



## **Pulling Warmth: *Teh Tarik* and Everyday Life in Malaysia's Culinary Tourism**

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### **Abstract**

This photo essay explores *teh tarik* [pulled tea] as an everyday practice through which cultural bonds, social encounters, and shared meanings are produced in Malaysia's tropics. Rather than approaching *teh tarik* merely as a culinary tourism product, the essay understands it as a form of embodied communication shaped by gestures, heat, rhythm, sounds, and social presence. Drawing on visual ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2024 and 2025 across sites in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia's Batam Island, the photographs presented here narrow our lens to the areas of Kuala Lumpur to capture moments of preparation, waiting, sitting together, and casual interactions in kopitiam, street stalls, markets, and urban spaces. The visual narratives reveal how *teh tarik* mediates everyday encounters among locals, migrants, and tourists, allowing diverse identities to coexist without formal negotiation. Through a reflective photo essay format, this work shows that culinary tourism experiences in the tropics often operate through intimacy, repetition, and a shared atmosphere rather than spectacle or promotion. In doing so, this essay highlights *teh tarik* as a living culinary heritage that connects bodies, spaces, and memories, offering insights into the emotional life of tropical urban streets and everyday cultural landscapes.

**Keywords:** *teh tarik*, culinary tourism, visual ethnography, photo essay, tropical tourism, Malaysia, tropical urban tourism, everyday life

## Introduction

Culinary practices in Malaysia are not only related to taste and consumption, but also to emotions, memories, and social relations that grow in everyday life. Food and drink are a medium of encounter, a way for people to get to know each other, and a means of building a sense of togetherness in tropical public spaces. In this context, *teh tarik* occupies a distinct position. It is present not only as a popular drink but also as a social ritual that involves the body, gestures, atmosphere, and interactions between people.

Various studies of culinary tourism have shown that the dining experience cannot be separated from the affective and cultural dimensions that accompany it. Cuisine works as a multisensory experience that connects tourists and local communities through taste, smell, visuals, and the social situations surrounding them (Chendraningrum & Suryana, 2025; Si & Couto, 2020). *Teh tarik*, which is found in street stalls, kopitiams, and urban tourist areas, shows how daily practices can function as a tourist attraction as well as a cross-cultural landscape of communication.

This photo essay begins from this understanding by examining *teh tarik* as a practice of cultural communication in tropical urban spaces. The research draws upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2024 and 2025 in Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Bahru, Melaka), Singapore, and Indonesia's Batam Island. For the purposes of this essay, our lens has been narrowed to photographs capturing moments of *teh tarik* and everyday urban life in different spaces around Kuala Lumpur.

The study traces how the movements of pulling tea, hot steam, shared tables, and the presence of different cultural backgrounds forms a spontaneous but repetitive affective bond. In this situation, *teh tarik* becomes a nonverbal communication: mutually understood, and transcending differences in languages, ethnicities, and social status.

The photo essay approach was chosen because it allows the experience to be conveyed closely and reflectively. Here, photography is not positioned as a supporting illustration, but rather as an analytical entry point that invites the reader to pause, observe, and feel the atmosphere captured in the frame. In line with visual and sensory approaches in ethnography, images are understood as a form of knowledge born from the presence, repetition, and involvement of researchers in the field (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Pink, 2021; Porfírio, 2022).

This essay is structured as a narrative with a continuous visual flow. Each photograph is accompanied by reflective text that combines observations, cultural interpretation, and field experience without rigid analytical separation. This structure is intended to

maintain the flow of the story while respecting the character of the photo essay as a fluid and open form of writing. Through this approach, this paper invites readers to understand *teh tarik* not only as a culinary tourism object but also as a tropical communicative practice that unites body, space, memory, and a sense of relationality in daily life.

### **Methodological Notes**

This photo essay is constructed through a visual ethnographic approach that places photography as part of the process of understanding everyday life, and not just as a tool of documentation. During fieldwork that took place between 2024 and 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Bahru, Melaka, Singapore, and Batam, the authors were present in public culinary spaces, such as kopitiams, street stalls, and urban tourist areas, to observe the practice of *teh tarik* in its everyday settings.

