

MALAYSIAN WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN TROUBLES



Getting to the UNESCO World Heritage List is a desire of many destinations. Malaysian cities George Town and Malacca have gotten to the list this year. These are actually the first cultural World Heritage sites in Malaysia. Malaysian officials hope the listing will bring more tourists to their country and consequently new economic profits. Nevertheless, there are problems with preserving the sites for future generations.

A number of pre war houses in George Town is being demolished or renovated in a way that does not respect the heritage building preservation guidelines. The owners of the houses want to renovate their property before the guidelines are strictly enforced. According to the Penang Heritage Alert coordinator Tan Yeow Wooi, more than 30 buildings have been destroyed since January. The coordinator has suggested that the government should offer the owners soft loans or grants to restore the buildings to their original splendor. The State Local Government, Traffic Management and Environment Committee chairman Chow Kon Yeow said that teams were established to monitor the condition of the pre-war buildings. Those who care about the country's cultural heritage hope the listing will help them to protect the discussed sites.

Some people do not like the rapid development George Town has undergone in the recent years. As they see it, new shopping malls or fast food chains are ruining the city's atmosphere. There is, however, a question. Will they be happier with the sights preserved but also with thousands of tourists coming in here? For example Malacca chief minister Mohd Ali Rustam hopes eight million tourists a year will be coming by 2010. The great number of visitors could, ironically, damage the sites as it happened in other destinations. Other Malaysians don't mind the commercialization. They prefer to have a KFC in an old building to having it empty. Nevertheless, the listing will allow the Malaysian officials to gain access to the international protection and funds. This could help the government to preserve their sites for the world.

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