

VISITORS to Seremban now have a new attraction to see in the heart of the city. Thanks to a backlane beautification project, Seremban's once-gritty and unremarkable alleys have been transformed into a vibrant open-air gallery with freshly painted walls and pavement art.

Lorong Seni Seremban, which stretches 250m from Jalan Dato Sheikh Ahmad to Benteng Walk here, features Instagrammable murals on every wall.

Over a three-month period last year, six local artists were commissioned by the Seremban City Council (MBS) to create works of art for the project.

MBS mayor Datuk Masri Razali said the council was applying to the *Malaysia Book of Records* to list the lane as the country's longest continuous art lane.

"We want to convey a message to visitors, through the murals, to oppose the stigma attached to back alleys and graffiti art," he said.

Masri added that the state government had approved an allocation of RM500,000 which included funds for the beautification project, as well as the Perpatih bazaar, a tourist information centre.

Tampin-born artist T.K. Lai, who painted 12 of the over 30 pieces that decorate the lane, said he was proud to be a part of the project.

"This has been a labour of love for me and a way to give back to my home state.

"The murals give a good impression of the city to visitors and I hope, that everyone will play their

Nostalgic works of art



A nostalgic mural depicting a rickshaw puller against a village backdrop.

part in ensuring the pieces are not vandalised," he said.

Lai's favourite mural is an image of the frontman of legendary local band Alleycats, Datuk David Arumugan, and national icon Datuk Sudirman. The piece is fittingly close to a site where buskers perform.

Another highlight that will bring back memories of yesteryear is the back wall of a former cinema that is now emblazoned with recreations of movie posters like Bruce Lee's *Way of the Dragon*, *El Dorado*, *Pendekar Bujang Lapok* and old Bollywood hit *Yaadon Ki Baaraat*.

Movie fans will also recognise silver screen legends like the late Tan Sri P. Ramlee and Saloma, stars

of 1950s and '60s box office hits.

A special piece that Lai designed showcases the images of Saloma and P. Ramlee painted on a collapsible gate. When one side of the gate is open, visitors will see Saloma and if only the other is pulled back, it's P. Ramlee who is visible.

Both stars only appear together, when both gates are shut.

The new additions also include murals of vintage advertisements.

Many visitors love to pose for photos with a 1970s era Malaysia Airlines stewardess, a boy relishing his bowl of Maggi noodles and a woman enjoying her bottle of F&N soda – symbols that those in their sixties and seventies will

remember fondly.

The artists have also captured vignettes of everyday life from days gone by, including a rickshaw puller and his customers.

To boost the economy in the area, business owners also have the opportunity to open stalls at night, when the area is illuminated with decorative lights.

Also interesting are the pavements that now showcase bricks painted to form tanglung, kolam and batik patterns.

The murals are an extension of a pilot back lane beautification project launched by MBS in 2019.

The project includes several streets – Jalan Dato Sheikh Ahmad, Jalan Dato Lee Fong Yee and Jalan Tunku Hassan – that cut across the Negri Sembilan capital's main arteries of Jalan Tuanku Munawir and Jalan Dato Bandar Tunggal.

These works of art range from colourful sketches measuring 1.5m by 1.8m to dramatic 6.1m-wide and 12.2m-high scenes covering entire walls, as well as large eye-catching designs painted on the road.

Existing elements such as water pipes, hydrants, air-conditioning units, vents and windows were also integrated into the designs, lending them a realistic 3D effect.

Among the pieces that now embellish the walls is Tin Mining

Sungai Ujong, one of the project's larger works and a nod to Seremban's roots as a town that flourished on the back of the tin trade. Other designs were inspired by local icons, historical figures and the trades that traditionally occupied the buildings the murals are painted on.

These include the late Malay Regiment hero Sergeant Hassan Othman, who was born in Kampung Pantai near here and whose brave exploits were the subject of the popular P. Ramlee-starrer *Sarjan Hassan*.

On a wall behind a bank, one image that makes passers-by do a double take is the imposing figure of a Sikh guard in the full garb of the British colonial police, who appears to be guarding an ATM alongside his Caucasian counterpart.

Sari-clad Indian women balancing earthenware pots, Malay tarian lilin dancers and a kampung scene featuring a family making dodol are images that celebrate culture and tradition.

Masri said a study was under way on how to make the city more pedestrian- and tourist-friendly.

"The study aims to implement the safe and walkable city concepts as well as introducing the tourism-friendly city concept to make it easier for tourists to explore the uniqueness of Seremban city," he said.