Shooting was performed without setting up a pose, taking advantage of the natural light and rhythm of daily activities. Each photo is accompanied by a short field note that records sensory impressions, such as heat, steam, metallic and street sounds, body gestures, and social interactions that occurred around tables and open kitchens. This approach follows the understanding that visual experience is always connected to other senses and the presence of the researcher's body in the field site (Pink, 2021).

In this essay, photography is treated as a form of knowledge born of proximity, repetition, and involvement, in line with the view that images not only represent reality but also help shape the way we interpret it (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015). Therefore, the narrative that accompanies each photograph is constructed in a reflective and continuous manner, incorporating visual observation, cultural interpretation, and field experience without rigid analytical separation. This approach allows *teh tarik* to be read as a communicative and affective experience in the tropical urban context of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

### **Visual Narratives**

Through the following fifteen photographs we analyse how the gentle gestures of *teh tarik* also embody histories of how this practice came to Malaysia through the harsh regimes of British colonialism. In this regard the photographs capture within their framed stories aspects of what the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss described as *tristes tropiques*, the sad tropics (Lévi-Strauss, 1974). Yet, the photo essay also shows how the continuation of this practice of *teh tarik* demonstrates a cultural resilience and cultural flourishing that invites tourists to partake in the local cultural landscape.

**Figure 1. Pulling Warmth across the Counter, Kuala Lumpur, 2024**



The movement of pulling tea occurs with a hypnotic rhythm. Arms are raised, the wrists rotate, and the hot liquid moves from glass to metal cup and back, forming a short arc in tropical air. Steam rises slowly, inviting attention. At this point, the process of brewing tea is no longer just kitchen work, but a small show enjoyed between tea maker and customer.

Around the table, the conversation pauses. There are waiting looks, faint smiles, and gestures of recognition of a fellow human without the need for words. Tea's warmth merges with that of social relations, creating a space where people feel present to each other. At this moment, *teh tarik* functions as an emotional bond, bringing a simple repetitive sense of togetherness to everyday life.

This everyday ritual also carries traces of a longer and more difficult history. The movements of pulling tea are linked to the colonial past of the region, when migrant labourers from South India were brought by the British to work on rubber plantations across Malaya. In the heat of plantation life, tea mixed with condensed milk became a simple but sustaining drink shared among workers during brief moments of rest. Over time, what began as a modest practice among labourers gradually travelled beyond plantation landscapes into urban kopitiam and street stalls, where migrants, locals, and traders adopted the habit as part of everyday social life. Today, this once-ordinary drink has become a cultural icon of Malaysian culinary heritage, and the performance of pulling tea is often sought out by visitors as an authentic experience of local life. In this sense, the warm arc of *teh tarik* also carries echoes of the "sad tropics" of colonial labour histories that quietly shaped everyday cultural rituals in the region.

**Figure 2. When Taste is Transferred, Kuala Lumpur, 2024**



Thickening steam, steady hands, and the sound of a liquid meeting metal create a familiar atmosphere. Behind these movements are beliefs and skills formed by repetition. Shelves in the background, filled with sweetened condensed milk and instant coffee, present traces of a meeting between local traditions and global commodity flows that have long been intertwined in tropical kitchens.

The process of pouring tea has become a form of silent interpersonal communication through the rhythm of work and the precision of movement. In this small space, collective memories of tastes, routines, and culinary heritage pass from hand to hand and from one generation to the next without the need for verbal explanation.

The story of *teh tarik* is closely tied to the movement of people across the Indian Ocean. Brought by Tamil Muslim migrants from South India during the colonial period, the practice of brewing strong tea mixed with milk gradually found a place in the everyday food culture of Malaya. Over time, what began as a drink associated with Indian Muslim stalls was reinterpreted within the multicultural landscape of Malaysia, where Malay, Chinese, and other communities encountered the drink in shared urban spaces such as kopitiam, street stalls, and markets. Through daily repetition, *teh tarik* moved beyond its migrant origins to become a familiar social beverage that quietly reflects the layered cultural exchanges of the region.

