



ST PHOTOS: MARK CHEONG, SEAH KWANG PENG
Thanks to the boats (left and top) anchored at Quayside Isle on Sentosa and the spacious boardwalk (above), the area has a marina vibe that is not seen on the mainland.

Sunny sides up at Sentosa



Sentosa, having shed its image as a kitschy tourist trap, has been flaunting more of its different sides of late – namely, the C Side and Quayside Isle.

C Side, a 3,000 sq m collective of new and revamped five eateries and bars on the island's southern Siloso Beach, launched a week ago.

There, families gather at the revamped seven-year-old Coastes, a rustic, laidback restaurant with sunbeds and deck chairs to lounge on at the water's edge.

The younger 20somethings chill out over ice-cold beers at the sexy, bigger Bikini Bar: a quirky standalone bar with beer bottles hanging overhead and, of course, sexy servers in bikinis.

Peckish sun-seekers could hit up two new food joints: Flame, which sells itself as Singapore's first beach rotisserie, and neighbouring Makan Makan, which serves local fare, such as laksa and chicken rice, from beach-style hawker stalls.

Rounding off the collective is the Sand Bar, a beachfront stalwart offering live music on a sea-facing stage.

The outlets started renovations, which cost \$4 million, in August last year to create more open-concept kitchens, widen old spaces and spruce up seating areas.

Coastes' managing director Heather Seow says the rejuvenation and expansion were timely as some eateries had closed early last year, and the early seaside bars had been around for seven years – a long time in the fickle nightlife scene.

The outlets which closed were Sakae Sushi and New Zealand Natural Ice Cream.

She adds: "C Side is a beach getaway without you having to leave the country. The opportunity came up to expand the concepts and give the outlets a facelift."

Meanwhile, Quayside Isle – on the eastern end of the island – has been drawing foodies with its eclectic, upmarket retailers, restaurants and bars.

There is also an art gallery and a beauty salon to cater to residents of nearby Sentosa Cove. A new pet shop as well as a



Diners at Paradiso Restaurant and Bar (above), which serves Mediterranean food, and European bistro Picotin Express (right) have a meal while enjoying views of the marina.



kindergarten-cum-enrichment centre will be coming up too.

Nikei Fine Art's gallery manager Herman Salleh, 30, says the five-month-old shop in Quayside Isle, which represents mostly Japanese artists, sees many walk-in customers after dinner.

"It's still early days," he says. "We expect traffic to pick up when people move into the nearby residences and know more about the place."

Never mind that some of these businesses have outlets in town: Kith, a cafe serving Western food and brunch items, also has outlets at Robertson Quay and Park Mall.

Since Quayside Isle's official opening about four months ago, a handful of Kith's customers have been driving to Sentosa regularly to get their caffeine fix. This, despite the \$7 day entrance fee for cars on weekends (reduced to \$3 after 5pm), says the cafe's co-owner Jane Hia.

On weekends, the wait for a table there could be as long as an hour.

Ms Hia, 29, adds: "Even if you take the free island shuttle, it would be a 15-minute walk from the Sentosa Cove Village bus stop. It does cut off some people without cars but people are still coming."

Such tenacity from patrons is understandable, given that Quayside Isle has a charming, marina vibe not found on the mainland. With alfresco dining, retro-inspired lamps dotting the wooden boardwalk and yachts floating at their docks next



to it, it feels more like Santa Monica Pier in Los Angeles or Coney Island boardwalk in New York than Singapore.

Ms Edina Hong, 40, who runs four establishments in Quayside Isle as director of the Emmanuel Stroobant Group, including the upcoming Blue Lotus Chinese Eating House, says: "When I saw the place, I knew that it would do well, given the amazing views and how it would be a destination for people to come to."

"It used to be that people didn't want to come to Sentosa because it had nothing

more to offer after you have been here once. But now, they are coming back."

Regular Sentosa visitor Tabitha Yeo agrees. The operations manager at a design consultancy does not mind paying \$8 in cab fare to travel from her home in Tanglin to Sentosa every weekend. She has an Islander pass, which costs \$25 and allows her unlimited entry for a year.

Ms Yeo, who declines to reveal her age, says of Siloso Beach: "This is the cleanest beach in Singapore and it's a stress reliever to be out here. It's not crowded like other

beaches, so you can really chill out and not have to fight with people for space."

But the new enclaves are just the latest instalment in a makeover story for the former Pulau Belakang Mati, or "island of the dead/death from behind" in Malay, as it was called before being renamed in 1972.

In recent years, fancy attractions such as Resorts World Sentosa, home to Universal Studios Singapore and a Marine Life Park, have sprung up. The Sentosa Development Corporation says that the island's visitorship has more than tripled – from 6.1 million in 2009 to 20 million last year.

Associate professor of marketing Seshan Ramaswami, at the Singapore Management University's Lee Kong Chian School of Business, says the island's development is fitting, given the increasing competition from other attractions in Singapore as well as neighbouring countries.

Having an array of lifestyle and entertainment offerings to suit all budgets has helped Sentosa stay relevant to Singapore residents and tourists alike, he adds.

"It could aspire to be all things to all people. The island is big and its different attractions are physically separated. So one could hang out for free on the beach and eat at the foodcourt, having taken the monorail over from VivoCity, completely oblivious to the glamorous offerings a shuttle bus ride away," he says.

"The traditional Sentosa offerings, such as the rides, shows and Fort Siloso, will continue to attract travellers as well as locals.

"If anything, the island should aspire to be a must-see location for tourists and still be attractive enough for locals to spend some time there a few times a year at least."

For now, folks are giving the island two thumbs-up.

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, Australian entrepreneur Nicole Rose was thoroughly impressed with Sentosa after chilling on the beach, riding the Segway and cycling there with her friend, engineer Sarah Godwin, 28.

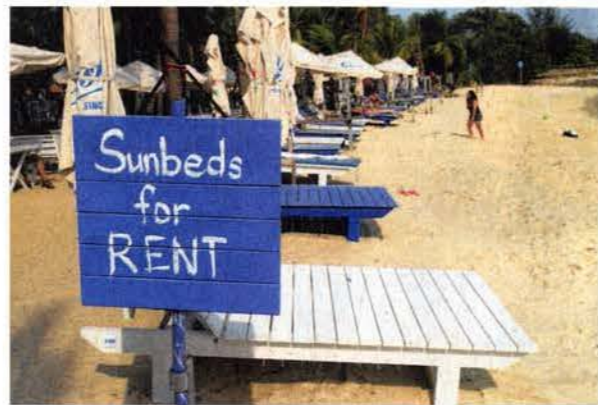
The 38-year-old, who was visiting Singapore for the first time en route to London, says: "I got a long e-mail from a Singaporean friend telling me that I had to visit Sentosa. We've spent six hours here already and it really feels like we're truly on holiday at a beach getaway."

"I haven't checked my BlackBerry once."

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What do you like about C Side and Quayside Isle on Sentosa? E-mail suntimes@sph.com.sg

Laze the day away by the beach (right) in front of the Coastes bar and cool down with drinks at the Bikini Bar (far right).



"This is the cleanest beach in Singapore... It's not crowded like other beaches, so you can really chill out and not have to fight with people for space."

MS TABITHA YEO, a regular visitor to Sentosa's Siloso Beach

