



After a 40-month, \$18.2-million upgrading, Geylang Serai Market now boasts modern facilities, better ventilation and higher hygiene standards.

Fresh food, fresh look

Buying groceries at wet markets is no longer a dirty job as these places get spruced up in style



Tay Suan Chiang

The Singapore institution – the wet market and hawkers centre – used to be dark and smelly, but no longer. Now, they look cleaner, brighter and even have that designer touch. Three recently revamped markets boast just that. Geylang Serai Market opened last month after a 40-month, \$18.2-million upgrading. Earlier this month, the popular Tekka Centre resumed business after a near 15-month revamp that cost \$10.38 million. Joining them is the heartland market and hawkers centre at Block 93 Toa Payoh Lorong 4, which was upgraded at a cost of \$2.6 million over 11 months. The three markets and hawkers centres were upgraded under the National Environment Agency's Hawkers Centre Upgrading Programme. The agency manages 110 markets and hawkers centres. Since the upgrading programme's launch in 2001, 77 centres across

the island have been spruced up. Other markets and hawkers centres that are undergoing upgrading works include Block 270 Queen Street, Box Crescent Market and Food Centre, Block 11 Telok Blangah Crescent.

Ms Chan Wai San, the National Environment Agency's hawkers department director, says that through "the upgrading of the physical infrastructure, cleanliness and hygiene standards of the centres are improved, which is increasingly important to patrons today".

She adds that the upgrading allows stallholders to stay competitive against other food businesses so that they can continue to provide a variety of produce at affordable prices.

Among the recent three, Geylang Serai Market has a more distinctive facade now. Reflective of its location and heritage, the building has sloping roofs and Malay motifs to resemble an old kampung.

The former one-storey market now has two floors, with the produce section on the first and cooked food and clothing stalls on the second.

It also boasts modern necessities – escalators and a lift – so there is no need to climb stairs. That is especially useful when one is lugging bags of groceries.

Other improvements made to the upgraded markets and hawkers centres

include wider aisles to handle crowds, handicap-friendly features such as ramps and new sanitary and plumbing pipes. More importantly, the ventilation and lighting system have improved too. Fans are installed on the walls and ceilings just outside the stalls to make stopping a more pleasant experience.

Public relations account director Shen Jieqian, who is in her 50s, has been going to Tekka Centre every Saturday morning for the last six years.

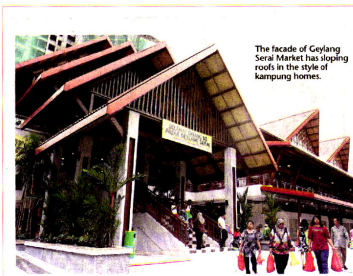
Before the revamp, she says, the old market was smelly and dark. "It was the fresh produce and great service that kept drawing me back," she adds.

She gives the revamped market the thumbs up. "The stalls are so organised and there is more space to move about. The smell is gone and the place is so clean."

SHEN JIEQIAN, who has been going to Tekka Centre every Saturday morning for the last six years.

The revamp has also attracted new marketers, such as housewife Melissa Lee, 37. The Tanjong Katong resident used to buy her groceries from supermarkets. A recent visit to Geylang Serai Market turned her into a convert. "The seafood and vegetable selection here is wider and the produce is fresher. Wet markets are now better than what I remember," she says. "There's so much buzz here and I can always bargain."

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Geylang Serai Market at 1 Geylang Serai

By Huijiah Moma, Nadi Padang, 02-166-1674 prepared for long queues at this baru padang stall.

History

This popular market was originally built in the 1960s before it was closed in 2006 for upgrading. It was originally a one-storey market and moved to a temporary site in 2006. It hit the headlines earlier this year when two people died after eating tainted Indian rojak from a stall there. Another 152 people fell ill.

What's new

A newly constructed market with sloping roofs and Malay motifs to resemble an old kampung. There is also a drop-off porch on the first level, with escalators and a lift to the second level. The toilet areas have fancy floral grilles. The wet market is on the first storey, while food and clothing stalls are upstairs.

