LANGKAWI BOOK VILLAGE AND A SUMMER TOUR OF EUROPEAN BOOK TOWNS OF HOLLAND, BELGIUM & WALES

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Abstrak


Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, the former Chief Minister of the state of Kedah mooted the idea of establishing a book village at Lubok Semilang in Langkawi after visiting the book village at Hay-on-Wye in Wales and meeting its founder Mr. Richard Booth. Tan Sri Sanusi, an avid reader himself and having a personal collection of 20,000 books in his private libraries estimated to be 50 million book lovers in the world. The establishment of a book village at Langkawi will provide another tourist attraction to this island.

The Langkawi Book Village built on an area covering 500 acres in South East Asia and Ulu Melaka will be the first book village in South East Asia and the third in Asia after the Kembuchi Miyagawa Book Village in Japan and Ilsen in Korea. The Langkawi Book Village was the 14th book village in the world. The other establishment being at Hay-on-Wye (Wales), Stillwater (U. S.), Redu Village Du Livre (Belgium), Montolie (France), Saint Pierre-de-Clagen (Switzerland), Bredevoort (Netherland) and Kembuchi Miyagawa (Japan).

Visiting book places have become an attraction for bookish people. Recently Tan Sri Sanusi Junid led a delegation comprising of state executive council, government official, businessman in book trade and book lover to tour European Book Towns of Holland, Belgium and Wales during last summer. For book lovers who enjoy European travel tours like Bredevoort, Redu and Hay-on-Wye represent a trail of delight where wonderful scenery, fine weather and good food provide a constant backdrop to the quest for the perfect book. The book towns offer purported benefit that both the serious and novice book collector might rightly expect as well as the other creative comforts and amenities one would hope for.

The first book town that were visited is Bredevoort. Bredevoort is a fortified town of 1,600 inhabitants, about five km from the Dutch-German border. Mr. Henk Ruesink, a retired lecturer in education mooted the idea of establishing Bredevoort as the book town for the Netherlands. After reading about Hay-on-Wye in a newspaper article and visiting Hay, he proposed the idea for Bredevoort. Most of the buildings in Bredevoort dated back to the seventeenth century. The local authorities renovated and restored the building. Mr. Ruesink by establishing the book village has given economic value to the building.

Bredevoort Book town received good response from both Dutch and German local authorities. In Bredevoort there are 22 bookshop and antiquarian. There are 4 art galleries and also home of Rembrandt'great painters wife. Bredevoort has prospered quickly because of the altruistic dedication of Henk Ruesink and his family who work fulltime without pay. They administer budgets, provide information services for visitors and the media, allocate books brought in by the car load to dealers, organise book fairs and are developing an internet network that expand daily. One fascinating thing about Bredevoort is that it has a book gallery called 'Gemilang' which exhibits books about South East Asia. Most of the books in Bredevoort were categorized according to various subjects. Bredevoort was regarded for having the most books in Dutch and German. Bredevoort has something for every body, ranging from junk for the penniless to fine single volumes and beautifully board sets for the connoisseur. It also offers an interesting paper chase because the bookshops are tucked away in corners and up side streets. Just when you think you have seen everything you stumble on shops you have missed.

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Entering Redu you weave your way across the Ardenes through the summershed forests of the late summer and seemingly empty village. The history of Redu dated back eleven hundred years to the reign of Charlemagne. By mid 1980's many of its buildings were abandoned and others sold off or let as holiday homes as a result of a decline in agriculture and forest activities. Mr. Noel Anselot a former journalist and CEO of the oil French Company ELF Belgique after a visit to Hay-on-Wye plan to establish one at Redu. Mr. Noel Anselot succeeded in transforming old farm houses of Redu into antiquarian bookshop, printing, engraver, paper manufacturer, art galleries, hotel and craftsmanship. Annually 250,000 visited Redu Book Village. Anselot connection in the book track enable him to attract dealer to Redu. The quality of Redu's antiquarian and second hand books stock is high and varied. Most dealer offer books on many subject. The prices range from a few pounds to several thousand. Overall Redu is well worth a visit by both collectors seeking good antiquarian book and those interested in more modest second hand book. The variety is good and the prices are fair.

The Hay-on-Wye book village was begun in 1961 by Richard Booth, an Oxford graduate, whose family have lived near Hay-on-Wye since 1903. Hay-on-Wye situated at the end of Wales about 400 kilometer from London. Hay was probably the first book village establishment in the world. As it is situated in mountainous, unpopulated Mid Wales, Richard Booth believed Hay could adjust to its international market, its very remoteness protecting it from domination by London. Apart from his family connections, he passionately wanted to stay in the country, also believing that he would make a country business competitive. He therefore persisted by pursuing the idea that a town full of bookshops could be an international attraction. His first major success was in establishing the Cinema Bookshop. Richard Booth has now moved to 44 Lion Street (the largest bookshop in Hay) which he concentrates on and which has a turnover of the more secondhand books than any other secondhand bookshop in the world. He would now like to see many small specialist bookshops in Hay with the proprietor as the expert on the subject in which he deals. To ensure this ideal his wife started the smaller specialist bookshops at the Castle. He and his wife are planning to rebuild Hay Castle as the secondhand book specialist centre of the world. "You buy books from all over the world and your customers come from all over the world " was Richard Booth's idea and it worked. The rapid growth of Hay-on-Wye was influenced by the existence of universities located in Hay-on-Wye neighbourhood such as in Birmingham, Cardiff, Aberyswyth, Oxford etc. If 38 years ago there are 3 hotels located at Hay-on-Wye, presently it have 100 hotels serving accommodation facilities to book lovers throughout the world.

The Langkawi Book Village which was started in 1996 presently housed 6 houses and it was named after the founders of book village of the world namely Noel Anselot, Richard Booth and Henk Ruesink. It is located at the foot of Gunung Raya, the highest mountain in Langkawi. Its distance from the Kuah town is only 10 kilometer and 12 kilometer from Padang Mat Sirai International Airport. A book village can be defined as a place which houses books regardless whether they are old or new in varied form and different languages and subjects. It is here that book lover can buy and read all books published by local and foreign publisher. Presently the 6 houses are categorized by languages namely Arabic, Eastern Asian, etc. The Langkawi Book Village received good response from tourist particularly foreign tourist who are fascinated by the beautiful natural environment of the book village.