

# Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Malaysian Culture Group

Newsletter of the Malaysian Culture Group

September 2011

## MCG PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE: MALAYSIAN MARTIAL ARTS AND THE KERIS	Wednesday, 07 September
ISTAC: THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION	Wednesday, 14 September
WALKING TOUR OF KAMPUNG BARU	Wednesday, 21 September
MCG OPEN HOUSE	Thursday, 29 September
NINE EMPEROR GODS FESTIVAL TOUR	Monday, 03 October
MONTHLY LECTURE: MALAYSIAN NAMES & TITLES, SPLITTING A DATO' FROM A DATUK	Wednesday, 12 October

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SELAMAT HARI RAYA

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The deadline for the October 2011 issue is September 08. Please send event reports for the next issue to the appropriate event convenor. If you have other material of interest to members that you would like us to include, please send it to: [newsletter@malaysianculturegroup.org](mailto:newsletter@malaysianculturegroup.org)

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This September is a busy month around Malaysia. Malaysia Day, observed on 16 September, became a public holiday in 2010 and commemorates the establishment of the Malaysian Federation. Many newly arrived Expat families are settling in to Kuala Lumpur. Muslims have finished the fasting month and have “*balik kampung*” to visit family during the Hari Raya season. Chinese have finished Hungry Ghost Month and are now getting ready for 9 Emperor Gods celebrations. Meantime the Indian Hindu community will begin Navratri celebrations and prepare for Deepavali next month.

Malaysian Culture Group (MCG) is busy too. In addition to our regular monthly activities this month, we will have our annual Open House on Thursday 29 September. It will take place at the Meritz Condominium where our Lecture Series occurs. I invite you to join us for this social and informative morning...and I encourage you to bring a friend along to learn more about our organization.

MCG has a unique book collection of particular interest to our members. At our Open House, we will be officially opening our Library at its new location in the Meritz Condominium. Moving the Library will hopefully make our books more accessible to members and stimulate renewed interest in the books in our collection. For a preview of the book titles that will be available to members, I invite you to visit the library section of our website.

Increasing our volunteer base is an important objective for the MCG committee this year. We are fortunate to have amongst our members, Alison Harrison, a trained Librarian who has graciously offered to manage our Library in its new location. In the near future, I hope to meet more members like Alison who are willing to contribute to our organization.

See you at our Open House.  
 Dawn Berger Babcock, President MCG



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### FIRST WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH LECTURE: Malaysian Martial Arts and the Keris

**DATE:** Wednesday, 07 September, 2011  
**TIME:** 10.00 am for 10.30 am start  
**PLACE:** Meritz Condominium, Jalan Mayang, behind "Avenue K"  
**COST:** Members RM15, Guests RM25  
**RSVP:** [mcgevents@yahoo.com](mailto:mcgevents@yahoo.com)

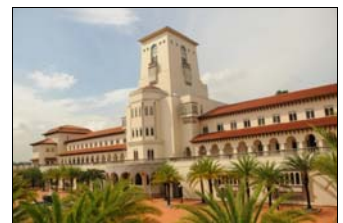


Our speaker, Mohd. Nadzrin Wahan, will talk to us about his twin passions; *Silat Malayu* and the *Keris*. *Silat* is a collective word for the indigenous martial arts, originally developed in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore and traditionally practiced in Brunei, the Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam. The *Keris* or *Kris* is a distinctive, asymmetrical dagger indigenous to Malaya. Historically, the *Kris* was used as a weapon for Malay self-defense and martial arts. History speaks of the *kris* as an object of mystery, believed to possess spiritual power and to protect the wearer from physical and spiritual harm. In modern Malaysia, it has become an important part of the traditional costume of the Malay Man. As a work of art, it is also prized as a collector's item.

Members of MCG, who have previously attended a talk by Nadzrin, can guarantee that this talk will be an intriguing blend of passion, knowledge and humour upon a subject that is embedded in Malaysian history and mythology. For those who want to know more about the topic ahead of the presentation, Nadzrin edits a comprehensive and interesting blog at <http://silat-melayu.blogspot.com/>.

