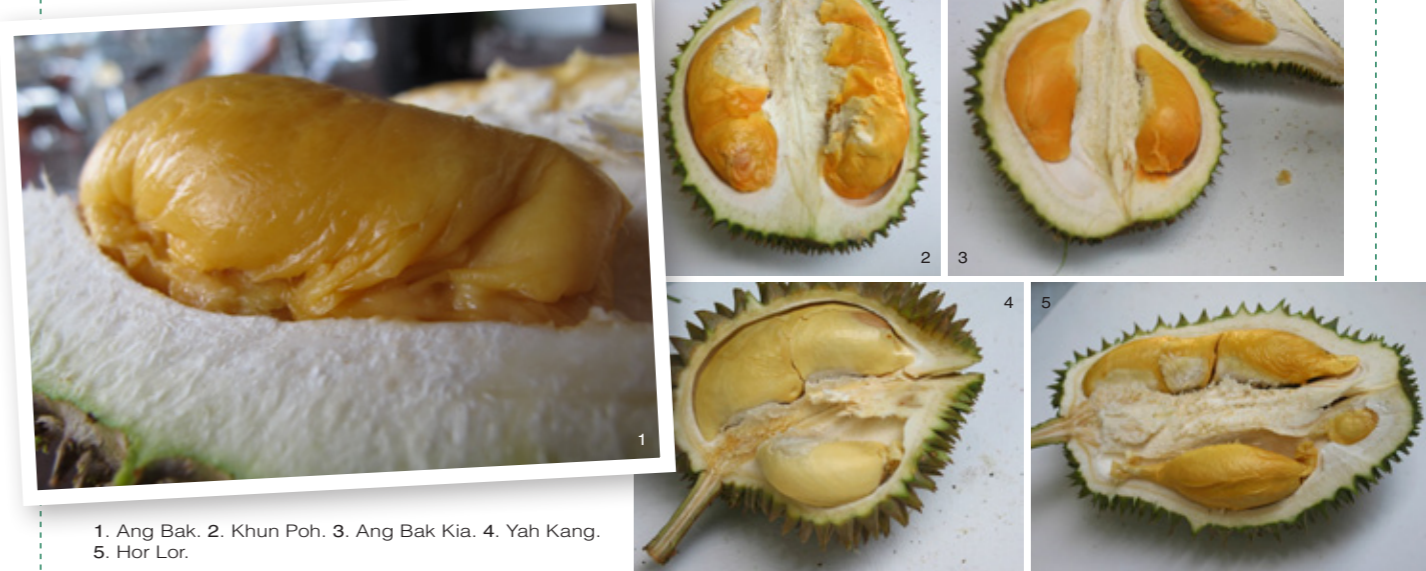
Freshness of the durian fall also

contributes to the durian flavour. The fallen durian continues to ripen, and many believe that tucking in between 30 minutes and eight hours after it falls is best, when the fruit is still crisp in texture and the flavour is milder; the time it takes for the flavours to peak depends on the cultivars. Then again, some connoisseurs prefer very ripe durians, when the flesh turns into a rich, creamy texture with a slightly alcoholic and highly complex flavour and a pronounced aroma on the nose.

So if you are a fan of the former, mark your calendar for a farm-stay at Bao Sheng this coming durian season for a taste of freshly fallen durian; even if you prefer the more pungent, riper versions, rest assured that Bao Sheng has durians in store for you, too. ■

For more information, contact Chang Teik Seng at 012-411 0600 or visit www.durian.com.my

Penang Durian Cultivars



1. Ang Bak. 2. Khun Poh. 3. Ang Bak Kia. 4. Yah Kang. 5. Hor Lor.

□ **Ang Bak Kia or Xiao Hong**, is literally the ‘little red one’; this meaty-fleshed, large-seeded durian has a coarse texture with mild, bittersweet overtones, and a hint of acidity. Peaks mid-June.

□ **Ang Hae or Hong Xia** originates from Kampung Pondok Upeh in Balik Pulau. It is a robust fruit, with an orangey-red pulp and a pungent smell. Its velvety soft, smooth pulp packs a punch on the palate, with a bittersweet taste and alcoholic overtones in mature fruits. Peaks early July.

□ **Capri** durian trees produce a round fruit with thin husk, uneven thorns, and small seeds. The aroma is muted and the pulp is dry, sweet, and slightly bitter; the bitterness intensifies with the age of the tree. Peaks end of June.

□ **Cheh Phoay’s** name literally means “green skin” in Hokkien. Its bright

green, oblong-shaped husk – said to resemble a rock melon – hides a meaty, pale yellow flesh, tasting slightly sweet with cognac overtones; its texture is smooth and creamy, yet a tad dry. Peaks mid-July.

□ **The D11** cultivar has a subtle aroma, and small seeds hiding under the rich and creamy yellow flesh. It is sweet on the palate with a tinge of bitterness. Peaks early July.

□ **The D600** cultivar from Sungai Pinang has large seeds and a thick pulp with a slightly coarse texture. Taste-wise, it is bittersweet with a hint of sourness. Peaks mid-June.

□ **The D604** was first cultivated by the late Mr Teh Hew Hong of Sungai Pinang. It produces quite a sweet durian with a good body. Peaks mid-June.

□ **The D99** cultivar produces durian with pale yellow pulp and medium-sized seeds; it is rich, creamy and

sweet on the palate. Peaks mid-July.

□ **Hor Lor** gets its name from its shape, which resembles a water gourd. It was first cultivated in Sungai Ara, producing durians with a sharp pungent aroma and a slightly bitter taste; the pulp is soft and dry, yet smooth. This cultivar is favoured by durian connoisseurs. Peaks end of June.

□ **Khun Poh** durian inherited its name from the late Mr Lau Khun Poh, who first budded this cultivar. It has a smooth, golden-yellow flesh with a slightly bittersweet taste and heavy aroma. Peaks in mid-June.

□ **Yah Kang** is a sweet durian with pale, whitish flesh. In the mouth, it is reminiscent of melting milky white chocolate. It gets its name from the many centipedes found at the foot of the tree, as centipedes are known as *yah kang* in Hokkien. Peaks mid-June.