

Display of Sumatran architectural legacy

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NEGRI Sembilan is known for its traditional Minangkabau-styled houses, the legacy of the influence of early settlers from Sumatra.

Houses and mansions with upswept roofs reminiscent of buffalo horns are ubiquitous around the state. One fine example is Teratak Za'ba in Kampung Bukit Kerdas, Batu Kikir, Jempol, which is located a mere 10 minutes' drive from Bahau.

The structure, built on a former padi field, has been converted into a museum and contains memorabilia and artefacts about one of the nation's foremost Malay intellectuals, Tan Sri Dr Zainal Abidin Ahmad, or Za'ba.

Teratak Za'ba was the brainchild of Tan Sri Samad Idris, then Negri Sembilan Museum board chairman, after his visit to the home of William Shakespeare in Stratford-Upon-Avon in England. He was inspired to have a similar memorial for Za'ba and proposed the idea to the menteri besar in 1995.

The state museum board strove to re-create the actual environment during Za'ba's lifetime, right from the day he was born in Sept 16, 1895.

As a result, visitors to the museum will be able to gain a greater insight into the life of this man of letters who made many contributions to the country in the fields of politics, education and socio-cultural development.

All items and artefacts in the museum are from Za'ba's personal collection, obtained from, among others, his family, friends, the National Archives and universities.

Letters handwritten by Za'ba to his friends and books from his collection are also on display. The songkok worn by

him when he was bestowed the award of Pendeta (Eminent Scholar) on Sept 21, 1956 is also on display, as is the tengkolok (traditional head gear) he had on when he was awarded the Darjah Panglima Mangku Negara, which carries the title Tan Sri, by the King on June 23, 1973.

Unfortunately, visitors are not allowed to take photographs inside the house. Nevertheless, a visit will surely evoke feelings of nostalgia and melancholy, especially among those who lived through the same era. Its serene surroundings also makes it a good place for quiet reflection.

Another unique building is Istana Lama Sri Menanti, a palace built between 1902 and 1908 in the royal capital of Sri Menanti, about 13 km from Kuala Pilah. Besides being one of the few last remaining timber palaces in the country, what is also well known about it is that it was constructed without nails.

It was the official residence of the royal family until 1931 and turned into a royal

museum in 1992.

Zahrul, one of the old palace's security guards, is literally a walking encyclopedia on the building and one needs only ask before he starts expounding on the fine architecture and history of the palace.

One amazing fact is that 99 posts were used in the building's structure. The four main posts in the middle of the palace are 20 metres high and each post is made from a single cengal tree trunk.

The palace is four stories high and the hardwood timber used in its construction was extracted from forests in the state. It was designed by two local master builders, Tukang Kahar and Tukang Taib.

The floor plan was drawn in the office of the Public Works Department in Seremban and endorsed in November 1902 by the state engineer and British Resident.

Even though the official palace has moved to a nearby location, the old palace continues to attract the attention of those who drive by this picturesque town.



Visitors taking photographs outside the house as no photography is allowed inside the building.



A giant pen nib at Teratak Za'ba symbolising the scholar's fondness for knowledge.



The famous old palace at Sri Menanti.

