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Malaysia

# Johor Bahru Johor

Cultural Cities Profile  
East Asia

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# Introducing Johor Bahru

Johor Bharu (referred to as 'JB') has been influenced by trading visitors and tourists throughout its history. Its cuisine, art and costume manifest cultural fusion from influences as diverse as the Arabs, Bugis, Chinese and Javanese. The city has harnessed a portfolio of traditional art forms, which have fused to give JB a rich contemporary identity and energy. The launch of Iskandar Malaysia – a special economic district bordering Singapore – has brought the city further opportunities in the creative industries, especially regarding film and digital.

Johor Bahru is the capital of Johor state to the very south of Peninsular Malaysia. The Greater Johor Bahru metropolitan area is also known as Iskandar Malaysia or the Southern Conurbation, covering five districts – Johor Bahru, Kulai, Pontian, Kota Tinggi and Kluang.<sup>1</sup>

As one of the most important hubs for finance, commerce and technology in Malaysia and the region, JB was ranked among the 'highly sufficient' cities by the GaWC 2020 report published by the Globalisation and World Cities Research Network.<sup>2</sup>

JB has experienced tremendous development since the launching of Iskandar Malaysia by the Federal and State government, formerly known as Iskandar Development Region and South Johor Economic

Region. Located so close to Singapore, JB is a gateway city to Malaysia and an emergent creative cluster which gains from the agglomeration and connectivity of its neighbour.

## IRDA

The Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA), established in 2007, is a Malaysian Federal Government statutory body tasked with realising the vision of developing Iskandar Malaysia into "a strong and sustainable metropolis of international standing". The vision of IRDA is "to create Iskandar Malaysia as the first choice to invest, work, live and play".<sup>3</sup> IRDA provides direction, policies and strategies to develop the region.

Today, the region has been developed as an economic and cultural centre with a reputation that transcends beyond the border of Malaysia. Iskandar Malaysia is the country's first economic growth corridor and is spread over 2,217 km<sup>2</sup> – three times bigger than Singapore and two times the size of Hong Kong.

- Since its inception, the economic corridor targets to achieve RM383 billion investment upon its maturity in 2025.



**A strong and sustainable metropolis of international standing... as the first choice to invest, work, live and play.**

Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA)

<sup>1</sup> The 3rd National Physical Plan. (2016). The Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Peninsular Malaysia. P. 3 – 6.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/world2020t.html>

<sup>3</sup> IRDA. <https://www.irda.com.my/about-us>



## Johor Bahru, an international, cultural and sustainable city.

Johor Bahru City Council

### City Vision/Mission/Slogan

Johor Bharu City Council (MBJB) aims to transform the city into ‘an International, Cultured and Sustainable City’.<sup>4</sup> The missions of the Johor Bahru City Council are to strengthen the role of organisations as strategic drivers and facilitators for all stakeholders, ensuring sustainable, prosperous city development and distinctive cultural identity, as well as provide high credibility governance.<sup>5</sup>

The *Majestic Johor* campaign of Tourism Johor alludes to a regal glory and acclamation – fitting to an ascending and unique state characterised by breathtaking landscapes, rich heritage and tradition.<sup>6</sup>

### Creative Industries and Cultural Services

Johor Bahru has an emerging creative scene that taps into the youth culture and the weekend tourist from Singapore. This has contributed to the city as a burgeoning hub with a wide cultural offer from independent mix-used cafés, music festivals, to mega bookstores and large-scale opera house and film studios.

Johor has been influenced by trading visitors and tourists throughout history. The Arabs, Bugis and Javanese have had major influence on the region. This can be seen from the traditional dress and cuisine.

Johor is well known for its traditional performing arts such as Kuda Kepang, a dance with a competitive element that is performed especially by locals of Javanese descent; and Hamdolok, a traditional theatre originally influenced by the Middle Eastern Arabs, which both Malay and the Middle Eastern characters.<sup>7</sup>

The city’s culture is also influenced by the Seletar people, an indigenous group that is only found in Southern Johor. Traditionally they live in boathouses but now they are settled along the coast of the Johor Straits.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mbjb.gov.my>

<sup>5</sup> Translation by Penang Institute. Mission & Vision of Johor Bahru City Council. <https://www.mbjb.gov.my/en/mbjb/profile/mission-vision>

<sup>6</sup> Majestic Johor. <https://tourismjohor.my/about-us>

<sup>7</sup> Johor Culture. <https://gojohor.my/johor-culture>

<sup>8</sup> Seletar Cultural Center. <https://www.facebook.com/Seletar-Cultural-Center-243431199039727>

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**Traditional dances such as Zapin are still popular in Johor Bahru and are complementary for each district to have its own Zapin groups... There are also Ghazal groups established by artists championing Ghazal musical arts themselves. Ghazal players play authentic music and attract young people in Johor. Ghazal music also features special songs that channel through the local radio station, RTM Johor. Ghazal music players can also play original music, but with the different instruments... Finally, Otak-otak is well-known as a traditional food attraction in Johor.**

Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque.

Photo © Tourism Malaysia



# Johor Bahru in Numbers

Johor Bahru has **3 government hospitals** and **50 government clinics** as of 2018

The Greater Johor Bahru metropolitan area has

**5 districts** and administered by **9 local governments**



Special economic region,

**Iskandar Malaysia**, is **2,217 km<sup>2</sup>** and **3 times** bigger than Singapore and **2 times** the size of Hong Kong

**EduCity Iskandar**

is home to **9 educational institutions**

**Endau-Rompin Johor National Park** has at least **10 endangered bird species**

Johor Bahru is

**25km** and **30-min drive** away from Singapore

# Context

The Department of Township of Johor Bahru was established in 1933, and later was elevated to Town Council status in 1950. In 1994, JB was promoted to city status and moved under Johor Bahru City Council.<sup>9</sup> Five districts in Iskandar Malaysia are administered by nine local governments under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and the Johor State Government’s policies.

Johor’s Sultanate (the Johor Royal Family) is widely respected by the state’s citizens, especially among its Malay population. According to the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute’s Johor survey conducted in 2017 showed: 87 percent of respondents say they are satisfied with the performance of the royal family. 75 percent of respondents agree the Sultan should intervene in politics when necessary.<sup>10</sup>

## Iskandar Malaysia



Over the past decade, the economic corridor has diversified JB’s economic portfolio and ventured into value-added investments to better position and develop Johor as the new regional economic powerhouse.

It has also played as a major enabler in capacity training and awareness advocacy.

### Grants and Professional Fund

- Iskandar Malaysia Employee Grant (IMEG): Designed to encourage job creation by offering

grants to employers that are willing to hire and train new technical personnel.

- Iskandar Malaysia Professional Fund (IMProf): Offers up to RM20 million in Upskilling and Recertification grants
- Dynamic Entrepreneurs Iskandar Malaysia (IMProud): Benefits micro-entrepreneurs through grants, loans and its development programmes.<sup>11</sup>

### Singapore-Malaysia Causeway.

Photo © Lionel Lim, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons



<sup>9</sup> Background of Johor Bahru City Council. <https://www.mbjb.gov.my/en/mbjb/profil/background>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/royal-family-sultan-influence-johor-malaysia-general-election-10102796>

<sup>11</sup> Iskandar Malaysia.

## Ethnic diversity

Malay language as the national language is the most common language in Malaysia. English is another compulsory language subject in the national education system. Other common languages in Malaysia are Mandarin, Tamil and dialects of different ethnic groups.

In Johor Bahru, Chinese people also commonly speak Hokkien as a dialect. The indigenous groups which are categorised as Bumiputera, such as Seletar, Kanaq, Kuala (unique to Johor) and Jakun speak their ethnic languages for daily communication. According to the

Department of Statistics Malaysia, in 2019 among the 1.6M population in JB city:

- Bumiputera 778K
- Chinese 512K
- Indians 143K
- Others 13K
- Non-citizens 152K



**[T]he state of Johor is very rich in various cultures including the Johor Bahru district especially these cultures have been gathered from time to time. The best way to define the culture of Johor Bahru is through the diversity of traditional cultures regarding musical instruments, clothing, food, customs, and dance.**

**Md Yusof bin Ali, Cultural Officer at JKKN Johor<sup>12</sup>**

<sup>12</sup> Interview by Penang Institute.



# Cultural, Arts and Civic Policy

The State arts and culture department (JKKN Johor) based in JB has similar functions and roles as in the other states. It has an active social media presence in promoting ongoing programmes involving the state troupe or other JKKN channels.

Capacity-building and enablement are a focus of the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA). Their community-focused efforts dedicate to awareness and

educational programmes that highlight the importance of participating in economic and social agendas.<sup>13</sup>

Under IRDA, several initiatives were launched including the Iskandar Malaysia Beyond Boundaries Program (IMB2P), pilot artist residency and public arts, to name a few. Youth development is another focus of IRDA work, including Social Hero Awards of which one of the categories is for arts, culture and heritage.



**The [Iskandar Regional Development Authority] agency is working together with all stakeholders to continue to create more opportunities for the local population to participate in so that they can share in the prosperity created in the region.**

**Datuk Ismail Ibrahim, CEO, Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA)<sup>14</sup>**

With the JB Transformation plan in place, urban regeneration has brought arts and cultural activities to the city.

- The new township of Iskandar Puteri puts an emphasis on placemaking and has introduced public art projects as well as the Iskarnival event to activate programmes in sports and culture.<sup>15</sup>
- City planners have been working with social architects from LabDNA to programme and activate

the place-based cultural activities in close collaboration with local artist, artisans, urban farmers and the wider community. This has included a year-long placemaking programme that covered the creation and activation of parks (such as the Edible Park), international festivals such as the Iskandar Puteri Jazz Festival, Tempatan Fest, a traveling market featuring local designers, artists and artisans, and the activation of the Mall of Medini with an arts and craft market.

<sup>13</sup> Programmes of Quality Living. <http://iskandarmalaysia.com.my/programmes>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/cover-story-reviewing-iskandar-malaysia>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gayatravel.com.my/iskandar-puteris-latest-community-hub-opens-in-may>

## Iskandar Malaysia Talent Development



**EduCity Iskandar** was formed in 2009 to play a significant role in developing the education sector in the corridor.

It is home to nine educational institutions, including Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia, Netherlands Maritime Institute of Technology, University of Southampton Malaysia, Multimedia University, University of Reading Malaysia, Kolej MDIS Malaysia, Raffles University, Marlborough College Malaysia and Raffles American School.