**Figure 3. *The Strainer as an Archive, Kuala Lumpur, 2024***



Tea passes through a filter darkened by time, tannin, and thousands of similar mornings. The fabric hangs quietly, maintaining traces of repetitive work. Steam frames the stove and steel countertop splattered with water droplets—confirming the proximity between the human body and heat, which is emphasised in the tropics.

The cloth strainer functions as an unwritten archive. It stores working hours, inherited gestures, and knowledge never recorded in a recipe book. Memory lives through touch and repetition; rather than formal documentation. What flows through the fabric is not merely liquid, but daily practices and familiarity—momentarily visible before they dissolve back into the hot urban air.

Thus, the cloth strainer carries traces of a longer labour history embedded in the tropical city. The preparation of tea in stalls and kopitiam echoes earlier forms of work that shaped the region's colonial economy, where migrant labourers from India, China, and around the Malay Archipelago moved through plantations, ports, and urban kitchens. Commonplace tools such as kettles, strainers, and metal cups quietly hold these histories of work and survival. Today, as tourists seek out kopitiam and street stalls in their quest for culinary experiences in modern day Kuala Lumpur, these humble materials become part of a living heritage—objects through which the sensory memory of labour, migration, and everyday tropical life continue to circulate.

**Figure 4. *Tropical Daylight, Kuala Lumpur, 2025***



Under the glare of daylight, street life moves slowly. Tourists and locals pass unhurriedly beneath red lanterns as warm air carries the scent of oil, spices, and sun-baked asphalt. Before any conversation begins, the atmosphere is already speaking.

Communication takes place through climate and motion. Clothes are adjusted to the tropical heat, steps are slowed, and drinks sipped to quench the body. Chinese writing on menu boards, festive lanterns, and silhouettes of distant high-rise buildings, reveal how heritage and modern urban life coexist. During the day, the tropical space conveys its message through a closeness and sticky warmth, creating a felt presence.

The lanterns and shop signs also recall another layer of the city's history. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, large numbers of Chinese migrants arrived in Malaya as labourers, traders, and miners, within the colonial economy. Many settled in urban districts that later became the commercial and cultural centres of cities such as Kuala Lumpur. Their presence shaped the everyday life of streets, markets, and food stalls, and tea shops, leaving traces that remain visible in architecture, language, and culinary practices. These histories of migration and labour—marked by hardship and uncertainty—form part of the region's "*tristes tropiques*", quietly embedded in the ordinary urban scenes that continue to animate the tropical city today.

Figure 5. *Tropical Night, Kuala Lumpur, 2025*



As sunlight fades, street soundscapes become livelier. Yellow lights reflect on metal tables, the clang of pots and lilt of laughter move from one space to another, and the tropical night is felt as denser.

On Petaling Street, eating and drinking has never been a private affair. A simple plastic table and chairs are turned into a shared encounter. Gestures are faster to understand than language, humidity reduces social distancing, and food is the most acceptable language. *Malam* [night] narrates her story. Light, smells, breath, and sound. Here, tropical life communicates through intensity rather than tranquillity.

The familiar sounds are punctured as a tourist passes, the wheels of his suitcase adding a modern note to this vibrant urban landscape. In recent decades, places such as Petaling Street have also become part of Kuala Lumpur's expanding culinary tourism landscape. Visitors arrive in search of what is described as "authentic" street food culture, turning everyday dining spaces into attractions within the global tourism economy. While this attention helps sustain local food traditions and small vendors, it reshapes the character of neighbourhoods as stalls, markets, and kopitiam adapt to tourist expectations. In this sense, the lively night streets reflect another dimension of the tropical city—where heritage, commerce, and tourism intersect, and where the search for authenticity may gradually transform the quotidian practices that once made these places meaningful.

Figure 6. *Heritage Gate, Kuala Lumpur, 2025*



A gate with Mandarin script is a crossing marking the move from street to a Chinese bridge in a garden of bamboo. Walls of peeled paint, faded lanterns, and footsteps continue over the threshold without pausing. Time never escapes this location. It survives in layers of paint, stones, plants, and incomplete memories.

