

Beauty of worship

The country has numerous gorgeous mosques that are not only culturally and historically important, but also have the potential to attract more foreign tourists.

By SHAHIDA SAKERI

A MOSQUE is a place of worship. But many mosques are also considered architectural wonders, and are culturally significant, too, especially to the area or community surrounding it.

In fact, recent years have also seen an increase in the number of visitors – both Muslims and non-Muslims – at some of the iconic mosques in Malaysia.

Datuk Dr Mohmed Razip Hasan, the director-general of Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) here believes that the attraction of mosques in Malaysia goes beyond the beautiful architecture as they are also great places for tourists to explore and learn about the culture of the local Muslim community.

“Malaysian mosques have interesting stories to tell based on the history and society in Malaysia, which also influence the architecture of the mosque. They reflect the lifestyles of the Muslim community of a destination, so it is one of the best ways for

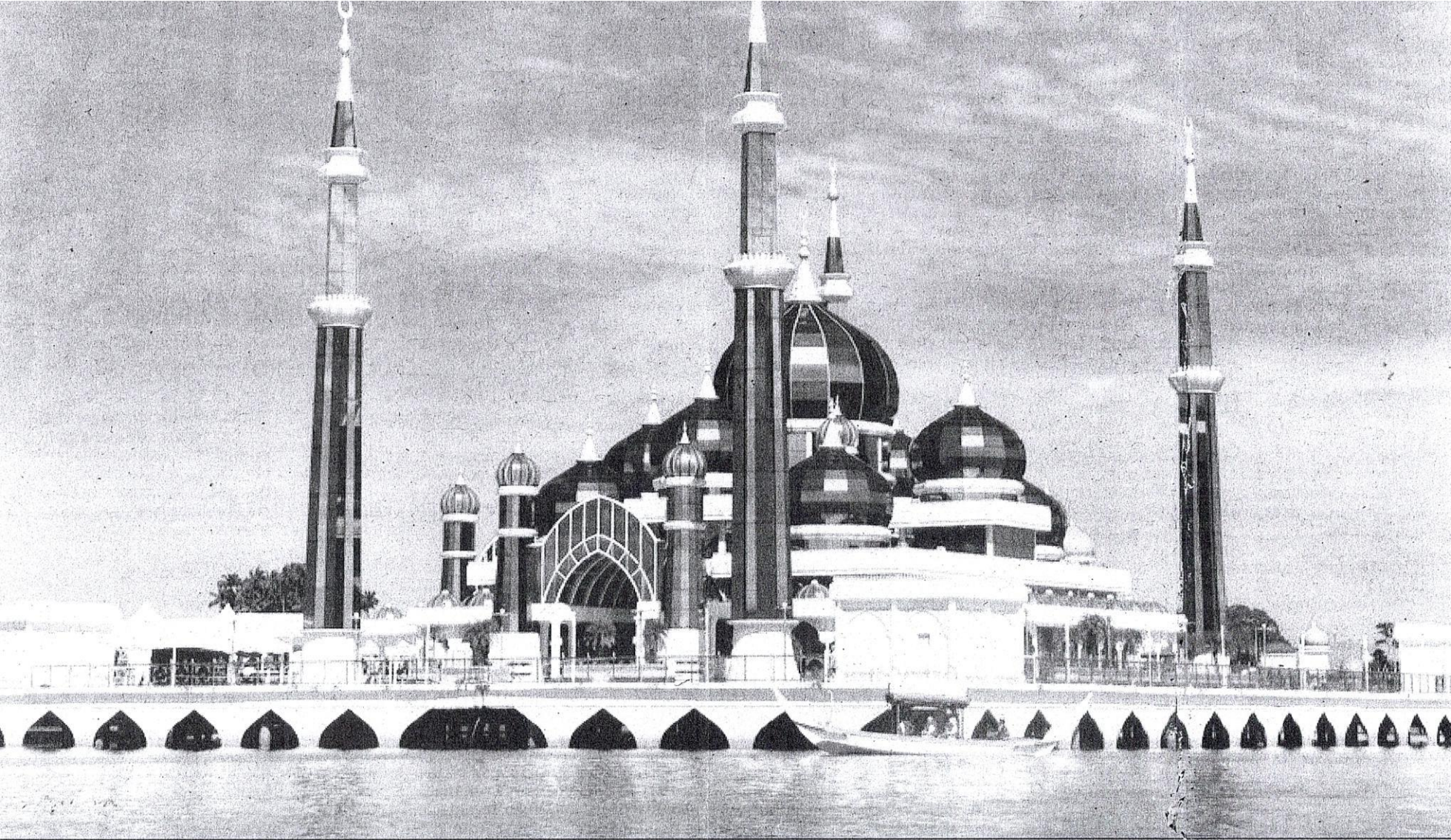
tourists to learn about the locals and how they live,” he says in an interview.