- An updated strategy, “EduCity 2.0: Beyond Asia’s First Education City” launched in 2020, aims to elevate IIB as a competitive destination among its international peers, by investing in facility upgrades and strengthening industry collaboration with research institutions and companies in R&D and upskilling.

The shared space, **EduCity Commons** was launched in 2020, located next to the EduCity Sports Complex.

- It is one of the Iskandar Puteri’s placemaking initiatives lead by labDNA to help local communities build expansive, effective and impactful engagement programmes.
- Aside from festivals, the Commons conducts green and sustainability-themed programmes through its School of Sustainability (SOS).
- To-date, ‘Plant Propagation’, ‘No Dig Gardening’, ‘Fruit Trees & Shrubs’ as well as cooking demonstration using a cob oven, solar dehydrator, and solar cooker have been conducted. Such exposure has enabled the public, especially youths to experience the practical side of sustainability.

### Key Policies for the Cultural and Creative Economy

#### **Johor Structure Plan 2030. Johor Town and Country Planning Department.**

The plan provides an integrated spatial framework for the next 15 years to ensure Johor becomes a high-income advanced state that is supported by different districts and remains competitive and resilient on the world stage. It also emphasises sustainable development through the preservation of natural assets and cultural heritage.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Integrated Land Use Blueprint for Iskandar Malaysia, 2011. Iskandar Regional Development Authority.**

The blueprint focuses on the long-term management of the Iskandar region by bringing together a wide range of Comprehensive Development Plan’s physical development strategies into a unified implementation plan.<sup>17</sup> The blueprint has adopted several development approaches to ensure sustainable growth and land use management of Iskandar Malaysia. For example, Johor Bahru Centre Business District is focused on heritage and cultural development. The suggested activities in the area are urban tourism, thematic retail and shopping, creative services, education, and financial services.

<sup>16</sup> Johor Structure Plan 2030. P. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Integrated Land Use Blueprint. P.1.

## Environment and Sustainability

Sustainable development in Johor is guided by multiple policies demonstrating the State's seriousness in ensuring that the state's economic development and people's wellbeing are balanced by the protection of the environment. Since the Iskandar Region's launch in 2016, the outcomes of the development plans and policies are on track for its target to be *"A Strong and Sustainable Metropolis of International Standing"* by 2025.

An Integrated Land Use blueprint set out to provide a framework to guide land use development providing for the region's development and growth in a sustainable manner. Hence, the public and private sectors and community can work together more systematically in the roll out of the region's policies and plans.

As a designated economic region, the blueprint has provided for 5 key zones taking into account existing development and new proposed developments while maintaining its natural assets including 3 RAMSAR sites. They recognise the importance of environmentally sensitive areas within the development zone.

- Their green commitment includes setting up an online portal, the "Iskandar Malaysia Green Portal" for the authorities to disseminate information on their initiatives for a Low Carbon Society. It also

provides a channel for public participation and feedback. It has also established a Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Shoreline Ecosystems (PESISIR). To date there have been related environmental education and eco-tourism initiatives put in place.

New investment is important for all the potential development areas identified for the Iskandar region. As such **Medini Iskandar Malaysia Sdn Bhd** (MIM) was set up.<sup>18</sup>

The development of Medini is undertaken in partnership between the private and public sectors and is a culmination of a shared vision between the Federal and State Government together with their strategic partners. Private developers such as E&O, Sunway, Mah Sing, UMLand, Macrolink Culturaltainment, Kim Lun to name a few, are responsible for creating new residential and business zones or hubs.

In keeping with the region's Comprehensive Development Plan and the vision of Green Iskandar Puteri, coupled with Sunway's ongoing commitment to the SDGs, Sunway Iskandar, Medini, is an integrated township that promises to maintain a balance of 40% nature with water bodies, landscape and green zones.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> MIM is owned by Jasmine Acres Sdn Bhd, United World Infrastructure and Mitsui & Co Ltd., is the master developer of the new metropolis named Medini – a vibrant and developing sustainable city located in Iskandar Malaysia. MIM promotes Medini locally and globally and works closely with government linked companies such as Khazanah Nasional Berhad (the sovereign fund of Malaysia), IRDA and Iskandar Investment Berhad, as well as investors and developers to establish Medini as the central business district of Iskandar Puteri, Iskandar Malaysia.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.uemsunrise.com>

## Medini – Sustainable City



In order to create a vibrant city that serves multiple communities, part of the larger Medini ecosystem also includes:

- Education and the establishment of international campuses such as EduCity.
- Tourism and Leisure with the development of LEGOLAND.
- Creative industries and film Iskandar Malaysia Studios (formerly Pinewood Iskandar Malaysia Studios) was created to attract the creative class to the city in the film and entertainment industry.
- Other services such as financial advisory; health and wellness; trade and logistics

As part of their sustainability policy to strengthen communities and provide shared and green

spaces, Medini Green was conceived. Medini Green is a sustainable collaboration between Medini Iskandar Malaysia Sdn Bhd and Johor Green, a green platform run by social enterprises that aim to inform, inspire, influence, encourage and connect with the community towards a greener Johor.

- **Medini Green Parks** comprise of a five-acre Edible Park and a seven-acre Heritage Forest. The Edible Park is an edible landscape designed to build communities around the important subject of food and how to incorporate it in sustainable living. It is equipped with a workshop studio, plant-based café, designed gardens and orchards. Whereas, the Heritage Forest gathers local, native and regional flora in a setting that celebrates wilderness and biodiversity.<sup>20</sup>

### Key Policies in Sustainability and Planning

#### Shoreline Management Plan for Iskandar Malaysia. Iskandar Regional Development Authority.

Launched in 2011, the 124 kilometres coastline of Iskandar Malaysia from Pulau Kukup to Sungai Johor has diverse natural and man-made features.

- The purpose of the Shoreline Management Plan is to establish a clear framework of sustainable policies and strategic programmes for effective management of Iskandar Malaysia's shoreline to benefit the Iskandar Malaysia community and the nation as a whole in the long term.<sup>21</sup>

#### Environmental Planning Blueprint for Iskandar Malaysia. Iskandar Regional Development Authority.

Launched in 2011, the main objective of the Environmental Planning Blueprint is to provide a strategic planning framework for the environmental management of Iskandar Malaysia that will consolidate the various environmental planning and management objectives for the region.

- There are seven environmental thematic areas, including biodiversity and habitat management, climate change management, air quality management, river water quality management, geo-terrain, soil and groundwater management, green economy and environmental governance.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Medini Green Parks.

<sup>21</sup> Shoreline Management Plan. P.1.

<sup>22</sup> Environmental Planning Blueprint. P. 1 – 3.

### **Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Blueprint for Iskandar Malaysia, 2011. Iskandar Regional Development Authority.**

The objectives of the Renewable Energy (RE) and Energy Efficiency (EE) Blueprint are to provide a strategic framework through policy guidances and urban design on RE and EE for Iskandar Malaysia, to identify potential areas for RE and EE initiatives taking into account the development strategies outlined for Iskandar Malaysia, to provide specific planning guidelines and building design codes (green building index) to promote RE and EE in Iskandar Malaysia, and to provide implementation plans and awareness programmes on RE and EE taking into account incentive mechanisms for investors/ developers and the general public.<sup>23</sup>

### **Low Carbon Society Blueprint for Iskandar Malaysia 2025 third edition, 2014. UTM-Low Carbon Asia Research Centre.**

The Low Carbon Society Blueprint for Iskandar Malaysia 2025 is a written document that presents comprehensive climate change mitigation policies and detailed strategies to guide development of Iskandar Malaysia towards achieving its vision of 'a strong, sustainable metropolis of international standing' by 2025. The Blueprint is to formulate a low carbon society roadmap for Iskandar Malaysia, apply a scientific approach to the carbon emission baseline and future scenarios study, promote awareness among the State government, regional authority, local authorities, industries, businesses and the community at large of climate change and its mitigation, and lead to the materialisation of a low carbon Iskandar Malaysia by 2025.<sup>24</sup>

### **Medini Iskandar Malaysia, 2007 – present**

Medini City is poised to be Iskandar Puteri's Central Business District (CBD). Over RM4 billion has been spent on building state-of-the-art infrastructure such as utility pipes, modern roads, security, and sewerage that are ready for connection, allowing investors to enter Medini on a 'plug-and-play' basis. Property developers that qualify to operate in Medini will benefit from incentives such as corporate and income tax exemption for 10 years, global capital sourcing, unlimited foreign purchase, etc.<sup>25</sup>

### **Forest City, 2014 – present**

Forest City is the enterprise of Country Garden Pacificview Sdn Bhd, a joint venture between Country Garden Group and the Malaysian-government-backed Esplanade Danga 88 Sdn Bhd (EDSB). It is a smart and green futuristic city that combines the environment with cutting-edge technology to create an idyllic and technology-driven living and working space ecosystem that comprises four man-made islands.<sup>26</sup>

### **Princess Cove Project, 2014 – present**

The Princess Cove Project is run by R&F Development of China. It encapsulates the HOPSCA (Hotels, Offices, Parks, Shopping Malls, Clubhouses and Apartments) Marina Living Concept – a first in Southeast Asia, to provide an epitome of modern living, combining residential properties, a business platform and a recreational environment. It is only a 2-minute drive to Johor customs, immigration and quarantine complex via car and 10-minute walk to the planned future Rapid Transit (RTS) Link to Singapore.<sup>27</sup>

### **Sunway Iskandar, 2014 – present**

Sunway Iskandar is a 1,800-acre development project with natural landscapes of wetlands and river. The tagline 'Nature's Capital City' is indeed apt for this development, as it will only occupy 60% of the area, leaving the rest of its vast, untouched nature for exploration and recreation.<sup>28</sup>

### **Ibrahim International Business District (IIBD), 2015 – present**

The Ibrahim International Business District (IIBD) was launched by The Sultan of Johor, Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar in conjunction with his 57th birthday celebrations in 2015. The 250-acre project is a transformation plan developed by Johor Corporation to turn Johor Bahru into a "metropolis of international standards". Johor Corporation is the state investment corporation of the Johor government.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Blueprint. P. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Low Carbon Society Blueprint. P. 3 – 4.