The gateway speaks without written narrative. It recalls histories of migration, colonial-forced labour, and efforts to preserve heritage amid change. Under the entry, a tourist and a woman in a hijab walk side by side, sharing the same space. The streets become a stage on which identities meet without the need to be announced.

Yet the survival of such spaces is increasingly fragile. Rapid urban development in Kuala Lumpur has transformed many historic districts, where older buildings are replaced by modern commercial structures or redesigned as carefully curated heritage attractions. In some places, fragments of the past remain only as decorative markers—restored gates, murals, or stylised shopfronts that evoke history without preserving it. Within the growing circuits of urban tourism, heritage is frequently reproduced as an aesthetic experience rather than a living environment. The tropical city thus reveals another layer of the “sad tropics”, where the pressures of modernization and tourism quietly reshape the material landscapes through which memory and everyday life once unfolded.

**Figure 7. Old Tables and Wordless Conversations, Kuala Lumpur, 2025**



Inside an old kopitiam, the sound of a spoon touching glass is mixed with laughter and everyday conversations. Wooden tables with marble tops become the centre pieces of meetings. Each seat faces another, creating a sense of equality among customers.

Communication occurs without the need to speak. A small nod, a sugar bowl changing hands, and the clinking of glass form a mutually understood grammar. The waiter moves to the rhythm of the room, delivering orders and simultaneously keeping the flow of interaction alive. In this space, togetherness is not built through long conversations; but rather, through familiar presence and repetition.

Seen through this lens, the material elements of the kopitiam—marble-topped tables, worn wooden chairs, metal spoons, and glasses of steaming tea—are not merely background objects but active participants in social life. These everyday things hold the marks of repeated gatherings, conversations, and everyday encounters. In this sense, the space reflects the “material poetics” of lived environments, where objects and architectural elements quietly shape human experience and memory (Lundberg, 2008). Within the tropical context, such material arrangements—from the texture of old tables to the warmth of a glass of *teh tarik*—form part of the sensory landscape through which social relations unfold (Benitez & Lundberg, 2022).

**Figure 8. Tea, Laughter, and the Warm Tropical Breeze, Shah Alam, 2025**



A simple steel table, a warm tropical breeze, slow-passing traffic, and mugs of *teh tarik* beaded with condensation. Conversations flow not through neat sentences but through laughter, pauses, and lingering. Open spaces create a sense of belonging. There are no doors, no reservations; only a shared space. Tea slows down time and gives permission to stay longer, to talk or to choose silence. People from different backgrounds sit side-by-side, united by the same air, the same table, and the stickiness of tropical heat.

Sometimes, the sense of homecoming is not in the building but in the table where glass and silence are received without question. In Malaysia, such moments of shared tea speak to longer histories of encounter and settlement. Over centuries, migrants from India, China, the Malay Archipelago, and beyond, arrived in the country's tropical ports and gradually learned to build lives alongside local communities. The making of home was not only negotiated through formal agreements and political institutions, but also through everyday gestures of hospitality—sharing food, sitting at the same table, and offering a warm drink. In this sense, *teh tarik* becomes more than a beverage; it is a quiet expression of culinary heritage through which strangers slowly become neighbours. For visitors who encounter these spaces through culinary tourism, the simple act of drinking tea can reveal how everyday practices of welcome helped shape Malaysia's multicultural landscape.

**Figure 9. Empty Plates, Full Stories, Selangor–Kuala Lumpur, 2025**



The plates are empty, drinks left half consumed, and no one has moved. Two men are speaking Tamil, a Malay man is holding his glass quietly, and a Malaysian Chinese woman is staring at a mobile phone screen. There are no cross-table conversations, yet there is no sense of alienation.

Presence has become a form of communication. Rings of tea and small stains left by cups mark the passing of time, quiet traces of conversation, and moments shared across the table. The dining room is transformed into a place of identity negotiation, where halal choices, tea-drinking habits, and the presence of tourists coexist without conflict. The quiet space between the tables holds stories that do not need to be spoken. The quietest table often conveys the deepest meaning.

