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By ANNA VIVIENNE

Sandakan

The blue sea lies tranquil in the horizon. Once in a while, a speed boat breaks the calm. Several boats are docked at the jetty. The site is at the New Central Market of Sandakan. The central market is one of the newest additions to the city's landscape. This market houses the fish market, the food court, vegetables and fruit stalls as well as clothes and accessories upstairs. The ground floor of this market houses the vegetables and fruit stalls, salted fish and meat while the first floor is occupied by clothes and accessories as well as cosmetics. There are also food stalls there.

From the first floor you can look out into the blue yonder and watch the fishermen move into the jetty. You will also have a sight of the esplanade.

The Rotunda is located besides the central market, a landmark of Sandakan. The rotunda houses Sandakan's most famous seafood restaurant, the Sandakan Bayview Seafood Restaurant. This where seafood connoisseurs can sample their favourite food to their heart's content.

And then there is the esplanade. The esplanade along the seafront, for two blocks of shophouses leads to the Sandakan Harbour Square.

The esplanade is decorated with lights at night where tables and chairs are placed. There, visitors can eat dinner and supper while enjoying the breeze from the sea.

There have always been comments that there are not enough hotel rooms in Sandakan. Well, it will soon be a thing of the past as besides a boutique hotel, a 256-room hotel will be constructed in September this year and to be completed in Oct 2010, says Kenneth Tiong, a Joint Managing Director of ICSD Ventures Sdn Bhd, the developer for the project.

He says the hotel will be managed by an international hotel management.

"We want to ensure that Sandakan become a tourist destinations. We are rich in eco-tourism sites as we have the Sepilok Orang Utan rehabilitation centre, dive sites and many other historical attractions, but sadly we lack hotel rooms," he says.

He believes that with the establishment of the hotel, more tourists will stay over in Sandakan, ensuring the economic development of that area.

On the cleanliness of that city, he says the people have to be educated about the importance of cleanliness.

"Littering has to stop," he says, adding that the relevant authorities may have to step up their campaign against littering.

There is also a noticeable lack of warmth by frontliners in Sandakan. It is especially true for salesgirls in the shops, markets and sales counters.

Kenneth says that these attitudes have to change and it is up to the employers to train their staff to be more warm and friendly to their customers.

A personal experience proved that even if you stand in front of a counter, in front of a salesgirl for several minutes, she will not look at you or ask what you need. When I spoke to her she stared at me, indiffer-



ently. I experimented in four counters of different shops and the same thing happened. The market seems to be the only place with friendly vendors.

Be that as it may, Sandakan has many interesting place to visit.

This include the Agnes Keith House, a two-storey home of local author Agnes Newton Keith and her husband Harry lived from 1930 to 1952, the English Tea House located in the grounds of Agnes Keith Museum, Sandakan Memorial Park at the site of the Taman Rimba prisoner-of-war camp, Japanese Cemetery, a memorial to the Japanese war dead on Borneo and St Michael's and All Angels Church a beautiful granite church built in 1897 and is one of Sandakan's few surviving pre-war buildings.

There is also the Puu Jih Shih Buddhist Temple built in 1987, a fiery red and gold temple overlooks the town centre, Sam Sing Kung Temple - built in 1887, the oldest building in Sandakan and Kampung Buli Sim Sim, a fishing village on the original site of Sandakan town.

Then there is the Crocodile Farm, located 12 km out of town, housing more than 2,000 of the reptiles in concrete pools and Labuk Bay Proboscis Monkey Sanctuary, a perfect Proboscis monkey observation spot for tourists.

Sandakan is indeed an exciting place to visit, with many and various sights worth seeing. The city is also on its way to being an ultra-modern city with the ongoing rife development.