<sup>25</sup> Medini City. <https://www.medini.com.my>

<sup>26</sup> Forest City. <https://www.forestcitycgpv.com>

<sup>27</sup> Princess Cove. <https://www.princesscove-rf.com/about-princess-cove>, accessed in July 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Sunway Iskandar. <https://iskandarinvestment.com>

<sup>29</sup> Ibrahim International Business District in Johor launched. <https://www.edgeprop.my/content/ibrahim-international-business-district-johor-launched>

### **Tebrau Bay (Iskandar Waterfront City), 2016 – present**

The development of the RM3 billion waterfront city in Tebrau Bay on the eastern corridor of Johor Bahru started after a deal was signed between The Iskandar Waterfront City Bhd (IWC) and China's Greenland Group. A snow world theme park, opera house, hospital specialising in Chinese traditional medicine and a school will be built under phase 1 of Tebrau Bay project.<sup>30</sup>

### **Astaka Phase 2, 2017 – present**

The Astaka @ One Bukit Senyum project is the tallest skyscraper in Southeast Asia that offers awe-inspiring views over the skyline of Johor Bahru and Singapore. It will include the new headquarters of the Johor Bahru City Council, a five-star hotel, serviced apartments and a premium shopping mall. It will also come with branded residences and serviced residences.<sup>31</sup>

### **Integrated Sustainable Living (ISL)**

Integrated Sustainable Living is a major development by Iskandar Capital Sdn Bhd (IskCap). It is going to be a model township which integrates the three pillars of sustainability namely: environment, economic, and social & cultural. The land of ISL has an important connection in the eco-continuum for regional biodiversity for 18 mangrove species, 6 mangrove associated species, 23 bird species, and 14 fish species. The project is going to develop over the span of 30 years.<sup>32</sup>

## **Culture, Environment and Urban Landscape – case studies**

### **Iskandar Malaysia Urban Farming (IMURFARM)**

The establishment of Iskandar Malaysia Urban Farming (IMURFARM) project is to enable the bottom 40% percentile of the income group to participate in small to medium scale food (mainly vegetable) production for their consumption and sale. In the long run, the project will contribute to the reduction of food expenses from aggregate cost of living. Indirectly, the project optimises the use of designated open spaces in the urban area. This has improved the local community's sense of belonging and cohesion.<sup>33</sup>

### **Sg Segget Rejuvenation Project**

The Sg Segget Landscaping and Upgrading of Jalan Wong Ah Fook Project aims to transform Sungai Segget and Jalan Wong Ah Fook into a new commercial, cultural and recreational area in the city centre. There are three phases – Phase 1 was the “Construction of Sg Segget Integrated Water Treatment Plant (IWTP)” and Phase 2 was the “Construction of Flood Mitigation System and Sewerage System” which was completed in April 2017 and Phase 3 is the on-going “Sg Segget Landscaping and Upgrading of Jalan Wong Ah Fook Project”.

- The last phase of the project involves hardscapes and softscapes, for example, swale, interactive lighting, kids playground, improvement of the river wall, reflection pool and local sculptures that will be designed by Local Artists (Community-Based Public Art Project). It is expected to be completed in Q3 2021.<sup>34</sup>

### **Kelab Alami (KA), 2006**

Kelab Alami is a community organisation that works to document the mangrove, seagrass, island and other habitats in Mukim Tg Kupang. It is for the purpose to create a record of the natural heritage in the area. There are local youth work full-time and part-time as Kelab Alami Youth Rangers or field research assistants for numerous universities, as well as conduct their own studies, documentation and monitoring of these habitats.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> IWC's joint venture development projects making great strides. <https://www.nst.com.my/property/2017/05/242649/iwcs-joint-venture-development-projects-making-great-strides>; Official website: <http://www.iwcity.com.my/official>

<sup>31</sup> Astaka's Bukit Senyum granted node status. <https://www.thesundaily.my/archive/astakas-bukit-senyum-granted-node-status-XTARCH464882>

<sup>32</sup> ISL. <https://iskandarinvestment.com>

<sup>33</sup> Urban Farming. <http://iskandarmalaysia.com.my/programmes>

<sup>34</sup> Sg Segget Landscaping and Upgrading of Jalan Wong Ah Fook Project at 23% Completion, Elevate Venue for Social, Business and Environmental Benefits. <https://iskandarmalaysia.com.my>

<sup>35</sup> Meet the Mangrove. P. 2. Official website: <https://kelabalami.weebly.com/about-us.html>, accessed in July 2021.

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/cover-story-reviewing-iskandar-malaysia>



**Endau-Rompin Johor National Park... [is]... the largest protected area in the southern peninsular of Malaysia. It is also the oldest rainforest area in north-eastern Johor and contains treasured biodiversity and habitat... for the Malayan tiger and tapir, as well as Asian elephants. The parks had been recognised as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) by BirdLife International in 2003 where it has at least 10 endangered bird species, including the helmeted hornbill and straw-headed bulbul.**

Iskandar Investment Berhad (IIB)<sup>36</sup>

#### **Endau-Rompin National Park, 1993 – present**

The 48,905-hectare Endau-Rompin National Park is the largest protected area in the southern half of Peninsular Malaysia. This ancient rainforest realm in north-eastern Johor is a treasure trove of biodiversity, and a critical habitat so important for the survival of the country's globally-threatened megafauna, including the Malayan Tiger, Malayan Tapir and Asian Elephant.<sup>37</sup>

#### **Tanjung Piai, 1997 – present**

The Tanjung Piai (Johor) National Park was established in 1997 to protect this unique site, in particular, the intertidal mangroves and mudflats that line the cape along with the important ecosystem services that they provide. In 2003, Tanjung Piai National Park was recognised by the Ramsar Convention as a Ramsar Site, or Wetlands of International Importance.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Endau-Rompin Map. <https://www.johornationalparks.gov.my/v3/endau-rompin-peta>

<sup>38</sup> Tanjung Piai. <https://www.johornationalparks.gov.my/v3/tanjung-piai>

<sup>39</sup> Pulau Kukup. <https://www.johornationalparks.gov.my/v3/pulau-kukup>

**Pulau Kukup, 1997 – present**

Pulau Kukup National Park was established in 1997 to protect one of the largest mangrove islands in the world. This unique island that spans 647 ha is an important refuge for many mangrove-associated plants and animals, a number of which are considered to be rare or threatened species. In January 2003, the park was designated by the Ramsar Convention as a Wetland of International Importance, or Ramsar Site.<sup>39</sup>

**Gunung Ledang, 2005 – present**

Gunung Ledang Johor National Park was established in 2005 to protect this special mountain, along with all of the unique plants and animals that call it home. The 8,611.9-hectare protected area, which spans the entire Ledang massif, holds an expanse of pristine tropical rainforest and serves as a critical water catchment area for both Johor and Melaka.

**Sultan Iskandar Marine Park  
(Taman Laut Sultan Iskandar), 2015 – present**

The Taman Laut Sultan Iskandar covers the Seribuat Archipelago, which includes 41 islands grouped within five main clusters, namely Pulau Tinggi, Pulau Sibul, Pulau Besar, Pulau Aur and Pulau Pemanggil. These islands hold a unique assemblage of flora and fauna that includes native, endemic as well as rare or globally-threatened species. 248-million-year-old volcanic rock formations may be seen at certain spots, such as in the southeastern part of Pulau Sibul.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Taman Laut Sultan Iskandar. <https://www.johornationalparks.gov.my/v3/taman-laut-sultan-iskandar>

<sup>41</sup> Temple of Fine Arts.



## Capacity Building and Digital Development

Within the public education system, the Ministry of Education has introduced the *Sekolah Seni Malaysia* (Malaysia Arts School) programme. The first of the *Sekolah Seni Malaysia* was established in Johor Bahru in 2007 and are now rolled out in Kuching and Kuala Lumpur.

According to Kreatif Johor Iskarnival 2016, “pupils of the *Sekolah Seni* are encouraged to collaborate when producing creative projects. Demonstrations, character re-enactments, storytelling and characterisation explorations are the kinds of activities carried out to stimulate engagement with the arts and critical discussion about performance.”

The school participates regularly in local and international competitions and its latest international success was at the 2017 Prague International Folklore, Dance and Music Festival and Competition.

Applicants undergo an audition before admission. In lower secondary (Forms 1 – 3, aged 13 – 15), music, dance, theatre and visual arts are offered while in upper secondary (Forms 4 & 5), there are options for

music, fine arts, design, visual communications, dance and theatre.

**Iskandar NEXT (Iskandar New Economic Experience and Talent)** was launched as a public-private initiative to help boost the digital ecosystem focusing on talent development and digital innovation. Expected to create jobs and attract investments, NEXT is also Iskandar Investment Berhad’s effort to build a strong knowledge and expertise base for JB, the Johor State and the country through talent incubation.

Iskandar Malaysia also plans to take up the challenge of capacity building through its Talent Innovation and Human Capital Development programmes – one to help local talent to get on-the-job training for redeployment while the other is to address talent needs and gaps in key industries. These initiatives are expected to boost the nation’s economy post pandemic.

IRDA is also developing smart farming as a means to address food security and export opportunities.



**Interconnected, innovative and inclusive (3I) Iskandar Malaysia transformed through distinctive ICT capabilities.**

Information Communication Technology Blueprint for Iskandar Malaysia 2020

## Arts and Education



In addition to the leadership role of the Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA), a range of NGOs also provides support in cultural education for the community.

**The Temple of Fine Arts Johor Bahru (2012 – present)** is founded by His Holiness Swami Shantanand Saraswathi, and is a place for young children to learn music and dance.<sup>41</sup>

**Artspire (2017 – present)** is an initiative that brings together, develops, and showcases students' talents in performing arts led by Johor secondary school teachers under the Teach For Malaysia programme.

- It enables the students to develop their skills through various workshops by industry professionals, experience performing arts in its truest form through pop-up performances at

different events and a final large-scale production (concerts or musicals).

- Apart from enhancing skills and boosting confidence, the programme also helps students develop character specifically in bravery, teamwork, determination, discipline, and self-purpose. It also provides them with opportunities for creativity and self-expression.<sup>42</sup>

**Sekola Baroka (2019 – present)** is a cultural centre and an independent school that operates on a crowdfunding model.

- The centre aims to provide shelter and basic education through art and culture. Through their programmes, they hope to bring children out of urban stress, cultivate better mental health and engender positive growth.<sup>43</sup>

## Key Policies and Projects in Digital Infrastructure

### Information Communication Technology Blueprint for Iskandar Malaysia 2020. Iskandar Regional Development Authority.

Launched in 2011, the vision statement of the information communication technology blueprint is “an interconnected, innovative and inclusive (3I) Iskandar Malaysia transformed through distinctive ICT capabilities”. The strategies are to build a super high-speed, flexible, scalable, open-access communications network, accelerate transformation of government services to demand-driven, customer-centric inter-operable model, develop a competitive ICT cluster around creative content, social commerce

and shared services, catalyse ICT-led innovation to improve productivity of key economic sectors and promote the benefits of ICT to all communities.<sup>44</sup>

### Smart City Iskandar Malaysia. Iskandar Regional Development Authority.

Launched in 2017, Smart City Iskandar Malaysia was endorsed by the Prime Minister in 2012 with a mandate for Iskandar Malaysia to become the first smart city in Malaysia. It is an initiative that aims to improve ease of doing business as well as quality of life in Iskandar Malaysia. It focuses on three areas namely economy, environment and social, and promotes six dimensions namely smart economy, smart governance, smart environment, smart mobility, smart people and smart living.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Artspire.

