

Kampong Glam Charm of A Commercial Historic District

On 2nd June 2012, I took a chance to experience daily mode of public transportation from Johor Bahru to Singapore. As I zoomed in from the comfort seat of a regular public bus, along the verdant tree-shaded expressway, there were other types of buses like double-deck and the Volvo B10M Superlong signifying that public bus is a common mode of convenient transportation here. Then, as I walked down the high-speed escalator at MRT station trying to keep track with fast paced of life sustained by the Singaporean dwellers, I could not help but wonder that behind the palpable modernization in this 'alpha plus' world city, could the legacy of Malay heritage stay alive? Will I be able to find the root of the Singapore's Malay culture here?

A couple of minutes later, there I was standing in the middle of Kampong Glam, just a stone's throw away from Bugis MRT Station. Historically, it used to be the seat of Malay Royalty in Singapore where Sultan's Palace and Sultan Mosque are located. Muscat Street, home of the mosque is now being architecturally rejuvenated under Muscat Street Project to commemorate Singapore-Oman links. Meanwhile, the debatable Sultan Palace that used to be occupied by descendants of former royal family in Singapore is presently being restored into Malay Heritage Centre. Looking at the palace, I was reminded of the paradox between Malaysian's view on the vulnerability of Singapore's Malay history's preservation, and Singaporean's rationales on the selection of the palace as a conservation site back in 1990s. Unfortunately, my eagerness to immerse myself at the center in order to build my own impression towards the outcome of conservation effort could not be fulfilled as it was closed for redevelopment works.

Just like a stroll back in time, I continued walking around Kampong Glam. Traces of colorful quaint traditional shop houses with five-foot ways are still evident here. Apart from iconic buildings, the presence of prominent trades that have been inherited since the trading heyday such as textile, rattan ware, perfume and Malay delicacies also became the attraction of the ethnic quarter. Remaining as a center for Muslim's commercial activities, it could be concluded that Kampong Glam has successfully been revitalized into a key cultural and retail magnet of the city.



Sultan Mosque, the congregation point; and The Muscat Street Project in progress



Beautifully preserved pre-war shop houses



An attempt by a group of shop owners to keep the area alcohol-free