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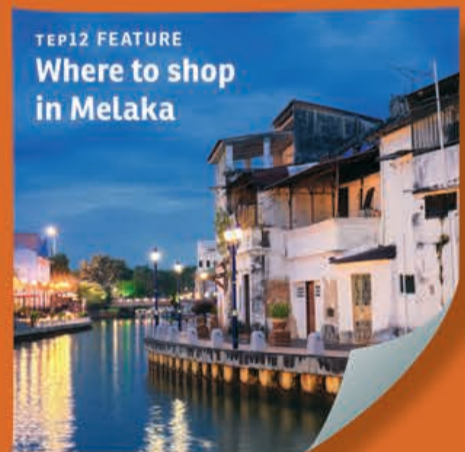
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You would be surprised at the unusual ways and the lengths some people go to own a property. See page 14.



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The Edge Malaysia

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LBS Bina to buy M3 Mall for RM105 mil

Property developer LBS Bina Group Bhd announced that it will be buying Gerbang Mekar Sdn Bhd, the mall owner and operator of the M3 Mall in Gombak, Selangor, for which it will be paying RM105 million. This will mark its entry into the retail business.

The M3 Mall in Gombak, which was fully developed in the third quarter of last year, has a market value of RM107 million, said LBS Bina.

Constructed on a 3.2-acre leasehold site, M3 Mall is part of a mixed development known as Medan Mega Melati, which also includes the M3 Residency, comprising two blocks of 16-storey serviced apartments built atop the mall. The mall has a gross floor area and net lettable area of 587,572 sq ft and 182,609 sq ft, respectively. It is currently 83% tenanted.

Retailers record healthier sales in 2Q2017

Malaysian retailers posted sales growth of 4.9% in 2Q2017, an improvement over 1Q2017 when overall retail sales contracted by 1.2%.

"After a dismal performance in the first three months, the retail industry managed to recover slightly during the second quarter," said Retail Group Malaysia managing director Tan Hai Hsin in the latest Malaysia Retail Industry Report (August 2017) released on Sept 5.

He attributed the better performance to the Hari Raya festive shopping, which helped boost sales in May, coupled with heavy price discounts offered by retailers.

Government looking at expediting MRT3 construction

The Malaysian government may expedite construction of the Mass Rapid Transit 3 (MRT3) in the Klang Valley ahead of its planned completion in 2027 to reap the economic benefits of the project.

"We have planned to complete MRT2 in 2024 and MRT3 in 2027, but looking at the benefits that we can reap from the MRT projects, the ministry has proposed to see whether we can bring forward the completion of MRT3 from 2027. We can start planning now, because the implementation will take five years. It's already 2017 and we don't need to wait another 10 years," said Transport



Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai.

Liow was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Sustainable Urban Transport Summit on Sept 5.

"We will leave the details to the Economic Planning Unit, Land Public Transport Commission and the Prime Minister's Office. We have to work with the different agencies," he said.

Retail sales growth in the first six months was 2.5%, buoyed by improved performance in all retail sub-sectors in 2Q2017. Five out of the six sub-sectors, which saw sales shrink in 1Q2017, did better in the April-June period.

The department store category improved to 15.1% compared with the 0.1% contraction in the January-March period. The department store-cum-supermarket improved to 4.1%, supermarket and hypermarket posted a 0.8% growth, fashion and fashion accessories rose 2.5%, and other specialty stores grew 6.3%. The pharmacy and personal care category continued its positive growth trend in 2Q2017, clocking in a 7.9% increase.

Tower REIT appoints Eusoffe Chua as its CEO

Tower Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) has appointed Chua Song

Yong @ Eusoffe Chua as its CEO effective Sept 5.

The CEO post was left vacant for more than a year. Chua is replacing Teo Juhn How, who resigned on June 8, 2016 to pursue other professional interests.

In a filing with Bursa Malaysia, Tower REIT said Chua, 39, was previously TA Global's head of group sales and marketing as well as head of group leasing and property management.

Before that, he worked for Skateline Malaysia Sdn Bhd from 2005 to 2007 as managing director and took on a regional role as Skateline Pte Ltd's managing director overseeing Skateline's operations in Malaysia and Singapore, said Tower REIT.

The Datai Langkawi closes for restoration

The Datai Langkawi forest and beach resort has closed its doors for a 10-month restoration project, said its operator in a statement.

This is the property's most significant overhaul since opening its doors in 1993 and will entail building new components besides refreshing existing facilities.

The resort's guestrooms, suites and villas will undergo renovations; the retail space will be refreshed while the overall landscaping will be enhanced.

In addition, a nature centre, extra spa pavilions and fitness centre by the beach will be constructed.

Themed Attractions Resorts & Hotels Sdn Bhd, the investment holdings company that manages The Datai Langkawi, declined to disclose the cost of the property's makeover and new facilities.

Taking charge of the makeover is interior designer Didier Lefort, who was also part of the original Kerry Hill Architects team who first worked on The Datai Langkawi.



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Eco Forest show village grand opening

Date: Sept 9 (Sat)

Time: 10am

Venue: EcoWorld Gallery @ Eco Forest 1, Lingkar Eco Forest 1, Eco Forest, Beranang, Selangor

Contact: (03) 8723 2255

EcoWorld invites all to join the grand opening of its Eco Forest show village this weekend. Eco Forest is the latest township project by EcoWorld located nearby Broga Hill, Semenyih. The developer will be showcasing its modern double-storey garden home show units.

Sama-Sama Bon Odori by UEM Sunrise

Date: Sept 10 (Sun)

Time: 5pm to 9.30pm

Venue: The Square, Publika,

Solaris Dutamas, Kuala Lumpur
Contact: (03) 2718 7788

Don your kimonos and yukatas and join UEM Sunrise Bhd at Publika for the Sama-Sama Bon Odori summer festival. Visitors will have the chance to experience both Japanese and Malaysian cultures at the food bazaar, the traditional Yosakoi Soran dance, Bon Odori dance and Malaysia's traditional dances such as Zapin, Joget, Bhangra as well as the 1Malaysia dance.

IJM Land's Lightival

Date: Sept 9 and 10 (Sat and Sun)

Time: 11am to 8pm

Venue: The Atrium, Level 1, Udimi Square, Lebu Tunku Kudin 3, Gelugor, Penang

Contact: (04) 296 1333



IJM Land invites all to its first Lightival, a grand annual celebration of exclusive living featuring some of The Light Waterfront Penang's most exciting and latest offerings. The developer will be offering a range of promotions and packages exclusive for buyers during this two-day event.

Confluent: An artistic tribute to Merdeka and Malaysia Day

Date: Sept 9 to 18 (Sat to Mon)

Time: 10am to 5pm

Venue: 8 Conlay, 8, Jalan Conlay, Kuala Lumpur.

Contact: (03) 2181 0788

In conjunction with this year's National Day and Malaysia Day celebrations, KSK Land and Art WeMe Contemporary Gallery are presenting an international artwork showcase "Confluent", starting from this weekend. The free admission event will feature local and international artworks that collectively touch on the power of confluence, confidence and influence.

Bertam Properties' property roadshow

Date: Sept 7 to 10 (Thurs to Sun)

Time: 10am to 10pm

Venue: Gurney Plaza, Persiaran Gurney, George Town, Penang

Contact: (04) 222 8111

Bertam Properties Sdn Bhd's latest housing developments are being showcased at Gurney Plaza. The developer is one of the main property players in Northern Seberang Perai, which is mainly focused on township development.

OSK Property's Crab-tivating feast

Date: Sept 9 and 10 (Sat and Sun)

Time: 11am to 6pm

Venue: Windmill Upon Hills Sales Gallery, B-P7 & B-P8, Jalan Permai Genting, Genting Highlands, Pahang

Contact: (03) 2161 3322

OSK Property Holdings Bhd invites all to visit Windmill Upon Hills sales gallery and join in a free savoury crab feast. RSVP is recommended. At the same time, one can check out the freehold 5.5-acre serviced apartment project in Genting Highlands.



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Technology and innovation to drive future cities

BY TAN AI LENG & NATALIE KHOO

PETALING JAYA: The concept of building a smart city is not about constructing a new city from scratch but how to improve the daily lives of city dwellers through technology, innovative ideas and sustainable design. And to achieve that would involve the participation of both the private and public sectors.

This was a key takeaway from the Future Forward Forum 2017 held yesterday. Themed "Trends: Insite", the forum was organised by Rehda Youth, the youth division of the Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association Malaysia, in partnership with Nippon Paint Malaysia. TheEdgeProperty.com was the official media partner of Future Forward Forum.

Over 170 participants from the building and construction, green technology and property development industries attended the forum, which featured six speakers of distinct specialisations who took part in active discussions on topics related to sustainability in master plan design, building and practices as well as the usage of big data and technology in building smart cities.

In her welcome remarks, Rehda Youth chairperson Carrie Fong noted that the forum could be a platform for industry players to exchange ideas, discover hidden opportunities and broaden their knowledge as well as help them inject new ideas into their businesses.

"The theme of Future Forward Forum this year, 'Trends: Insite', is a wordplay of what we have seen (insight) and what we could implement in our businesses (on site)," she said.

The one-day forum was divided into two sessions, with the first titled "Future-Planning: Emerging Trends in Sustainable Projects" while the second was titled "Digital Disruption: Programming the Property Industry".



(From left) Pimbley, Au, Ho, Rehda Youth committee member Ethan Lai, Lee, Fong, Patai, Tan, Hu, Nippon Paint (M) Sdn Bhd senior manager Wong Meng Lee and Future Forward Forum organising committee Alex Chew at the forum.

The speakers in the first session were Hong Kong-based Ho & Partners Architects Engineers & Development Consultants Ltd deputy managing director Nicholas Ho, IKEA Southeast Asia (Singapore) head of sustainability Dr Lee Hui Mien and SPARK Architects (Singapore) director Stephen Pimbley.

The speakers for the second session were Builk Asia Co Ltd (Thailand) principal and CEO Patai Padungtin; Shanghai Distrii Technology Development Co Ltd (China) founder and CEO Dr Hu Jing; and Panasonic Malaysia strategic B2B development general manager Tan Chee Hon.

In his session "How SMART can you AFFORD to be?", Ho from Ho & Partners shared his views on how smart design in the construction process could also be affordable and accessible to most people.

He said Design For Manufacturing and Assembly (DFMA) will be the future trend in the construction sector as it could help

reduce cost and dependence on labour as well as shorten building time.

"Research also showed that the implementation of DFMA could reduce the building of double concrete wall and ceiling, and overall construction time could shorten about 30%," he added.

IKEA Southeast Asia's Lee then shared the ways in which the company incorporates sustainability into its development process.

She pointed out that sustainability in the retail business starts from product design as a well-designed long-lasting product could help individuals have a better lifestyle by improving their living environment.

Meanwhile, in his session titled "Connected Architecture", Pimbley from SPARK touched on the importance of incorporating cultural elements in architectural design.

The first session speakers — Ho, Lee and Pimbley — also participated in a panel discussion where they shared more of their

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views on sustainability in city planning and architecture design. The session was moderated by TheEdgeProperty.com managing director and editor-in-chief Au Foong Yee.

Forum participants were also invited to join in interactive online polls on current issues such as China's "One Belt One Road". To provide a visual summary of each session, the organiser had also invited sketch post artist Chan Wai from Scribbilicious to visualise the essence of every session through his sketches. Home-grown cafe operator The Whisk was also on hand to serve participants with fresh brewed coffee.

Andira Park to launch phase 2 mid-Sept following strong sales for phase 1

BY RACHEL CHEW

PUCHONG: Hot on the heels of its very successful Andira Park phase 1 launch, TAHPs Group Bhd is launching phase 2 on Sept 16 and 17.

Located on an 8.33-acre freehold site at the developer's township in Bukit Puchong, the gated-and-guarded landed residential development has a gross development value of some RM100 million.

Phase 1, which was launched on Aug 19 and comprises 38 2-storey and 38 3-storey link villas, recorded full take-up the very next day. Interested buyers had queued up at the sales gallery for the launch since 2am on the day of the launch.

Built-ups for the 2- and 3-storey link villas in phase 1 are 1,583 sq ft and 1,789 sq ft, respectively. The selling price starts from RM686,000.