<sup>43</sup> Sekola Baroka.

<sup>44</sup> Information Communication Technology Blueprint 2020. P. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Smart City Iskandar Malaysia. P. 5.

### Johor 4.0 – Moving Towards the New Decade. Digital Johor.

Launched in 2018, Johor 4.0 aims to develop Johor as a regional and global business hub through big-data analytics and data intelligence to accelerate its economic growth. Digital Johor Sdn Bhd, a state-owned company has been set up to drive this transformation agenda.<sup>46</sup> Telekom Malaysia, through TM ONE, and Digital Johor have collaborated to develop the JASS smart application hub which is set to empower Johor 4.0 initiatives via eight strategic thrusts including: Intelligent Johor – Data Driven Digital Economy; Integrated Intelligent Digital Network & Mobility Infrastructure; Unified Service Delivery Platform to Rakyat & Tourists; Trusted & Efficient State Government seen by Private Sector & Rakyat; Digital Johor Lifestyle – Digital-on-Things (IoT & 4th Industrial Revolution 4IR); Digital Johor Halal Hub; Digital Johor Agropolitan, and Digital Johor Innovation X-Celerator.<sup>47</sup>

### Media and Game Innovation Centre of Excellence (MAGICX)

The Media and Game Innovation Centre of Excellence is a strategic cooperation between Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA) to support and promote the development and ecosystem of the creative industries that focuses on gamification and enrichment of digital content.

- MaGICX plays an integral part as the anchor for the Iskandar Malaysia Innovation Valley envisioned to offer industry players/SMEs/clients technical expertise and consultation, research and product development, business development, publishing, marketing and/or training in producing commercially.<sup>48</sup>

### Iskandar Malaysia Urban observatory (IMUO)

Iskandar Malaysia Urban Observatory (IMUO) is a 'single window' that integrates data from various authoritative sources and transforms them into actionable information for better policy making and well-informed decision making.

- It is also to enhance spatial planning, provide better public policies that are benchmarked to international standards, and encourage better coordinated policies and planning processes with subnational governments.<sup>49</sup>

### Cyberport Business Innovation Centre

MSC Cyberport Sdn Bhd is appointed by the Johor State Government to drive ICT initiatives within the state. One of their initiatives is to undertake the development of technology entrepreneurs or technopreneur programmes to assist seed and start-up companies to grow their business through the innovation centre.

- It offers fully fitted and furnished offices with competitive rates, MSC Malaysia status application assistance and IT-related business support solutions. It also specialises in developing digital government solutions to Johor.<sup>50</sup>

### Iskandar Space

Iskandar Space is a co-working initiative launched by Iskandar Investment Berhad (IIB) to jump-start the development of local startups and SMEs in the Iskandar Malaysia region. This initiative encourages a multidisciplinary, co-working community that combines the best elements of a co-working space and community building all under one roof. Iskandar Space occupies an 8,000 ft<sup>2</sup> area in the CIMB Leadership Academy in Medini, Iskandar Puteri.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Johor 4.0 Moving Towards the New Decade. P.2.

<sup>47</sup> JASS Smart Application from TM ONE set to empower Johor 4.0 Initiatives. <https://www.tm.com.my/Newsroom/Pages/JASS-SMART-APPLICATION-FROM-TM-ONE-SET-TO-EMPOWER--JOHOR-4-0-INITIATIVES.aspx>

<sup>48</sup> Media and Game Innovation Centre of Excellence. <https://ihumen.utm.my/magicx>

<sup>49</sup> IMUO. <https://www.iskandarmalaysia.com.my/imuo/about.html>

<sup>50</sup> About Cyberport Business Innovation Centre. <https://www.aseanvirtual.com/site/msccyberport/who>

<sup>51</sup> Iskandar Space. <https://iskandarinvestment.com>

### **DRZ Iskandar (Drone & Robotics Zone Iskandar)**

Launched in 2020, DRZ Iskandar is the establishment of the first drone and robotics hub in Southeast Asia, and aspires to become a growth engine, technology leader and talent hub for Malaysia and the Asia Pacific region. DRZ Iskandar is an affiliation of IIB's Iskandar NEXT initiative, a public-private partnership programme with the Johor state government to support the State's digital economy agenda to accelerate growth towards becoming a Regional and Global Business Hub.<sup>52</sup>

### **Muafakat Johor Bus (Bas Muafakat Johor, BMJ)**

Bas Muafakat Johor is a free bus service funded by the Johor State Government and Local Authorities to provide convenient transport throughout the state. Operations commenced in April 2016 in the Iskandar Malaysia area. The buses are equipped with CCTV systems, GPS, passenger data system and free internet. Passengers need to register and obtain the Muafakat Johor Card before taking the buses.<sup>53</sup>

### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore**

- 2018: Agreement to build Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) Link was signed between Malaysia and Singapore.<sup>54</sup>
- 2019: Malaysia and Singapore agreed to establish a working group to manage maritime issues surrounding the Johor Bahru Port Limits and

Singapore Port Limits. Discussion was held over Malaysia's establishment of a permanent Restricted Area over Pasir Gudang and Singapore's implementation of the Instrument Landing System (ILS) procedures for Seletar Airport.<sup>55</sup>

- 2020: Both prime ministers agreed to establish the Singapore-Malaysia Special Working Committee on COVID-19. The Committee would be co-chaired by Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean, and Malaysian Senior Minister and Minister of Defence Dato' Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob and Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Hasni Mohammad. The Special Working Committee would propose and coordinate joint mitigation plans to ensure the safe and sustainable movement of people, goods, and services between Malaysia and Singapore.<sup>56</sup>

### **East Coast Economic Region (ECER)**

The East Coast Economic Region (ECER) was formed in 2007 with the launch of the ECER Master Plan by the Federal Government. The formation of ECER was intended to accelerate economic growth and ensure equitable distribution of wealth across the country, in line with national aspirations to become a high-income developed nation by 2020. ECER comprises the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and the district of Mersing in Johor. It accounts for 51% of the land area of Peninsular Malaysia and is home to 4.8 million people.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> DRZ Iskandar. <https://iskandarinvestment.com>

<sup>53</sup> Bas Muafakat Johor (BMJ). <https://paj.com.my/bas-muafakat-johor>

<sup>54</sup> Foreign Policy. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore. <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/SINGAPORES-FOREIGN-POLICY/Countries-and-Regions/Southeast-Asia/Malaysia>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> East Coast Economic Region. <https://www.ecerd.com.my/about-ecer>

## Culture and Inclusivity – case studies

### Youth Empowerment

#### Iskandar Malaysia Youth Empowerment Fund (IMPOWER)

A grant worth RM3 million in total, specifically offered to the youth to empower them in implementing programmes that will enhance the quality of life of the local community.<sup>58</sup>

#### Youth to Biz (Y2B)

A grant which increases youth participation in entrepreneurial endeavours especially in new creative businesses.

- With around RM2 million worth of grants ready to be distributed, this initiative targets to create more than 80 new entrepreneurs and 200 job opportunities amongst the youth.<sup>59</sup>

### Rural Development

#### Pusat Orang Desa Iskandar Malaysia (IMPOD)

This is a learning platform for rural youth communities to increase their standard of living through entrepreneurship, which also acts as a place to disseminate information on available opportunities in the region.

- This RM1.72 million project is expected to engage youth in 6 different villages around Iskandar Malaysia.<sup>60</sup>

#### Kawan Iskandar Malaysia (KIM)

KIM focuses on empowering the village communities through operationalising social enterprises.<sup>61</sup>

### Social Empowerment

#### IM Makmur

A programme to train members of the society who are constrained in their ability to make a livelihood such as the physically challenged, single mothers and the low-income earners. Targets have been set for the programme to ensure the participants can improve financially and socially as a direct outcome.

- The types of training comprise motor mechanic, entrepreneurship, beauty care, food preparation & handling, and maternity care.<sup>62</sup>

#### Smart Healthy City and Community Programme

The Smart Healthy City and Community programme in Iskandar Malaysia generally comprises two elements: educating and reaching out to the people and communities in Iskandar Malaysia to embrace a healthy lifestyle, and creating a conducive ecosystem to enhance the quality of life.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Iskandar Malaysia showcases youth development achievements to Minister of Youth and Sports. <http://iskandar-malaysia.com.my/iskandar-malaysia-showcases-youth-development-achievements-minister-youth-sports-iproperty-com-oct-1-2018>, accessed in July 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Iskandar Malaysia showcases youth development achievements to Minister of Youth and Sports. <http://iskandar-malaysia.com.my/iskandar-malaysia-showcases-youth-development-achievements-minister-youth-sports-iproperty-com-oct-1-2018>, accessed in July 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> IM Makmur. <http://iskandarmalaysia.com.my/programmes>

<sup>63</sup> Smart Healthy City and Community Programme. <http://iskandarmalaysia.com.my/programmes>

## Culture and Disability



NGOs have a pronounced legacy in providing services to the disabled community in Johor Bahru. An art and culture programme is at the centre of their intervention.

### **Johor Rehabilitation Centre (JARO), 1952 – present**

- JARO is an organisation providing training and support in the Johor Bahru area specialising in custom-made handicrafts and binding services.
- It is a rehabilitation centre and workshop for the physically, intellectually and visually challenged.<sup>64</sup>

### **Handicapped and Mentally Disabled Children's Association Johor Bahru, 1990 – present**

- The association is Malaysia's largest home which specialises in custody of around 220 special needs children.

- It provides art therapy for the children, which includes drawing, colouring, and painting, and some simple arts and crafts like basket weaving.<sup>65</sup>

### **Kiwanis Down Syndrome Foundation (KDSF), 1991 – present**

- KDSF provides critical early intervention programmes (EIP) for children with Down Syndrome from two months to six years old. One of the main objectives is to prepare the children so that they are ready for special education in government schools.
- There are three levels of programmes offered by the centre including infant stimulation, toddler and special education.
- Teachers are trained to create a fun-filled environment where singing, dancing, art and crafts, sensory play and story-telling are part of the routine.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> JARO.

