



Gaya, the rescued turtle.

Taste of freedom

The release of its 28th rescued turtle marks another milestone for this resort in Borneo, writes **Intan Maizura Ahmad Kamal**

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SWISH. Swish. Its paddle-like flippers swish noisily into the sand as the turtle makes its excited amble towards the glistening world beckoning in the distance. The sun is high, set gloriously against the backdrop of clear blue skies.

It's a momentous day at Gaya Island Resort, situated on Pulau Gaya within the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park in Borneo. The release of Gaya, the resort's 28th rescued turtle, back to its natural habitat, is a touching moment not only for the team here, but also 50 in-house guests who have descended on the beach to witness — and celebrate — the occasion.

Gaya, a Green Turtle species (scientific name "Chelonia mydas") which is endangered, came into the care of the resort's Marine Centre on June 7 earlier this year. A local fisherman had spotted the turtle wandering close to the property and promptly brought it to the attention of the team.

Upon its arrival at the Marine Centre, Gaya underwent a thorough examination and was diagnosed with chronic debilitation, severe dehydration and malnutrition. Resident marine biologist Scott Mayback and his team immediately commenced with Gaya's treatment plan, which included a series of antibiotics and saline drips over a period of 30 days, together with multivitamins. It was also put on a special dietary programme.

Major improvements were seen in the turtle's digestive track and as time went on, its appetite too slowly improved. After a month of care, the

NATURAL SANCTUARY

GAYA Island Resort is a natural sanctuary nestled in the hillside of an ancient rainforest. The 121 villas respect Sabahan elements and blend harmoniously with the natural environment while the interiors are designed with a contemporary elegance.

Integrated within the mangroves is Spa Village Gaya Island offering programmes that reflect the region's healing practices - from the specialised rice scrubs and masques of the Kadazandusun, to the age-old practices of the Bajau sea nomads. Discoveries and authentic experiences with nature all prevail across the YTL Luxury Resort's land and seascape, offering travellers an escape that's distinctively Borneo.

team noted a steady increase in Gaya's body mass, from approximately 4.4kg to 5kg. After about three and half months of rehabilitation, its ideal weight of 6.5kg had been achieved and it was finally deemed fit for a release back where it came from — the ocean.

RETURN TO THE BIG BLUE

Gaya has been tagged with a metal International Fisheries tag, which enables it to be recognised if it's found anywhere in the world. The simple ceremony, held on the beach of Maloham Bay, which lines the front of the resort, is joyous but also rather poignant.

Mayback shares proudly: "It's an honour to be able to, yet once again, nurture a compromised Green Turtle back to health, which is Gaya Island Resort's small but impactful contribution back to the local environment."

Looking to the guests around him who are listening intently to his every word, he continues: "We hope that sharing this experience (with our guests) will broaden everyone's appreciation and understanding of the need for conservation efforts for a sustainable future."

The rehabilitation of Gaya marks the resort's consistent efforts in playing a proactive role in preserving the beauty of its natural environment and protecting the local wildlife. With the help of a passionate and dedicated team helmed by director of conservation Justin Juhun and Mayback at the Gaya Island Resort Wildlife Centre and Gaya Island Resort Marine Centre respectively, the resort has several eco-friendly initiatives in place. They range from conservation through education to rescue programmes.

For more information on the resort's ongoing conservation projects, visit gayaislandresort.com



intanmfinst.com.my Up close and personal at the Marine Centre.