Across the tropics, food cultures have long been shaped by the movements of people brought by trade, migration, and colonial labour. In Malaysia, communities of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and many other backgrounds brought different dietary practices, religious rules, and culinary traditions, that at times produced tensions through their encounters. Yet shared eating spaces such as kopitiam and street stalls gradually became places where these differences were negotiated in everyday life. The presence of tourism today adds another layer to this dynamic as visitors enter these spaces seeking authentic culinary experiences. In this sense, the table becomes more than a place to eat—it transforms into a small arena where histories of migration, cultural difference, and contemporary tourist flows quietly meet.

**Figure 10. Entrance of Ho Kow Hainan Kopitiam, Kuala Lumpur, 2025**



In front of Ho Kow Hainan Kopitiam, a line forms under the tropical sun. Red and white bamboo curtains open to a glimpse of the interior. The aromas of Hainanese coffee, rich bread, and boiled tea, become familiar mixed markers of place. This is not just a shop, but a living archive.

Waiting becomes part of social ritual. Everyone in the queue shares the same patience, acknowledging that inheritance is worth waiting for. The Chinese script, old recipes, and daily routines form a bridge between the past and quotidian modern city. Here, memories are lived through steam, motion, and habits that are consistently repeated. Inheritance survives because it continues to be practiced.

Kopitiam are an important part of Malaysia's culinary heritage. The word combines *kopi* (coffee in Malay) and *tiam* (shop in the Hokkien Chinese dialect), reflecting the meeting of Malay and Chinese cultural traditions that shaped everyday urban life. Emerging in port cities and migrant neighbourhoods during the colonial era, kopitiam became social spaces where traders, workers, and families gathered over drinks and simple meals adapted to the climate. Open shopfronts, ceiling fans, marble tables, and the constant circulation of hot drinks, create an environment suited to the rhythms of tropical life. Today, places like Ho Kow continue this tradition, where culinary practices, architecture, and everyday social encounters combine to form a living heritage that attracts both local communities and tourists seeking the atmosphere of Malaysia's historic food culture.