<sup>65</sup> HMDCA.

<sup>66</sup> KDSF.

# Cultural Ecosystem and Infrastructure

There is a mix of public and privately developed cultural infrastructure in Johor Bahru. Key venues include an international convention centre, a city stadium and numerous community halls.

Like other states in Malaysia, the Johor state government also maintains a youth, sports, culture and heritage committee.

The Johor Heritage Foundation, established under a special enactment in the Johor State Council, has among its portfolio one that oversees the development of arts and culture. The scope of its

function covers capacity building, event programming and management plus research and documentation.

Besides this, the Johor Bahru arts and culture scene has been driven by private corporations, agencies and community groups such as the Khazanah Nasional Bhd, UEM Sunrise, Themed Attraction Resorts and Hotels, Yayasan Warisan Johor, Johor Society for Performing Arts, Temple of Fine Arts and newer groups like Temasya Rangkaian (Terang). With the JB Transformation plan in place, urban regeneration has often had a cultural, creative and digital dimension.



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**We are also actively promoting the digital transformation agenda in Iskandar Puteri through collaborative projects with international and reputable partners such as KT Corporation of South Korea for the Virtual Reality Centre of Excellence and DHL for the DHL-IIB Global Centre of Excellence.**

Iskandar Investment Berhad (IIB)<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/cover-story-reviewing-iskandar-malaysia>

## Cultural Funding and Partnership

### Iskandar Malaysia Beyond Borders (IMB2P), 2018 – 2019

The Iskandar Malaysia Beyond Borders (IMB2P) mobility grant is an initiative that funds arts, culture and heritage projects of Iskandar Malaysia with collaborative international partners based abroad or in Malaysia. It aims to recognise and appreciate the artistic and cultural diversity as well as to support and encourage collaboration and sharing for better use of resources and sustainability. A total of RM500,000 is being offered under this grant. There are 3 categories under the grant with a maximum award of either RM8,000 or RM20,000 per person and per programme depending on the category applied for.<sup>68</sup>

## Heritage Assets and Activation

As a commitment of the Sultanate and the state, Yayasan Warisan Negeri Johor (YWNG, Johor State Heritage Foundation and now known as *Yayasan Warisan Johor*, YWJ) was launched in 1988 when The State Heritage Foundation Enactment 1998 was passed by the State Assembly of Johor. It has the objective to preserve the history and culture of Johor.

- In the early days of establishment, the focus was towards the identification, excavation, preservation and conservation of places and artefacts of historic significance in collaboration with the *Muzium Negara* (The National Museum). Four divisions were created, including: the museum division, arts and culture development division, literature and history division and performing arts division.
- It is currently housed in *Kompleks Warisan Sultan Abu Bakar*, a one stop centre for heritage, arts and culture and continues its work in the research and collection of heritage and artifacts by organising series workshops, events and competitions to ensure the values of the heritage will be passed on to the next generation.

In 2016, with the expansion of urban revitalisation body Think City into JB, a strategic partnership was quickly formed between the local government and Think City concerning the conservation and preservation of parts of the old town.

- The partnership includes knowledge transfer and capacity building, resulting in public realm rejuvenation programmes such as the redevelopment of alleyways and streetscapes.
- Projects include: *Galeri Tenun Johor* completed in collaboration with YWJ, Jalan Segget conservation project in partnership with the MBBJ local council, the design and streetscape rejuvenation of Coronation Avenue as well as programming festivals in restored back alleys, supporting the Johor Bharu Film Grants Programme.

<sup>68</sup> Iskandar Malaysia Beyond Boundaries Programme Mobility Grant. <http://iskandarmalaysia.com.my/calling-arts-culture-enthusiasts-realize-dreams-iskandar-malaysia-beyond-boundaries-programme-imb2p-mobility-grant-keen-applicants-invited-attend-th>. Official website: <https://www.facebook.com/imb2p>



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**JB is different from George Town or Kuala Lumpur as it was the seat of government of the most progressive Malay Sultanate. It's built heritage represents institutions dedicated to education, town planning and cultural identity that are unique in Malaysia and the region.**

**Daniel Lim, Programme Manager, Think City (Iskarnival 2016)**

The resurgence of George Town and Melaka have catalysed other local councils and entrepreneurs to rethink their local heritage. Taking note of the huge influx of weekend visitors from Singapore to Melaka and George Town, Johor entrepreneurs have jumped on the business opportunities on Jalan Tan Hiok Nee Street and Jalan Dhoby Street in the old town.

- These new businesses have capitalised on the power of social media offering highly instagrammable artistic and creative elements in the form of their food or their interior design, which

is attracting a new younger audience to the old town. This has also helped create a boom for the existing businesses famous for their traditional cuisine.

- A cluster of mixed-use creative spaces sprung up in renovated building, including: Senso Art Gallery Café<sup>69</sup> and EH HE art café (now permanently closed due to the pandemic).<sup>70</sup> 11-F Art Gallery & Café<sup>71</sup> housed in a 1980 building is an artist commune and café located outside of the JB town centre.

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/sensoartgallerycafe>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/culturestreetcafejalanrus>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/its11F>

## Distinctiveness Through Placemaking



The Iskandar Malaysia Area Character Statement is a non-statutory document that identifies the distinctive qualities and characteristics of Iskandar Malaysia.

Launched in 2011, the document proposes strategies to preserve and enhance the quality of place of Greater JB.

Four types of assets identified:

- Natural resources: coastline, beaches, mangroves and other forests, rivers, mountains, hills, plants and animals;
- Built heritage: historical buildings, infrastructure and gardens;
- Social, cultural and traditional elements: people, food, attire and costume, dances, performances, music, songs, games and festivals;
- Urban design: gateway, landmark, edges, nodes, path, to name a few.<sup>72</sup>

### Heritage Activations Case Studies (selected)

#### Johor Bahru Old Chinese Temple, late 19th century

The Johor Bahru Old Chinese Temple was built by a group of community leaders led by Tan Hiok Nee. Unlike other Chinese temples that are named after the deity, the Johor Old Temple is believed to be the first Chinese temple in Malaysia to be named after a State. This is attributed to the strong relationship between the Johor ruler and the Chinese immigrant community.<sup>73</sup>

#### Gurdwara Sahib, 1921 – present

Sikhs settled in the State of Johor in the late 19th Century, mostly employed in the Police Force or in the Johor Sultan's Guards. The present site was gazetted as a temple reserve in 1921. It has undergone several restorations and additional construction throughout WWII and into the 1980's.<sup>74</sup>

#### High Court Building

The building is a fine example of the British colonial architectural aesthetics, which demonstrated the power and authority of the colonial administration in every town across the country. JB's High Court is no exception and a model of it is on display in Legoland Malaysia at Iskandar, just outside of JB. In front of the court is a fountain and monument bearing Johor's coat-of-arms.

#### Johor Bahru Chinese Heritage Museum

The Johor Bahru Chinese Heritage Museum promotes the history of the Chinese community in Johor Bahru. The collection includes photos, old coins, porcelain and other artefacts. It relocated to Jalan Ibrahim in 2004.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Area Character Blue Print, p.1 – 2.

<sup>73</sup> Bonded in tradition. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/04/137144/bonded-tradition>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.malaysia-traveller.com/johor-bahru-heritage-trail.html>

<sup>75</sup> Chinese Heritage Museum. <https://jb-tionghua.org.my/main/新山华族历史文物馆>

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**Johor appreciates the role played by the Chinese community in the opening and development of the state since the beginning of the Johor Sultanate in the 16th century... My forefathers had the foresight to forge a unique relationship with the Chinese. They were invited to Johor to open our land and cultivate plantations. They are ‘Bangsa Johor’, just like the Malays, Indians and others, who are all Malaysians.**

**The Sultan of Johor, Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar<sup>76</sup>**

### **Johor Figure Museum**

The Figure Museum (*Muzium Tokoh*) is a museum housed in a building which was constructed in 1893. It was the official residence of Jaafar Muhammad, the first Chief Minister of Johor. The building was constructed on a 100-hectare land on Senyum Hill. The museum showcases the history of Johor and the Johor Sultanate.<sup>77</sup>

### **Mersing Museum**

The Mersing Museum is based in an old building which was built in the 1920s. It was the Mersing district administrative office. The last government agency to use the space of this building as an office was the Mersing District Council and the Department of Agriculture before it was finally turned into the Mersing Museum.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/02/667464/johor-sultan-pays-tribute-chinese-community>

<sup>77</sup> Figure Museum. <https://itc.gov.my/listings/figure-museum>

<sup>78</sup> Muzium Mersing. <http://www.ywj.gov.my/muzium-mersing>

**Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque, 1900 – present**

The Sultan Abu Bakar State Mosque is the state mosque of Johor, Malaysia. It was constructed between 1892 and 1900, under the direction of Sultan Abu Bakar. It can accommodate 2,000 worshippers at any one time.<sup>79</sup>

**Johor Bahru Railway Station, 1909 – present**

The Johor Bahru Railway was closed in 2010 and is expected to be set up as Malaysia's first train museum in Johor as part of efforts to preserve the country's rich history of the railway system. This includes updating inventories and recordings, hosting conservation programmes as well as restoring all railway historical artefacts that are found at locations throughout Johor and other parts of Peninsular Malaysia.<sup>80</sup>

**Arulmigu Sri Rajakaliamman, 1922 – present**

Arulmigu Sri Rajakaliamman is the first glass Hindu temple in the world and the only one in Malaysia. It is decorated with glass inside and outside. In 1996, the temple was rebuilt and reopened. Transformation of the Arulmigu Sri Rajakaliamman temple with glass fittings started in 2008. It was completed in 2009 and became one of the major attractions in Johor Bahru.<sup>81</sup>

**Sultan Ibrahim Building, 1942 – present**

The Sultan Ibrahim building was constructed between 1936 and 1939, and completed in 1940. It was officially opened by Johor's late Sultan Ibrahim in 1942. The building used to house both the Chief Minister's office and the Johor State Legislative Assembly. However, the offices of the state secretariat have been relocated to Kota Iskandar and plans are in the pipeline to convert the building into a museum.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Sultan Abu Bakar State Mosque. <https://itc.gov.my>

<sup>80</sup> Johor plans to house country's first train museum. <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2019/11/29/johor-plans-to-house-countrys-first-train-museum>

<sup>81</sup> Arulmigu Sri Rajakaliamman Glass Temple. <http://johortravel.com/arulmigu-sri-rajakaliamman-glass-temple>

<sup>82</sup> A historical landmark down south. <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/travel/2020/07/09/a-historical-landmark-down-south>

## Cultural Infrastructure, Creative Hubs and Assets (selected)

Johoreans pride themselves with their rich and diverse cultural heritage. The cultural landscape in Johor Bahru features a mix of large-scale public-private commercial projects, such as the Iskandar Malaysia Studios<sup>83</sup> which was originally backed by the international film company Pinewood Group until their withdrawal of funding in 2019<sup>84</sup>, and the recently unveiled Permaisuri Zarith Sofiah Opera House<sup>85</sup> built by one of the China's top 10 real estate developers – R&F Group.