### ISTAC: THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION

**DATE:** Wednesday, 14 September, 2011  
**TIME:** 10.00 am for 10.30 am start  
**PLACE:** ISTAC, 24 Persiaran Duta, Taman Duta  
**COST:** Members RM15, Guests RM25  
**RSVP:** [mcgevents@yahoo.com](mailto:mcgevents@yahoo.com)



Today we have the unique opportunity to visit ISTAC, a beautiful oasis in Taman Duta. It is a private research and postgraduate institution offering master and doctoral degrees in Islamic and other civilizations, philosophy, ethics and contemporary issues. ISTAC has many aims and objectives, i.e. study and research regarding problems encountered by Muslims in the present age, Islamic response to the intellectual and cultural challenges in the modern world and various schools of thought, religion and ideology, and much more. ISTAC has a world renowned library consisting of over 150,000 volumes in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay, German, Dutch, Russian, Latin and Greek!

We will have an introductory talk about the Institute after which you will be able to ask questions. This will then be followed by a guided tour of the facilities including the library, plus, hopefully, the priceless collection of manuscripts dating 900-1000AD. Here is a chance for you to experience Islam in quiet surroundings and with trained scholars, so we hope that you will join us for this very special morning.

The Institute has requested that we let them know the number of participants a week before the event so please, if possible, book early

## WALKING TOUR OF KAMPUNG BARU

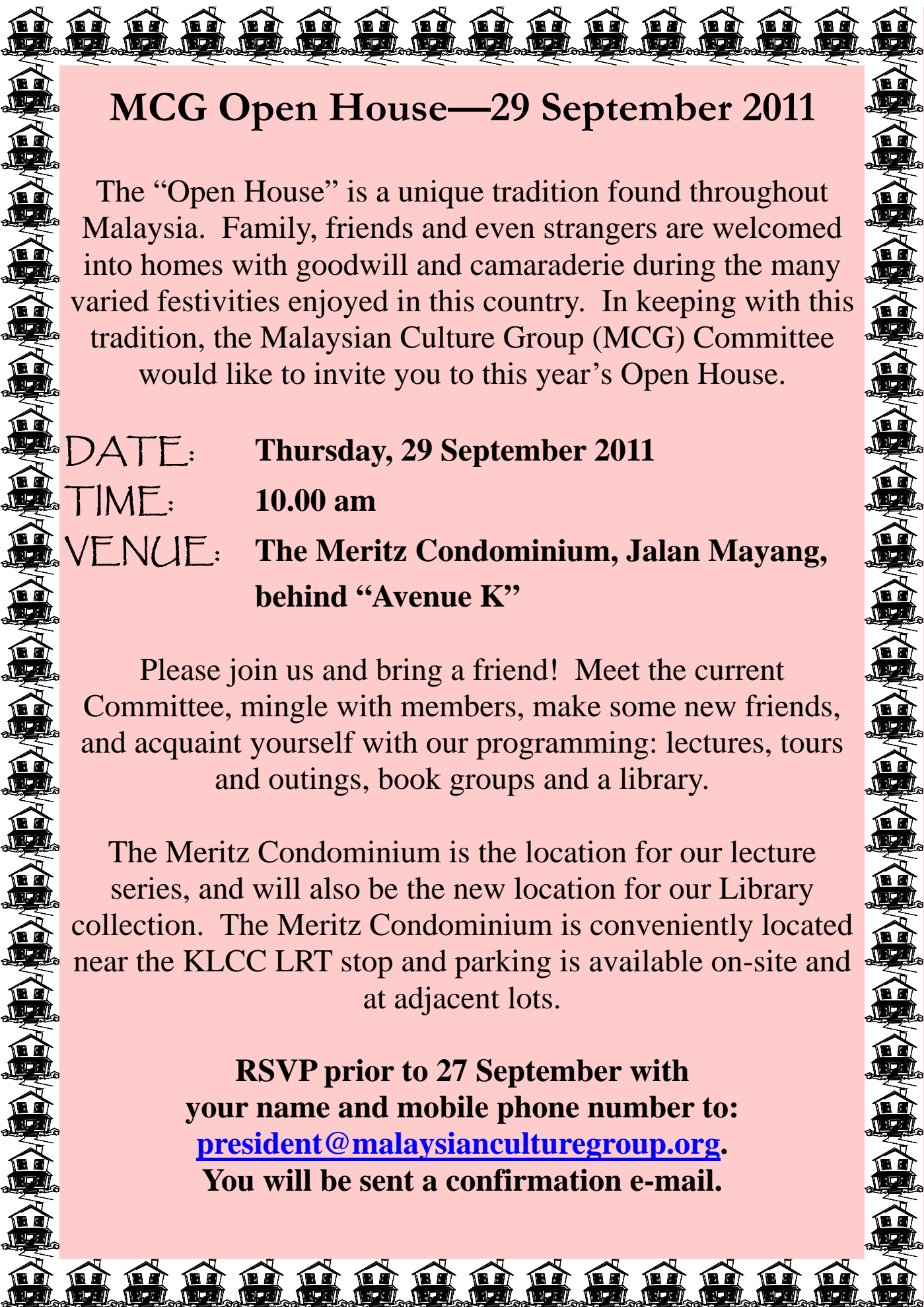
**DATE:** Wednesday, 21 September, 2011  
**TIME:** 10.00 am for 10.30 am start  
**PLACE:** Meet at Kelab (Club) Sultan Sulaiman, Kampung Baru (car parking available)  
**COST:** Members RM25, Members only (limited to 20 persons)  
**RSVP:** [mcgevents@yahoo.com](mailto:mcgevents@yahoo.com)

