

# Rousing a sleeping beauty

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their operations and technology.

A recent roadshow that it organised to market 20 local software firms in the United States led to three deals with multinationals there.

Some long-standing investors do say they remain happy – but add that more needs to be done, especially in training.

“The Penang authorities really understand what we need,” said Intel Malaysia Managing Director K C Yoon. The company, which employs 6,000 people, has pumped RM\$2.8 billion into its operations so far, including investment in a research and design centre.

Multinationals “like ours hope to receive more creative incentives to encourage technical innovation,” said Mr Yoon.

“If Penang is to move up the value chain, the authorities need to be committed to that. It’s hard to invest in that because people want to see returns immediately. It is a long process but it has to be done.”

The state has also been given the title “Cyber-city” as part of Malaysia’s push to be the next Silicon Valley.

The designation means foreign investors are entitled to a string of incentives, grants and services if they operate from the state.

Dr Koh is also optimistic about the chances of reviving the tourist industry, even as other countries such as Singapore boost their attractions. The key will be a focus



SHARON VASOO

*Alarmed by slow economic growth and declining tourism in Penang, the state government has begun a campaign to restore some of its lustre.*

on emphasising Penang’s heritage.

“We don’t need theme parks or casinos. We have all the gems in our backyard,” he said.

Alongside Dr Koh, the man in the hot seat is Mr Teng Chang Yeow, a former political secretary of the chief minister who for the past 12 months has headed the State Tourism Development and Environment.

“We are repackaging ourselves as a cultural and heritage destination, and we are lobbying for more money to preserve our heritage sites,” said Mr Teng. “It’s a real challenge because many people think that what is old is useless.”

To preserve Penang’s many historic gems, a Heritage Act will be passed later this year to ensure that colonial buildings and designated heritage sites cannot be demolished.

There has also been a concerted push to tidy the island up by clamp-

ing down on errant hawkers, illegal parking, littering and the cluttering of five-foot ways. Factories have also been targeted to make sure that the local rivers and the sea are not polluted.

“We admit that the state tourist attractions were in a state of decline and that there are many areas that need to be improved, such as the cleanliness of the streets and the hawkers and transport,” said Mr Teng. “To bring back the tourists, we need to get these basics back in order.”

Time will tell whether all this helps to awaken Penang’s deep slumber. But before that happens – if it does – there’s a great deal of hard work yet to be done.

“It’s better late than never and we are looking to set ourselves apart from the competition,” said Dr Koh. “It will take some years of sacrifice before we can catch up, but it will be worth it.”

A YEAR ago, Malaysian Lim Bee Chin embarked on a book project aimed at getting tourists back to Penang.

The former civil servant from Kedah felt there were many hidden gems in Penang that couldn’t be found in travel guidebooks.

Her book focuses on Penang’s heritage sites and food and will hit store in Singapore later this year.

“I felt that the guide-

books on the shelves only skimmed the surface. Why not hear it from a locals and discover where the best food stalls are, and its really more than just Gurney Drive,” Ms Lim, now a full-time writer, told TODAY.

She spent over a year scouring the streets of Penang and speaking to residents to find out where the best food can be found. In the course of her

journey, she enjoyed countless plates of *char kuay teow*, *hokkien mee* and Penang *laksa* and re-discovering Penang’s colonial heritage.

“I spent most of my childhood wandering the streets of Penang with my family but even now, every time I come here there is always something new to see or taste, and I hope that visitors will feel the same way.”

## Selling Penang



*Ms Lim’s aim in writing a guidebook was to uncover the state’s hidden gems.*