

e brightly painted house attracts tourists

Part of Kampung Morten on
the bank of Malacca River

Tour of the living museum

Abdul Rahim Haji Hashim is proud to show
SHANTI GUNARATNAM the house his father
built. After all, Villa Sentosa in Kampung Morten
is a fine example of how the rich Malay family
lived in the 1920s

NST 15/7/08 PG 8

JAMBATAN KG. MORTEN

Kampung Morten Bridge links
the village to a bustling part of
Malacca city



HIS English is impeccable as is his Bahasa Malaysia. Abdul Rahim Haji Hashim, son of Haji Hashim Datuk Demang Haji Abdul Ghani, is the primary caretaker of Villa Sentosa.

He looks typically Malay though and this is also reflected in the beautiful house built by his father 88 years ago in Kampung Morten, the only Malay village at the heart of the city near the Malacca River.

Listening to Abdul Rahim, 72, talk about Kampung Morten is like taking a walk back in time to when the British ruled this land. He will tell you how Kampung Morten, on the banks of the Malacca River, came about, how his father, who was the village headman, built Villa Sentosa, which is now a "living museum".

He will also tell you how he studied under some of the best teachers in Malacca during the British rule, which explains his command of the English language.



Abdul Rahim, the current 'patriarch' of Villa Sentosa

Colonial Character

Not a single day goes by without tourists coming to Villa Sentosa to experience what it was like to live and grow up there during colonial times.

Inside the house, nothing much has changed, not even the cups, saucers and glasses used to serve drinks. There are tea sets from England too, which the family uses occasionally. Sometimes, these are laid on the beautifully set tables for tourists to see and admire.

Indeed, time seems to stand still at Villa Sentosa, except maybe for the plants growing in the front yard.

"This was how we used to live when my late father and my 11 siblings stayed in this house," he says. He and his family still live in the house and he has turned it into a museum of sorts.

What's so remarkable about Villa Sentosa is that the mainly timber house was constructed without a single nail. There are four rooms and an equal number of halls, a long kitchen, a beautiful porch and a well maintained backyard that faces other traditional Malay houses there.

Abdul Rahim guides guests around the house, telling them about the intriguing collection of costumes, embroidery, furniture, muskets and an interesting array of Malay items. Among these are a 500-year-old Majapahit keris, a 100-year-old Quran, Mign Dynasty ceramics and family photographs.

He says Villa Sentosa offers four things — Malaysian culture, history, architecture and hospitality.

There are more than 100 traditional Malay houses in Kampung Morten but all are smaller than Villa Sentosa and definitely not as grand though each house and its occupants have their own stories to tell about life in the village.

Heritage Village

Kampung Morten was named after F.J Morten, the land commissioner of Malacca during the British rule, in 1920. At that time, there were already some 100 houses there, of which Villa Sentosa is one of the oldest. The Malacca State government has declared Kampung Morten a heritage village.

Villa Sentosa is open to visitors from 9am till 1pm, and from 2pm till 5pm, everyday except Friday when the opening hours are from 2.45pm till 5pm. Entrance is free. For details and appointments, call 06-282 3988.

How To Get There

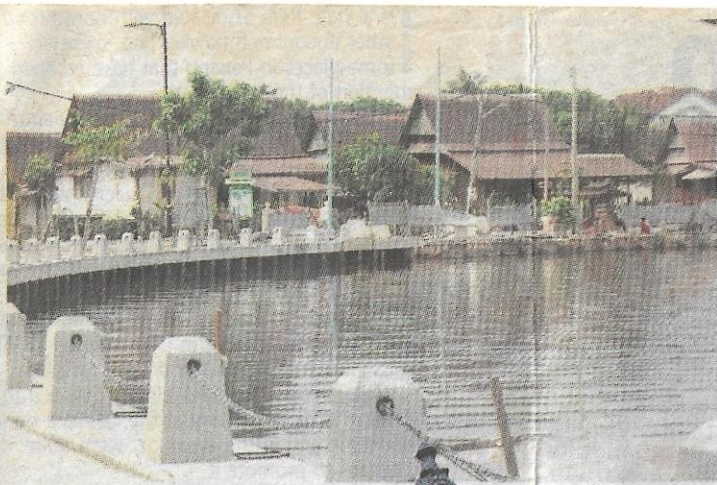
Malacca is accessible via the North-South Highway with exits at Ayer Keroh and Alor Gajah. Many bus and taxi companies offer scheduled trips to the historical State. It takes about two hours to drive to Malacca from Kuala Lumpur.



