

A former Colombo Plan Malaysian student who had studied in Sydney was the connecting link between client and the Sydney firm.

The design goal was to provide a mix of facilities along the waterfront that would appeal to both local and international visitors, and establish a specific local sense of place. The desire of SEDC was also to retain the historical and cultural settings of the waterfront but to get rid of the dirt and truck traffic and to link Main Bazaar to the water and views across it. It was to be a showpiece for Kuching and an exemplar for waterfront design in Malaysia. It was perceived to be a 'quality of life project' and well funded.

There were thus several design objectives. One was to open up the riverfront to the city by creating view corridors to the water. Another was to preserve the historic elements in the area and a third was to be 'Kuching in character'. The artworks, and food outlets are hence predominantly local in nature rather than parts of international chains. Indigenous tribal patterns were adapted for the paving patterns. The materials, however, had to be robust and easy to maintain. No local materials that possessed this quality were available so granite stocks were imported from China and mosaic tiles from Ravenna in Italy. A further objective was to remove the mudflats that locals regarded as ugly. The riverfront was extended and parts of the new development are located on reclaimed land. The tidal difference on the Sungai Sarawak was 5 metres. A barrage built down river now keeps the water at a constant height. It also effectively cuts the city off from the sea as far as shipping is concerned and makes the pontoons that form part of the design redundant.

The new waterfront consists of a 1-kilometre (about 3040-foot) long riverside promenade (see Figure 5.16). The promenade was

built on piles to prevent settling and lined by tropical trees at 12-metre intervals to provide shade. The landscape architects were under some pressure to build a colonnade but won the argument to keep it as an open walkway. The scheme has a dumbbell design linking the hotel district with downtown Kuching. Between the two ends there are a number of rotundas that serve as rest points and also a series of 'features'. There are food outlets and restaurants, a pavilion for cultural performances, a series of water features and fountains and a 'thematic' playground for children. They are all aimed squarely at the tourist market but they also provide for local residents, Malays, Chinese and minorities alike, so that there is always a mix of people there.

A number of special features give a unique character to the Kuching waterfront. The Courthouse is celebrated with a square in front of it. The former Sarawak Steamship Company headquarters is home to a tourist centre. At the southern end of the boardwalk is the Chinese Museum housed in a building erected in 1912 by the Chinese community of Kuching for the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. A Town Square that contains a nineteenth century square tower is the centrepiece of the project. Pools and fountains now flank it. The tower, formerly a gaol, houses an exhibition. It also offers views across the new waterfront to the historic features of the city and river: Malay villages, the Astana (home of the Brooke family, the white rajah's of Borneo from 1837 until the 1950s), and Fort Magherita.

The art works include the Hornbill Fountain, a modern steel sculpture, depicting Sarawak's national bird. The balustrades are finely wrought, the furniture is well designed and the planting reflects the lush tropical environment of Sarawak. It is this