



★ TRAVEL ★  
REVOLUTION  
革新旅游 2018  
THE EVENT ★ 顶级盛会

- **WHEN**  
March 23 to 25, 11am to 9.30pm
- **WHERE**  
Marina Bay Sands, B2 Expo Hall E
- **ADMISSION**  
Free



# Kuching chic

The capital of Sarawak is developing into a snazzy city and is slated to become the newest travel destination in Malaysia, as **Carolyn Hong** discovers

I was nursing a coffee alone in a café on a rainy morning in Kuching when the waiter asked if I'd like to join a ladies' knitting circle.

It didn't matter that I couldn't knit, I was told. My curiosity stoked, I agreed and he introduced me to a group of three women who were doing more chatting than knitting. I found

out that they were from France, Germany and the Netherlands, and had been living in Kuching for between two months and 26 years.

That was an unexpectedly pleasant interlude. It transpired that the Indah Café is quite the meeting place for people interested in all things holistic and artsy, from yoga to knitting.

The place does exude a creative vibe, with walls and shelves laden with an eclectic collection of artwork and crafts by local artists and artisans, all for sale. It is a great place to pick up souvenirs that are contemporary yet Sarawakian, from paintings to soaps to hand-drawn post-cards and mugs.

Indah Café, which opened recently, has the company of the sleek Lima Tujoh café, Lemon & Co gift shop and two guesthouses along the same stretch. Once a quiet alleyway used mostly by the families living in the old shophouses here, Upper China Street is beginning to



look distinctively chic.

Kuching itself is looking increasingly snazzy with new cafés, guesthouses, bars, street art and other attractions having mushroomed in recent years in the old quarter by the Sarawak River. Last year alone, it hosted two major cultural festivals that drew thousands of visitors.

In a way, this new vibrancy feels like a breath of fresh air.

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Above: A boatman takes a break, mooring his sampan at the foot of the new Darul Hana Bridge.

Left: The old Anglican resthouse (now the Marian Hotel) in the background with an old Chinese temple in the foreground.

PHOTOS: CAROLYN HONG



## TRAVEL REVOLUTION



## Kuching chic

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Sarawak is so rich in history and culture that it can sometimes feel rather ancient, weighed down by an identity so tightly entwined with its history.

As I left Indah Café to explore the area, I saw signs of this energy everywhere. Even its heritage crafts such as woven rattan items look sleeker and more contemporary.

It is also fun to explore how traditional recipes, such as chicken pansuh (chicken cooked with jungle vegetables in bamboo) and the famed Sarawak layer cake, are being reinterpreted. I also got to discover new uses for gula apong (palm sugar).

Next, I checked out Kuching's latest attraction, a 335m-long curving bridge high over the Sarawak River. Opened last November, the Darul Hana Bridge provides a new vantage



point to view this iconic river, offering fresh perspectives of the cityscape.

On the bridge, I could see how the domes of the Sikh Gurdwara look strikingly similar to the dome of a nearby mosque, and how the pointed roofs of the shophouses resemble the sharp angles of the Chinese temple in their midst.

For now, Kuching is still under the radar and laidback but don't expect it to be quiet for too long.

Above: A chic restaurant operates in one of the old courtrooms on the meticulously landscaped grounds of the Old Courthouse.

Top: The artsy Indah Café offers a range of local arts and crafts for sale.

PHOTOS: CAROLYN HONG

## CITY GUIDE

### WHAT TO DO

Kuching's compact waterfront area is easy to explore on foot.

- Shop for fine craftwork at low prices along the Main Bazaar where there are numerous souvenir shops. For more luxurious and unusual crafts, browse the gift shops at The Marian Boutique Lodging House (25 Wayang Street) and The Raneer Boutique Suites (7 Main Bazaar). Indah Café (38 Upper China Street) carries affordable original artworks.

- Cross the Sarawak River on a covered sampan (wooden boat) just for fun. The alternative route is via the new Darul Hana Bridge that links the heritage sites on both banks. The bridge is popular with the locals for enjoying beautiful sunsets.

- Learn about the fascinating story of Sarawak's unique history and its White Rajahs at the Brooke Gallery. It is located in the evocative Fort Margherita, which was built in 1879 based on the design of an English castle.

- Wander around Kuching's waterfront area. Keep an eye out for free walking tours or other regular events. Leaflets can usually be found in the cafés.

### WHERE TO EAT

There is more to Kuching than Sarawak laksa and kolo mee, so make time to check out new cafés by the waterfront.

- Lima Tujoh café's (57 Upper China Street) chilled vibe invites you to linger over coffee. Its main offering is its interpretation of nasi lemak (coconut rice) with a sweet-sour sambal, sunny side-up and bittergourd crackers. Try it with the tender chicken pansuh.

- The artsy Indah Café has a vegan menu and a tempting array of cakes. Its version of the Sarawak layer cake is a lush steamed slice of alternating layers of Milo and Horlicks. Check out its vegan wraps with interesting fillings such as tempe caramelised with gula apong (palm sugar).

- The Old Courthouse (Jalan Tun Haji Openg), as its name suggests, used to be a courthouse. Its landscaped grounds and whitewashed pillars make for striking photographs. A stylish restaurant, which operates in one of the old courtrooms, is a charming place to dine in while imagining the drama that its walls have witnessed over the years.

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PHOTO: TEQ

Fly Scoot to Gold Coast on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner and book during the Travel Revolution 2018 — The Event fair to enjoy 20 per cent off selected fares with promo code "SCOOT20". Sales period: Singapore time, from March 21, 10am to March 26, 11.59pm. Travel by Aug 30, 2018.

Visit [www.flyscot.com/goldcoast](http://www.flyscot.com/goldcoast) to book your tickets.

Scoot is the only local budget airline that flies directly to the Gold Coast four times a week.

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