

# Kelantan's royal bedrooms

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Rarely does one get to peek inside the bedrooms of a royal family but you can do so now at the Muzium DiRaja Kelantan, formerly the palace of the current Sultan of Kelantan.



Blue room used to be bedroom of Sultan Ismail Petra, the present Sultan of Kelantan.

**T**raditionally, palaces are located high on hills or at the centre of vast parklands, safe from prying eyes. However, Istana Batu, now Muzium DiRaja Kelantan or Royal Museum, is an exception.

It is located in the middle of the Kota Baru town centre, has only a small garden and is surrounded by the houses of commoners. In fact, what used to be the royal kitchen overlooks the backyards of nondescript houses, so eaves-dropping must have been a possibility!

This is proof-positive that the Kelantan royal family has always been close to the *rakyat* (people) and mingle easily with their subjects. Throughout history, this bond between ruler and subject has been unshakable. Today, what stands next to Istana Batu is not a nobleman's house but a new, three-star, three-storey hotel called somewhat grandiosely Royal Guesthouse.

Were it not for the sign announcing Istana Batu's background, visitors would have been none the wiser and assumed it to be the home of a wealthy, colonial-era *townkay*. Once painted sky blue, the building is now

yellow, the colour of Malaysian royalty. The single-storey palace is not particularly huge but it boasts elegant proportions and a stately driveway.

The unusual name Istana Batu is a topic of conjecture. *Batu* means "rock", and so it is said that the palace was so named because it was the first brick palace in the state. Istana Batu, built in 1939, was designed with input from Sultan Ismail Sultan Muhammad IV (1920-1944), who personally supervised its construction.

Upon completion, it became the wedding gift to Sultan Yahya Petra (1961-1979) when he married Raja Perempuan Zainab II. Istana Batu was the official residence of Sultan Yahya Petra when he was Tengku Mahkota (Crown Prince) until 1960 when he ascended the throne and moved to Istana Kota Lama. In 1966, it was renovated and turned into the home of the Sultan's daughter Tengku Salwani Sultan Yahya Petra.

She lived here with her family until 1969 when it became the official residence of her nephew, the Crown Prince Tengku Mahkota Tengku Ismail Petra Sultan Yahya Petra, now the Sultan, who occupied the palace

until 1972.

In the years until it was converted into a museum, Istana Batu was used as a venue for royal weddings, receptions and accommodation for friends who visited Sultan Ismail Petra. On July 25, 1991, Istana Batu marked another milestone when Sultan Ismail Petra graciously consented for it to be turned into a royal museum so the *rakyat* could get to know Kelantan's royal family better.

His Royal Highness inaugurated Muzium DiRaja Kelantan as part of his 41st birthday celebrations.

## Royal Bedrooms

Upon entering Istana Batu, you'd want to turn left to admire a 14-seat table set for a formal dinner in the elegant dining hall.

Though impressive, the dining room exudes a warm family atmosphere. The walls are adorned with photographs of the royal family taken through the generations. A console displays signed photographs of HM Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Phillip and Princess Anne who visited Kelantan in 1972.

On the floor are ivory tusks

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while opposite are a hat stand with the Sultan's collection of hats and cabinet filled with silver scrolls that contained awards, honorary degrees, honours and titles. The first room to the left facing the road is the former bedroom of Kelantan's reigning Ruler HRH Sultan Ismail Petra. It's called the Blue Room.

This was also the royal bedchamber of Sultan Yahya Petra and, in 1966, the bridal suite for his third daughter Tengku Salwani. It was painted blue by Sultan Ismail Petra when he moved in as Tengku Mahkota (Crown Prince) in 1969. The original furniture, including the bed with four crowns, was made for his wedding, and the trousseau is also on display.

The antique safe from England was a gift from Sultan Ismail to Sultan Yahya Petra in 1938.

The adjoining feminine Yellow Room used to be Tengku Salwani's bedroom. The unusual and extravagant bed was designed by her mother Raja Perempuan Zainab II for Tengku Salwani's wedding in 1966. The three elaborately embellished circular headrests were inspired by the ceiling decorations of nearby Istana Jahar while the rest of the furniture came from Sultan Muhammad IV's summer palace at Gunung. Surrounding the bed are the dowries.

The Sultan Yahya Petra Room or Peach Room was also occupied by sisters Tengku Rozan and Tengku Salwani until 1960. They moved to the Yellow Room when Che Puan Besar, the mother of Sultan Yahya Petra, moved in.

It became the bedroom of Tengku Salwani's son Raja Amir

Saifuddin Shah until 1969 when it was used by Sultan Ismail Petra's eldest son Tengku Muhammad Faris Petra, the current Crown Prince.

The green songket on display was worn by Sultan Yahya Petra three days before he died when he was Yang DiPertuan Agong or King of Malaysia in 1979.

Compared to the rest, Sultan Ismail Room (1920-1944) round the back seems almost spartan. The wooden bed is narrow and the dressing table is small. In front of the room is the family parlour filled with stuffed animals, including a tiger skin on the floor with bared fangs. This was also the kitchen leading to the Brassware Room and Gifts Room where presents and plaques given to Sultan Ismail Petra and family members are kept.

The rest of the palace is devoted to a permanent royal photographic exhibition showing the activities of the Sultan and Raja Perempuan and their four children Tengku Mahkota, Tengku Bendahara, Tengku Temenggong and Tengku Amalin. The photographs are of them from their childhood days to the present, including overseas trips and meetings with foreign guests such as Queen Sirikit of Thailand and Sultan of Brunei.

A Weapons Room sees a collection of antique spears and keris, and there is a special hall that shows the coronation robes.

□ *The Muzium DiRaja Kelantan on Jalan Hilir Kota is open daily from 8.30am to 4.45pm except on Friday. Admission is RM1. Tel: +609 748 2266.*



Family parlour.

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Royal dining room.



Yellow bedroom belonging to Tengku Salwani, Sultan Kelantan's sister.