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Cover Story: Preserving the old while embracing the new

Ethel Khoo / The Edge Malaysia

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Property values have increased since the launch of the MRT service *Pictures by Pa*

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As typical Malaysians, we often identify and connect places with food. For most KLites, when one mentions “satay”, Kajang straightaway comes to mind. Kajang is a subdistrict or mukim in the district of Hulu Langat, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Kajang Municipal Council.

Its urban area is surrounded by Cheras in the north, Bangi in the west, Semenyih in the east and Negeri Sembilan in the south. Prominent landmarks



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which were constructed in the 1970s. One of its best-known establishments is Restoran Sate Kajang Haji Samuri, which began business in the 1990s and has franchises across Selangor and Negeri Sembilan.

The area is also growing into an education hub with institutions such as Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, German-Malaysian Institute, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur, Universiti Kuala Lumpur and Open University Malaysia.

Kajang also has a fascinating history. According to Lee Kim Sin, director of the Kajang Heritage Centre and former Kajang assemblyman, the founding of the area can be traced back to the 1850s when the Javanese and Sumatrans lived in small pocket settlements along Sungai Langat.

Incidentally, “kajang” refers to a particular building material — woven palm leaves used for roofs and walls of houses by the two communities.

One of the earliest industries in the area was tin mining. Lee reveals that a small town called Rekoh, which once stood near the present town of Kajang, saw Americans arriving in 1855 to open tin mines without the consent of the locals. There were altercations and eventually, the Americans left. In 1868, Sultan Abdul Samad invited a Chinese tycoon, Chin Ah Chan, to open tin mines in Bukit Arang. These two places were the earliest tin-mining towns in the Hulu Langat district.

In the 1870s, Chinese and Indian migrants moved to the area as labourers and traders. A census report in 1884 showed that Kajang town had 60 inhabitants — 40 Sumatrans, 19 Chinese and an Indian.

The first brick houses in Kajang were built in 1895. Lee says there are no records of where the oldest houses in Kajang are located but based on the building materials and built-ups, they could be those in Jalan Tengah, Jalan Tukang and Jalan Mendaling.

While tin mining may have been the first industry in the area, Lee says it was rubber



ished over time.

In the 1890s, the Kindersley brothers from Scotland established a company called Inch Kenneth and introduced rubber cultivation in Kajang. The company is now known as Inch Kenneth Rubber Estates Ltd.

By the 1980s, Kajang saw much growth as more people moved there due to the increasing house prices and shortage of homes in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya. Housing demand rose in the 1990s and, according to Lee, this was when property developers came to Kajang, buying up rubber plantations and converting them into residential areas.

One of the earliest townships in Kajang, according to Rahim & Co International Sdn Bhd director of research Sulaiman Saheh, is Country Heights by Country Heights Holdings Bhd in 1992. MKH Bhd completed its first project there — Taman Bukit Indah — in 1981. It is a landed residential development located along Jalan Bukit and Jalan Bukit Indah.

Then, other developments followed, such as Jade Hills by Gamuda Land, Saujana Impian by Sime Darby Property Bhd and TTDI Grove @ Kajang by Naza TTDI Sdn Bhd.

Commercial developments include Plaza Metro Kajang, Metro Avenue, MKH Boulevard (newly completed) and Metro Point Complex by MKH.

Many high-rise developments also came up recently, and those located near MRT or KTM stations are popular, says Sulaiman. Moreover, with the decentralisation of the Kajang area, he adds that new developments and townships are moving away from Kajang town to neighbouring subdistricts.

Among the upcoming developments in the Kajang area are Oasis Residences by TLS Group, MKH Avenue 2, MKH Boulevard 2 and Kajang 2 by MKH, and Jade Square by Gamuda Land.

Infrastructure stimulates growth



Kajang is well supported by various highways such as the Kajang Dispersal Link Expressway, South Klang Valley Expressway, Kajang-Seremban Highway and North-South Expressway.

Additionally, the mass rapid transit Line 1 has three stations in Kajang — Sungai Jernih, Stadium Kajang and Kajang — and has helped reduce traffic volume. “But there is still room for improvement in optimising [MRT] usage,” says Sulaiman.

However, he says, since the launch of the MRT service, property values have increased. The average compound annual growth rate for residential properties located within 1km of the stations was 12% to 15%. Such properties include those in Taman Desa Ros, Taman Sungai Chua, Taman Kajang Baru and Taman Bukit Kajang Baru.

KGV-Lambert Smith Hampton (M) Sdn Bhd director Anthony Chua says the reduced travel time by MRT between Kajang and Kuala Lumpur city centre has benefited the residents.