We are fortunate that Heritage Walks is giving us the opportunity to explore this hidden treasure in the centre of Kuala Lumpur. Kampung Baru is the oldest Malay residential area in KL, originally founded in 1899 by the British as a Malay Agricultural Settlement allowing the Malays to retain their village lifestyle within the City. Modern development seems to have passed it by and there are still authentic traditional Malay wooden houses to be seen, as well as the Heritage Building where we will meet.

The Kelab Sultan Sulaiman was built in 1901 on land donated by the Sultan of Selangor, in the style of Malay Minang architecture. We will have a short briefing here before walking to the Market, which is described as a very typical Malay market. Lunch is available in the Club at the conclusion of the tour for those interested.

**Please note that as this is a rescheduling of an event that was cancelled earlier this year For five days after delivery of this newsletter, preferential booking will be given to members who previously registered for this tour.**





## MCG Open House—29 September 2011

The “Open House” is a unique tradition found throughout Malaysia. Family, friends and even strangers are welcomed into homes with goodwill and camaraderie during the many varied festivities enjoyed in this country. In keeping with this tradition, the Malaysian Culture Group (MCG) Committee would like to invite you to this year’s Open House.

**DATE:** Thursday, 29 September 2011

**TIME:** 10.00 am

**VENUE:** The Meritz Condominium, Jalan Mayang,  
behind “Avenue K”

Please join us and bring a friend! Meet the current Committee, mingle with members, make some new friends, and acquaint yourself with our programming: lectures, tours and outings, book groups and a library.

The Meritz Condominium is the location for our lecture series, and will also be the new location for our Library collection. The Meritz Condominium is conveniently located near the KLCC LRT stop and parking is available on-site and at adjacent lots.

**RSVP prior to 27 September with  
your name and mobile phone number to:  
[president@malaysianculturegroup.org](mailto:president@malaysianculturegroup.org).  
You will be sent a confirmation e-mail.**

## NINE EMPEROR GODS FESTIVAL TOUR

**DATE:** Monday, 03 October, 2011  
**TIME:** 9.30 am for 10.00 am start, please note earlier than usual start time  
**PLACE:** Meet at Nan Tiong Gong Temple in Pekan Ampang (Directions, car pooling information will be emailed to registered participants.)  
**COST:** Members RM15, limited to 15 participants  
**RSVP:** [mcgevents@yahoo.com](mailto:mcgevents@yahoo.com)



The Nine Emperor Gods Festival is held annually, for nine days, during the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. It has its roots in the secret societies of the nineteenth century Chinese mining communities and is shrouded in mysterious ritual ceremonies. Devotees keep a strict vegetarian diet, pray at the altar 3 times a day and participate in the rituals that balance the forces of Yin and Yang. This year the festival runs from September 27 to October 05.

