

Out-of-the-box ideas to turn pillboxes into modern attractions



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Wong (second right) presenting the award to Farhana (right). With them are Ang (second left) and Teluk Kumbar penghulu (chief) Khalid Zakaria.

BUILT to stop off-coastern invasions that never came, the PD02 military pillboxes in Penang may

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Architecture lecturer Farhana Mohd Razif, 36, envisioned turning the area into a glamping site after seeing its potential as a tourist attraction since it is surrounded by rustic fishing villages.

In her proposal, she said using the site that way could bring economic benefits while allowing visitors to experience the local way of life.

Freelance designer Tan Chee Sing, 44, suggested turning the pilbox into a “bunker theatre” that could showcase documentaries, movies or theatrical plays highlighting the folly of conflict.

The area could also double as an events space for sports, weddings, festive open houses and seminars.

Their ideas were judged the contest’s top ideas.



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The contest was jointly organised by George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) and Wawasan Open University (WOU).



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Farhana and Tan were each presented with a certificate and RM2,000 prize by state tourism and creative economy committee chairman Wong Hon Wai in a ceremony at Komtar.

GTWHI general manager Dr Ang Ming Chee said the participants' unusual ideas could breathe new life into such historical structures.

"We will communicate these proposals to the communities living around the pillboxes and listen to their opinions before deciding the next step," he said.

One structure is the BD02 coastal-type pillbox built by the British between 1938 and 1941 prior to World War Two in anticipation of a Japanese invasion by sea from the south.

Located along Jalan Cikgu Abu, the pillbox could house about six to eight military personnel and had three embrasures for machine gun mounts.

But the assault came from the north instead, with Japanese imperial divisions landing in southern Thailand and Kota Baru before making their way down the Malayan peninsula.

After being left idle for many years, the pillbox was restored by GTWHI with work completed in April this year.

Two other nearby pillboxes, BD01 on Jalan Gertak Sanggul and BD03 on Jalan Teluk Kumbar, were restored in September last year.

So far, around RM132,000 has been spent on the effort.

The three are among 26 pillboxes which have been earmarked for restoration, with work being done in stages.

The plan is to turn them into tourist attractions as part of the state's heritage trail.

"I urge all parties to continue working together to ensure the preservation of our state's heritage assets for the benefit of local communities and also future generations," Wong said.

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