The upcoming Andira Park phase 2 launch will consist of 64 units of 2- and 3-storey link villas

with similar built-up areas as those in phase 1. There will also be five premier 3-storey terraced homes with built-up areas starting from 2,347 sq ft. The selling price starts from RM668,000.

"The feedback we received from purchasers for phase 1 was overwhelming as seen from the sales transacted.

"Some of the purchasers were not able to secure a unit in phase 1; we have a long list of purchasers who have registered their interest for phase 2," said TAHPs Group CEO Eugene Khoo.

"Given the feedback from purchasers on phase 1, we expect phase 2 to be a success as well. When we launched phase 1 two weeks ago, our purchasers started queuing up from 2am," he told TheEdgeProperty.com.

He added that site-clearing for the project has commenced and the entire project is expected to be completed by August 2019.

LOW YEN YEING | TheEdgeProperty.com



Khoo: The feedback we received from purchasers for phase 1 was overwhelming as seen from the sales transacted.

Artist's impression of Andira Park.





BY LUM KA KAY

Eco Forest's maiden terraced homes launch by year end

SEMENYIH: Cementing its foothold in the growing Semenyih corridor, south of the Klang Valley, Eco World Development Group Bhd (EcoWorld) will be having the first property launch at its latest township development Eco Forest by end-2017. The show village will officially open tomorrow.

The 515-acre freehold development is located less than 1km away from the picturesque Broga Hill and has a gross development value (GDV) of RM3.5 billion, according to EcoWorld divisional general manager Evon Yap.

Eco Forest will kick off its launch at the Ebonylane precinct targeting Semenyih locals and young homebuyers. The precinct will be launched over phases, with the first phase comprising about 300 homes.

There are 685 double-storey terraced homes in the Ebonylane precinct made up of two types of homes — Artisan homes and Garden homes, which will feature a unique A-frame design.

"It took us about six months to study the A-frame design of the homes to make sure it not only looks good but is also practical. Each home will have its own linear garden. Prices will start from RM600,000," said Yap.

Artisan homes will come in three sizes — 20 ft by 65 ft, 20 ft by 70 ft and 22 ft by 70 ft — while the Garden homes are all 30 ft by 62 ft.

The developer has been having private previews of the homes for its existing customers and has received positive feedback.

"Our location here in the Broga corridor has attracted a lot of locals living in this area who would love to upgrade their homes but remain in Broga," said Yap.

In a run-up to the launch, EcoWorld, in partnership with Cartoon Network, organised the We Bare Bears 1001 Expo (ended on Sept 3), which has attracted many to visit the EcoWorld gallery at Eco Forest. The expo featured over a thousand models and inflatable of the famous bears from the popular animated series.

"The expo had caught the attention of those living in Kajang, Sungai Long and Cheras to visit our township," said Yap.

To be developed over eight to 10 years, the township will comprise over 1,800 landed-strata homes, 3,500 apartment units and over 200 commercial units.

Anchored by a 25-acre Central Park, Eco

Forest will introduce new and unique elements to the township including the landscaping of its environment and the design of its homes.

"As one drives into Eco Forest, one will be greeted by a tree trunk-inspired latticed entryway, followed by rows of arching bamboos that will screen off the sun, ushering you into the township.

"Eco Forest's tagline 'Canopy of Artistry' tells everyone the concept of this township, which is inspired by the four layers of the forest — the undergrowth, understory, canopy and emergent layer," Yap told TheEdgeProperty.com.

At the heart of the Central Park will be a giant Woven Tent, which will serve as the pavilion for residents and their friends to gather.

"There will also be a Chirpy Tree where a hundred goldfinches will stand and rotate when the wind blows. On top of that, we have our Forest Dragons, which are monitor lizard-inspired pebble-glass sculptures. Monitor lizards are common in our forest and signify survival, flexibility and nature. They are like the guardians of Eco Forest.

"The Central Park will be completed by end-2018. As it is a catalyst for the entire township, we would like to see the trees grown enough to provide shade for residents when the first homes are handed over," said Yap, who added that more than 10% of the township will be made up of blue belts and green lungs. The Central Park is placed right in the middle of the township, surrounded by the homes which are linked by a cycling path.

Yap said the growing population in the Hulu Langat district offers strong development potential for the Semenyih area.

"I would say Cheras is very mature and saturated already while Kajang doesn't have much land left for such a huge township, so

SHAHNIN YAHYA | THE EDGE MALAYSIA



Yap: Our location here in the Broga corridor has attracted a lot of locals living in this area.

Semenyih bears a lot of potential. The population growth in Hulu Langat is about 9% per annum; in the next few years, the population in this district will reach one million," Yap noted, adding that the area is supported by the popular natural attraction Broga Hill and Nottingham University Malaysia, which is already more than 10 years old.

According to Yap, EcoWorld's first township in Semenyih, the 1,089-acre Eco Majestic with a GDV of RM11.15 billion, has attracted buyers in areas neighbouring Semenyih such as Kajang and Cheras.

"But we realise there are many locals in Broga who are looking to upgrade their homes as well," said Yap.

Eco Forest is about 45 minutes' drive to Kuala Lumpur city centre. It is accessible via the Cheras-Kajang Highway, South Klang Valley Expressway through SILK Highway and Kajang-Seremban Highway.



ECOWORLD

Anchored by a 25-acre Central Park, Eco Forest will introduce new and unique elements to the township.

CK East plans boutique residences in Kayu Ara

BY TAN AI LENG

PETALING JAYA: CK East Group plans to launch a low-rise residential development in Kampung Kayu Ara, Petaling Jaya, sometime during mid-2018.

CK East managing director Ng Chong Kiat told TheEdgeProperty.com that the 5-storey development, which carries an estimated gross development value (GDV) of RM60 million, will comprise 67 units of low-rise apartments and "villas" on top of the apartments.

The development will feature single- and double-storey villas, he added. The single-storey ones will be built on the fifth floor, while the double-storey type will be built on the ground floor. However, all the villas will come with a private swimming pool.

"The development will be built on a 38,000 sq ft leasehold tract near Centrepont Bandar Utama," Ng said.

Initial plans are for 18 villas that will feature a private lap pool in each unit and the rest will be apartment units of varied layouts and sizes. The apartment residents will share a common swimming pool.

Meanwhile, CK East is targeting to launch a 29-unit double-storey terraced house project in Taman Melati, Kuala Lumpur, by the fourth quarter of this year.

"This freehold project has a GDV of RM22 million with an indicative selling price from RM700,000. We haven't decid-

Tan (left) and Ng anticipate the demand for business suites, such as the ones in Rencana Royale (depicted in this scale model), will continue to grow.



LOW YEN YEING | TheEdgeProperty.com

ed on the name for this project," Ng said.

CK East is also the project manager for Rencana Royale (previously called Rencana TTDI), developed by Minda Muhibah Sdn Bhd in Kampung Sungai Penchala, KL.

Rencana Royale is a 2-acre commercial development on Malay reserve land and has a GDV of RM380 million. It comprises two towers of 627 Smart-office Flexible-office units with choices of executive suites, duplex executive suites, deluxe suites, duplex deluxe suites, 2-storey garden suites, retail

lots and corporate suites, as well as two facility floors for business and leisure.

CK East director Tan Aik Huat said Block A, which was launched in 2014, has seen 90% of the 310 business suites being taken up while Block B, which was unveiled in February 2015, has seen 60% of the 317 units sold.

"We have a wide range of buyers from their early twenties to senior citizens who bought for their children for business or for rental investment," he added.

Ng noted that the project is in a strategic

location as it is easily accessible via Penchala Link about 2km away from Taman Tun Dr Ismail (TTDI) and 12km from KL city centre.

Slated to be completed by 2020, the average selling price is RM650 psf with the minimum selling price at RM280,000. The built-ups range from 472 sq ft to 5,000 sq ft for the duplex and corporate suites.

"Prices have increased over the years. The average selling price was around RM600 psf back in 2014 with the minimum selling price from RM250,000," said Ng.

ROUNDTABLE ON THEEDGEPROPERTY.COM-LAFARGE HAPPINESS IN THE CITY INDEX 2017

PICTURES BY LOW YEN YEING | TheEdgeProperty.com



(From left)
Fong, Ezumi,
Legrand, Liew,
Benson, Au and
Ihsan.

How to be happy in the city

BY RACHEL CHEW, NATALIE KHOO & SHAWN NG

TheEdgeProperty.com LAFARGE
Happiness
IN the city INDEX
2017

Keys to a happy city

According to the survey, 77% of respondents ranked safety as the second-biggest concern after the cost of living.

The panellists agreed that a feeling of insecurity over crime and other safety issues has caused a lack of trust among people — even among those living within the same building.

“I think the level of trust even among neighbours is low, which is why security is such a big issue and gated-and-guarded communities are becoming more and more popular,” said Liew.

However, Think City’s Benson believes gated-and-guarded communities are actually segregating people and discouraging them from interacting with others beyond their own community. He also mentioned that a place needs diversity and vibrancy, which could indirectly reduce crime.

“Jane Jacobs once said: ‘The safest street is the busiest street.’ The many eyes on the street and the ownership of the street among its users are what make a safe street. People usually don’t commit crimes in their own neighbourhood,” he offered.

Benson also pointed out that living in a smaller city might be less stressful and makes its residents happier.

“Just like Penang — the survey showed that only 3% of Penang folks were unhappy and very unhappy. It is probably because Penang is smaller, and so it brings people closer together. It is possibly a big part of the reason that Penangites are happier,” he noted.

Some people say small-town folks are often happier than city folks. It may not be so throughout the world but TheEdgeProperty.com-Lafarge Happiness in the City Index 2017 showed that this could be true in Malaysia.

The survey was conducted over a period of one month from April 28 to May 28 to find out how happy Malaysian city dwellers are and what could be done to make their living quality better. The online survey — which focused on the Klang Valley, Johor Bahru and Penang — garnered a total of 1,796 respondents.

The survey showed that only 50% of city folks are happy living in their cities. The question is, how do we add a bit more happiness among the other half, of whom 43% found life in the city tolerable while the rest felt unhappy and very unhappy. Penang, however, stood out as the happiest place

as 77% of respondents there said they were very happy and happy.

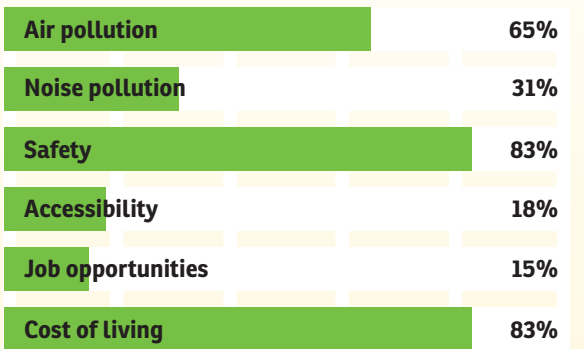
Pondering on the results of the index, panellists at a roundtable on TheEdgeProperty.com-Lafarge Happiness in the City Index 2017 held on Aug 21 endeavoured to first find out the root of the unhappiness among Klang Valley folks and then proceeded to share their thoughts on the attributes of a happy city.

Moderated by TheEdgeProperty.com managing director and editor-in-chief Au Foong Yee, the participants of the roundtable were Lafarge Malaysia president and CEO Thierry Legrand, Think City urban solutions programme director Dr Matt Benson, Rehda Youth chairperson Carrie Fong, Malaysian Institute of Planners (MIP) president Ihsan Zainal Mokhtar, Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) president Ezumi Ismail and Eco World Development Group Bhd executive director Liew Tian Xiong.

