



CITY FOCUS



Bandung

Falling in Love Again with Bandung



Once known as the Paris of Java for its cool climate and natural landscape, Bandung is today a fast-growing metropolis plagued with snarling traffic, floods and pollution. To reclaim its beauty and restore quality of life, the city government has been aggressively pursuing improvement projects, with the private sector, to make Bandung a loveable city once more.

Bandung City, the capital of West Java Province, is one of the most important economic centres of Indonesia. Located 768 m above sea level, the city's cool climate and fast-growing economy has made it an attractive place to live, work and visit. This has led to a population boom of about 3.5% per year, making Bandung the third most populous city in Indonesia. Some six million visitors (mostly locals) also throng Bandung for its lush greenery, myriad art galleries and fashion factory outlets.

Being at the vortex of economic activity has put immense pressure on Bandung's public infrastructure: traffic congestion, pollution and flooding (due to rapid urbanisation) are among the challenges confronting the city. Residents feel the strain of living and working in a densely built urban landscape, where traffic often comes to a standstill.

To make the city more liveable and loveable, Bandung's Mayor Ridwan Kamil has spearheaded numerous efforts, in partnership with the private sector. The former architect shared in an interview that with S\$8 billion projects lined up for Bandung's improvements, "you would need nine mayors to finish the job" with the S\$2 billion per five years budget that every mayor is given.

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A significant project underway is the integrated urban mobility plan to improve roads and infrastructure, increase public transport systems, and promote walking and cycling. The hope is to shift commuters towards mass transport and reduce their dependency on motorbikes and cars. While major projects like the light rail and cable car systems are underway, the mayor has introduced smaller “urban acupuncture” initiatives to nudge behavioural change.

Every Monday and Thursday, students enjoy free public bus rides to school. Friday is promoted as the day to cycle to work. On Saturdays, a section of the city centre is closed to traffic and transformed into a bustling food street, while a main street is kept car-free every Sunday morning. The mayor also named the bicycle sharing scheme Boleh, meaning to pedal, but also a clever acronym for “Bike On Street, Everyone Happy”.



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The cycling culture is picking up momentum due to initiatives like the Boleh bike-share system and car-free Sunday mornings.



The colourful skywalk attracts both locals and tourists alike, and more of such skywalks will be built in Bandung.



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To alleviate congestion on a major shopping street, an elevated 450 m bridge known as Cihampelas Terrace was built above the popular strip.

Today, instead of tourists, pedestrians, street vendors and vehicles jostling for the same space, people can use the elevator or stairs to access the skywalk. Lined with 192 street vendors selling food, clothes and tourist souvenirs, the walkway is equipped with toilets and even a prayer space.

Another initiative has been the revamp of traditional markets to make them one-stop shopping centres that would attract locals and tourists. The new markets also house street hawkers, relocated from congested and unsanitary streetsides. The hope is for small and medium businesses to scale from informal trade to formal enterprises.

“Formerly they were disorganised and had insufficient infrastructure,” said Mayor Ridwan in an email interview with *Urban Solutions*. “[Now] we organise them to compete with supermarkets, have their own characteristics, and optimise their potential not just as economic hubs but also tourist hubs.”

Sarijadi Market was the first of four revamped markets. Clean and airy, the new four-storey market now has more than 180 stalls for rent. The monthly rental is Rp 3 million (S\$298), but the 21 original traders were offered a rate of only Rp 10,000 (S\$0.99) per month, which will only be implemented when the market is officially open.

Since Dutch colonial days, Bandung has been known for its fresh air, beautiful landscapes and parks. But urbanisation led to shrinking green and open public spaces. To create

01 The Sarijadi Market will accommodate up to 180 vendors, including the 21 original ones as well as former street hawkers.

02 The extensive retail range, generous public spaces and accessibility ramps within the market make it an attractive place for people of all interests and abilities.



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hangouts for social interaction and a respite from the urban chaos, the Mayor led an aggressive campaign to develop new green and open public spaces.

In three years, 10 public parks were developed, bringing a refreshing change for urban-weary residents. Some were created from “dead” spaces beneath busy flyovers, while others were cleaned up and given a makeover.

The parks appeal to a wide range of interests from music, history and photography to pet ownership. Superhero Park, previously an orchid garden, is now a popular children’s attraction with its many superhero statues. Elderly Park has facilities catering to older folks, while young people love hanging out at the Film Park where movies are screened regularly.

The free WiFi at the parks is an attraction in itself. “By providing easy access to the Internet, we encourage citizens to spend time at the park, connect with other citizens and at the same time connect with their ‘cloud friends’,” explained the social media-savvy mayor.

“What we’ve done are small-scale interventions, but they can improve citizens’ moods, connect people to places and improve mental health,” he added. “We’ve seen a slight increase in the Happiness Index since we developed the parks.”

Besides drawing communities closer, the parks have also rejuvenated the city and enhanced the value of properties around Bandung, noted the mayor.

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Another creative placemaking initiative is a prototype microlibrary in a village near the Bandung airport. Local architectural firm, SHAU, which was commissioned for the project, used recycled ice cream tubs to create an iconic, modern landmark.

With high illiteracy and school dropout rates across Indonesia, the hope is to rekindle interest in books by creating a dedicated space for reading and learning, while making books, media and courses available. “We hope it will allow community revitalisation,” said Mayor Ridwan. “In fact, it is referred to not as a ‘library’ but as an ‘urban mediascape’.”

The government hopes that when these microlibraries are replicated across Bandung, the local people will organise the content and maintain these spaces for themselves.

When Mayor Ridwan first took office in 2014, he admitted that his greatest challenge was to get residents to have a stake in improving the quality of life in Bandung.

It seems that his efforts to change mindsets have made some headway. In 2016, the “If I were a mayor” programme garnered 1,200 ideas from residents on how Bandung could be improved, some of which were implemented. With so many refreshing changes on the horizon, the people of Bandung will no doubt fall in love once more with their city. 

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- 01 Dead space under a flyover was converted into Film Park, where films are screened for free.
- 02 The floating library box was built above a small square already used by the local community for social and sports activities.
- 03 Every year, the mayor works with the community to paint murals along the Babakan Siliwangi urban forest.