MCG member, and self-admitted Festival Freak, Cheryl Hoffmann, will be leading a tour to the Nan Tiong Gong temple in Ampang on the 7th day of the festival, October 03. We will meet with temple officials, pay our respects at the altar of the Emperor, visit the dormitories where hundreds of devotees stay, and explore the Chinese opera stage. We will learn about the significance of many of the festival rituals and also how to navigate through the noisy carnival scene.

For a preview of what we will see there, visit Cheryl's blog at [9emperorgods.wordpress.com](http://9emperorgods.wordpress.com)

## MONTHLY LECTURE

### MALAYSIAN NAMES & TITLES, SPLITTING A DATO' FROM A DATUK

**DATE:** Wednesday, 12 October, 2011  
**TIME:** 10.00 am for 10.30 am start  
**PLACE:** Meritz Condo, Jl Mayang, K.L  
**COST:** Members RM15, Guests RM25  
**RSVP:** [mcgevents@yahoo.com](mailto:mcgevents@yahoo.com)



One of the most puzzling and abstract elements faced by new arrivals - after the traffic - is understanding Malaysian names, titles and forms of address. What is the difference between a Dato' and Datuk? What is a Tun and Tan Sri? What do the initials YM and YAM stand for? Longtime MCG member Colette Hassan will enlighten us on this as she guides us through the labyrinth of the correct forms of address. Her presentation will touch on understanding titled and untitled Malaysian names, royal titles and awards, as well as on the structure of the government.

Colette's fascination for this subject started while she worked, for approx. 30 years, at the French and the Swiss Embassies in Kuala Lumpur. She is now retired. No books or guidelines were available then and still today, very little information exists. She, therefore, compiled this data in the hope of enabling not only newcomers to Malaysia but also long-time residents to see more clearly through this complex subject.

# MEMBERS' CULTURAL CORNER

## THE HINDU MONTH OF AADI PURAM

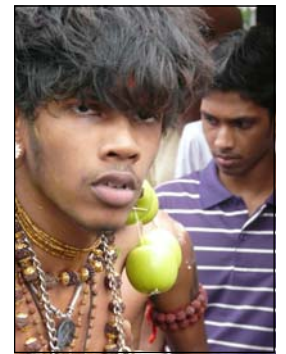
This Hindu festival of Aadi Puram is celebrated in all Hindu temples in southern India in the month called Aadi, corresponding to the English months of July-August. The festival is observed to propitiate the goddess Sakti Devi who is said to have come into this world on this occasion to bless the people. People therefore worship her in order to secure happiness not only for themselves but also for their loved ones.

It is said that there are eight Saktis (Forces of nature) in the universe and they are controlled by Devi, the goddess of the Hindus. According to myth, the goddess of the universe took a human form on the Aadi Puram day in a miraculous manner.

I attended two such festivals in KL this Aadi Puram; the first at Sri Nageswary Temple in Bangsar; and the second at Arulmigu Devi Sri Rajakaliamman Alayam temple in Brickfields. On both occasions there were adherents' making offerings of milk to the deity and some being put into a trance and fire walking. I enjoyed both occasions and share some of my favourite photos with you.

Thanks to [http://www.eprarthana.com/festivals/fadipuram.asp?lkf=fst\\_list](http://www.eprarthana.com/festivals/fadipuram.asp?lkf=fst_list) for the very basic information I have mentioned above. You can go to this site for a more elaborate explanation.

**Vicki Fennessy**



## REPORTS ON PREVIOUS EVENTS

### AL-'ILM: SCIENCE AND INNOVATION IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD – THURSDAY 28 MAY

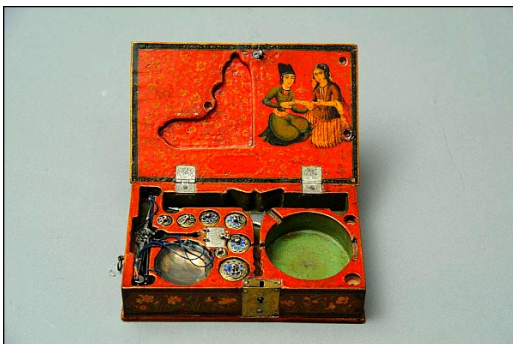
The curators of this exhibition deserve congratulations for taking existing treasures from the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia and using them to demonstrate an often overlooked aspect of Islamic faith – the importance of the quest for knowledge, or Al-'ilm. About one-eighth of the Qur'an is devoted to science-related verses exhorting believers to enquire, observe and seek answers for the benefit and betterment of their communities.