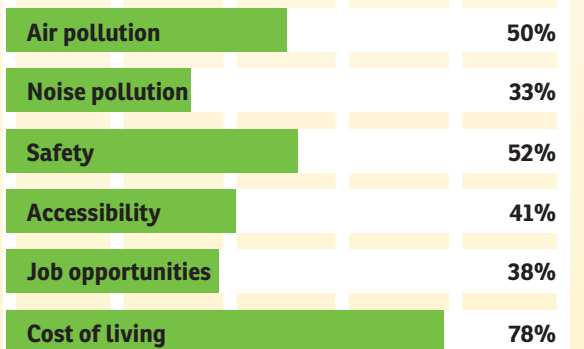
ROUNDTABLE ON THEEDGEPROPERTY.COM-LAFARGE HAPPINESS IN THE CITY INDEX 2017

The biggest concerns about the city

KLANG VALLEY



PENANG

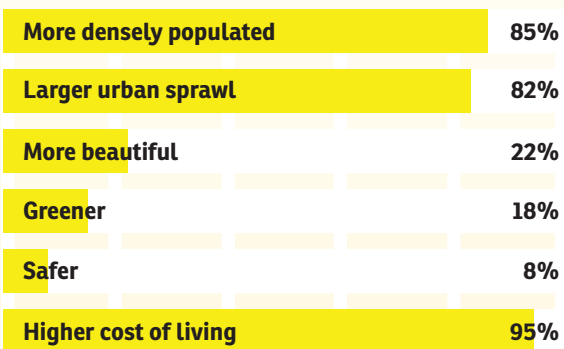


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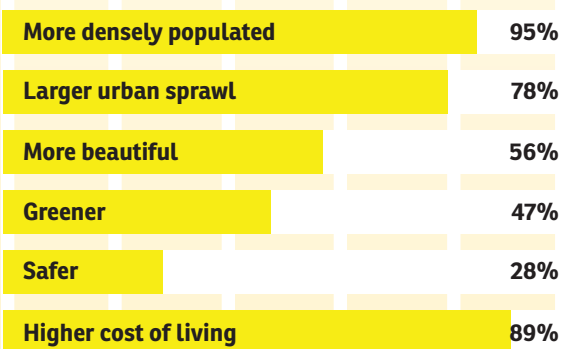


The city in a decade ...

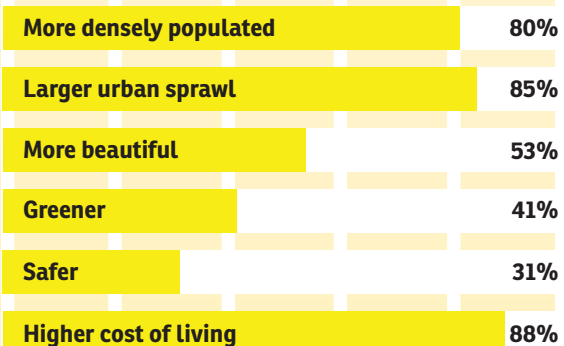
KLANG VALLEY



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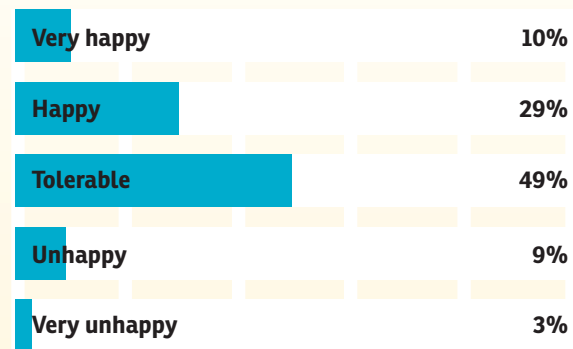


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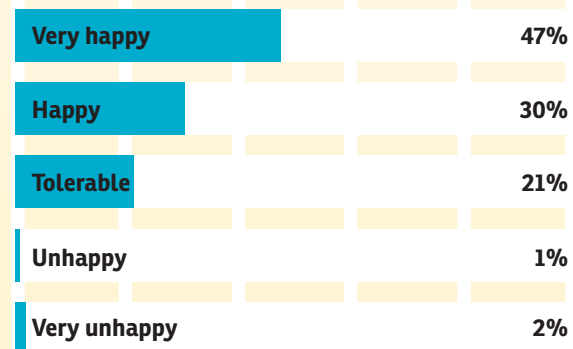


Happiness level in...

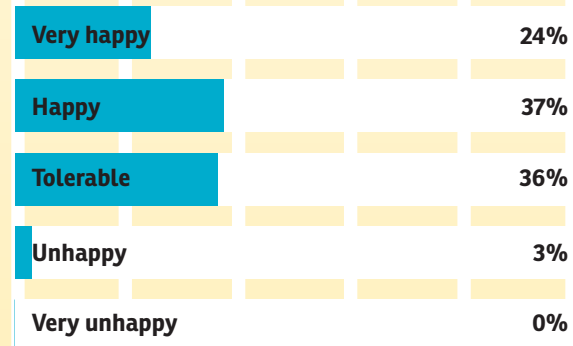
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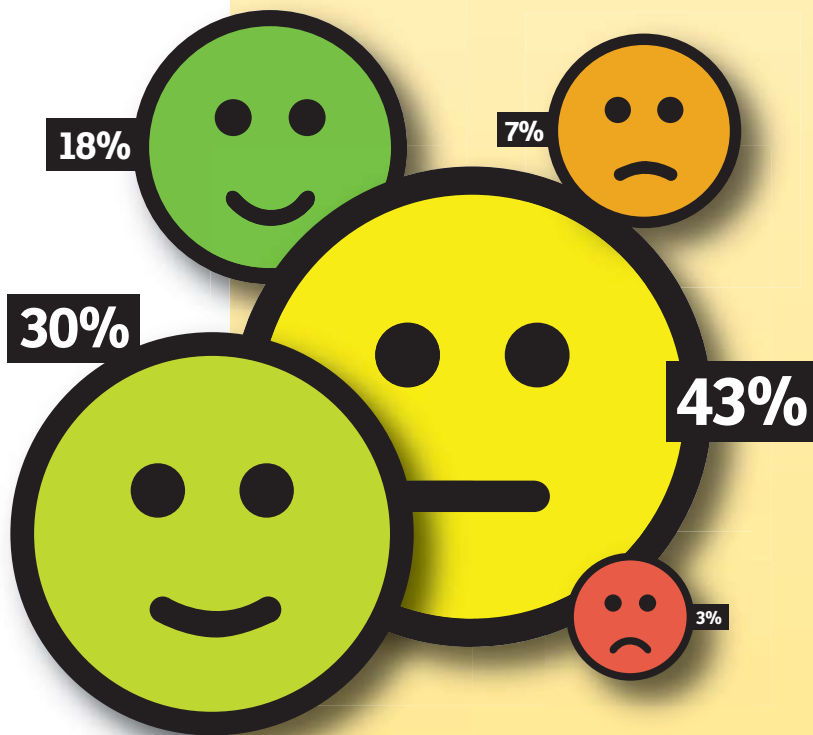
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Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to the fact that participants were allowed to choose more than one answer for the question.

Happiness in the city (overall results)

- Very happy
- Happy
- Tolerable
- Unhappy
- Very unhappy



But, Legrand asked, whose job is it to build happy cities?

"Is it the planner's job? Is it the government's job? I think it is the people's job to think. You know, as a company, we could have stayed with our past goals, which is producing cement and concrete, but we would like to help build better cities. Yes, we are still producing cement and concrete, but we are encouraging people to have ideas and letting them know that they have a small part to play in a bigger role. It's everybody's job," he expressed.

Liveability

Besides safety, MIP's Ihsan pointed out that a city also needs to be liveable. Currently in Kuala Lumpur city, the city centre is more of a commercial hub where people work and do business. However, many cannot afford to live in the city centre.

"A very limited number of people can afford homes in the city. But what happened in Melbourne? It is the world's most liveable city but it started with a lot of problems, such as an oversupply of office space in the city, but they converted them into apartments and attracted people to live in them. That's something we should learn from Melbourne," Ihsan noted.

Benson also felt that Malaysian houses are overpriced and unaffordable to many. In response, Ezumi raised the issue of hidden costs in property development such as the cost of doing business, cost of building infrastructure and subsidies for affordable housing schemes.

However, he believes that normal house prices should be left to market forces while the government takes care of public housing.

A city can also be more liveable when its residents find it easy to walk or cycle from one place to another. "We have too many cars and carbon [in the city]. Walking and cycling are something we can look at. However, it has to be connected to the safety aspect," said Ihsan.

A sense of belonging

What would you do if you were the mayor? Many of the panellists said they want to retain the identity of the city and make the environment safer and more pleasant.

"When you talk about top cities in the world, you remember straightaway their character that you enjoyed. We need to maintain and keep that character in our cities, not hide them," said Re-hda Youth's Fong, citing Eiffel Tower in Paris as example where no development is allowed around the city's landmark so that the iconic skyline and identity can be maintained.

The panellists agreed that a city with its own character can evoke a sense of belonging and identity for its citizens.

"I think a sense of belonging is vital as having ownership on where you live is important. Malaysians like to adapt and follow [foreign] culture, but rather than doing that, we should embrace our own culture and practise it," offered Liew.

CONTINUES NEXT PAGE

ROUNDTABLE ON THEEDGEPROPERTY.COM-LAFARGE HAPPINESS IN THE CITY INDEX 2017

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Think City urban solutions programme director Dr Matt Benson: Happiness in the cities can be measured by happiness indices such as TheEdgeProperty.com-Lafarge Happiness in the City Index 2017 as they can give some indication of people's feelings.

I think, for myself, happiness is about how many people you know. It is about your network and support system. That is what really defines an individual's happiness. Obviously, money counts. A trustworthy government counts. But a big proportion of happiness, particularly in the city, lies in your social network — which includes your immediate family, as loneliness is not something that is going to make you happy. Social direction, social capital and support network — those are some of the things that make a person happy.

Eco World Development Group Bhd executive director Liew Tian Xiong: If you ask me if I'm living happily in KL, the answer is yes. I studied in Melbourne and upon graduating, I came back to Malaysia.

I enjoy living in the Klang Valley, but I don't enjoy going into KL city centre because the traffic is bad. Car parks are difficult to find. Shopping is a very typical thing to do in the city centre, but the brands there [at the malls] can also be found all around the world. Hence, this is why I spend more time in the suburbs like Mont'Kiara, Damansara Heights and Petaling Jaya, where you will get a more unique and localised experience.

I think it is the unique sense of belonging combined with connectivity that makes a place everyone can feel happy to live in.

Lafarge Malaysia president and CEO Thierry Legrand: I have been in KL for two years with my family, and yes, we are happy. The life here is quite easy although there is traffic jam. The public transport is not the best and the green spaces of the city are not comparable to the other cities that I have lived in. But, compared with other places in the region, it is rather good. And we have a community where we can get connected quite easily.

PAM president Ezumi Ismail: I am from Kota Bharu and I stayed in a "kampung" when I was four or five years old. At that time, every morning I followed my grandfather to the restaurant he was operating in the city and then back to the "kampung" in the evening. I am still doing the same thing after I moved to KL. I work in the city and go back to my "kampung" at Bukit Antarabangsa at night.

There are different characteristics of people living in town and those living in the "kampung". In the "kampung", you will know almost everybody there and you can guess a person's behaviour. But in the city, you cannot guess what a person is going to do. Hence, everybody is like an enemy as you don't know whether he or she is a good person or not; whereas in the "kampung", everybody is like your friend.

So, the city folks put up barriers and fences around their living

environment to feel more secure. This, however, actually breaks up the neighbourhood. People lose interaction within their community.

The other thing I observe is that everything has started to become pricey in the city, but in the "kampung", everything is priceless as people share hope together — and you can't buy that kind of relationship.

Legrand: I think the way condos, districts or towns are built will determine whether or not it is easy for people to connect with each other. You have condos that are built in such a way that there is no way you will meet your neighbours. But we also have some places where it is easier to connect with each other.

Benson: I come from Perth and have lived in Melbourne for a while. I have been living in Penang for the past five years. Penang is top of the list [in being happy] in the survey, isn't it? If that is true, I would suggest it is probably because Penang is smaller, and so it brings people closer together. It is possibly a big part of the reason.

Rehda Youth chairperson Carrie Fong: I'm from Ipoh and our family moved to KL when I was six as my father found that there

were more job opportunities in the city. Since then, I have been living in KL, so I cannot imagine living outside the city but I can imagine living in different cities.

The city is going to have a greater influx of population. The World Economic Forum has estimated that there will be another 2.5 million people coming into the city. As the city has a life of its own and needs to constantly grow and adapt, we need to find ways to ensure that despite development growth, people are not left behind. You can see in some countries — for instance, in China — where the development is going at such a rapid pace that some are worried whether or not the people can keep up with it.

MIP president Ihsan Zainal Mokhtar: I'm happy to be here but I'm not happy on my way here [Petaling Jaya] because of the traffic and to be caught in a jam. And like what Ezumi said, I'm happy with the people around me, my community. I stay in Shah Alam where it is less dense and is a mixed community.