Commercial projects such as BookXcess at Sunway Big Box opening in 2020, focus on the local market as well as Singaporeans who frequent JB for affordable entertainment and groceries.<sup>86</sup>

- BookXcess opened this JB concept store, featuring 32,000-square feet of floor space and over 1 million books. Its Box of Knowledge installation makes it the biggest bookstore in Southern Region of Malaysia.

In addition to these large-scale investment projects, the city is not short of community-driven initiatives such as the Johor Sketchers<sup>87</sup> – an informal community of artists that share inspirations on sketching – and Little Graffiti Story House<sup>88</sup> that provides a library and literacy programme to children.

There is also a strong social purpose movement led by JARO (Johor Area Rehabilitation Organisation)<sup>89</sup> who provide employment for less-abled artisans skilled at rattan weaving, sewing and book binding.

Under the Medini umbrella, there has been a concerted effort to create long term cultural and sports programmes comprising, music festivals, buskings, arts and craft workshops, extreme sports performances and art exhibitions in the Mall of Medini, EduCity Commons or in Edible Park.

- The Mall of Medini has also programmed a series of artisanal markets, hackathons, start-up pitch sessions and drone classes. OneMaker Medini is the first overseas makerspace outlet of OneMaker

Group Pte Ltd, providing maker education opportunities (such as learning journeys, workshops and camps) to corporate and learning institutions that are based in Johor and beyond. They are lining up a series of events including STEM camps for schools, monthly/quarterly bazaar and weekly learning journeys.

## Audiovisual/TV/Film Hubs

### G Six Studio, 2012 – present

The vision of G Six Studio is to create a dynamic performing studio that is liberal, progressive, innovative, and full of diversity. It aims to provide a well-equipped and safe platform for creative individuals and organisations to express their work, stimulate dialogue, exchange ideas and challenge performing possibilities.<sup>90</sup>

### Iskandar Malaysia Studios, 2016 – present

Iskandar Malaysia Studios is a premier destination for filmed entertainment production in Southeast Asia. It houses film stages, TV studios, water filming tanks, and extensive production support facilities. The mission of the studio is to serve as a preferred location for film and television productions from around the world, as well as to promote and foster the development of quality Malaysian screen content amongst domestic filmmakers and TV producers.<sup>91</sup> The campus covers a 30-acres and was rebranded from Pinewood Iskandar Malaysia Studios into its current name after Pinewood pulled out from its initial 10-year partnership with the government in 2019.<sup>92</sup>

### BroadWay Cinema

Built in 1940, this art decor cinema on Jalan Segget went through a facade restoration by Think City. The cinema currently shows Tamil and Bollywood blockbusters.

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.iskandarmalaysiastudios.com>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/whats-post-pinewood-future-malaysias-150m-film-studio-1224498>

<sup>85</sup> <https://pzsoh.com.my>

<sup>86</sup> <https://mothership.sg/2020/03/bookxcess-sunway-big-box-singapore>

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/666876979994604>

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/lqshbatu11>

<sup>89</sup> <https://jaro.org.my>

<sup>90</sup> G Six Studio. <https://www.facebook.com/GSixStudio>

<sup>91</sup> Iskandar Malaysia Studios. <https://www.iskandarmalaysiastudios.com>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/whats-post-pinewood-future-malaysias-150m-film-studio-1224498>

## Cultural and Creative hubs

### JOHO HQ, 2018 – present

JOHO HQ is a classic bungalow within 2 acres of land and was previously known as a working space for a creative group. It was converted to a creative hub for the public in 2018, for the purpose of gathering a creative community and creative thinkers. It is also a venue for events, homestay, food and entertainment.<sup>93</sup>

### The Johor Society for the Performing Arts (JSPA), 2000 – present

The Johor Society for the Performing Arts is a non-commercial organisation, which aims to encourage, develop, support, advance, create awareness, and instill an appreciation for the arts in Johor through projects across a spectrum of artistic disciplines and genres. In addition to the annual Johor Arts Festival (JohorAF), they also organise Jazz Festivals, Film Festivals, Indigenous Festivals, Classical Music Festivals, Piano Festivals, Writers & Readers Festivals and so on.<sup>94</sup>

### Embrace Hall Records & Distribution, 2015 – present

Embrace majors on trading local & imported records such as vinyl, CD and cassette for any genre of music. It is also a DIY space for independent music & art lovers, welcoming any kind of creative event such as gigs, screenings, art workshops.<sup>95</sup>

### Ruang by Think City Johor Bahru, 2016 – present

Ruang by Think City Johor Bahru is set in a traditional Straits Chinese shophouse which is located in the downtown area of the city. It offers a space and amenities for communities to hold workshops, talks, exhibitions and other events.<sup>96</sup>

### The Rockin Jamz Hall, 2016 – present

The Rockin Jamz Hall is a space that caters to all kinds of events such as showcases, seminars, gigs, theatres, filming etc. It is able to fit an audience of 350 people.<sup>97</sup>

### 11 F, 2018 – present

11 F is a creative community in Johor. It is a cafe, artist studios, workshop and event space which is driven and supported by a team of creatives and associates with diverse interests and backgrounds.<sup>98</sup>

### Rekan Library, 2019 – present

Rekan Library is a community library in Muar that encourages reading, promotes life aesthetics, and provides an experiential platform for cultural activities. It aims to promote a better standard of living through its activities, including collaborations.<sup>99</sup>

### Ambeng Artspace, 2019 – present

Ambeng Artspace is a place where the public can experience arts through art exhibitions, residency programmes, and art classes.<sup>100</sup>



Rekan Library.

Photo © Rekan Library

<sup>93</sup> Joho HQ. <https://www.facebook.com/JOHO-HQ-910586342471552>

<sup>94</sup> The Johor Society for the Performing Arts (JSPA). <https://jspa.peatix.com>.

<sup>95</sup> Embrace Hall Records & Distribution. <https://embracehall.com>

<sup>96</sup> Think City. <https://thinkcity.com.my/contact-us>

<sup>97</sup> The Rockin. <https://www.facebook.com/TheRockinJamzHall>

<sup>98</sup> 11 F. <https://www.facebook.com/its11F>

<sup>99</sup> Rekan Library. [https://creativehubs.my/creative\\_hub/rekan-library](https://creativehubs.my/creative_hub/rekan-library); Official website: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Rekan-Library/298655174338459>

<sup>100</sup> Ambeng Artspace. <https://www.facebook.com/ambengartspace>

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## TMIYC Muar will be equipped with various facilities for the benefit of youths and will be the focal point for personal development and group activities.

Tunku Mahkota Johor Tunku Ismail Ibni Sultan Ibrahim<sup>101</sup>

### Tunku Mahkota Ismail Youth Centre (TMIYC), 2020 – present

Tunku Mahkota Ismail Youth Centre was launched in 2020 by the Johor crown prince. It is a platform for JB youth to carry out leisure and recreational activities. It covers an area of 6.07 ha with 11 facilities, including a canopy walk, youth centre, mountain bike trails, parkour park, Kiddo Ground, and Skatepro.<sup>102</sup> The idea of forming TMIYC is to strengthen youth development by having a youth centre in every district in Johor. The second TMIYC was launched in Muar.<sup>103</sup>

### Cultural and Creative Infrastructure

#### Kompleks Warisan Sultan Abu Bakar

KWSAB<sup>104</sup> or Sultan Abu Bakar Heritage Complex, is a one stop centre for the culture and traditions of Johor. It was previously known as Kompleks Yayasan Warisan Johor (The Heritage Foundation of Johor). The centre was developed by the Johor Royal Family in collaboration with the state government to preserve

the heritage and traditions of Bangsa Johor. Aside from being the headquarters of Yayasan Warisan Johor, the complex is a one stop center for six core components of heritage – a weaving gallery, weaving workshop, a mini gallery, an archive, an art gallery and a park that celebrates traditional arts.<sup>105</sup>

#### Galeri Tenun Johor, 1946 – present

The Weaving Gallery of Johor has revived the historical Rumah Tenun Johor, the first weaving centre that was initiated by Tengku Ampuan Mariam, the eldest daughter of Sultan Abu Bakar in 1946, and administered by Tok Ambak, a prominent figure of the Johor's women's association. The Heritage Complex includes the Johor weaving gallery, an art gallery, a documentation center and a number of cafes serving Johor food.<sup>106</sup>

#### Sultan Ismail Library, 1964 – present

Perpustakaan Sultan Ismail was founded in 1964 and launched by the late Sultan Ismail, who was the 23rd Sultan of Johor and the 3rd Sultan of Modern Johor.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/12/29/tmj-opens-second-youth-centre-in-muar>

<sup>102</sup> Johor crown prince launches youth centre, NGO. <https://www.thevibes.com/articles/news/10730/johor-crown-prince-launches-youth-centre-ngo>

<sup>103</sup> TMJ opens second youth centre in Muar. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/12/29/tmj-opens-second-youth-centre-in-muar>

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/YayasanWarisanJohor/posts/kompleks-warisan-sultan-abu-bakaryayasan-warisan-johor/1188081144563739>

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/420/EDISI/Johor/KWSAB-jadi-pusat-sehenti-budaya-warisan>

<sup>106</sup> <https://senijari.wordpress.com/2018/12/13/galeri-tenun-johor-the-launch-and-revival-of-weaving-gallery-in-johor>

<sup>107</sup> Perpustakaan Sultan Ismail. <https://www.facebook.com/psimbjb>

### **The Bugis Museum, 1982 – present**

The Bugis Museum is located in Pontian District. It was established in 1982 as Bugis Heritage and supported by Johor State Government in 1994 through Johor Heritage Foundation. The museum was declared as the first Bugis museum in Malaysia. There are more than 2,000 artifacts displayed in the museum, ranging from weapons, clothes, old coins, jewellery, pictures etc.<sup>108</sup>