**Figure 11. Looking at History, Kuala Lumpur, 2025**

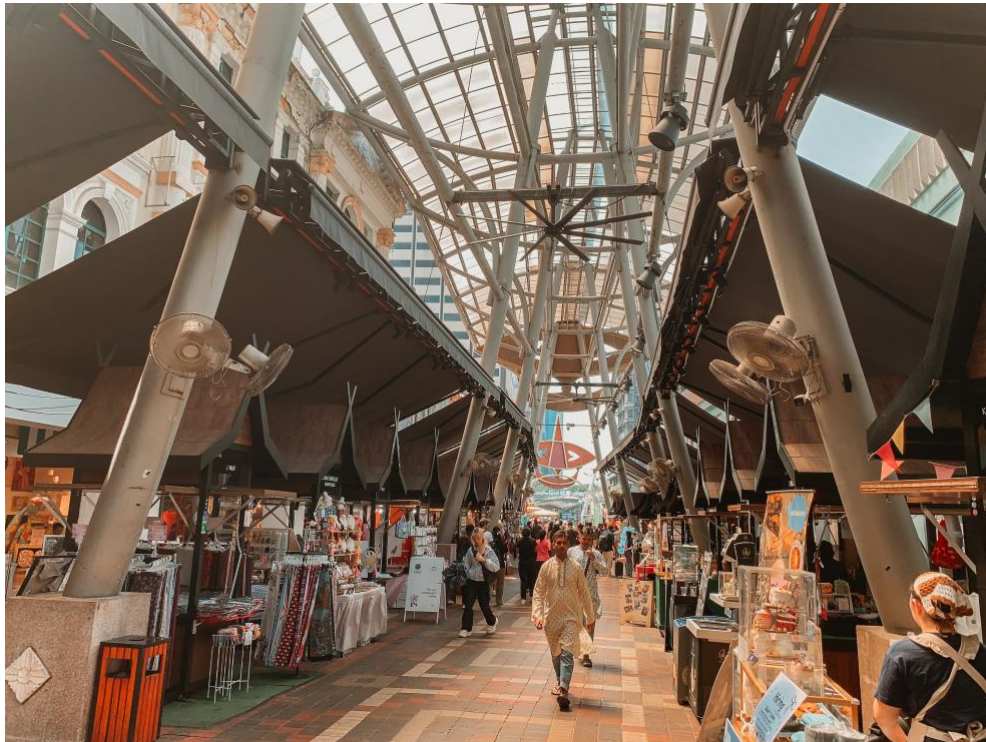


A tourist with a red backpack stands silently in front of a mural that charts the paths of coffee, sugar, and rubber trades. A dim light softens the room and encourages the body to stop, rather than walking past. The wall speaks silently, reminding us that *teh tarik* was shaped by the history of migration, plantation work, and the movement of commodities across the seas.

A calm body attitude is a form of listening. History does not come across as a grand narrative but is gathered in images, textures, and simple decisions to pause. In this silence, *teh tarik* is present not only as sweetness but also as a remnant of the long journey that settles in the present.

The history behind this drink stretches across oceans and colonial trade routes. Tea itself travelled to the Malay Peninsula through global maritime networks linking China, India, and the British Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Under British colonial rule, large numbers of Tamil labourers from South India were brought to work on rubber plantations throughout Malaya. In the plantations and workers' settlements, tea mixed with condensed milk became a practical and energising drink during long hours of labour. Over time, this everyday beverage moved from plantation kitchens into urban food stalls and kopitiam, where the technique of "pulling" the tea emerged as both a method of cooling the drink and creating its distinctive froth. What today appears as a familiar symbol of Malaysian street food culture carries echoes of an inhumane past—one shaped by colonial labour systems, migrations across seas, and the lived realities of workers who helped build the region's tropical economy.

**Figure 12. Market Conversations, Kuala Lumpur, 2025**



Under the steel frame and glass canopy, batik fabrics, souvenir racks, and *teh tarik* cups share the same hallway. Tourists walk slowly, artisans serve customers, and conversations accumulate without demanding full attention. Tradition and urban life do not collide, but rather negotiate through proximity.

The market displays hybridity through coexistence. Handmade textiles sit alongside mass-produced fabrics, and all are offered for sale under the awnings of modern architecture. Here *teh tarik* circulates as a drink and symbol. Cups are lifted, photos taken, and identities move flexibly in an ever-changing space.

In this place, the legacy of life is not because it is rigidly preserved, but because it continues to be practiced. Yet the material heritage visible in markets such as this is also undergoing subtle transformation. Textiles once woven by hand, architectural details shaped by local craftsmanship, and everyday objects tied to older ways of living, increasingly circulate within a tourism economy that values them as souvenirs. While this commerce helps sustain livelihoods and keeps certain traditions visible, it also reshapes the meaning of these objects as they are reproduced for tourists seeking traces of the “authentic” tropics. In this shifting landscape, the market displays another dimension of the region’s “sad tropics”: a place where heritage continues to be practiced, yet is gradually reconfigured by the demands of tourism’s trade and its global cultural circuits.

**Figure 13. *Flags and Cups, Kuala Lumpur, 2025***



Flags hang above tables while teacups change hands. The symbols of the country and everyday practices are present in the same frame without distinguishing one from the other. National identity is not announced through speech, but through the habits of sitting, drinking, and sharing space. The dining room becomes a place where nationality is felt lightly. People are present as citizens, workers, or tourists, but also as bodies that need rest from the tropical heat. In this encounter, symbols and practices coexist, creating a sense of belonging that does not require affirmation.

Yet this quiet sense of belonging emerges from a more complex historical background. During the colonial period, identities in Malaya were often organised and separated along ethnic and economic lines, with different communities assigned particular roles within the colonial economy. Such divisions created tensions and uncertainties about who belonged where in the social landscape of the tropics. In the decades following independence, everyday spaces such as food stalls, markets, and kopitiams gradually became places where these boundaries softened through daily interaction. Sitting at the same table, drinking tea, and participating in ordinary routines allowed a more fluid sense of coexistence to develop—one in which national identity is less declared through symbols alone and more experienced through the shared rhythms of everyday life.

