



NST175: For 100 years a city landmark

By [Esther Landau](#) - August 20, 2020 @ 10:45am

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An aerial view of Pudu Jail in Jalan Hang Tuah, Kuala Lumpur, taken on April 16, 1975. - NSTP/File pic

LOCATED in the heart of the city on Jalan Hang Tuah (formerly Jalan Shaw), Pudu Jail was once a distinguished city landmark that managed to stand the test of time for more than 100 years before it had to close its doors and make way for development in 1996.

Many of Malaysia's infamous criminals were sent to the gallows at this prison. One of them was Wong Swee Chin a.k.a. Botak Chin, one of the most notorious gang leaders in the 1960s and '70s.

As with many things associated with death and misery, many people believe the building was haunted.

Built by the British in 1895, the prison complex took four years to complete on a site believed to be an old Chinese burial ground.

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While the prison is known for tales of restless and angry spirits and things that go bump in the night, the X-shaped complex was also hailed for its unique colonial architecture and believed to be built by the convicts themselves.

A few months after the building was completed, it was devastated by cholera in August 1895 that killed hundreds of inmates.



It was reported that the deadly water-borne disease was due to the prison's poor water supply system that was only fixed in 1898.

In its early days, Pudu Jail was the only prison in the Klang Valley and had also housed female convicts who were serving short sentences.

Hardened criminals and drug offenders were later sent there, and the prison earned a reputation for meting out corporal punishment such as caning.

The notorious image of the prison took a somewhat "friendlier" tone when an inmate named Khong Yen Chong turned its long walls measuring 262.1m by 4.3m into a huge art canvas.



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Wong Swee Chin a.k.a. Botak Chin, one of the most notorious gang leaders in the 1960s and '70s, was sent to the gallows at Pudu Jail. -NSTP/File pic

Using some 2,000 litres of paint, Khong and other inmates painted a long mural depicting the country's tropical landscape, while serving his jail sentences in 1984.

The mural, which was not completed at the time, earned a mention in the *Guinness Book of Records* for being the longest in the world.

In Oct 17, 1986, the nation was rocked by a six-day riot and hostage situation at the prison.

The Pudu prison siege was led by the notorious Jimmy Chua Chap Seng, a former policeman from Singapore who was detained on a murder charge.

Chua managed to convince five other inmates to join him in his plan to escape from jail, taking advantage of a routine medical check-up at the clinic in the building.

In the incident, they seized and held two members of the prison staff hostage for six days. However, no death from the riot was reported and the hostages were rescued.

Chua and the five other inmates met their end at the hangman's noose there.

At the height of its establishment, the prison could hold some 2,000 inmates. In the coming years, overcrowding became an issue, leading to the establishments of Kajang Prison (opened in 1985) and Sungai Buloh Prison (opened in November 1996).



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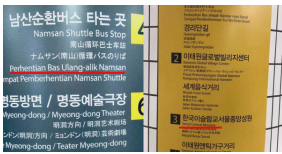
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Pudu Jail was turned into a museum in May 1997. Visitors were able to experience life behind bars and walk inside the dimly-lit courtyard and along the dark alleyways. - NSTP/File pic

More inmates were later sent to the Kajang and Sungai Buloh prisons in the '90s.

The prison was turned into a museum in May 1997, attracting around 500,000 visitors a year.

Visitors were able to experience life behind bars and got to walk inside the dimly-lit courtyard and along the dark alleyways.

It was closed again a few years later and reopened in 2004 as a museum. At the same time, it was also used as a temporary detention centre for drug addicts from the Hang Tuah police station.

In June 2009, 10 years after closing its doors as a prison for good, the government decided to take down the prison complex in phases to make way for future infrastructure development.

By the end of 2012, all buildings within the complex were completely demolished.

At present, a redevelopment plan by the Urban Development Authority called Bukit Bintang City Centre is being undertaken at the site.

Only the original main gate and a portion of the exterior wall is still standing today, a unique feature that will stand alongside modern residential towers, hotels, commercial spaces and a transit hub.



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