On what Liew said — he is happy in the city but the city itself has problems such as not being very walkable. We are not taking full advantage of the city centre and this is probably why our youngsters are very car-oriented. KL is actually so much better than it was and it is truly wonderful to walk — along the river, Dataran Merdeka and Medan Pasar — compared to a few years back.

And there is no city in the world that has the oldest virgin forest right smack in the city centre — the Bukit Nanas Forest Reserve. Sometimes we fail to tell that story. So I think we should walk more in the city, as that will make us happier and healthier.

As for gated communities and safety, among other things, I think it is a failure of our system and community. Like Ezumi said, these gated communities are actually creating enclaves and separating people, so I think we are going in the wrong direction. For me, real

happiness is about getting to know new friends and feeling safe and comfortable in the city.

Au: That's a good point about people putting up fences because it is inevitable due to security reasons. In fact, 77% of respondents in our survey ranked safety as the second-biggest concern after the cost of living.

Fong: When you segregate people within gated communities, it is kind of like schools, right? Like you belong to this school while I belong to that school, but the schools don't really mix. So imagine we have inter-township games — let's say, a swimming gala to get people to mix with each other.

Ihsan: Yes, but there is a cheaper way to do it. We have gated communities because we don't feel safe, that is the general reason. Carrie [Fong] pointed out correctly about inter-community activities to get people to interact more. But for designers like me and Ezumi, what we are more concerned with is the need to have more public spaces that belong to everybody.

The work that I do is to create public places that you want to go to and you feel safe being there. There are many things that we can actually do to enjoy the city life besides shopping.

Legrand: I like walking very much, but KL is unlike Paris, where there will be some walk-

ways for pedestrians in the city. In KL, sometimes you have to take your car and go the long way to get to a place, even though it is just within walking distance, because there is no other way for you to get there. Hence, I think it is the way we do the connection.

Ihsan: You are right — it is called barriers. We need to create a barrier-free city; give KL a chance of being barrier-free and get the community more involved. We are doing it now; we are slowly picking up. Compared to 10 to 15 years ago, there is now more participation in urban design in the city. It is still quite new for us.

Consider the recent incident in Taman Tun Dr Ismail [in KL] where the people are not happy with the proposed public housing coming up on green space. At least now we have the avenue to question the government. It is something impossible 10 years back as people would not have questioned [such a proposed development] at that time.

Ezumi: To have a barrier-free city, we need to first tackle the crime rate. I have observed that in Putrajaya, the originally fenceless terraced [homes] are being fenced up because of crime. I think we have failed to control crime properly.

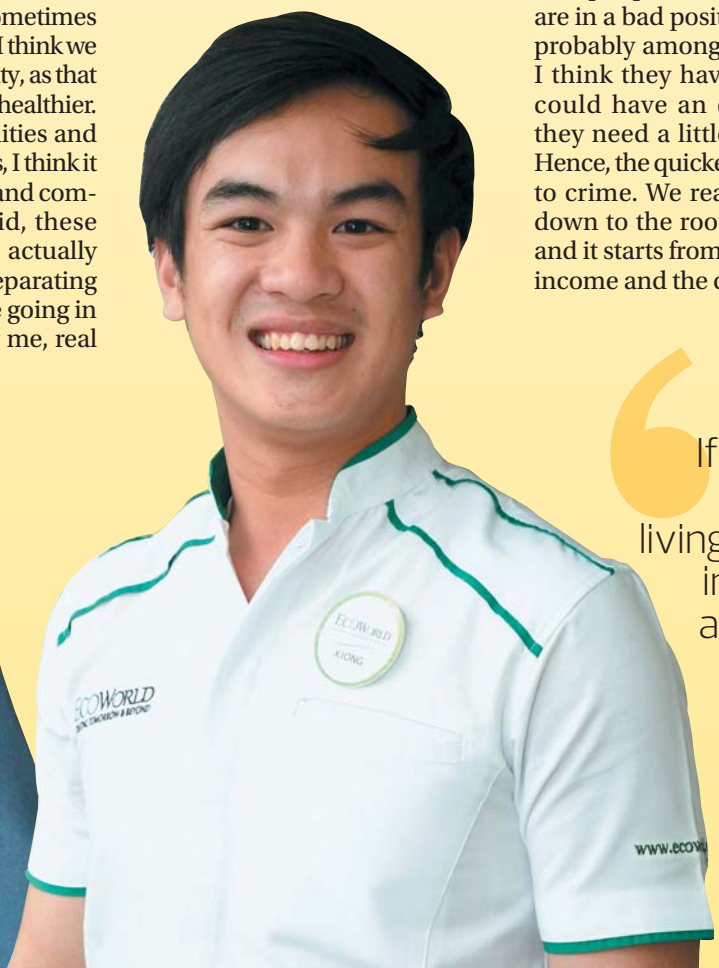
Benson: So does putting up more barriers create less opportunities for crime [to take place]? If you take Medan Pasar in downtown KL as an example, it doesn't feel particularly safe at night. One reason people don't go there is nothing is open. This reminds me of what Jane Jacobs said: "The safest street is the busiest street." The eyes on the street and the ownership of the street is what make it the safest street.

Fong: I've been a [crime] victim three times! We really need to look at the root cause of the problem. The people who are doing this are in a bad position and they are probably among the urban poor. I think they have jobs, but they could have an emergency and they need a little bit more cash. Hence, the quickest way is to resort to crime. We really need to drill down to the root of the problem and it starts from education, jobs, income and the cost of living.

Are you happy?

TheEdgeProperty.com editor-in-chief Au Foong Yee: Being happy is very important. Otherwise, what is life all about? So, my question is — are you happy?

"Happiness is about how many people you know."
— Benson



"If you ask me if I'm living happily in KL, the answer is yes."
— Liew

How to build a liveable city?

Au: Matt [Benson], you have touched on a very interesting point about Medan Pasar. In your opinion, what needs to be done? Is there a role for the government or the people themselves, or maybe a combination?

Benson: I think the answer is a combination. It is not a person or an organisation's responsibility. So there are people like the MIP, PAM and Think City — all these organisations have some obligations to address this issue. Meanwhile, the business owners, property owners, migrant community and even the homeless have some responsibility.

To be fair, Medan Pasar is a transitional space with bus stops and other public transportation. In a transitional space where there is less ownership, safety issues will be created. People usually don't commit crime in their own neighbourhood and I remember someone said a few years ago: "The best thing to turn off a crime is a mother with a child." So having a family presence in an area will actually change the way people see the space. I think we need more diversity of lives in the area.

Legrand: I have lived in really different environments. From a safety point of view, I truly believe that safety is fundamental for good quality of life. It is a combination of a lot of things — enforcement, clean and beautiful places, and many, many other elements to prevent crimes from developing.

Liew: When we first launched our projects in Eco Majestic, Semenyih, we were selling terraced homes without walls and partitions to separate the roofs, but one of our customers asked us to build the wall so that the neighbour can't climb over and break into his house through the roof.

If you are going to live in that area, you should trust your neighbours and if you do not trust them, why would you live in the area? I think the current level of trust, even between neighbours, is low. Hence, gated-and-guarded communities are becoming more and more popular. But like what Ihsan said, even with a gated-and-guarded community, you need proper planning to integrate the public spaces, so that you can move from one area to the next area safely.

I think a good example is Desa ParkCity. Despite its exclusivity, it is a very brought-together community where residents interact with each other a lot and are able to enjoy outdoor activities. That is what we [EcoWorld] are trying to do as well.

So apart from just building gated-and-guarded homes, it is essential to ensure that residents feel secure while encouraging activities among them. The role of a developer is not just to build and hand over the homes to their customers. It is about bringing together the community and to sustain the longevity of the township, so that a culture that is unique to the township is created.

Au: In terms of liveability, how do we compare with other cities in the world?

Benson: Like Penang.

Ihsan: Yes, what is it about Penang that makes it safe and exciting? It's the vibrancy. It's like there is a festival all the time. You don't have this in any other cities in the country. A mosque, a church and Chinese temple in the same place.

Benson: That counts. But the thing I want to say is unfortunately, or fortunately, most people in Penang are from Penang, whereas people in KL come from all over the country. Do you have a family network? Do you have an attachment to the city?

Ezumi: There is a sense of ownership in Penang. Some of the old uncles and aunties have been doing the same things for the past 10 years. They know they can change their lives if they want to but they choose not to change and they keep doing the same thing. They sell coffee at the coffee shop, the original way. But there's one thing I want to mention here. We talk a lot about the hardware of the cities — the city design, the landscape, the softscape, the buildings. But we don't really talk about the software of the city. This is a good start for us to talk about happiness. Happiness is a software.

We cannot physically measure happiness by the size of your car or house. We need to look at the software as well. A city with built environment is not enough. We need more activities. We need to be aware and focus on the emotions and beliefs of the people.

Au: And whose job is it to create awareness and to instil this sense of belonging?

"I truly believe that safety is fundamental for good quality of life."
— Legrand

Legrand: Is it the planner's job? Is it the government's job? I think it is the people's job to think.

As a company, we could have stayed with our goal in the past, which is producing cement and concrete.

Now, if we want to get people motivated and emotionally linked to the company, we need to have something with more value that they can contribute to. Then we came to building better cities and helping others build better cities — I mean, people working on all kinds of solutions. And this works. I can see the level of motivation and engagement we can get and it has nothing to do with cement production. Yes, we are still producing cement and concrete but we are encouraging people to have ideas and letting them know they have a small part of a bigger role. It's everybody's job.

I have lived in Paris — you see everyone commuting from many countries to Paris or London and they are emotionally linked to the city very quickly even if their parents came from Greece or Perth, for instance. I feel it is very important to develop the heritage and the ability to embrace the heritage.

Benson: Take Penang, for example. Because we [Think City] have been there the longest, our programme there is a bit more matured, and it [a sense of belonging] is not necessarily the direct result of the city. Data showed volunteerism and membership of societies have increased over the last eight to 10 years. I think, partially, when George Town received the Unesco world heritage status, there is something to attach yourself to. For some of the old family groups that used to be part of the "kongsi", there is increased ownership. But I suspect it is not so much about the urban regeneration as it is about Unesco and heritage and worldwide recognition of this space. But on the ground, the ownership of spaces is not easy — it is a difficult thing.

Ihsan: At the end of the day, one has to feel like this city belongs to him or her. That they are part of the city. Let me

just divert a bit. I think Malaysia should start giving more power to the local government for local governance. We are mature enough to say the day-to-day running of the city should be given to the people.

When you ask me, "where do you want to live?", I say here. I know we are changing — it is a long battle but we are changing as a country, city, people. And what Lafarge is doing is great. We should find solutions together.

Liew: A sense of belonging is actually an aspect of community living. Like I said earlier, the uniqueness of a place can evoke a sense of belonging. At EcoWorld's projects, we do not have a cookie-cutter template. In one of our projects, Eco Ardence, for instance, we have etched out 26 acres out of the 533 acres together with the lake to house recycled containers, which will form a lifestyle as well as food and beverage hub — Ardence Labs. We are encouraging new businesses, home-grown local brands to use this as a platform to link the entire township.

And through our bicycle lanes and pedestrian walkways, we get people to walk and cycle as their everyday experience.

Au: On public transportation and connectivity — do you agree it is crucial for a better city? Ihsan, I recall that you believe in trams?

Ihsan: Yes, yes, I do. When I was in charge of the Urban Design Guidelines for KL, I first mentioned about trams in a meeting and there were actually sniggers in the room. The tram is what we

call the last-mile connection. It's hop on and hop off. It works in Melbourne; it works in Vancouver; it works in European cities. And it can work with us.

If cost is an issue, bus lanes can work too. Our bus lanes, however, need a bit of tweaking. You know, our bus lanes are on the left.

In places like Curitiba, Brazil, the bus lanes are in the middle and they connect people to the other side of the street via overheads, underpasses or undergrounds, and it works fine. That's the thing you want. Trams will give a certain character to the place. We are going that way — we have free buses like the GoKL.

Benson: SPAD [Land Public Transport Commission] is doing a feasibility study on that now. I agree with Ihsan that the city centre serves a commuter population. It is great to get in and out of the city but not around the city. So, I take your point on the last mile. It will improve the internal mobility within the city centre.