### **Johor Art Gallery, 1994 – present**

Johor Art Gallery was formed in 1994. It was a place for the collection and exhibition of historical artifacts, especially those related to the arts and culture of the state of Johor. In 2003, it reopened as an art gallery which serves as a centre of education, collection, demonstration, documentation, reference and a place for art activities.<sup>109</sup>

### **Kota Tinggi Museum (Muzium Kota Tinggi), 1999 – present**

Kota Tinggi Museum was first built in 1997 as Kota Tinggi History Centre. It was completed in 1999 and handed over to the Department of Museum and Antiquities. It was later handed over to the Johor State Government in 2001 and is currently under the management of Johor Heritage Foundation.<sup>110</sup>

### **Johor Documentation Centre (Pusat Dokumentasi Johor), Johor Heritage Foundation, 2000 – present**

The Johor Documentation Centre has been in operation since 2000. It is currently located at the Sultan Abu Bakar Heritage Complex in the Literature and History Division of Johor Heritage Foundation. It aims to preserve the collection of historical heritage, literature, arts, culture, language, religion, economy, social, science and technology, especially those related to Johor.<sup>111</sup>

### **Johor Public Library Corporation (Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Johor)**

The Johor Public Library consists of 3 floors with a land area of 2,661 acres and a floor area of 45,000 square feet. It has a collection of over 100,000 books. The entire library is also equipped with WiFi facilities.<sup>112</sup>

### **Persada Johor International Convention Centre, 2006 – present**

The Persada Johor International Convention Centre is owned by Johor Corporation. It is for the purpose to host various trade and consumer shows, meetings, banquets, weddings and other special events.<sup>113</sup>

### **The Kota Johor Lama Museum (Muzium Kota Johor Lama), 2007 – present**

The Kota Johor Lama Museum tells the history of ancient Johor. Construction started in 2004. The museum was completed and opened to the public in 2007.<sup>114</sup>

### **Austin International Convention Centre, 2018 – present**

The Austin International Convention Centre is the largest ballroom in Tebrau, Johor. It can accommodate more than 2,000 banquet guests.<sup>115</sup>

### **Permaisuri Zarith Sofiah Opera House, 2020 – present**

The Permaisuri Zarith Sofiah Opera House is named after Her Majesty Raja Zarith Sofiah, Permaisuri Johor (Queen of Johor). The opera house can accommodate more than 500 people, and spans 114,430 square feet. The launch of the Opera House also coincides with the China – Malaysia Year of Culture and Tourism in 2020 which was intended to foster friendship between the two countries.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Bugis Museum. <https://itc.gov.my/listings/bugis-museum>

<sup>109</sup> Galeri Seni Johor. <http://www.ywj.gov.my/galeri-seni-johor>

<sup>110</sup> Muzium Kota Tinggi. <http://www.ywj.gov.my/muzium-kota-tinggi>

<sup>111</sup> Pusat Dokumentasi Johor. <http://www.ywj.gov.my/pusat-dokumentasi-johor>

<sup>112</sup> Perbadanan Perpustakaan Awam Johor. <http://ppaj.johor.gov.my>

<sup>113</sup> Persada Johor. <http://persadajohor.com/V15>

<sup>114</sup> Kota Johor Lama Museum. <https://itc.gov.my/listings/kota-johor-lama-museum>

<sup>115</sup> Austin International Convention Centre. <http://austinparkhotel.my/galleries?gid=4>

<sup>116</sup> Permaisuri Zarith Sofiah Opera House. <https://pzsoh.com.my>



**Legoland Malaysia, 2012 – present**

Legoland Malaysia covers more than 50 full size football pitches and contains more than 15,000 LEGO models made from over 60 million LEGO bricks. Other LEGOLAND Resorts are located in Japan, United Arab Emirates, Denmark, Germany, United States, and the United Kingdom.<sup>117</sup>

**Pasir Gudang Kite Museum, 2002 – present**

The Pasir Gudang Kite Museum is a museum about kites which was established in 2002 during the 7th Pasir Gudang International Kite Festival. The museum is housed in a two-story building. It features a small windmill to generate its own electricity.<sup>118</sup>



**Before the building was turned into a museum, it served as a windmill and we have retained its original structure until today... [We provide activities] includes kite showcases, kite-flying competitions as well as workshops to teach primary and secondary school students about kite-making.**

**Andik Husni Andik Abdul Latif, curator, Bugis Museum<sup>119</sup>**

## Events, Festivals and Creative Marketplaces (selected)

Johor has an active festival scene. Pasir Gudang World Kite Festival, organised by the Pasir Gudang Municipal Council, with the cooperation of Tourism Johor and the Johor Tourist Association, is among the most reputable.

In recently years, a ‘hipster culture’ is gaining wide appeal among local and regional youth, with music at its core. This trend saw the hosting of Southern Gate Music Festival<sup>120</sup> in 2019 organised by JB Oxygen<sup>121</sup> and South Beats Festival<sup>122</sup> in 2017 organised by EH HE Art Café and the team Earth Heart Art & Culture.<sup>123</sup>

**Pasir Gudang World Kite Festival, 1995 – present**

Organiser: Pasir Gudang Municipal Council, with the cooperation of Tourism Johor and the Johor Tourist Association

The Pasir Gudang World Kite Festival is one of the most prestigious annual events and has been listed in the Johor State Tourism Calendar.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Legoland. <https://www.legoland.com.my>

<sup>118</sup> Kite Museum (Johor). <https://itc.gov.my/listings/kite-museum-johor>

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2020/10/30/first-kite-museum-in-search-of-unique-logo>

<sup>120</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/southerngatemusicfestival>, accessed in July 2021.

<sup>121</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/jboxygen>

<sup>122</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/southbeatsfestival>

<sup>123</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/earthheart.ehhe>

<sup>124</sup> World Kite Festival Pasir Gudang. <http://www.kitefestpasirgudang.com/v2>



**FLLSPG [Pasir Gudang World Kite Festival] is such a significant tourism event in Johor and it plays a role to express the exquisite culture of wau and kites. Aside from that, it will also boost the economy of the region due to an influx of international visitors during the period.**

Liow Cai Tung, Johor State Women and Tourism Development Committee Chairwoman<sup>125</sup>

#### **Bon Odori, 1999 – present**

Organiser: Southern Branch of Japan Graduates of Malaysia (JAGAM)

Bon Odori is a Japanese folk-dance harvest festival. 2019 marked its 20th annual celebration in Johor.<sup>126</sup>

#### **Johor Arts Festival, 2003 – present**

Organiser: Johor Society for the Performing Arts (JSPA)

Johor Arts Festival is an event to encourage a sense of community. It brings performers together under a common theme each year.<sup>127</sup>

#### **Johor Crafts Festival, 2010 – present**

Organiser: Kraftangan Malaysia Johor

The festival aims to foster innovation in terms of design and creation in Malaysia's traditional handicrafts.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>125</sup> <https://theiskandarian.com/24th-pasir-gudang-world-kite-festival>

<sup>126</sup> A Record-Breaking Japanese Dance in Johor Bahru. <https://theiskandarian.com/a-record-breaking-japanese-dance-in-johor-bahru>

<sup>127</sup> JBartsfest. <https://issuu.com/jbartsfest>

<sup>128</sup> Festival Kraf Johor. <https://www.facebook.com/festivalkrafjohor>



**Although every state has its own crafts festival, craft makers also take part in other state festivals as well, especially in Johor, which attracts a large number of visitors from nearby countries... Johor attracts the second-largest crowd after the Kuala Lumpur Craft Festival and each year, we see an increase in participation from craft makers not only from the state but others as well.**

**Ibrahim Ismail, Kraftangan Malaysia director-general<sup>129</sup>**

#### **Iskarnival Eko, 2011 – present**

Organiser: Marina Walk Puteri Harbour, Iskarnival and Iskandar Puteri

Iskarnival Eko is Iskandar Puteri's platform for local initiatives and talents to showcase and share ideas on working, playing and living green. This free public festival aims to strengthen appreciation for natural resources in an urban context.<sup>130</sup>

#### **International Islamic and Halal Festival (FIJO), 2019**

Organiser: Warisan Advertising Sdn Bhd and FAZ Ventures Sdn Bhd in collaboration with the Johor State Government and Perbadanan Usahawan Johor Sdn Bhd (PUJB).

The International Islamic and Halal Festival serves as a stepping stone in making Johor a fast-growing halal hub. More than 200 exhibitors participated in this festival including those from Thailand, Indonesia, Syria, United Kingdom, Singapore and Turkey.<sup>131</sup>

#### **TERANG International Online Festival, 2020**

Organiser: Temasya Rangkaian

TERANG is a combination of the words TEMasya + RANGkaian. It is an online festival celebrating art performances across space boundaries via the Internet during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2019/12/05/rm75mil-sales-target-for-craft-festival>

<sup>130</sup> Iskarnival Eko 2019 Highlights Eco-Consciousness Of Creative Communities In Johor. <https://www.propertyguru.com.my/property-news/2019/11/184594/iskarnival-eko-2019-highlights-eco-consciousness-of-creative-communities-in-johor>

<sup>131</sup> Johor Hosted the First International Islamic and Halal Festival. <https://theiskandarian.com/johor-hosted-the-first-international-islamic-and-halal-festival>

<sup>132</sup> TERANG International Online Festival. <https://kakiseni.com/event/terang-international-online-festival>; Official website: <https://www.facebook.com/temasyarangkaian>

# Cultural Ecosystem and Infrastructure

Inspired by indie and hipster influences abroad and from domestic counterparts Kuala Lumpur, Melaka and George Town, Johoreans have created their own creative movement, resulting in a dynamic indie music scene that is gaining traction across the border, into Singapore and beyond.

Lifestyle cafés and restaurants have an expanding following amongst the local community as well as the

weekend travelers from KL, Singapore and Penang. Streets in the old town such as Tan Hiok Nee and Jalan Dhoby have been rejuvenated with the influx of instagrammable boutiques and cafés, with a touch of art and cultural programme. Such a regeneration has drawn crowds to the old town and brought in younger consumers to the local traditional food businesses.