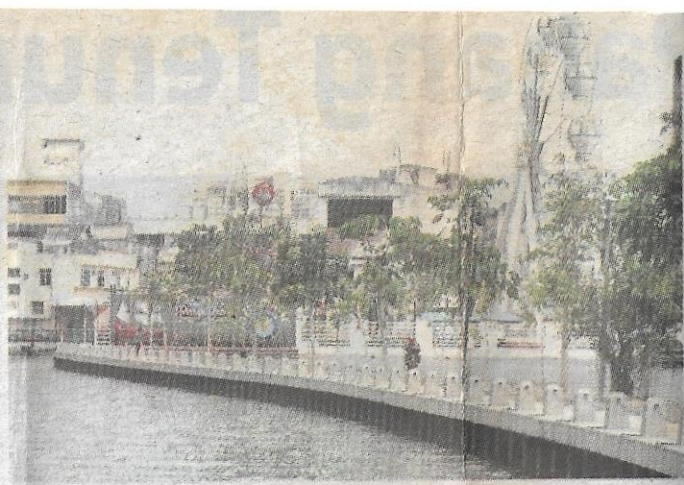
Villa Sentosa is built without nails



The brightly painted house attracts tourists



Part of Kampung Morten on the bank of Malacca River



The Eye On Malacca ferris wheel is a short five minutes walk from Kampung Morten



The house and its interior have remained the same for almost a century



Beautifully set table with items imported from England and Italy



Some of the interesting displays in Villa Sentosa

All the fun in Malacca

MENARA TAMING SARI: Malacca's latest and arguably most popular attraction now is the Taming Sari tower, named after the legendary Hang Tuah's kris.

The tower attracts hundreds of people on weekdays and thousands on weekends, all eager to get a bird's eye view of the city from the top of the 110-metre tower.

To go up, visitors ride in a "car" that rotates as it moves up the tower and stays stationary for a few minutes at 80 metres high before rotating down. The rotating "car" can seat 80 passengers.

From the top, visitors can see up to a radius of five kms, which includes many historical sights like Dataran Pahlawan, the Malacca Straits, Stadthuys and St Paul's peak.

The tower in Jalan Merdeka, Bandar Hilir, is open from 10am till 10pm. Rides are priced at RM20 (adult) and RM10 (child).

For inquiries and reservations, call 06-288 1100.

CHITTY LEGACY:

"We are Chittys, not chettiers," corrects K. Nadarajan Raja as we tour his home, dubbed the "living gallery" of the Chitty settlement in Gajah Behrang.

The former chairman of the Chitty museum, which is also in the same area, says Chittys are often mistaken for chettiers who are money lenders.

The Chittys came to Malaya some 500 years ago from the Coromandel Coast in South India. They were traders who first came here when they were doing business in Indonesia. Our numbers have shrunk so much that there

are fewer than 350 of us now.

"Many have also married outside the race and no longer practise our culture. Only a few do and it is only in our settlement in Malacca," says Nadarajan.

At the living gallery of Nadarajan's home, many of the things on exhibit belonged to his late grandmother. The items include utensils used at the family's weddings, ponggol and Deepavali

celebrations as well as clothing, artifacts and furniture.

The Chitty museum, too, has similar exhibits.

The opening hours of the museum are from 9am till 5pm Wednesday through Sunday.

The charges are RM2 for adult and 50 sen for child.

As for those who wish to visit the gallery at Nadarajan's house, please call him at 019-667 7226 for an appointment.

MALACCA RIVER CRUISE: If you want to explore the historical city at leisure, take the cruise along the Malacca River. The 45-minute cruise from the jetty near the Dutch Square takes you past Kampung Morten and back.

The traditional houses of Kampung Morten are visible from the boat. Passengers will also be able to see many bridges, including the Sungai Malacca Bridge opposite Kampung Morten.

The banks of the 4.5km river are dotted with old houses, godowns, shops and eateries. It is a lot more fun to take the cruise at sunset.

A recorded commentary on the history of Malacca and the sights along the cruise, is available on board.

The river was once a leading trade gateway in the region. This month, Unesco recognises the river as one of Malacca's World Heritage Sites.

The cruise service starts at 10am and ends at midnight. The fees are RM5 for adult and RM2 for child. Details, call 06-281 4803.



Sight to enjoy on night river cruise

