



Motorcyclists boarding the ferry which they now no longer need to share with four-wheeled vehicles.



Selvarajah reading The Star while waiting for the ferry to arrive at the Raja Tun Uda ferry terminal in George Town.

Muhamad Tahir and his wife Rohani Sulaiman, 55, on board the ferry at the Raja Tun Uda ferry terminal in George Town. — Photos: ZHAFARAN NASIB/The Star

# Enjoying iconic ferry all to themselves

Motorcyclists thankful one vessel is still in use to take them across Penang channel

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WHILE foot passengers are now pleased to travel across the Penang channel in fast boats, motorcyclists too are grateful that one iconic ferry is still retained to provide a similar service.

Rela (Volunteer Corps) member Selvarajah Ramanmayandi, 66, is thankful that he can still travel back home to Paya Besar, Kulim, using the ferry service.

"I stopped using Penang Bridge after one bad experience when I was almost thrown off my bike at the mid-span.

"The crosswinds are very dangerous and even those young motorcyclists have problems dealing with the winds at times, especially when it rains.

"These days, it is much easier to just wait for the ferry and take a quiet and leisurely trip home after disembarking from the ferry in Butterworth," said Selvarajah when met at the Raja Tun Uda ferry terminal recently.

Goh Lun Tong, 58, who works at a plating company in Chain Ferry Road on the mainland, says it is convenient for him to take the ferry to work.

"If I go via the Penang Bridge, I will have to travel from my place in Jelutong and pass through Prai to get to Chain Ferry Road.

"The bridge is always busy in the morning and I definitely don't want to be caught in the gridlock.

"I have been travelling by ferry for the past 20 years and I hope the iconic ferry service will be retained for motorcyclists like me."

Muhamad Tahir Mat Taib, 56, said he travels with his wife from Kulim to visit his mother on the island every week.

"As we need to travel fast, it is dangerous to ride on the bridge with a pillion rider, especially when it is windy.

"We prefer to take a slow ride on the Butterworth Kulim Expressway and later take the ferry which is comfortable and relaxing," he said.

Starting Jan 1, Penang's ferry service is seeing a new era of efficiency and reliability via two fast boats for foot passengers, while one of the old ferries is used for two-wheeler vehicles only.

From 6.30am to 11pm, there is a trip every 20 to 30 minutes, up to 27 round trips per day.

This is the interim phase until

June 30 next year while the ferry terminals are being upgraded and hi-tech water buses and vehicular ferries are being built.

The first cross-strait ferry service started in 1894, making it the oldest such service in the country. The fleet has been replaced many times over the years.

Steamships of various sizes were first used and after WWII, even army tank landing crafts of the Allied Forces were modified into ferries.

The previous fleet of boxy, double-deck old ferries were commissioned between 1971 and 2004.

The sole ferry of the last fleet will be in use for the two-wheelers because many motorcyclists prefer to avoid using Penang Bridge during bad weather to avoid crosswinds.



Penang Bridge is always busy in the morning, and I don't want to be caught in the gridlock, says Goh.