**Table 1** Selected Johor Bahru stakeholders<sup>133</sup>

Media/Film/Digital	Arts	Crossover – Culture/Arts/Lifestyle
Camou Academy, 2010 – present	Hasmi Hashim, lyricist	Temasya Rangkaian (TERANG)
Eason Chan, founder of JohorNow	Kicau-Bilau, musicians	Chris Parry, Johor Green
Edey Suresh, director of The Isklandarian	Mulo, artist	Johan Ropi, co-founder of Kilang Bateri and a former special officer to IRDA
Kreat, 2018 – present	Tok Rimau, artist	Think City, Urban Rejuvenator
	Peggy Loh, writer	LabDNA, social architectural firm
	Paul Law, composer and producer	Soon Ng, restaurateur
	Plague of Happiness, punk & ska band	JARO (Johor Area Rehabilitation Organisation)
	Laila's Lounge, music band	
	Juno and Hanna, synthpop artists	
	Popscene, Britpop band	
	Ahmad Zakii Anwar, artist	
	Cheeming Boey, artist	

<sup>133</sup> For the purpose of this report, cultural influencers are defined as the media or cultural sector go to people comprising key opinion leaders who are networked into the public, private and cultural scene. They or their organisations, where possible, have a substantial following (>50,000 followers) especially on social media and/or digital channels and are seen as credible experts in their field and can influence change, innovating culture and arts practices through their programmes. In order to provide a sampling of the movers and shakers, they have been categorised into 3 key sectors comprising media, film and digitals, the arts, and those within a crossover of culture, arts and lifestyle.

## Media/Film/Digital

### Camou Academy, 2010

Camou Academy originated from Camou Studio, which was founded back in 2010. It has gradually expanded and currently owns three buildings, making it the largest media design institute in Southern Malaysia. It also created its very own ecosystem which involves media design-related companies including a 3D animation studio, equipment rental house, performing arts institute, a marketing company and more.<sup>134</sup>

### Eason Chan, founder of JohorNow

Upon returning from Singapore after almost a decade of running a digital agency, Eason saw the opportunity for a localised content site to promote Johor to a wider audience. The JohorNow media agency supports small and medium enterprises and traditional companies with digital content creation.<sup>135</sup>

### Edey Suresh, director of The Iskandarian

Edey Suresh is a respected journalist, editor, social entrepreneur, planner, trainer and strategist. Born and raised in Johor, he is the Director of True Soul Media PLT which under a public-private partnership with Iskandar Regional Development Authority (IRDA), owns and publishes the region's only local newspaper called The Iskandarian. Edey is also the Director of Global Compact Network Malaysia (GCMY) which is the official local network for the United Nations Global Compact. He is the founder of the Social Hero Foundation as well as the Founding President of Johor Bahru Collective Media or JOCOM.<sup>136</sup>

### Kreat, 2018 – present

Kreat is a media and physical platform that showcases the creative community, its artworks and ideas in Johor Bahru.<sup>137</sup>

## Arts

### Hanzhen Yap, artist

Yap is a young sketch artist. His works have been exhibited in Malaysia and across Asia. He has been commissioned by notable organisations such as Doubletree Hilton Hotel, Ramada & Ramada Encore Hotels, Shell Malaysia and the Singapore High Commission in KL. He has published six sketch books in a series called “*Sketches By Hanzhen*”, currently available in bookstores in Malaysia and Singapore.<sup>138</sup>

### Hasmi Hashim, lyricist

Hasmi Hashim or Budi Hekayat is a lyricist and one of the founders of the cultural group, Jalan Telawi.<sup>139</sup> He is also the columnist of online media sites, Malaysiakini and The Malaysian Insight.

### Kicau-Bilau, musicians

Kicau-Bilau is a husband-and-wife soundscaping duo. Ngerfan plays the guitar, engineered to sound like a sitar. Jihan plays the angklung, a Southeast Asian traditional instrument made of bamboo.<sup>140</sup>

### Mulo, artist

Mulo is a Malaysian visual artist who is well-known for producing digital drawings. He showcased his most recent artworks in an exhibition in 2020, supported by Balai Seni Negara and Kreat.<sup>141</sup>

### Tok Rimau, artist

Tok Rimau had his earliest drawing lessons from his father and has now learnt a great deal more through his interaction with fellow members. He is the founder of Johor Sketchers which encourages everyone to rediscover the joys of sketching.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Camou Academy. <https://camouacademy.com>

<sup>135</sup> 2018 Johor Startup Ecosystem Report. P. 47-48. Official website: <https://www.facebook.com/johornow>; <https://www.facebook.com/johornowenglish>

<sup>136</sup> Edey Suresh. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/edeysuresh>

<sup>137</sup> Kreat. <https://www.facebook.com/kreat.my>

<sup>138</sup> Hanzhen. <https://www.hanzhen.org/index.html>

<sup>139</sup> Hasmi Hashim. <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/bahasa/a/14789>

<sup>140</sup> Kicau-Bilau. <https://canstudiojb.tumblr.com/post/185379760290/kicau-bilau-tokok-tumbuh>

<sup>141</sup> Mulo. <https://www.facebook.com/mulo87>

<sup>142</sup> Johor Sketchers. <http://ppunlimited.blogspot.com/2014/01/johor-sketchers.html>; Official website: <https://tokrimau.tumblr.com>

### **Peggy Loh, writer**

Peggy Loh is a Johor-based writer of The New Straits Times (NST), contributing to various segments like Destinations, Gourmet & Shopping Trails, Hotel Watch, Culture Heritage and Traveller's Tales. She writes regularly on a blog titled *My Johor Stories*.<sup>143</sup>

### **Paul Law, composer and producer**

Paul Law is a renowned pop music composer and festival producer. Law is a pillar of the Johor Bahru Chinese independent music scene and deeply involved with the popular music scene in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China.<sup>144</sup>

### **Plague of Happiness, punk & ska band**

Plague of Happiness<sup>145</sup> is one of the country's finest ska bands. Formed in 1999, this nine-man band with a strong brass sound, is heavily influenced by punk and reggae. It has built a reputation for their entertaining and rowdy live sets.

### **Juno and Hanna, synthpop artists**

This brother and sister singer songwriter duo was born and raised in JB and have relocated to Kuala Lumpur for their music career. The band has been rapidly gaining popularity since the release of their album AIR in 2016.<sup>146</sup>

### **Laila's Lounge, music band**

Formed in 1998, Laila's Lounge<sup>147</sup> gained popularity with the release of *Mawar Khayalan* in 2008. The song was included as the soundtrack of the popular teen movie *Kami* and garnered over 2 million views on Youtube. Their EP *Kosong* released in 2008 achieved critical acclaim and became a hit on local radio charts. The band took a hiatus in 2009 and launched a comeback after 2015 with a re-release of *Kosong*.

### **Popscene, Britpop band**

Formed in 2014, this Britpop band released their first EP *Popscene* in 2016 and have gained a steady following. Prior to the pandemic, they have been playing at gigs around the country such as Tempatan Fest's live shows in KL and Ipoh as well as across the region.<sup>148</sup>

### **Ahmad Zakii Anwar, artist**

Ahmad Zakii Anwar (b. 1955), also known as Zakii, is one of the best-known artists in Malaysia.<sup>149</sup> His photo-realistic, large-scale charcoal drawings of male nudes are lauded for capturing not only city motifs and urban features but also the distinctive psychological dimensions and cinematic quality of these settings.

### **Cheeming Boey, artist**

Cheeming is an animator, illustrator and author. Primarily known only by his last name Boey, he is best recognised by his illustrations on foam coffee cups, his daily webcomic *'I Am Boey'*<sup>150</sup> and his autobiographical graphic novel *When I Was A Kid*. Boey has taught computer animation and worked as a lead animator for the international game developer Blizzard Entertainment as a lead animator on popular console game hits *Diablo II* and *Diablo III*.<sup>151</sup> He has also worked at *Factor 5 on Lair* and with a rich portfolio of international clientele such as Mattel, Disney, 7-Eleven, Esquire, Vittoria Coffee, draftfcb, to name a few.

<sup>143</sup> Peggy Loh. <http://ppunlimited.blogspot.com/p/about-peggy-loh.html>

<sup>144</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/paul.law.969>

<sup>145</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/plagueofhappiness>

<sup>146</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/junoandhanna>

<sup>147</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/lailasloungeofficial>

<sup>148</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/popscenejb/about>

<sup>149</sup> <http://www.saparcontemporary.com/ahmad-zakii-anwar>

<sup>150</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/iamboey>

<sup>151</sup> <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/books/news/2012/08/07/not-your-usual-bio-from-cheeming-boey>

## Crossover – Culture/Arts/Lifestyle

### Temasya Rangkaian (TERANG)

TERANG<sup>152</sup> is a JB-based online festival for performing arts and interdisciplinary art forms. It aims to spread hope through access to arts.

### Chris Parry, Johor Green

Chris Parry is the founder of Johor Green, a social enterprise focused on cultivating green urban lifestyles. The Johor native designed and operates Medini Green Parks, two urban parks with edible landscapes that build communities around food and sustainability.

### Johan Ropi, co-founder of Kilang Bateri and a former special officer to IRDA

An architect by training, he is the co-founder of Kilang Bateri and a former special officer to IRDA. He is an influencer and is very well connected in JB. Kilang Bateri was a successful rejuvenation project of an old battery factory, comprising a youth lifestyle mall that combined hipster culture with the then emerging food truck fad.

### Think City, Urban Regenerator

Think City a subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Bhd, has been working together with local council MBBJ on rejuvenating the heritage core of JB. The transformation programme comprised a grants programme offering grants to community leaders and change agents to create a bottom-up catalytic effect in the city. Their projects have since grown to encompass urban design, alley rejuvenation and a streetscape public realm improvement programme in JB old town.

### LabDNA, social architectural firm

Led by Nani Kahar, LabDNA<sup>153</sup> have pioneered placemaking in Malaysia with Publika the mixed-use development built by UEM Sunrise. Nani have been working closely with Think City and Khazanah to help in the activation of Medan Pasar (Market Square) in downtown Kuala Lumpur as well as the Medini quarters in Iskandar Puteri.

### Soon Ng, restaurateur

Soon Ng is a seasoned restaurateur. He has founded many lifestyle dining venues such as People & Places Café (closed as a result of the pandemic) and Founders Café. He has now started a new brand under ROUTINE by Soon that features artisanal pastries and food by local Johor bakers.

### JARO (Johor Area Rehabilitation Organisation)

JARO is an organisation providing training and workplace for the disabled artisans around Johor Bahru area, specialising in custom-made handicrafts and binding services.<sup>154</sup> The centre has recently gone through a complete renovation to upgrade their facilities and handicap access with the assistance of Think City's grants programme.

<sup>152</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/temasyarangkaian>

<sup>153</sup> <http://www.labdna.com>

<sup>154</sup> <https://jaro.org.my>