Legrand: During the summer, I went back to my own small hometown in France where it is known for its middle-age heritage. There were a lot of tourists and activities there. For instance, you may find yourself suddenly playing a game with someone else, and this connects people.

Fong: I have to admit the covered walkways in KL city centre and the lighting have improved especially at night. The money DBKL [KL City Hall] has spent to build all this is great.

Ihsan: We are all for sustainability. Too many cars, too much carbon. Walking and cycling are something we can look at. But safety is important.

I am not keen on elevated paths because once you are up above the footpath, you are taking the people away from the street experience, which is supposed to be the best experience.

Fong: Places like Hong Kong have elevated paths because one can walk to criss-cross the buildings.

Ezumi: Twenty years ago, a proposed 22km elevated walkway in KL city was rejected because it was feared it might spoil the character of the city. Back in 1997, the only rapid rail line we had was the STAR LRT. Since then, you can't see the façade of Jalan Tun Perak.

CONTINUES NEXT PAGE

"The covered walkways in KL city centre and the lighting have improved."
— Fong



ROUNDTABLE ON THEEDGEPROPERTY.COM-LAFARGE HAPPINESS IN THE CITY INDEX 2017

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Does owning a home make you happier?

Au: Nature is said to be able to make people happier and healthier. If that is so, what do we need to do to make our space a little bit more green?

Ezumi: One of the things we can do is urban farming. It will work if we really want to. But people would rather go to the supermarket to buy vegetables. We are blessed with many cheap things. Cheap water, cheap electricity, cheap petrol and cheap parking. This is one of the reasons we have so many problems because everything is cheap. Every time I mention something related to prices, people would say because I have money. That's not true. One of the reasons why opportunities are rare in certain places is because everything is cheap. For example, curry puff here is RM1 for one, but in some "kampung" they are still selling five for RM1. This is why people are still living in the "kampung" because it is cheap, but they don't have much opportunity to really make money. However, they are happy. But here in the city, we have money and can buy everything. That's why we are more careless. Sometimes it is very difficult to get a good balance.

Au: Is the provision of public spaces in townships sufficient? Could we do more?

Fong: The great thing about the townships built today is that developers are not just trying to attract residents but are also place-making.

Take, for instance, Desa Park-City; I know that there are many people who will travel all the way there just to use the spaces — they don't live there. Besides the city, the decentralised areas with dense working communities also need public spaces and green areas.

The Taman Tugu initiative to create a central park in KL city is a great initiative. Such initiatives should also be from the government and not just the private sector.

I wish to add that our young people have a great sense of belonging. I think the number of social enterprises initiated by young people who want to improve the city and retain its culture is great.

Ihsan: Definitely, definitely. There's a difference between the public place and the public space. A public space is the road, the paths. But a public place is where you want to be and want to go because it is happening. It's a place that excites you; it's a safe place.

We have a ready-made culture for 24/7 activities. We have the Chinese who eat breakfast early in the morning and supper late

at night again. You have the Muslims who wake up early and go to the mosque. It is a nice mix, you see.

We have missed this opportunity to tap on the richness of our culture to make our city safer and happier. These are the things that we, as a planner, need to look at.

Whenever I am being interviewed, I always say awareness is important. Public awareness, whatever you do in the city, has an effect. You can't talk about housing for a certain income group without thinking of the rest of the society.

You see, Malaysia used to provide low-cost houses that were merely boxes — boxes with windows and a door you can kick down. There is no privacy. That's one thing we have failed with public housing. And throughout the years, what has happened is we have abused certain words in our financing system. Now people talk

about affordable, affordable, affordable. But I keep asking, affordable to who?

Is it affordable to the banks to give the loans because you have that much salary so you can afford to take that loan? But it is not really affordable. You are taking a big chunk of somebody's basic income and leaving him with very little to survive. I think Malaysia needs to change.

We need to change our mindset of owning a house. We don't need to own a house anymore. It is an ideal. You see in Malaysia, what makes you successful? I graduate, I have a car, I have a house. A better car, a better home.

Ezumi: And you have a loan to pay.

Benson: Correct me if I am wrong — I think Malaysia has one of the highest home ownership rates

in the world. It's like over 70%, whereas in European countries, it is only 50% to 60%.

Ihsan: Yes, that's the benchmark that we set. If you can't afford to buy a house, the government and developers could come up with public housing. All the low-cost, so-called "affordable housing" are not in the city centre — they are way out. People will then have to spend money on transport. Really, it is like punishing people for being poor. Stay away, spend more on your public transport, pay for a house you can't really afford. That's putting things in a nutshell. People might not agree with this kind of thinking, but this is what is happening. What you want to do is pull people back to the centre, so that it is cheaper.

Benson: I would like to make three comments if I may. First comment: KL particularly has a very high proportion of household income and transport cost — one of the highest in Asia. It is a reflection of the layout of KL. Second comment: It's not so simple about people living in the city centre — we know that

the population of citizens in the city centre has declined and perhaps it is also about jobs. Where are the jobs? Are they in the city centre? Third comment: In Australia, we have stopped talking about affordable housing decades ago, and now we are talking about housing diversity. Generally speaking, I think Malaysia used to be like that. I think over the last two decades, I have seen more and more segregation between the rich and poor. It's not race, it's class.

Ezumi: We shouldn't look at pricing. We have to look at whether it is affordable to own, to live or to grow. That is affordability of a home. There were houses in Rawang that were sold for RM40,000 to RM50,000 just four years back but nobody wanted to stay there, because there were no jobs, no transport, no opportunity there. The house is affordable in terms of price but is not affordable for people to live there.

So when we look at affordable housing, we need to look at all the factors — it must be affordable to live there, to find jobs and activities there and to grow. We should also look at how the community can grow.

“When we look at affordable housing, we need to look at all the factors — it must be affordable to live there, to find jobs and activities there and to grow.”
— Ezumi

“To me, comfort is the most important thing in no matter what kind of housing.”
— Ihsan



ROUNDTABLE ON THEEDGEPROPERTY.COM-LAFARGE HAPPINESS IN THE CITY INDEX 2017

Legrand: From our [Lafarge's] perspective, we also look at how new solutions can ease the cost of building houses. There are still a lot we can do to build affordable houses for those who want to buy. This is one axis we are putting a lot of our energy on. The way we build our houses is still very traditional but we can build our houses quicker and with good quality.

Ezumi: I also want to mention something about privacy in affordable housing. People think that a lack of privacy in affordable housing is a failure, but the way I look at it, the lack of privacy is a success. The reason why people don't really share common places and are not going to public places is because they are too comfortable in their houses. They have everything at home.

I'm trying to relate it to a "kampung" house. It is just one house and no privacy, so you stay at home only at night, while during day time you go outside. You go to common places where you can meet a friend.

If you have your own room with everything in it, you will not go out — siblings may not talk to each other or father and children probably meet only once a day

even though they are staying in the same house. This is because there is too much privacy inside the house. That is why I don't think too little privacy is a failure. Probably we should change, make it less private in the home.

Maybe affordable housing can have less privacy as a starting point. You don't need so many rooms. People try to relate to social problems caused by lack of privacy but I believe that it is the other way around. Less privacy will make people behave better.

Ihsan: When you are talking about "kampung", you can just walk out of the house. But in a 600 sq ft urban housing on the 20th floor where you live with three children, it is stressful when you live in such a small place without privacy. Some houses even have such low ceilings that tall people will hit their heads!

But I agree that a low-cost project can be nicely designed and be a comfortable house that looks good as well. I'm not saying we should be a communist society, but to me, comfort is the most important thing in no matter what kind of housing.

Ezumi: I think "affordable housing" is to sell it in its actual value.

It is not about bringing down the price but by increasing the income.

Benson: Frankly speaking, I think Malaysian houses are overpriced. It is not affordable to many.

Ezumi: That is for the high-end. But today, developers are forced to sell houses at RM42,000 while the construction cost and land price are RM50,000.

The house you buy at RM600,000 actually costs RM400,000 — the remaining RM200,000 is to [cross] subsidise the affordable housing schemes. The price of a house includes costs such as infrastructure. The cost of doing business is high. There are a lot of hidden costs that a developer has to pay.

Ihsan: Even if they build low-cost housing, are developers going to close down? No, they are just making less profit. It is the social function of a developer. I mean, developers make money!

Au: This is very interesting. What do you see as the role of the government in this?

Ihsan: We are talking about the social system now. Are we going to get the market to think about public housing? Low-cost and

subsidised housing is a small portion. The big one is the middle-income group who is finding it hard to buy a RM200,000 to RM300,000 house. That is the worry and that is the gap!

Ezumi: Why is that the gap? You see, the house is supposed to be sold at RM200,000, they marked up to RM400,000 to subsidise the social houses. That's why you see the gap.

Ihsan: I do not agree. But my conclusion is those [mid-range] houses are overpriced. I do believe the government has a role, and so do the developers as well as the banking system.

We are talking about affordability and very limited people can afford homes in the city. But what happened in Melbourne? It is the world's most liveable city but it started with a lot of problems, such as oversupply of offices in the city. These were converted into apartments. That's something we should learn from Melbourne.

So where are we going? We have these cities to learn from, so let's not do the same mistakes. The solution that Melbourne provided was when there is an office oversupply, they converted them into homes in the city centre. I'm not

saying let's do that tomorrow, but that's probably the solution to office oversupply and getting people back into the city. Maybe some people do not agree with what the government is doing, but I think the focus on public transport is right — this is the way forward.

Ezumi: The objective of a private entity is to make money, no doubt. The government is not supposed to make money from the people, so how to balance this?

If the developer sells a house at RM1 million which is valued at RM200,000, let it be. But the government has to balance it by creating houses priced at RM200,000. That will balance it out. This is a natural correction because people will go for the government [built] houses. So what will private developers do? They will need to bring down the price. This is market forces.

Ihsan: We allow market forces and we also allow selling at prices beyond the value and selling property to foreigners. We have accepted it as a negative problem but not changing it to something positive. This is a worldwide phenomenon.

Attributes of a happy city

Au: Name three attributes of a happy city.

Ihsan: The people have to be happy, the environment has to be taken care of and we have to feel safe.

Fong: I think happiness in the city is about inclusiveness for people of all races, gender, religions and social groups. Basic amenities must be accessible to people from all social groups. Also, a city's identity must be maintained. When you talk about the best cities in the world, you identify their character; it is something you will remember and enjoy of the city. Just like Eiffel Tower, there is no development allowed around the tower in order to maintain the best view of the skyline, thus maintaining Paris' identity. We have the Twin Towers in KL and right now, I'm a bit concerned because it is a bit overshadowed by other upcoming skyscrapers. I am being emotional maybe because I feel a sense of belonging to this city. We need to maintain our identity.

Ezumi: A city has to be liveable — where people do not harm each other. It has to be loveable and memorable. Every time people come to the city, they love the city and remember the city so they

will come again and even live in the city.

Legrand: I like the idea of inclusiveness. A city has to be inclusive for different ages — the young, the family and old people. All people should be able to stay and enjoy the city. Green and sustainable are the second attribute, and third is being connected and beautiful. I think KL is beautiful.

Liew: Apart from safety and connectivity, I think a sense of belonging or having ownership of where you live is important. Culture is also important. Malaysians like to adapt and follow other people's culture, rather than embrace our own culture.

Benson: According to the Global Happiness Report in 2016, Malaysia was ranked 42 out of 150. Not too bad. But my one word to move up the happiness level is to have more "kampung-ness".

Au: If you were the mayor, what would be your top three priorities?

Ihsan: First would definitely be to improve connectivity

and make the city barrier-free because once you make spaces connected and get more people into the city, I think people will be happier. Secondly is to improve public places. Thirdly, put effort into providing safer homes in the city. The city belongs to everyone.

Fong: I don't know if I can influence but I would like to create more jobs and maybe bring in more regional offices. You know, regional offices are hardly based in KL but in Singapore and Hong Kong. It is quite sad because I think we have a lot to offer, such as cheaper rents for the same amenities and infrastructure, but we just don't have that crowd.

The next one is architectural. We have a lot of eco, green architecture. I would love to cooperate with more local artists and turn our buildings into something that can tell our city's character. I think Penang is our best example, as well as Melaka.

Many old heritage shops are forced to move into malls. We are going to lose the affordability or the ability to find RM1.50 nasi lemak because we are moving the retailers into establishments that come at a higher cost.