Many of the objects in the exhibition related to the golden age of Islamic science from 750-1100 AD. Key regimes facilitated advances in science: the Abbasids of Iraq, Umayyads of Spain, Fatimids of Egypt, Ottomans of Turkey and Mughals of India. Some of this scientific endeavour was to support specific aspects of Islamic faith, such as the determination of accurate prayer times and the astronomical calculation of the direction of Kaabah. But a large portion assisted fields as diverse as agriculture, engineering, medicine, botany, zoology, weaponry, architecture and the visual arts.

These scholars preserved the knowledge of the ancient world when it was lost to the west during the dark ages. They also made important discoveries, some of which have been attributed to western individuals: the discovery of planetary motion by Kepler and Copernicus, the circulation of blood by Harvey and gravity by Newtown. Some discoveries are surprising, such as the suitability of pig organs for transplants in humans.

The exhibition ran at the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia until 30 June, and we trust that the museum will continue to provide us with fresh perspectives on the interrelationship between Islamic faith and its arts.

#### **Britt Spyrou**



An apothecary box from mid-19th century Iran.



Manuscript on traditional healing, probably from the Malay Peninsula



## AFTERNOON TEA AT CARCOSA SERI NEGARA – 21 JULY 2011

On Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July, a group from MCG experienced the delights of a traditional English afternoon tea at the beautiful Carcosa Seri Negara hotel, situated on a peaceful hill-top overlooking Lake Gardens. The hotel comprises two buildings, namely the Seri Negara building where we enjoyed our afternoon tea, and the Carcosa building which is currently closed for renovation. It is due for completion in 2013 - 2014.



Afternoon tea was served in the beautiful drawing room, and comprised of delicious fare including finger sandwiches, small trifles, freshly baked scones with jam and clotted cream, an assortment of dainty home-made cakes, and finally chocolate covered strawberries. All this was washed down with an endless supply of tea and coffee. I don't think anyone had room for dinner that evening!



The hotel serves afternoon tea on a daily basis from 3pm to 6pm, either in the drawing room, or on wicker chairs on the verandah overlooking manicured gardens.

### History

The two buildings have a rich history. In 1896, Sir Frank Swettenham, the first resident-general of colonial Malaya, began constructing his official residence above Lake Gardens. It was named 'Carcosa', a stylisation of the Italian word for 'dear place'. In 1904, Sir Frank moved to the completed Carcosa, at the same time finishing a building called 'King's House' on an adjacent hillside. The King's House, today called the 'Seri Negara' (which means 'beautiful country'), was used to house the Governor of the Straits Settlements as well as other illustrious guests of the Malay Federation. From 1904 until 1941, the Carcosa building was the official residence of the highest British representatives to the Malay States.

During World War II, Carcosa became the Japanese Senior Officers' Army Mess. In August 1945, the British Army used the mansions for their own Senior Officers until a Chief Secretary was appointed. With the independence of Malaya in 1957, Carcosa became the official residence of the British High Commissioner, while Seri Negara was the official guesthouse for Malaysia's most important visitors.

In 1987, Carcosa was returned to the Government of Malaysia, and in 1989, after Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II stayed at Carcosa during the meeting of the Commonwealth nations, both mansions were administered together forming what is now called Carcosa Seri Negara.

In 1989, the two colonial buildings became an exclusive hotel, owned by the Malaysian Government, where guests can enjoy suite style accommodation and 24-hour butler service.

### Wilma Webster



Photos: Wilma Webster and Vicki Fennessy

# ENAK!

## JULY ENAK!

I have been regularly eating at Kedai Makanan Kim Poh (KMKP) for the last 10 years, having been introduced to the restaurant by a local friend who once worked in the area. KMKP is in a short strip of shop fronts that are mostly car repair shops and a printing shop. Not a delectable area, but I was taken with the flavours of the chicken claypot rice right from the start.

