

A love for *heritage*

Historically significant landmarks in the country unearth a past that is worth remembering and retelling.

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WHEN it comes to historical landmarks, Malaysia has many significant structures that are still standing today. From imposing fortresses to calming places of worship and beautiful monuments, these landmarks showcase the country's illustrious past.

The existence of these venues also helps boost Malaysia's appeal as a holiday destination, especially when it comes to heritage tourism.

Sometimes referred to as historical tourism, heritage tourism is the act of travelling with the purpose of exploring the history and heritage of a place.

Prior to the pandemic, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) reported that heritage tourism generates about US\$327bil (RM1.367tril) yearly in the Asia Pacific region.

Historically-vibrant places like Melaka, George Town, Ipoh, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and Kuala Lumpur – with their colourful past and rich multicultural makeup – are primed to tap into this evergreen market.

In the case of George Town in Penang, heritage tourism there blossomed after the island city, and the state of Melaka, were jointly listed as Unesco World Heritage Sites in 2008.

However, tourism in historical places is not without its challenges. Experts have noted that sustainability in heritage tourism is a somewhat delicate matter.

On the UNWTO website, it states: "One of the main motivations of tourism is mankind's inherent curiosity and desire to explore cultural identities across the world. Natural and cultural heritage sites, including scenic landscapes and revitalised historic towns, are prized tourism assets that distinguish one destination from another.

"Yet as cultural heritage attractions are unique and fragile by nature, it is fundamental that tourism authorities study how to best develop these cultural heritage sites while protecting and preserving them for the long-term."

In Malaysia, the National Heritage Department (JWN) and the National Heritage Act 2005 are in place to guard both tangible and intangible national heritage.

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Down memory lane



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JWN deputy director general Mohamad Muda Bahadin, in a previous interview with *The Star*, noted that a good management plan of heritage sites is vital for tourism.

"Heritage sites that are maintained well will ensure the safety of travellers. This will inadvertently encourage more visitors to the country."

"Besides, a well-maintained heritage site is usually more interesting and is better able to showcase the refinement work that has been done to the place," he said.

During the tabling of Budget 2021, RM10mil was allocated to preserve national heritage buildings as iconic tourist spots are vital towards strengthening the country's tourist offerings.

What's for certain is that travellers will have many historical attractions to visit in the country. With Malaysia Day around the corner, now is a good time to take a walk down memory lane at some of the historically fascinating sites in the country.

We checked out some of these places.

IPOH RAILWAY STATION

The Ipoh Railway Station began construction in 1894, when tracks were first laid through the town for the Perak Railway. The station served the town for 20 years until its consolidation into the Federated Malay States Railways.

Then, in 1914, construction for a new railway station took place, this time with an adjoining hotel, to replace the first one. This new station was designed by well-known English architect Arthur Benison Hubback, who also designed the Carcosa Seri Negara and Masjid in KL, among other iconic buildings in Malaysia.

The Ipoh Railway Station was finally opened in 1917, though at the time, the Majestic Station Hotel was not fully completed yet. Due to the shortage of materials and rising costs due to World War I, the construction of the hotel was held back for many years; it was finally opened in 1935.

The building was often referred to as "the Taj Mahal of Ipoh" by locals, thanks to its British Raj-style facade that included Moorish domes,

Photos: Filepics



turrets and verandahs.

Today, the Ipoh Railway Station provides a popular backdrop for photography enthusiasts. It is located within the Ipoh Station Square, where a cenotaph has been erected to honour those who lost their lives in World War

I and II.

Ipoh Station Square is also the starting point for doing the Ipoh Heritage Trail walk, where you will also come across other colonial buildings like Ipoh High Court, Ipoh Town Hall and the Old Post Office.

ISTANA BANDAR, SELANGOR

Located in Jugra, the former royal capital of Selangor, the Istana Bandar was built in 1906 during the reign of Sultan Alaeddin Sulaiman Shah. Sultan Alaeddin resided at the palace for 35 years and upon his demise in 1938, the palace was abandoned but has since been restored.

The beautiful conservation work was handled by the Selangor State Malay Custom and Heritage Corporation (PADAT), which continues to maintain the palace today. Istana Bandar is one of the oldest Malay palaces in the region that still retains its original design.

There are various influences on the design of this building. Moorish

Indian elements are found in the shape of the roof while Chinese and Western styles can be seen on the columns and doors.

Istana Bandar is also known as the palace with 40 rooms. Roam around the various chambers in the two-storey building and check out its interiors for a sense of how things were like in the past.

On top of that, Istana Bandar is situated on a piece of land that is Sha in size, so there's plenty for visitors to explore. You can also head next door to check out the Sultan Alaeddin Royal Mosque.

The heritage landmark stands tall in the present day as a mark of the Selangor sultanate's illustrious past.

— Tourism Malaysia



STADTHUYS, MELAKA

Situated in the heart of Melaka is an arresting red building called the Stadthuys. Built during the Dutch era in the country, the complex in its entirety – including the courtyards – covers approximately 1ha.

Construction of the building was completed in 1650 by the Dutch East India Company, nine years after the capture of Melaka from the Portuguese in 1641. The structure subsequently served as the

Dutch's main administrative centre until Melaka was handed over to the British in 1824.