To create awareness on “Mosque Tourism” in Malaysia, some preparations needed to be made to ensure that the facilities are accessible to visitors from all faiths, nationalities and backgrounds. Hence, ITC began working closely with stakeholders such as the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), and the Department of Religious Affairs in each state.

One of the key engagements was the National Imam Roundtable Conference in 2016 which helped in making mosques more accessible to the public.

Among the initiatives passed at the conference were to allow and facilitate visits to mosques by non-Muslims under proper guidance, and to ensure the comfort and safety of all mosque visitors.

> TURN TO PAGE 2



Crystal Mosque in Terengganu. — Tourism Malaysia

10 mesmerising mosques in Malaysia

> FROM PAGE 1

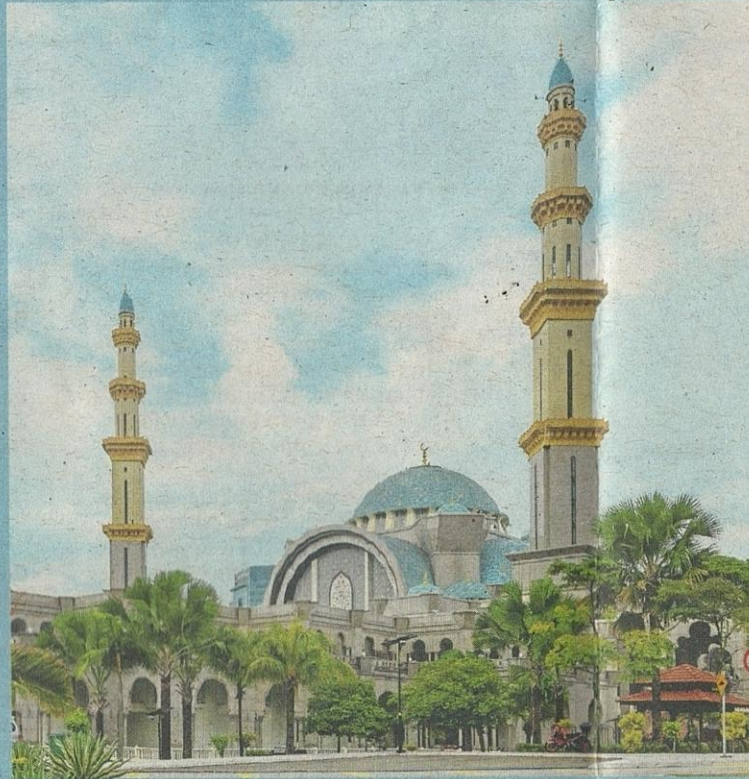
This was followed by two more roundtable conferences in Terengganu and Penang, in 2017 and 2019, respectively, to further enhance the initiatives.

On top of that, ITC also conducted a study entitled “Profiling of Mosques with Tourism-Related Attractions within the Tourism Corridors in Malaysia”, which helped the organisation identify mosques across the country that have the potential to be included in the Mosque Tourism programme.

“We are currently finalising the Mosque Visit Guide Programme (MosVi) module to provide training and other necessary skills to volunteer mosque tour guides. ITC provides training to equip existing in-house tour guides or coordinators with a formal understanding of Mosque Tourism in Malaysia,” he adds.

Currently, there are 6,850 mosques in Malaysia registered with JAKIM. As many as 80 of them are placed under the tourism belt, because of their heritage and historical values. They make ideal additions to any travel itinerary, especially for those interested in art, architecture, culture, and heritage.

Here are 10 of Malaysia’s most unique and interesting mosques.



Heavily influenced by Ottoman architecture, the Federal Territory Mosque was designed to be a place of worship set in a garden. — UWE ARANAS/Wikimedia Commons

Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Mosque, Selangor

The Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque, or the Blue Mosque, stands proudly in the Selangor state capital of Shah

takes its cue from Morocco’s King Hassan Mosque, while its single minaret is inspired by the Sheikh Omar Mosque in Iraq.

Apart from the 12-column main prayer hall, the mosque is also home to a landscaped court-



Zahir Mosque has been referenced for the construction of many other mosques, especially in Kedah.



Federal Territory Mosque, Kuala Lumpur

Starting off the list is the iconic Federal Territory Mosque, which sits in the heartland of the Segambut district in Kuala Lumpur. The mosque drew architectural inspiration from the 16th-century Ottoman Empire – particularly the Blue Mosque of Istanbul – boasting 22 domes of varying sizes gorgeously glazed with turquoise tiles.