“Terraced house prices in Kajang are still within the affordable range of RM400,000 to RM500,000. With the MRT, homeowners can live in Kajang and commute to the city centre with ease,” he says.

He adds that this has encouraged several developers to acquire land in Kajang. He cites the example of Sunway Bhd, which has purchased a 5.3-acre tract with an abandoned project next to the Sungai Jernih MRT station.

Sulaiman highlights that Sunway bought the land for RM63 million and has plans for an integrated development.

Properties and buyers' profile

Kajang was once known as the ideal place for retirement, says Sulaiman. “But this has changed and it is now a destination for first-time homebuyers and upgrad



According to property experts, landed properties here are in demand. “It has a pricing advantage that is comparable to other established areas such as Subang Jaya and Petaling Jaya,” Sulaiman says, adding that gated-and-guarded developments are a growing trend in the area.

Raine & Horne International Zaki + Partners Sdn Bhd executive director Lim Lian Hong concurs, adding that amenities such as parks, good landscaping and clubhouses are a big plus.

He notes that a mix of entrepreneurs and wage earners as well as civil servants working in Putrajaya live in Kajang.

Transactions

According to transaction records provided by Henry Butcher (M) Sdn Bhd, 1-storey terraced houses in Taman Bukit Mewah — which is located close to the Kajang MRT station — with built-ups of 796 sq ft were sold for RM159,000 in 2011 and RM355,000 last year. Those with slightly bigger built-ups of 818 sq ft were sold for RM217,500 in 2012 and RM347,500 in 2016.

Also located close to the same station is Taman Jasmin. The 2-storey terraced houses there with built-ups of 1,302 sq ft were sold for RM226,500 in 2011 and RM467,500 in 2016. Those with smaller built-ups of 1,097 sq ft were transacted at RM308,000 in 2013 and RM385,000 in 2015.

In Saujana Impian, which is located near the Sungai Jernih station, semi-detached houses with built-ups of 1,959 sq ft were sold for RM874,754 in 2013 and RM1.062 million in 2015. Those with bigger built-ups of 2,195 sq ft were transacted at RM925,000 in 2016 and RM931,000 last year.

For commercial properties, 2-storey shops with built-ups of 3,003 sq ft in Bandar Teknologi Kajang were sold for RM332,500 in 2010 and RM730,000 in 2015.

In Taman K



4,789 sq ft
year.

Challenges

Property experts say traffic congestion is one of the challenges Kajang is facing currently.

“Due to rapid development and fast population growth in Kajang, traffic volume has increased significantly, causing frequent congestion.

“One of the major initiatives taken to improve access and mobility is the MRT,” Sulaiman says, adding that further improvements, such as implementing a flow system to streamline peak traffic and having more pedestrian and Park N’ Ride facilities, can help ease traffic congestion.

In addition, highways linking places such as Semenyih to Kuala Lumpur have helped divert traffic from Kajang town.

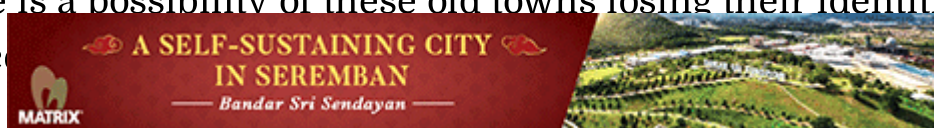
However, there have been floods in the area — a problem the government will need to tackle quickly.

Another challenge is preserving the heritage of Kajang. Kajang Heritage Centre’s Lee hopes that the local council will do more to promote Kajang as a heritage town.

“We hope to rebrand or rebuilt Kajang as a heritage town that has some artistic and aesthetic value, a town that is more livable. Then, people will come here not only for the food but also for the scene ... and experience a slower-paced life.

“We are appealing to the government to gazette the old buildings and pre-war shophouses in old towns in Selangor, including Kajang, as heritage buildings.

“Many of them have been demolished and modern buildings built on the sites. There is a possibility of these old towns losing their identities due to this practice



Growth

Despite the challenges, the property experts say Kajang still has great growth potential. “Kajang is well-linked by highways to Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. Moreover, there are big townships coming up in Semenyih, which is at the border of Kajang,” says Raine & Horne’s Lim.

“The reasonable pricing of development land makes Kajang and its surrounding areas suitable for affordable housing. Together with the rapid development in nearby Bangi and Semenyih, these three locations can merge to become a major conurbation in the southern part of the Klang Valley,” says KGV-Lambert Smith Hampton’s Chua.

“When the Sungai Besi-Ulu Kelang Elevated Expressway is completed, the newer areas will see greater growth potential,” says Sulaiman.

Kajang will continue to establish itself as a destination away from the hustle and bustle of the capital city with pricing as an advantage, he adds.

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