Figure 14. *Two Men and Curious Lenses, Kuala Lumpur, 2025*



Two elderly men sip *teh tarik* in quiet conversation, while a few steps behind them, tourists hold up their phones to photograph the long *roti tisu* [tissue bread] traditionally eaten with a glass of *teh tarik*. Routine and admiration go hand-in-hand in this shared space.

Differences in viewpoints provide food with new meanings. For some people, *teh tarik* is a daily habit. For others, this experience is worth capturing. The camera transforms taste into imagery, and daily life continues to be re-interpreted.

Scenes like this also reflect how everyday culinary spaces are increasingly shaped by contemporary tourism practices. What was once a routine local meal can become a visual spectacle as visitors photograph food, interiors, and ordinary moments of daily life. Through social media platforms, particularly Instagram and travel blogs, certain stalls and kopitiam quickly gain visibility, attracting new flows of visitors seeking the same images and experiences. While this attention can support local businesses, it can also transform neighbourhood food spaces into staged sites of consumption, where everyday practices are subtly adjusted for the gaze of tourists. In this sense, the camera does not merely record the scene—it participates in reshaping the cultural landscape of the tropical city.

Figure 15. *Borderless Tables, Kuala Lumpur, 2025*


In a kopitiam, generations and backgrounds sit side-by-side without ceremony. Parents, workers, young people, and tourists share tables as orders are taken, and drinks are served. Above them, a flag marks the place, while the flow of people in and out remains open-ended.

These tables function as borderless stages. Differences are negotiated using seating distance, small gestures, and shared presence. *Teh tarik* moves from hand to hand, bringing warmth that soothes boundaries that were once asserted but are now porous. It is inhaled with steam, understood by sight, and maintained through the habit of sharing a table.

In many parts of the world, food practices can become markers of cultural and ethnic boundaries, distinguishing communities from one another. Yet in places such as the kopitiam, the act of drinking *teh tarik* suggests another possibility. Shared tables, circulating cups, and the simple ritual of offering tea create moments in which difference becomes less rigid and everyday interaction takes precedence. The drink becomes a material expression of relational life in the tropics—where migrants, locals, and visitors encounter one another not through formal declarations of identity, but through the quiet warmth of sitting together. In this sense, *teh tarik* is more than a beverage; it is a small but powerful gesture in cross-cultural communication in the shared spaces of the tropical city.

## Conclusion

In this visual essay, *teh tarik* is not presented as a stand-alone culinary object, but rather as a living practice that moves between the body, space, and memory. From open kitchens to shared tables, and from bright tropical days to sound-dense nights, *teh tarik* reveals how everyday life in Kuala Lumpur is shaped through shared presence, simple gestures, and sensory experiences.

The shared ritual of drinking *teh tarik* creates a common ground for social interaction. Kopitiams, markets, and city streets are places where differences in language, background, and purpose do not have to be formally reconciled. Instead, the warmth of the drink, the slow rise of steam, and the rhythm of sitting together creates a gentle sense of togetherness that requires no explanation. In these moments, communication takes place not primarily through words but through proximity, repetition, and recognition.

This photo essay suggests that culinary tourism in the tropics doesn't always operate through promotion, representation, or spectacular narratives. Culinary heritage often appears in quiet, ordinary situations. Even when a queue forms, tables are not immediately abandoned; people linger, finishing their tea and conversation before giving their place to the next arrivals. The unhurried exchange of tables is reminiscent of the long flow of history. *Teh tarik* becomes a medium through which tourists, migrant workers, locals, and different generations share cultural space.

Through photography, this practice is captured not to freeze it in time but to understand it as an ongoing process. Each image invites the reader to pause, observe, and sense the tropical atmosphere that shapes everyday social relations. In this context, *teh tarik* carries not only sweetness but also traces of labour, migration, and travel—accumulated through habits that are repeated day after day.

Ultimately, drinking *teh tarik* means participating in a living culinary culture. It is history that can be felt, identity held in a glass, and a sense of belonging that requires no official declaration. Between steam, heat, and shared tables, Malaysia speaks in its own way—quietly, warmly, and continuously.

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