Once inside, visitors will find the main prayer hall adorned a pastel-themed finishings, including floral motifs, stained glass lattice windows, and a grand sandstone-coloured dome.

Explore the mosque further and one may even notice extensive displays of intricate woodwork within the space, skilfully crafted by local artisans from the east coast.

The Federal Territory Mosque is open to all for visits, but for the best experience, visitors are advised to book a free and personalised walk-through with an experienced volunteer guide.

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Selangor state capital of Shah Alam. This is by far the largest mosque in the country by capacity. Upon arrival, its magnificent blue-and-silver dome, along with the four imposing minarets that rise to a whopping height of 142.2m at all corners, will immediately catch one's attention.

But despite its remarkable size, the interior decorations here are not meant to distract anyone, and kept simple by blending modern and traditional elements seamlessly.

The blue stained glasses, on the other hand, colour the light that seeps into the building, thus adding a sense of serenity to the surroundings.

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Putra Mosque, Putrajaya

The Putra Mosque, undoubtedly, is one of the great icons in the “Garden Intelligent City” of Putrajaya. It overlooks a tranquil man-made lake and features a clever blend of influences

from various Islamic civilisations in its designs. For example, the basement wall

also home to a landscaped courtyard named The Sahn, a religious learning centre, and some function rooms.

Come sunset, the astonishing beauty of Putra Mosque is amplified as its rose-tinted granite domes embellish the warm orange sky, turning it into a dreamy spectacle.

Contact: masjidputra.gov.my

Sri Sendayan Mosque, Negri Sembilan

A glance at the Sri Sendayan Mosque in Negri Sembilan, endowed by the founder of RHB Group Tan Sri Abd Rashid Hussain, will remind visitors of the bewitching Taj Mahal, with its cream-coloured facade, enormous domes, towering minarets, and long magnificent walkways. But the interiors, however, exude a whole different feel to it.

Be sure to look up at the ceiling as the designs are simply hypnotising. The mosque plays with symmetry and exquisite craftsmanship that incorporates materials from China, Dubai, Egypt, Morocco, and Turkiye.

Expect to spend a couple of hours here as the expansive complex is also home to lecture halls, a library, an



Crystal Mosque is also known as the country's first ‘intelligent’ mosque with a built-in IT infrastructure and WiFi connection.

orphanage, multi-purpose halls, mortuary management rooms, and living quarters for the staff.

Contact: [facebook.com/mssns.19/](https://www.facebook.com/mssns.19/)

Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque, Johor

Reminiscent of a majestic Victorian-meets-Moghul mansion, the Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque is a state mosque commissioned by its namesake – the first sultan of “Modern Johor”, Sultan Abu Bakar. The building took eight years to complete and was finally inaugurated in 1900.

The main prayer hall is graced with regal touches such as distinctive Roman pillars, dazzling chandeliers from the then Czechoslovakia, and a gilded mimbar from Turkiye.

The breathtaking view of the Tebrau Strait adds to the romantic allures of this heritage building.

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Crystal Mosque, Terengganu

Sitting on Wan Man Island, the Crystal Mosque shines against Terengganu's bright blue sky with its sleek onion-shaped domes made of crystal, glass, and steel. The whole structure juts out into the nearby river, symbolising the local community living in stilted houses along the riverbank.

Inside, the walls are adorned with elegant finishings in the



The name Al-Badr Seribu Selawat Mosque is in reference to the 1,000 scriptures that adorn the walls and pillars of the mosque in Perak. — Photos: Tourism Malaysia



Johor's Sultan Abu Bakar himself laid the first stone for this mosque that was named after him in 1892. — Tourism Malaysia

shades of white and gold, while its showstopping centrepiece is the elaborate crystal chandelier in the main prayer hall.

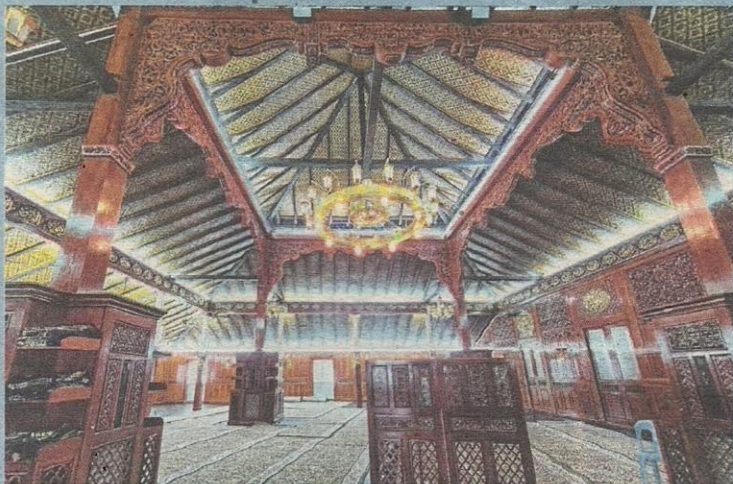
The Crystal Mosque is part of the Islam Heritage Park, where replicas of famous mosques across the globe are on display.