Well-known stalls

- Geylang Brivani Stall, 02-146, sells mutton and chicken brivani
- Echi Fetri, Nak Lagi, 02-120, sells Malay kueh; "nak lagi" is Malay for wanting more

■ Huijiah Moma, Nadi Padang, 02-166-1674 prepared for long queues at this baru padang stall.

What stallholders say

"I like the fans that have been installed outside the stalls, which help to keep the area cool. But construction for the overhead bridge is still ongoing, which makes the place dusty."

MS MALAN SURYANING, 36, who owns a clothing stall

"The market is well-built. The aisles are more spacious than my stall. But the area around my stall tends to be dark in the evening, making it hard to shop."

MS B.B. DALLAR, in her 40s, owner of B B Spices

What customers say

"The market is now cleaner. I've been here several times already, to eat and shop for groceries and clothes. My favourite food stalls are still around."

MS YATI SARUAN, 26, a housewife

"The design of the market is very impressive. The high ceilings make it cool too."

MS HASLEEN SALLEH, 18, a student



ST PHOTOS: LEE HOOK KONG



ST PHOTOS: DEMAKO LIM

To reflect the location and heritage of Geylang Serai Market, Malay motifs are used to decorate the spacious interior of the two-storey building (above). Besides escalators and lifts, improved features include wall fans in the hawkers centre (left).

Tekka Centre at Block 665 Buffalo Road

History
Originally known as Kandang Kerbau Market, it moved to its present site in 1982. It was then called Zhuanzi Centre but was later renamed Tekka Centre. Tekka got its name from Tekka, a Hokkien for "centre of the small bamboo", as bamboo plants used to grow on the banks of the nearby Rochor Canal.

What's new
Escalators to the second storey where the clothing stalls are, new floor and wall tiles and new washing areas for customers.

- Well-known stalls**
- Alaudan's Brivani, 01-232, famous for its fish brivani
 - Chia's Vegetable Supply, 01-201, offers more than 100 types of vegetables
 - M A Osman, 01-130, sells quality goat meat

What stallholders say

"The stall area is now smaller, but the aisles are wider, making it easier for customers to walk around."

MADAM YEO HOON MOL, 61, owner of Lee Hoe Seafood

"The market is now brighter and cleaner than before. Even my customers have noted that my stall is now so beautiful."

MR JOHARI, 55, owner of Joe's Butchery

What customers say

"The market is much cleaner now and I can still



ST PHOTOS: LEE HOOK KONG



The upgraded Tekka Market is brighter and cleaner (above) and has washing areas for customers (left).

find my regular vegetable and fruit stalls."

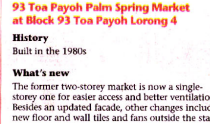
MRS SUMA MURTHY, 67, a housewife

"Apart from the escalator, there doesn't seem to be much difference. We still need to climb a flight of stairs to get to the hawkers' centre."

MR THAMIL, 48, a regular visitor



ST PHOTOS: DEMAKO LIM



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The Toa Payoh market now has better ventilation and upgraded toilets.

93 Toa Payoh Palm Spring Market at Block 93 Toa Payoh Lorong 4

History
Built in the 1980s

What's new
The former two-storey market is now a single-storey one for easier access and better ventilation. Besides an updated facade, other changes include new floor and wall tiles and fans outside the stalls.

Well-known stalls

- Hei Jong Tau Foo, 01-40, a young tau foo stall that is popular with the lunch crowd
- Wang Ji Hainanese Chicken Rice, 01-53, sells chicken rice and char siu rice
- Jian Fa Fish Ball Noodles, 01-35, a popular choice among the dinner crowd for its juicy fish balls

What stallholders say

"The market is now neater and easy for customers to find the stalls. The ventilation is also much better than before."

MADAM KANG HWEI LENG, 44, owner of a floral stall

"The aisles between the produce stalls are now wider. The ceiling of my stall is now lower but thankfully, there are fans outside, so it is still cool."

MR TOH KHAI CHEW, 41, owner of a joss paper stall

What customers say

"It's good that everything I need is just on one floor as I don't need to climb stairs anymore."

MR TONG AH HING, 78, a retiree

"I find the aisle between the food stalls and the tables too narrow. Once a queue forms, there's just no space to walk."

MADAM YEO LAY LING, 39, a housewife