The complex continued to serve as the government's administrative complex until 1957. It was finally converted into a state museum in 1984. Local historians have mentioned that the Stadthuys was the oldest surviving and best preserved administrative building in the region. Located at Jalan Laksamana, beside the Christ Church, the complex is certainly a must-visit for visitors to Melaka.

— Tourism Malaysia



FORT MARGHERITA, SARAWAK

Constructed in 1879 by Charles Brooke, who was then the ruler of Sarawak, this historical monument is one of the country's most important monuments. The former fortress played a vital role in the past, guarding Kuching's river against all enemies.

It was named after Brooke's beloved wife, Margaret de Windt, who was given the title of the Rane of Sarawak upon their marriage. In its heyday, Fort Margherita – which overlooks the northern bank of the Sarawak

River – was well equipped to protect the city from river-borne invasions.

With its white-washed structure that resembles an English castle, the three-storey fortress is a popular tourist spot in Sarawak. In 1971, it was turned into the Police Museum, but today, the venue houses The Brooke Gallery which displays memorabilia of the Brooke dynasty.

Gazetted as a Historical Monument and Site in 1971 (Antiquities Ordinance 1971), Fort Margherita still stands tall today as an important Brooke architectural legacy in Borneo.



SULTAN ABU BAKAR MOSQUE, JOHOR

The Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque is a state mosque commissioned by its namesake – the first sultan of "Modern Johor", Sultan Abu Bakar. The building is reminiscent of a majestic mansion with Victorian and Moghul architectural influences.

Construction of the mosque began in 1892, and in 1900, it was finally complete and ready for use.

The main prayer hall is fitted with beautiful Roman pillars, dazzling chandeliers, and a gilded mimbar from Turkiye. On each side of the building is a minaret with a dome that's four storeys high.

One unique feature of this mosque is its wall moulding,

which is found along the exterior. The main functions of these mouldings are to prevent rain water from flowing on the surface of the wall and entering the windows or any other openings.

The view of the Tebrau Strait nearby adds a magical feel to this heritage building.

If you're planning to visit as a tourist, do remember to wear appropriate attire, and respect the rules and regulations set by the mosque.

Also, try not to come during prayer times unless, of course, you intend to pray, in which case you are welcome to join the congregation. The exterior of the mosque is stunning in itself, so most tourists are happy with just taking pictures outside of the building.



SULTAN ABDUL SAMAD BUILDING, KUALA LUMPUR

Situated across the historic Dataran Merdeka in the capital city is one of the most treasured heritage buildings in the country. The Sultan Abdul Samad Building is a late-19th century building that was named after the reigning sultan of Selangor at the time of its construction.

Built by the architects A.C. Norman and R.A.J. Bidwell, it's easily recognisable thanks to its striking clock tower and Moorish-style architecture. It has gone through several incarnations over the years. The structure was used to house the Federated Malay States administration in 1897, then the High Court and Supreme Court in 1972 before being occupied by the Tourism and

Culture Ministry in the present day.

For many years, the Sultan Abdul Samad Building offered a picturesque backdrop during the national day parade. For some truly amazing photo opportunities, come visit at night when the facade is all lit up. You can also venture to the nearby River of Life for a scenic and relaxing stroll.



PENANG TOWN HALL & CITY HALL

Two handsome colonial structures sit side-by-side at the waterfront Esplanade in Penang – the Town Hall and City Hall buildings. The former, declared opened in 1880, is the oldest municipal building in the state. As for the latter, it was one of the first buildings in Penang to be fitted with electric lights and fans.

The Town Hall's rooms were used as municipal offices until it was taken over by the City Hall when it was completed in 1903. However, the Town Hall continued to be a popular venue, especially among European elites who gathered there for theatrical performances. This caused the locals to refer to the place as Ang Moh Kong Kuan, which roughly means "European Club" in the Penang Hokkien dialect.

The Town Hall was also once used as a private college until its recent renovation in 2004. Today, the venue serves as a public space that hosts art exhibitions and the yearly George Town Festival. The building is currently closed for its 6th renovation.

Next door, the City Hall building still houses the Penang Island City Council since 1904, a year after its completion. It was known as Municipal Offices until

Penang Town Hall



Penang City Hall



1957 when Britain's Queen Elizabeth II declared George Town a city, and renamed it City Hall. The building still retains its original Edwardian Baroque and

Palladian architectural form. And within a stone's throw away is the Cenotaph, one of the earliest war memorials in the country.

ST MICHAEL'S AND ALL ANGELS CHURCH

The St Michael's and All Angels Church is an Anglican church located in Sandakan, Sabah. Designed by B. W. Mountfort, a New Zealand architect, the building was first constructed in 1925 with bellian timber or ironwood, before brick was added. Finally, stones that were said to have been sourced from a nearby village called Buli Sim Siro, were added to make the building more secure.

This turned out to be a really good move as during World War

II, Japanese forces tried to destroy the building but was unsuccessful. The outer structure was not damaged, making it easy for builders to reconstruct the church a few years later.

St Michael's is one of the few historic stone buildings in Sabah, and is said to be the oldest stone

church in the state. It features beautiful stained glass windows that are named "Window Of Remembrance And The Friendships Windows", which were donated by prisoners-of-war relatives from Australia. This was to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II in 2005.

The church is part of the Sandakan Heritage Trail, which also includes a tour of the Agnes Keith House. This was where American writer Agnes Newton Keith (whose book *Land Below The Wind* was published in 1939) and her family lived.

