

Nostalgia - Old Time Entertainment - Kampar Style

By Ian Anderson

Kampar Town, founded by the Mandailings who came up the river from Kampar Regency, Rau Province Sumatra, has changed rapidly in the last few years. The arrival of UTAR and the huge development alongside it has given us Kampar Baru. Here there is the Grand Hotel, a tin mining museum and a range of shops and houses, with decoration reminiscent of Disneyland. But what about the town's original main streets? How have they fared with time? The answer is "Not too well". While many of the old shophouses still stand in various states of disrepair; other iconic buildings have either been demolished or left to rot.

"What iconic buildings?" you may ask. They were, of course, places of entertainment as in the mid-1900s Kampar had a lot of such places.



The Great World Kampar c1960

Just cast your mind back and you will remember Shaw Brothers Great World Amusement Centre on Jalan Masjid. Just like Ipoh's Jubilee Park, it featured a Theatre, Taxi Dancers, The Ronggeng, Bars, Fairground Entertainment and special programmes featuring Boxing and Wrestling. Legend has it that even Rose Chan 'strutted her stuff' here. Incidentally, there is still a Great World Centre in Kampar, but do not be confused as it bears no resemblance to the Shaw establishment of the 50s, that is unless you consider smartphones as a source of entertainment. Come to think of it, most of our young folk think exactly that!

Then there were the movie theatres. Kampar had its fair share with the Rex, Princess, Majestic and Sun. The Rex, being another Shaw enterprise, usually screened movies produced by their own production team. Divas such as Lin Dai, Ivy Ling Po, Li Ching and Cheng Pei Pei reigned supreme on the silver screen.



The Princess Theatre, Kampar c1975

But unlike some towns, Shaw did not have the monopoly in Kampar as the Majestic was part of the Cathay circuit, while Princess was operated by Eng Wah. Speaking of the Princess Theatre built in 1954, the building still stands albeit in a shocking state. It has suffered the fate of most of the old cinemas in Ipoh, it is now a furniture shop, although the word "PRINCESS" is still clearly displayed at the front of the building. Apart from the Princess, all the other buildings have gone, the Sun being replaced by a new supermarket. So what was it like going to the movies back then? Well, it was certainly very different from today's Multiplex with several shows running at once, somewhere high up in a shopping mall, with tickets bought in

advance on your smartphone. Back in the 1960s, we would queue up for tickets, in long lines outside the building. Weekend matinee shows were popular as they were the cheapest. Evening shows cost 40 cents, with First Class (upstairs) at \$1. These were mainly for the British Military, European Miners and Planters and their families. Standing in the queue was not too bad as there were always hawkers selling snacks and cigarettes in front of every cinema. One elderly Kampar resident remembers: “Freshly roasted peanuts, sunflower seeds and fruits. Those buying the fruit slices would smother them with salt and chilli from little bottles using long-handled spoons. They were all so much better than Popcorn!”