

The 'Taj Mahal of Ipoh'

MAJESTIC: The iconic Ipoh Railway Station, built in 1914, has not lost its lustre, judging by the number of commuters it accommodates, writes Raja Khalidatul Asrin

RIGHT smack in the heart of Ipoh town lies the majestic Ipoh Railway Station with its blend of Neo-Moorish and western architecture.

It was designed by Arthur Benison Hubback, a British architectural assistant to the director of public works in Malaya, who was largely influenced by the Neo-Moorish architecture of British India where he had lived.

The railway station was built in 1914 by the East India Company at a cost of RM335,000.

The country's first railway track was built from Taiping to Port Weld (Kuala Sepetang) in 1885 and was known as the Perak State Railway. In 1901, trains became the mode of transport for rubber and tin ore between the state and the name was duly changed to the Federated Malay State Railway. In 1946, it became known as Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM), and on Aug 1, 1992, it was renamed KTM Berhad.

Ipoh Railway stationmaster Mohamad Zahrin Ahmad, 58, disclosed that there is a tunnel beneath the Ipoh Railway Station that leads to the city hall across the main road. The tunnel was used to escort convicts to the courthouse just beside the town hall during the Japanese Occupation.

Locals fondly call Ipoh Railway Station the 'Taj Mahal of Ipoh' because of its architecture which resembles the iconic structure in

Agra, India.

The heritage building used to house the Majestic Hotel on the top floor which had a nice view of the city hall and state mosque.

The stairway and the reception area seemed to be from a different era, with an old fashioned elevator that looked rather eerie. That was a few years ago, when we could still enjoy a cup of tea at the balcony, which was called 'The Corridor'.

The hotel is closed now and there goes pieces of the past.

Asked about his favourite memory of the station, the camera-shy Zahrin said:

"Back in the 70s, people would come to the railway station for 'makan-makan' (eat out). There used to be stalls selling hawker fare along the road beside the station. The food was cheap and drew in the crowd every night.

Long ago, every railway station would have food stalls and that was their identity. People would say 'Jom makan kat railway' (Let's eat at the railway station). Not any more. Time has changed and people are no longer laid-back. Everyone seems to be rushing," he said.

Another favourite memory was when he saw the late sultan of Perak, Sultan Idris Shah Almarhum Sultan Iskandar Shah, drove the train. The sultan had a train driving licence and he drove one up to Tanjung Malin.

"Back in the 60s, the royal family



Visitors in front of the facade of the Ipoh Railway Station which shows the influences of Neo-Moorish and western architecture.



People using the ETS (electric train service), which allows for travel between Ipoh and Kuala Lumpur in two hours.

travelled by train to Kuala Lumpur. Even the late Shah of Iran visited Kuala Kangsar by train from Kuala Lumpur. There used to be a royal coach, but now, it is only available for use by corporate organisations for exclusive train rides at a price," said Zahrin.

While the facade of the Ipoh Railway Station has been maintained, its interior has been refurbished.

The services, too, have improved and we now have the ETS (electric train service) that takes only two hours to get to Kuala Lumpur, making this a popular mode of transport

once again.

Standing in front of the station, there is the 'Ipoh tree' and a cenotaph to honour fallen soldiers from the state during World War 2, the Malayan Emergency, the Indonesian Confrontation and the Insurgency.

The Ipoh Railway Station is nicknamed the 'Taj Mahal of Ipoh' due to its resemblance to the iconic structure in India.