The restaurant itself is very basic, with laminated tables and they use plastic dinnerware. As the name implies, the mainstay is the chicken rice, cooked in clay pots over coals in the old way, which makes a difference to the flavour for sure. The mix is rice, small chicken pieces, sliced Chinese sausage, oil, soy sauce and spices. The pot is cooked over fast heat for 10 minutes, and then a lower heat for a further 5 minutes. Julienned ginger slices and sliced spring onion is then mixed through, along with a special mix sauce and brought to the table. Salted fish is an ingredient that can be added if requested. Along with the chicken rice, we had braised lettuce drizzled with oyster sauce. There are various soups on offer; chicken, duck, pork, with herbs but no-one at the table availed themselves, so have no idea if they are tasty or not.

Beer is available, along with Chinese tea, water and soft drinks. You can order the pots as half or large. Usually half is enough for one person. The cook was able to do a vegetarian version for us, with mushrooms and vegetables, which should be pre-ordered.

If you would like to try out this restaurant, the details are:  
Kedai Makanan Kim Poh, 7 Persiaran Segambut Utara, 51200, phone 6258 3167

**Vicki Fennessy,**  
Text and photos



## BOOK GROUPS

### Book Group 2 — May

#### The Gentleman in the Parlour by Somerset Maugham

Ten members attended the Meeting held at my home on 25<sup>th</sup> May to discuss The Gentleman in the Parlour by Somerset Maugham.

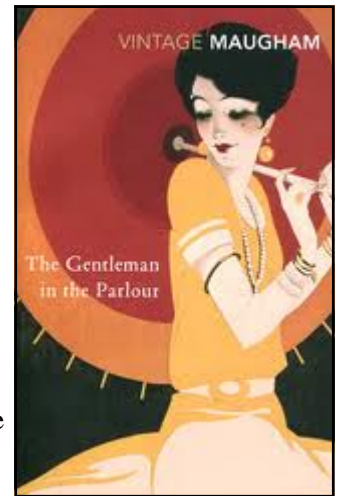
First published in 1935, this is Somerset Maugham's account of a journey he made from Rangoon to Haiphong – by river to Mandalay, on horseback through the mountains and forests of the Shan States to Bangkok, and onwards by sea.

None of the group really enjoyed the book although agreeing that it would not prejudice the idea of reading another of his more famous titles. It was difficult to appreciate because it didn't fall into any conventional genre of writing, being neither travelogue, novel, adventure story, nor romance and it therefore became a piece of rather dated, contrived writing; at times beautifully descriptive, while still being somewhat self-indulgent and superficial. Unfortunately none of the sense of adventure or excitement that one would have thought should have existed on such a hazardous journey in the nineteen twenties was conveyed. One problem raised was that the Introduction by Paul Theroux appears at the start of the book and one reads it before realising that it is written by somebody other than the author. Unfortunately it contains facts that change the perception one has of the author and the content and would definitely be better read after finishing the book.

There are beautifully descriptive passages about Angkor Wat and the Temples of Pagan and yet at other times he gives an impression of being a rather stereotypical colonial traveller in 'British' Burma, moving from Rest house to Rest house, arriving always in time for the first whisky/gin & tonic of the day in the company of some dissolute British expatriate. It was felt to be insulting to the unsung heroes of the Colonial period who often left behind legacies that still influence the infrastructure of the countries in which they lived. When asked which of the 'stories' stood out for them, only one or two members were able to recall the details.

This book is worth reading for the description of Angkor Wat alone, but make sure to read the introduction after you finish the book!

**Susan Nelson**



Claypot Chicken by Vicki Fennessy

## MCG Book Groups

Each of the MCG Book Groups meet monthly to discuss a book chosen by its members prior to the new season. We limit our selections to Asian literature, both fiction and non-fiction. If you enjoy discussing what you read with an interesting and diverse group of people, then one of our book groups would certainly appeal to you. The books chosen for 2011-2012 are listed below. Membership is limited to 15 members per group. Book Group 1 meets the last Friday of the month, while Book Groups 2 and 3 meet the last Wednesday of the month. Do join us if you feel you can make a regular commitment to one morning meeting a month from August to June, not including December.