Ezumi: I think if I had the opportunity, I would listen to the people, gather the people and work together with them. But first I would like them to believe we can do this thing together.

The first thing I would like to do is get the houses built in the city centre. I believe I can solve the problem but I know many do not believe this. I would want to take the opportunity to prove that it can be done.

We no longer have problems with joblessness. We just need to create activities and give people more opportunities. We can put talents together and provide them chances to sustain in the city while retaining our culture. For example, we can provide handicraft training and jobs, such as wood crafting or wau and wayang kulit making.

I know there are still a number of people who are masters in these skills. We can ask them to transfer their skills to others. If you can get this model successful, people will start believing in you. But we have to work together.

Legrand: I think connectivity and raising the visibility of the country's heritage is what I will do. What strikes me in

the TheEdgeProperty.com-Lafarge Happiness in the City Index 2017 survey was that so many people are not optimistic that the city will be better in 10 years.

If I were the mayor, I would invite more collaborations, debates and contributions from all over the nation and beyond the nation. I would wish to create more engagement.

Liew: I would focus on the details of the town planning, such as how you walk from one end to another end, how you walk from home to the neighbourhood coffee shop; how the place is maintained; and how to maintain our culture and promote it rather than let it die off.

Benson: For me, it is all about building up the teamwork and connectivity between government agencies and people.

Legrand: What about you, Foong Yee? What are your thoughts?

Au: For me, it is about the people, community, integration, joining the dots and a sense of belonging. The trust factor placed in the system is key. I feel we are now in a trust deficit of how things are managed and organised. We need to overcome and change the negative perception. This is urgent as such negative sentiments could lead to self-fulfillment.

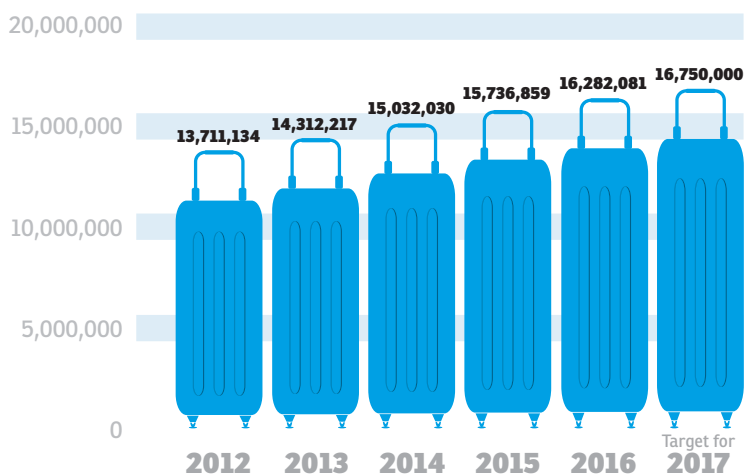


Where to shop in Melaka



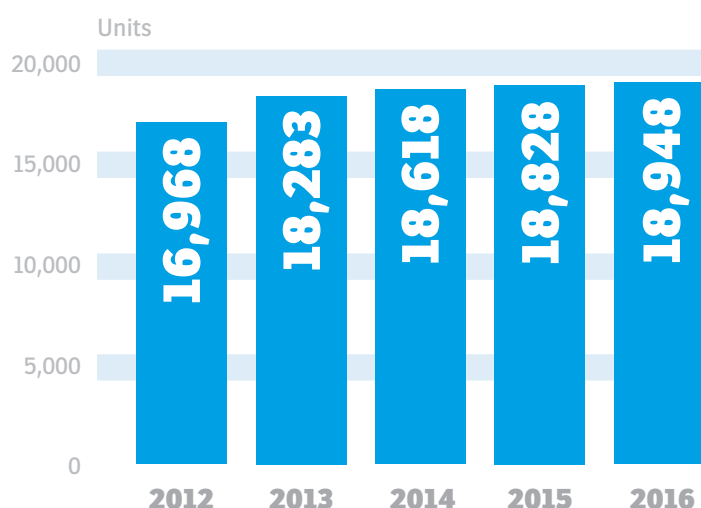
Tourist arrivals in Melaka

Tourist arrivals in Melaka are expected to grow this year based on consistent increase in the past five years



SOURCE: TOURISM MELAKA

Supply of shops in Melaka on an uptrend



SOURCE: NAPIC

BY SHAWN NG

Recognised for its emblematic historical edifices and favoured for its array of delicacies and cuisines, Melaka is a popular destination for visitors near and far.

This is evident from the rising number of tourists over the years. According to Tourism Melaka, about 16.28 million tourists visited Melaka in 2016, of whom 68.93% were locals.

It is the highest ever tourist arrivals recorded by the state and 3.5% higher than the 15.74 million tourists registered in 2015. The target tourist arrival for 2017 is 16.75 million, an increase of about 2.87% compared to last year, the tourism office tells TheEdgeProperty.com.

In tandem with the positive tourist arrivals, shophouses have been mushrooming in Melaka city as more businesses emerge to cater to the growing tourist market.

However, the rise in the number of shophouses has not turned out to be good news for this commercial property market segment in the historical city.

Oversupply

According to Jordan Lee & Jaafar Sdn Bhd Melaka branch manager Lee Thiam Sing, there is an oversupply of shophouses in Melaka. And because of that, he adds,

“the vacancy rate [for shophouses] in Melaka is higher now”.

Most of the vacant shop units are located in Pulau Melaka, Taman Kota Syahbandar, Taman Kota Laksamana Jaya and some areas close to Pulau Melaka in Melaka Raya.

He says the mismatch in supply and demand is the reason behind the oversupply situation. “Outsiders would think that it is always crowded in Melaka city because they visit the state during the peak periods, but it is actually a false impression. There are not as many occupied properties in town as many would perceive.”

The problem, says Lee, has caused the retail shop units market in some locations to soften and vacancy rates are creeping up. “We actually do not need that many shophouses in Melaka,” he opines.

Data from the National Property Information Centre (Napic) showed that the supply of shophouses in Melaka has been gradually increasing over the past few years. There were 18,948 shops as at end-2016 and the first quarter of this year (1Q2017) — an addition of 1,980 units or 11.67% from end-2012 and an increase of 120 units or 0.64% from end-2015.

Looking ahead, the future supply of shophouses in the state stood at 7,358 units as at 1Q2017.

A Melaka-based real estate agent concurs with Lee. He says the oversupply of shops started

about two to three years ago.

“The tourism industry in Melaka is doing quite well, but overall the population is still not big enough to support and absorb the supply of shop units,” says the agent, who does not want to be named.

He draws attention to the shophouses situated along Jalan Limbongan to Kota Laksamana area, which are only 30% to 40% occupied. Completed about five years ago, some of shophouses are still vacant.

“Even some unit owners in a shopping mall have approached us to market their units, which shows that there is not enough demand here, so I’m a bit worried looking at the future supply of some 7,000 units,” he adds.

Twincrest Properties real estate negotiator Choo Yu Fong, who specialises in Melaka properties, says that it is a tenant’s and buyer’s market in the state now due to the slowdown in the Melaka property market.

The lack of human traffic during off-peak seasons in the state has resulted in a challenging business environment. “When there are not enough people, businesses are very hard to sustain and forced to close down. This has caused the rents for shophouses to weaken this year,” she says.

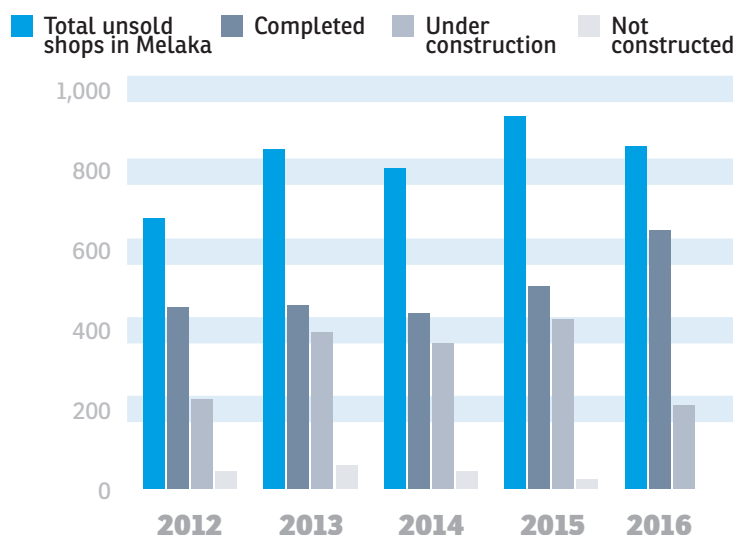
Where are the hotspots?

Despite the lacklustre property market, CBRE|WTW Melaka



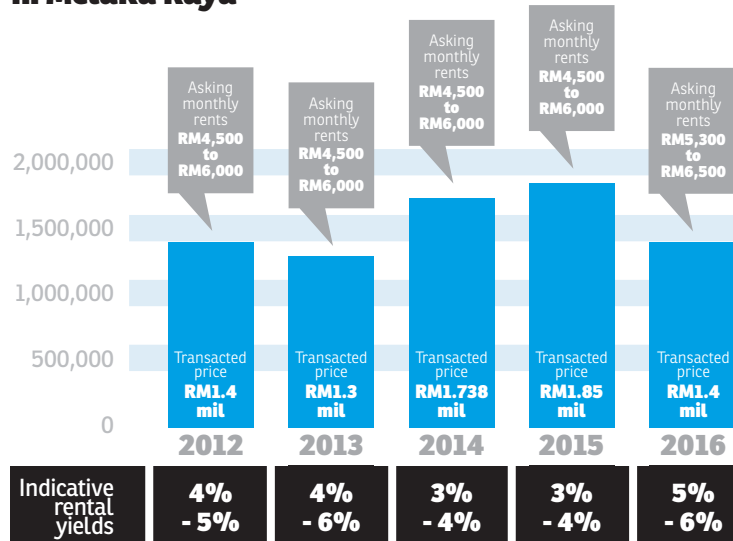
Shophouses along the Melaka River.

Total number of unsold shops in Melaka



SOURCE: NAPIC

Rental yields of 3-storey, 1,540 sq ft shopoffices in Melaka Raya



SOURCE: CBREIWTW

Positive growth

Going forward, Teh anticipates prices and rents of shophouses in Melaka Raya to continue gradually rising as the medium-term outlook and growth for the tourism industry remains very positive.

However, he warns that it would not be wise for investors to expect rental and price growths to remain constantly high, as one can't tell the future and negative events such as the MH370 tragedy and global economic crisis may occur occasionally and impact business confidence and the tourism industry.

He notes that shophouse prices in Melaka Raya weakened from RM1.4 million in 2012 to RM1.3 million in 2013 before they moved into an uptrend in 2014. On the other hand, rentals had remained stagnant for three years from 2013 to 2015 before increasing strongly in 2016.

According to data from Naptic, 11 housing schemes in the state saw their ground floor shops record a year-on-year double-digit growth in monthly rents in 2016, namely Taman Melaka Raya, Prime Square in Bandar Hilir, Taman Kota Laksamana, Taman Pertam Jaya, Taman Peringgit Jaya, Taman Malim Jaya, Taman Ayer Keroh Heights, Taman Teknologi Cheng, Taman Cheng Permai, Taman Rambai Jaya and Taman Angkasa Nuri.

With annual growth rates of between 11% and 25%, all the projects are located in Melaka Tengah, with the exception of Taman Angkasa Nuri, which is in Alor Gajah.

Commenting on the strong double-digit growth, Teh believes it is due to the rental revision of lease renewals every three years, which translates into an annual compounded growth rate of 3.5% to 4.5%.

"Looking at the growth in tourism-related commercial activities over the past three years, we are not surprised with this growth rate. Primarily, the strong shopoffice demand and rental growth is being driven by the consistently above-average growth of tourism-related businesses such as F&B, accommodation, tour operators, souvenirs, novelties and gifts.

"However, the growth rate at Taman Ayer Keroh Heights and Taman Peringgit Jaya is surprisingly much higher, although they are located much further from the city centre," he says.

CBREIWTW MELAKA



Commercial investments in Melaka continue to be attractive." — Teh

estimate current shopoffice prices in Melaka Raya to range from RM1.5 million to RM1.8 million. Prices below RM1.4 million would be cheap and above RM1.8 million would be expensive," Teh elaborates.

