

Unravelling Kajang's past heritage



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By KURNIAWATI KAMARUDIN / BERNAMA

FROM “time immemorial”, Kajang has been famous for its satay, which was introduced to this area by the Javanese community in the early 20th century.

Its skewered barbequed chicken and beef delicacy aside, the town is considered a backwater by most people.

However, not many know of its tourism potential. In fact, Kajang boasts a 200-year-old history and heritage that is worth exploring.



To promote Kajang, located about 20km from Kuala Lumpur, as a tourism destination, Tourism Selangor, Kajang Heritage Centre and Kajang Municipal Council teamed up to launch the Kajang Heritage Walk programme sometime in 2017.

The 3km heritage route provides “pit stops” at seven interesting landmarks, namely Kajang Heritage Centre, which was opened in 2000 with the help of the Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia; Shen Sze She Yar temple, which was the first place of worship for the Chinese community in Kajang; Soon Fatt sundry shop; Hin Wah Tong, an 80-year-old hardware shop founded in 1917, and the Kajang Heritage Centre.

an ironsmith; old post office building; Masjid Jamek Kajang; and, of course, Restoran Sate Hj Samuri that was established in the 60s and serves the original Kajang satay.

Heritage Tour

The heritage walk takes one through Jalan Mendaling, Jalan Tengah, Jalan Besar and Jalan Tukang — situated around Kajang's old quarter — where one can appreciate the historical and heritage values of the old buildings that remain to this day.

The Kajang Heritage Centre at Jalan Mendaling displays more than 300 historical artefacts and documents related to the town. It is open to visitors every Saturday from 10am to 5pm, but the public can also make prior arrangements to visit the centre on weekdays.

The centre also offers three-hour guided tours of Kajang at RM30 for adults and RM15 for students and senior citizens.

Not far from the Kajang Heritage Centre is the ancient Shen Sze She Yar temple that is more than 120 years old and is decorated with limestone carvings resembling dragons.

There are also a few sundry shops in the same area, some of which are almost a century old. The Soon Fatt sundry shop, for example, is 88 years old and is now being run by the second generation of the Siew family.

It sells more than 400 types of biscuits that are either supplied by factories all over Malaysia or imported from Thailand.

Also worth visiting are the old post office building that was built in 1914 and Masjid Jamek Kajang, built during the 60s.

Collating Information

The brain of the Kajang Heritage Walk is Lee Kim Sim, who is Kajang Heritage Centre director. This former science teacher developed an interest in documenting Kajang's history after he left the teaching profession in 1996.



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"I wanted to help the people of Kajang to reconstruct the history of the town in order to turn it into a more lively and liveable place that has its own history, culture and art," he said.

Lee, who was Kajang state assemblyman from 2008 to 2013, said in 1999 he made a proposal to the Federation of Chinese Associations to set up a heritage centre for Kajang and the former agreed.

"The idea of setting up such a centre came to me when I realised that many senior citizens, who were familiar with the origins and history of Kajang, had passed away while the historical relics that belonged to them had gone missing," he told *Bernama*.

He said although there were writings on Kajang's history, the information, however, was not properly structured.

This father-of-four, who was born and raised in Kedah, then took it on himself to document Kajang's history by doing research at the National Archives of Malaysia and visiting villages all over Hulu Langat district, where Kajang is located, to talk to senior citizens and collect relevant photographs and documents.

"During the process of collecting information, some people handed me antiquated artefacts such as a latex cup made of porcelain. The Kajang Heritage Centre is filled with all the artefacts and photographs I collected from the people I met," he said.

Among the more interesting artefacts are a plaque that is believed to be more than one hundred years old donated by a nobleman who was said to have hailed from China's Qing dynasty; and a *dulang* that was used by tin miners around Kajang.

Early History

Besides Kajang, Lee also studied the history of small towns in Hulu Langat, such as Balakong, Batu 14 Hulu Langat, Batu 18 Hulu

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In fact, Lee's expertise has been recognised by others and he is often invited to present working papers on Kajang's historical development at institutions of higher learning.

He said Kajang was first inhabited by the Mandailing, Rawa, Minangkabau and Kampar communities from Sumatra who migrated there during the 1870s.

According to a census carried out by the British in 1884, Kajang had 60 shophouses, 37 of which were owned by people from the Mandailing and Rawa communities.

"The Mandailings were good at business and tin mining, but they moved to the kampungs after the entry of Chinese and Indian traders into the Malay peninsula," said Lee, who also hoped that Kajang's history would be made known to the general public and preserved for future generations. — *Bernama* ↑