

Chowrasta: Penang oldest market a crowd puller

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The Chowrasta market is the first market to be accorded the silver Green Building Index rating for its environmental-friendly design . (NSTP/DANIAL SAAD)

GEORGE TOWN: If Perak is proud of its iconic Taiping market, Penang can look to its Chowrasta market that boasts as rich a tradition.

The oldest market in Penang, its history can be dated back to the Indian street vendors of the mid-19th century.

In 1890, the George Town Municipal Council built the single-storey Chowrasta market for \$16,471 (Straits dollar).

It was replaced with a threestorey building in the 1960s. The market has been selling almost everything, from fresh livestock on the first floor, to clothing, shoes and second-hand books on the upper floor. Despite its age, the market, which is in the heart of George Town, still remains vibrant to this day.

While the Taiping market is being given a RM9 million facelift to boost facilities for traders and customers, Chowrasta had benefited from a RM13.5 million massive renovation project that started in 2013 and completed in 2017.

Komtar assemblyman Teh Lai Heng said the main aim of the project was to attract more people, especially the younger generation.

“The younger generation do not enjoy going to market. So, what we did was to redesign the internal layout of the market, and rearrange the shoplots. The dry section, which is located at the front, sells pickled nutmegs and others, while the wet section at the back sells fresh fish and meat.

“More people, including the younger ones, visit the market nowadays ,” he added.

The Penang state government has maintained the original character of the building built in the 1960s, and made improvements to cater to the needs of time.

Previously, the market could house only 90 traders but now 170 traders have filled up the shoplots in the three-storey building.

Parking has always been an issue as it is situated at the town centre. However, it is a non-issue now, as there are 120 parking spaces with special lots for women and families.

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Teh said the market remained relevant because of the business culture that had existed for over a century.

To add value to the building , the state government is constructing a 120m-long walkway with a glass panel roofing that is expected to be completed in a few years.