He shares that Melaka Raya and Kota Laksamana are among the most popular areas for shophouses in Melaka. Hence, investors should keep an eye on these areas as they are located in the town centre and near to tourism hotspots in Melaka.

He adds that the pre-war shophouses at Jonker Street and Heeren Street are also very popular as they are located in the tourism hotspot.

"I suppose these pre-war shophouses are good for corporate investment, such as chain shops, franchises, big retailers and wealthy hobbies, but not for new business owners or business starters as they have to handle slow business during weekdays and busy peak days during weekends," he says.

As tourism is the underlying factor driving the business sentiment in Melaka, the primary target of retailers as well as food and beverage (F&B) outlets is tourists, hence shophouses that are located near proposed new tourist attractions such as Impression City and Malacca International Cruise Terminal in Melaka Gateway would also offer the best opportunities for investors, Teh adds.

Sitting on a 138-acre site in Kota Laksamana, Impression City is a RM7.7 billion mixed development project featuring the first-of-its-kind Impression Melaka — an iconic tourist landmark that showcases large-scale live cultural music performances.

With a gross development value of some RM40 billion, Melaka Gateway spans 1,366 acres on three artificial islands and one natural island on the Straits of Malacca. The first phase of the mixed development consists of Malacca International Cruise Terminal, theme park, shopping mall, education centre and ferry terminal.

Besides the two projects, Teh notes that another catalytic project poised to give a boost to the Melaka property market in the medium to long term is the proposed Kuala Lumpur-Singapore high-speed rail (HSR).

The HSR is expected to have one intermediate station in Ayer Keroh, Melaka, while the remaining seven stations will be located in Bandar Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur), Putrajaya, Seremban, Muar, Batu Pahat, Iskandar Puteri and Singapore.

Targeted to be operational by 2026, the HSR expects to call for its first tender in 4Q2017, Land Public Transport Commission chairman Tan Sri Syed Hamid Albar told reporters on the sidelines of the third HSR Symposium in Malaysia.

branch manager Teh Hong Chua points out that the commercial investments in Melaka continue to be attractive as rental yields of 5% to 6% are still achievable in some of the tourism hotspots, such as the areas in Melaka Raya nearby Dataran Pahlawan Melaka Megamall at Jalan Merdeka and Melaka City, which was listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2008.

He cites the 3-storey shopoffices with built-ups of 1,540 sq ft

in Melaka Raya as an example. The shopoffices' asking monthly rentals range from RM5,300 to RM6,500 while the average transacted price was at RM1.4 million last year. This translates into indicative rental yields of 5% to 6%. "In Melaka Raya, the prevailing rental for a 3-storey shophouse is about RM5,500 per month. Below RM5,000 would be considered a bargain and above RM6,000 would be expensive.

"In terms of selling prices, we



Weird ways PEOPLE BUY PROPERTY

BY SHAWN NG

In Sydney, a 19-year-old trainee teacher James Kidd tried harnessing the power of social media to buy a house of his own. Against “ridiculously high housing prices” in the most populous city in Australia, he started an online fundraising exercise on GoFundMe in February this year to raise A\$1 million (RM3.39 million) to achieve his dream, according to a News.com.au report.

To date, he has only managed to collect A\$110 from 15 people, of which A\$5 is from his mother. His attempt has highlighted the challenges and unusual methods some people use to secure a home for themselves.

The process of buying a property, which is considered relatively easy in Malaysia, has been so taken for granted by us — we may not realise that in some countries, buying a property can be more challenging than just surmounting bureaucracy.

Against certain historical and cultural backgrounds and political systems, some people have contrived creative and innovative ways to purchase property, which may sound weird to others.

Here are four different ways these people have taken to secure roofs over their heads:

1 Gold bullions

rather than the local currency due to monetary inflation and currency debasement. Moreover, the Vietnamese prefer to use gold bullions to pay for big ticket purchases rather than apply for bank loans.

The habit can be traced to the Vietnam War, which officially ended in 1975. At that time, post-war inflation was insanely high as cities, infrastructure, farmland and buildings were devastated by the war, which resulted in an economic slump in the country.

According to data portal IndexMundi, annual inflation rate skyrocketed 400% in 1986 from a year earlier, which caused the Vietnamese dong to become one of the worst-performing currencies in the region.

Hence, the Vietnamese started to buy gold to hedge against inflation and began

In Vietnam, property prices are often quoted in taels of gold

trading with the precious metal, especially for big items like property.

In today's market, using gold bullions to trade is still very common although Vietnam has transformed from one of the world's poorest nations to one of the fastest-growing economies in the region with a 6% GDP growth in 2016 while the Vietnamese dong has strengthened from its low in the past.

The tide is turning in the country though, as more people have started using cash to purchase their houses. However, most people are still resistant to bank loans as they do not trust banks and deem the paperwork too much of a hassle and the interest charges too high.



2 Fake divorce

arguing and infidelity as reasons for their divorce, there are mainland Chinese couples who are filing them to dodge forking out more money for a second home purchase.

In order to cool the country's red-hot property market, many local governments of first- and second-tier cities in China have introduced cooling measures including limiting purchase by existing property owners, and requiring larger down payments and higher interest rates for the purchase of second homes, besides a tax on profits from secondary sales.

Since first homes are not affected by the cooling measures, many couples who already own a house have manoeuvred around the regulations by filing for “fake” divorces. This

allows one of them to hold their common property while the other can start with a clean slate and purchase his/her “first” home, which technically is the couple's second home. After the purchase is completed, the couple would marry each other again.

According to Beijing government data, a total of 97,600 couples got divorced in Beijing in 2016, a 73% increase over 2014, while more than 22,000 couples remarried their former spouses in 2016, a 131% rise compared to 2014.

It is a chance for them to grow their wealth, said Mr and Mrs Cai, a couple from Shanghai. The couple decided to invalidate their marriage in February 2016, after the Shanghai government started implementing restrictions, to buy an apartment for 3.6 million yuan (RM2.29 million), adding to three other assets in their coffers.

“Why would we worry about divorce? We've been married for so long,” Cai, the husband, told Bloomberg. “If we don't buy this apartment, we'll miss the chance to get rich.”

However, like-minded couples may not be able to do so now as local governments have started countering the loophole. For example, the Beijing government has announced that people who are divorced for less than a year can no longer receive the benefits of a first-time buyer in their second home purchase.



3 Permanent house-swapping

Back in the days before monetary instruments, people used their possessions, such as precious metals, livestock and food, to exchange for goods and services. The archaic practice is obsolete in today's world, where people use cash, cheque, cards and even e-money to buy things.

But do you know property bartering still exists today? There are even house-swap listing portals.

In the US, the concept of permanent house-swapping emerged about 10 years ago, when the property market experienced a downturn — mortgages were hard to get and buyers were difficult to find.

According to permanent house-swapping and real estate exchange listing portal GoSwap.org, the concept is especially beneficial to someone who is moving to a different location and simply wants a similar property to live in.

It works for properties with and without mortgage.

The steps are simple. First, post your property on a listing portal to find matches. Once you have found a match and both parties have agreed to proceed, you will have to prepare two contracts — one for selling your property and one for buying



the property owned by the other party.

Subsequently, both parties will have to place escrow deposits at the local title companies. If your property is free and clear from mortgage, you only have to order surveys and appraisal reports and wait for the title company to prepare all the documents and close the deal on the same day. Title companies review public records relating to real estate, in order to inform all interested parties of the status and condition of title to the subject property.

If your property is bound to a mortgage, you can still trade it for the property you want. All you have to do is to apply for a new mortgage for the property you are buying (swapping) for.

The house-swapping process worked out perfectly for Pamela, who traded her house in Florida for an adobe home in New Mexico.

Both parties hired a major closing company that has worked with house swaps before and has offices in the two states to close the deals.

“The closing worked out perfectly — plus, we were able to save a lot of money by doing it ourselves in trading,” Pamela shared on GoSwap.org.

“After closing, [the respective parties] packed and drove our moving trucks, west and east of the 2,000 miles. It has been a great adventure and [both sides] love our new homes and lifestyles,” she said.

4 Buying from the black market

Buying and selling a home is illegal in North Korea as the socialist country owns all property. But according to a Reuters report, the percentage of North Koreans who are buying their own homes — as opposed to waiting for the government to assign one — is growing rapidly.

Surveys among defectors showed that buying and selling property is becoming more widespread and sophisticated in the country. The defectors reportedly said brokers can be found with lists of properties for sale in markets selling food and cheap consumer goods, which are tolerated by the government in cities and towns.

“You can find a house you want by asking brokers,” said Kim Young-il, a

defector and activist in Seoul.

It is common for defectors to send money to the North so their families can buy better homes. Kim and two other defectors said they have also heard of some people buying property as an investment ahead of what they hope will be the eventual reunification of their impoverished homeland and the wealthy South.

Apparently, the property deals are done in US dollars in the capital Pyongyang and in Chinese yuan along the border with China, where most of the North's trade with the outside world takes place.

According to the report, buyers and sellers then allegedly bribe housing officials to approve the transaction by issuing or modifying residency documents.

Kim told Reuters he had a friend who needed to raise money in 2013 to fund his escape to the South, so the friend sold his apartment in the North Korean border city of Hyesan for 40,000 yuan (RM25,484).



China investors shifting focus to domestic market

BY TAN AI LENG

The Asia-Pacific region has been impacted by China's capital outflow control with China's outbound investment in Asia Pacific in the first half of this year (1H2017) having slumped 59% y-o-y, according to CBRE Research's Asia Pacific Marketview 2Q2017 report.

China investors have instead turned their investment focus to the domestic market, which has seen transaction volume in China increase 46% y-o-y in 1H2017 to US\$14.5 billion (RM61.9 billion), of which 79% of the transactions were done by locals.

Notable transactions recorded in China during 2Q2017 include Chongqing Tiandi, a mixed development owned by China Vanke Co Ltd sold to Shui On Land Ltd at a price tag of US\$604 million, while Metropolitan Plaza which is owned by Link REIT was sold at US\$592 million to GAW Capital and Morgan Stanley.

Overall, Asia-Pacific commercial real estate investment turnover increased by 11.5% y-o-y to US\$53.2 billion in 1H2017. Most activities are focused on China, Japan and Hong Kong, which collectively accounted for 66% of the total investment turnover across the region.

Activity in Hong Kong remained robust, supported by the commercial land market that saw local investor transaction volume of US\$8 billion in 1H2017.

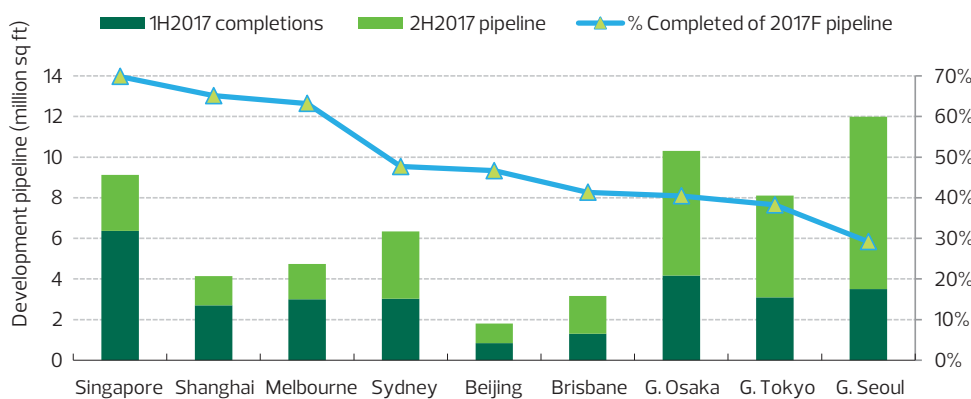
In terms of outbound investment, regional investment by Hong Kong buyers surged 300% y-o-y in 1H2017 amid a wave of deals in Singapore.

For instance, FWD Group, owned by Hong Kong businessman Richard Li — the youngest son of Li Ka-shing — has bought a 50% stake of One George Street in Singapore from CapitaLand for US\$425 million.