For more information, contact the MCG Book Group Convenor:

[bookgroup@malaysianculturegroup.org](mailto:bookgroup@malaysianculturegroup.org).

### Book Group 1

**Finding George Orwell in Burma**, Emma Larkin

**A Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet**, David Mitchell

**Cutting for Stone**, Abraham Verghese

**What Your Teacher Didn't Tell You**, Farish A. Noor

**Peony in Love**, Lisa See

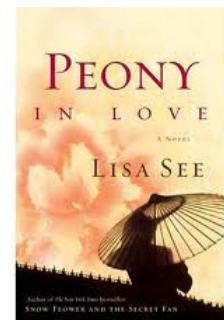
**Ali and Nino**, Kurban Said

**Country Driving**, Peter Hessler

**The Blue Notebook**, James Levine

**And The Rain My Drink**, Han Suyin

**Thirsty River**, Rodaan Al Galidi



### Book Group 2

**Ladyboys, The Secret World of Thailand's Third Gender**,

Susan Aldous and Pornchai Sereemongkonpol

**The Hungry Tide**, Amitv Ghosh

**The Piano Tuner**, Daniel Mason

**Cracking India**, Bapsi Sidhwa

**The Sandalwood Tree**, Elle Newmark

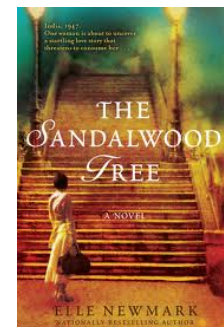
**The Spirit Catches You And You Fall Down**, Anne Fadiman.

**The Reluctant Fundamentalist**, Mohsin Hamid

**A Different Sky**, Meira Chand.

**Three Sisters**, Bi Feiyu

**The White Rajah**, Nicholas Monserrat



### Book Group 3

**A Fine Balance**, Rohinton Mistry

**Long Day Wanes, a Malay Trilogy**, Anthony Burgess

**The Malayan Life of Ferdach O'Henay**, Ferdach Lees

**And the Rain My Drink**, Han Suyin

**Singapore Grip**, J. G. Farrell

**Sorrow of War**, Bao Ninh

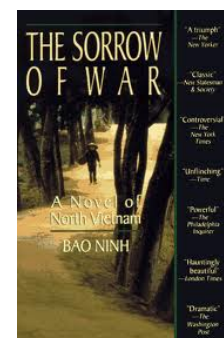
**Fieldworks**, Mischa Berlinski

**Mao the Unknown Story**, Jung Chang & Jon Halliday

**The Case of the Exploding Mangoes**, Mohammed Hanif

**The Cave of the Yellow Dog**, Byambasuren Davaa & Lisa Reich

**Wasted Vigil**, Nadeem Aslam





Kumpulan Kebudayaan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur & Selangor  
Malaysian Culture Group

[www.malaysianculturegroup.org](http://www.malaysianculturegroup.org)

**MEMBERSHIP FORM 2011/2012**

**Individual Membership Fee : RM 75**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**First Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Surname** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Postcode** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Handphone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email** \_\_\_\_\_

**I would like to join (please tick):**

**Enak!** \_\_\_\_\_ **Book Group** \_\_\_\_\_

**The MCG is run by volunteers. Please consider to help keeping the group interesting by sharing your skills, experiences and/or time. Please tick below in which area you can volunteer:**

\_\_\_\_ **Share expertise or experiences in the area of:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ **Write a report about an event**

\_\_\_\_ **Occasionally provide venue for a meeting**

\_\_\_\_ **Volunteer in the MCG Committee**

*Do you have any suggestions for events?*

*Please complete the form and bring it together with your payment to the next MCG event you are attending  
Cheques should be crossed and made payable to "Malaysian Culture Group"*

*If you prefer to pay by Paypal, please send a completed membership form using the e-mail address of your  
Paypal account to : [membership@malaysianculturegroup.org](mailto:membership@malaysianculturegroup.org)*