Contact: facebook.com/masjid-kristalofficial

Razaleigh Mosque, Kelantan

The recently opened Razaleigh Mosque has become the focal point of the quaint Gua Musang town in Kelantan, thanks to its fascinating design that pays homage to the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca.

It boasts nine 30m-tall towers, seven domes, and an open court-



Al Qadim Mosque has just reopened its door to the public after being closed for a few years for renovation work. — MOHD RADZI JAMALUDIN

yard filled with a replica of the Kaaba made up of blocks of light-emitting diode (LED) that displays the holy verses of the Quran on repeat.

The mosque can accommodate up to 3,500 devotees at a time.

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Al-Badr Seribu Selawat Mosque, Perak

From afar, the Al-Badr Mosque, also known as Masjid Seribu Selawat Pangkor, seems to be just another beautiful floating mosque in Malaysia, with subtle ivory-coloured walls, a large dome, and a minaret soaring into the sky. However, a surprise awaits visitors who decide to venture further into the building.

The walls inside explode with thousands of striking polychrome tiles painted with Islamic inscriptions and Perak's signature pattern, the bunga tekak, while the intricate carvings on its wooden front doors are guaranteed to impress.

This mosque can accommodate up to 1,500 devotees and visitors at a time.

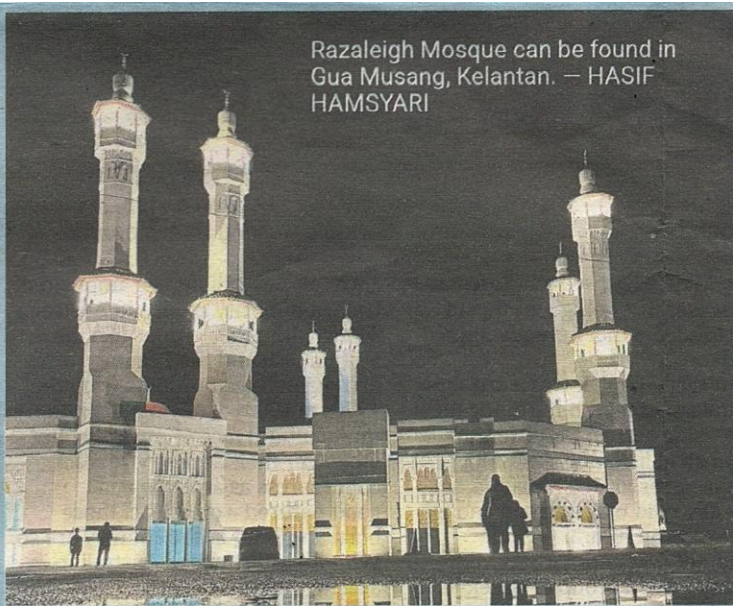
Zahir Mosque, Kedah

Rich in history and pleasing to the eyes, the Zahir Mosque today is a celebrated landmark in Alor Setar, Kedah. The construction began in 1912 and was completed in 1915, making it one of the oldest mosques in the country.

The site was once a cemetery for the fallen Kedah warriors during the Siamese invasion in 1821.

The mosque features Neo-Mughal architecture inspired by the Azizi Mosque in North Sumatera, which was popular in the region during that time. It also cleverly incorporates elements that tolerate the local tropical climate such as the installations of overhangs on the corridors to protect against harsh sunlight and heavy rain-falls, as well as ample openings to allow natural ventilation.

Interestingly, the bulbous domes which give the mosque its



Razaleigh Mosque can be found in Gua Musang, Kelantan. — HASIF HAMSARI



The Putra Mosque in Putrajaya is also known as the Pink Mosque. — Tourism Malaysia

distinctive character were not originally black; instead, they are actually made from copper (therefore, they used to be copper-coloured domes), but had oxidised and turned black over time.

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Al-Qadim Mosque, Sarawak

Despite its humble facade, the Al-Qadim Mosque in Sibü, Sarawak is still worth a visit because of its intricate wood-work. The large size of the carv-

ings make it easier for visitors to examine the craftsmanship closely, while the mosque's location within Sibü town makes it easily accessible.

Al-Qadim Mosque features a unique three-tiered limas roof, along with rich wooden interiors made of precious belian timber and crafted by artisans from Semarang, Indonesia. The intricate handwoven art on the ceiling also spreads throughout this place of worship.

The foundations of this mosque has stood against time since 1861, making it one of the oldest mosques in Sarawak.