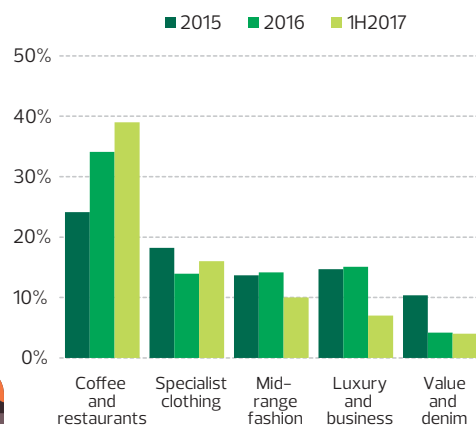
Tokyo continued to attract the bulk of investor interest with more transactions concluded in Yokohama and Osaka, which collectively accounted for 26.9% (an increase of 19% y-o-y) of the total turnover, said CBRE Research.

Meanwhile, CBRE Research observed that despite investors' strong interest, own-

Logistics new supply concentrated in Greater Seoul, Greater Tokyo and Greater Osaka



F&B retailers spearheaded leasing demand in 2017



SOURCE: CBRE RESEARCH, 2Q2017

ers in Australia were reluctant to sell, limiting the investment activities, and as a result the investment turnover in Australia declined in 1H2017.

CBRE Research anticipates the full-year transaction volume to be flat compared with last year, with Hong Kong and China remaining upbeat while Singapore will see less activity as availability is tight following the completion of several major deals.

Robust office leasing demand in China and India

According to CBRE Research, the net absorption of office space has improved 26% y-o-y to 14.5 million sq ft net floor area in 2Q2017, supported by robust leasing demand in China and India.

In China, tier 1 cities registered solid net absorption from domestic companies. However, CBRE Research expects the leas-

ing momentum to moderate gradually as service sector sentiment softens.

In India, the expanding financial and manufacturing sectors have provided support to the leasing market, but the weakened performance in the IT and outsourcing sectors might impact the office market.

CBRE Research also noted that co-working adoptees are emerging as an important new source of office leasing demand. In Singapore, one company plans to move about 100 of its employees to co-working spaces to test the concept before adopting it at its new headquarters.

Overall, rental growth in Asia-Pacific commercial space remained weak in 2Q2017 at just 0.5% growth q-o-q. India, Australia and China have seen steady rental growth while Singapore's office rental market has finally reached the bottom after eight consecutive quarterly declines.

Retail: F&B retailers take the lead

Food and beverage (F&B) retailers have spearheaded retail leasing demand in 2Q2017 due to relocation activities, among other reasons.

For instance, the recent ban on liquor in hotels and restaurants within 500m of national highways in India has caused a wave of relocations.

In Japan, some restaurants that were located in struggling department stores have moved to other places.

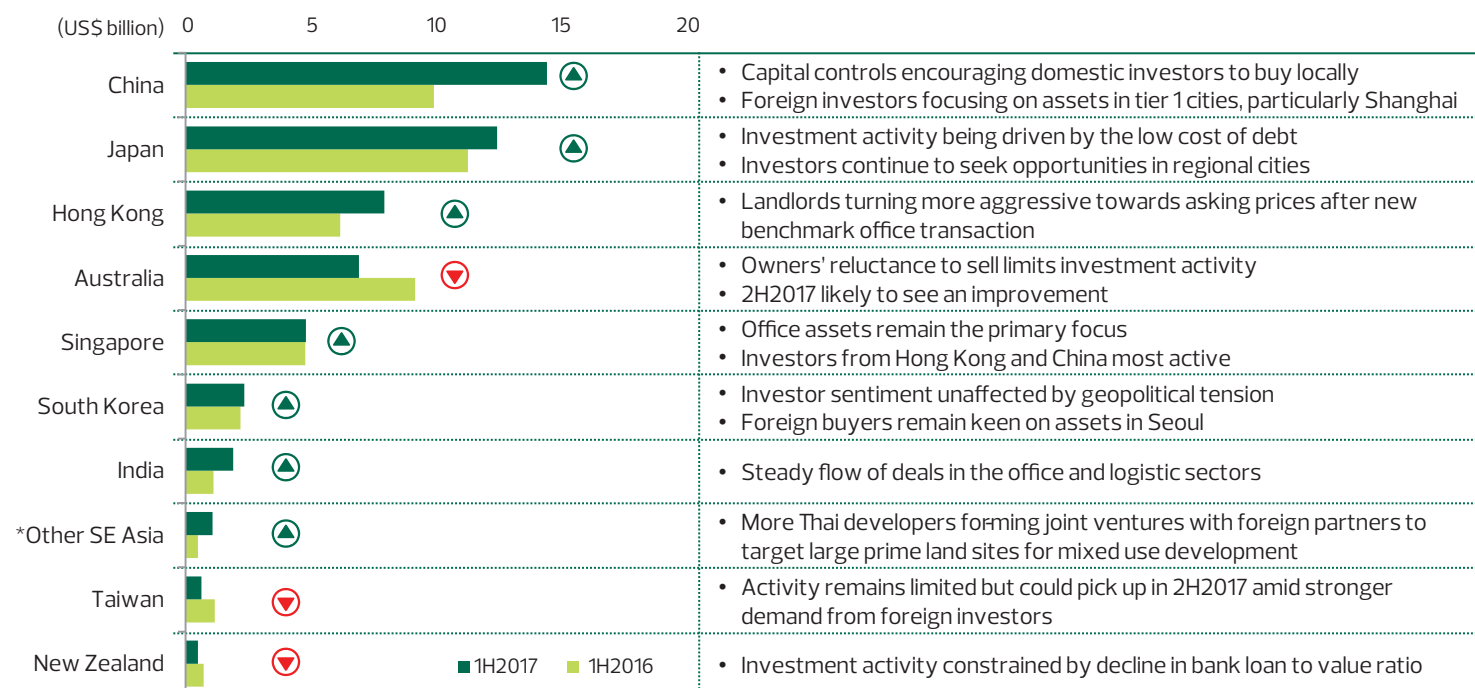
The F&B sector, however, is gaining momentum and CBRE Research noted that several cosmetics retailers are jumping on the trend by opening pop-up cafes either attached to their stores or as separate entities, to strengthen their competitiveness.

For instance, Chanel's COCO café has opened a new branch in Hong Kong, following the launch of branches in Tokyo, Seoul, Singapore and Shanghai.

However, department stores are still struggling in many markets but mall operators are taking action to revive their business through renovations and working on the tenant mix by offering new brands/products.

CBRE Research expects retail rents to remain flat in 2H2017 as the slow recovery in consumer demand will continue to constrain retailer in brick-and-mortar stores.

Transaction volume by market



SOURCE: CBRE RESEARCH, 2Q2017
NOTE: *OTHER SE ASIA INCLUDE MALAYSIA, INDONESIA, THE PHILIPPINES, THAILAND AND VIETNAM

Logistics: Tapping on the strong growth of e-commerce

CBRE Research said investor demand for logistics assets remained strong amid continued growth in e-commerce, thus supply in Asia Pacific is rising with 72.9 million sq ft of logistics space expected to be delivered before end-2017.

Most of the new supply is concentrated in Greater Seoul, Greater Tokyo, Greater Osaka and Western China but the increasing supply will put pressure on rental growth — for instance, Greater Seoul has seen landlords trying to reduce rental to attract tenants.

In 2H2017, Greater Seoul, Greater Tokyo and Greater Osaka are expected to see the completion of 8.5 million, 6.1 million and 5 million sq ft of new supply respectively.

"New supply comprises mainly high-spec modern facilities and will attract e-commerce firms. Lower-grade warehouses are therefore likely to be the most vulnerable to falling rents and higher vacancy," said CBRE Research.

FEATURE



BY MATT GROSS

NEW YORK: The Saybrook Breakwater Lighthouse is a Connecticut icon. Built in 1886, it sits at the mouth of the Connecticut River, in the exclusive Fenwick section of Old Saybrook. Since 1993, its “sparkplug” design has adorned the state’s “Preserve the Sound” licence plates.

But for the first 131 years of its existence, the cast-iron and brick Breakwater Lighthouse has had a reputation for hardship. Life was “cold, damp, and uncomfortable at the station for the keepers,” according to a local enthusiast site. “Going to shore for supplies in the 12ft rowboat required a hazardous journey fighting the Connecticut River’s strong currents. A walk to shore along the half-mile-long breakwater was dangerous as well, and even impossible after ice built up on it in the winter.”

Soon, though, the lighthouse will begin a metamorphosis that’s been decades in the making. Frank Sciamè, the construction magnate whose eponymous company has worked on ambitious New York City projects such as the New Museum for Contemporary Art, the High Line, and the Harvard Club, has been a co-owner of the lighthouse since 2015. Last week, he solidified his control over the 49ft tower and plans this fall to begin turning it into a guesthouse for his children and grandchildren.

“Historic structures are of real interest to me,” said Sciamè, the former chairman of the New York Landmarks Conservancy. He added that he’d been looking at the lighthouse throughout the 20 years he’s spent on Fenwick, the last decade from the former estate of Katharine Hepburn, at 10 Mohegan Avenue. “When it came on the market, I had to have it.”

And now that he’s got it, he’s going to fix it up on his own, he said, as a “hobby,” with the advice of restoration experts and the aid of his family. “I’ll have the young guys help me,” he said.

First on his list is restoring the exterior, which has been through a serious beating over the course of its history. In 1938, the lighthouse barely survived a hurricane. “Everything was swept away by the hurricane except the tower,” wrote its keeper at the time, Sidney Gross.

“There are a couple of cracks in the masonry and in the cast-iron shell that we will be restoring and repairing,” Sciamè said, adding that he’ll source the cast iron from the same resource in Alabama he used when restoring the artist Donald Judd’s SoHo loft. “We’ll paint it, put in new windows. Make sure it’s watertight.”

Sciamè intends to install a generator and solar panels, with shipbuilding as his inspiration. (At one point, he engaged the yacht designers Persak & Wurmfeld to draw up plans for the transformation.) “It’ll be totally self-sufficient,” he said.

The compound includes two parcels of land, one with an 8,000 sq ft, 5-bedroom house, the other a 2,643 sq ft, 3-bedroom one.



When your US\$10.4 mil mansion comes with an iconic lighthouse



A living room on the property

It might change — and it might take a while. “Finally a project without a budget or a deadline!” he crowed. “I’m not gonna rush.”

Nothing about the lighthouse’s recent history has been rushed. In 2008 the National Park Service began trying to transfer control of 12 “excess” lighthouses away from the federal government and, ideally, to non-profit, educational, or cultural agencies. For various reasons — logistical, bureaucratic, political — this didn’t happen, and by 2015, Sciamè had the chance to acquire it through a General Services Administration auction.

But a friend of his wanted it, too. “We didn’t want two guys bidding against each other, so we went partners on it,” Sciamè explained. They won the auction with a US\$290,000 (RM1.24 million) bid.

In the two years since, again due to what Sciamè described as “red tape,” they haven’t done any work on the structure. Then, five months ago, Sciamè’s partner put his own Fenwick property — a US\$10.4 million compound connected to the breakwater, and thus to the lighthouse — on the market. “Imagine the Life of a Lighthouse Keeper!” read the listing.

The compound included two parcels of land, one with an 8,000 sq ft, 5-bedroom house, the other a 2,643 sq ft, 3-bedroom one. Both are colonial-style, with red-cedar shingles that have a well-aged look, even though they were built in 2006. They were available to be purchased separately, for US\$7.4 million and US\$3.5 million, or together for US\$10.4 million.

As it happened, it was Sciamè himself who last week went into contract on the larger house, with an option on the smaller as well. He sold the Hepburn estate, which had been on the market since March.

If any of this saga has you lusting for a lighthouse of your own, well, the GSA has five up for auction right now. They may not be as iconic as Saybrook’s, but they are not as expensive either — the highest price listed is US\$31,000.

The Coast Guard, meanwhile, will maintain the Saybrook light, which continues to run at night, and the foghorn. “If it’s foggy, the horn will go off,” said Sciamè. “I guess you’re not gonna sleep too well!” — *Bloomberg*



Inside the kitchen of one of the mansions on the compound

Inside, Sciamè plans to create an entrance lobby, put an owner’s stateroom on the second floor, fill the third floor with bunk beds for his grandchildren, and on the fourth floor build a salon “with a stair to a little indoor bar that connects to the wraparound 5ft wide walkway”. He said the design of the exterior would remain traditional, with the interior being more contemporary. “Honestly, that might change,” he acknowledged.

The “sparkplug” design has adorned Connecticut licence plates since 1993

