

## SAHA THEATRE

Patthalung Road, Songkhla

1929-mid-1990s

The ravages of time have been gentle to Songkhla city. The centuries-old seaport has largely been spared the mass reconfigurations of built environments that have done so much to strip the charm out of countless Thai urban areas. Road widening, the demolition of historic buildings and the accompanying paving over of history have only slightly altered the fabric of Songkhla. Indeed, the well-preserved state of Songkhla is a textbook example of how similar old places calcify into what they are. As economic opportunities moved to Songkhla's much larger sister city, Hat Yai, and further afield, so departed much of the town's youthful vitality. Buildings that once housed thriving businesses and workshops were shuttered, while others lingered on thanks to the help of capital accumulated during more prosperous times. The city slowed down, but it didn't die.

Of all the pieces of vintage architecture that make up the streets of Songkhla, there's perhaps none with a more storied past than



the long dormant Saha theatre. Yet, to the average passerby today, the structure would hardly register as a movie theatre. Its lack of architectural elements common to the structural type combined with the fact that it is mostly made of wood (a material not commonly used for movie theatres), places it under the radar of all but the most discerning observers. But to long-time residents, the Saha is a well-known, if not legendary, piece of the town's recent past.

When the Saha theatre opened for business in 1930, originally under the name of Chernchom theatre, the age of the motion picture officially arrived in this bustling port city. Movies became an instant hit, giving rise to a succession of movie theatres in the years to come. With the coming of newer cinemas in the modern era, the Saha became a third-class theatre by Songkhla's standards, eventually closing down for good in the mid-1990s.

The Saha's packed auditorium, circa 1967 (left), the facade in 1971 (opposite), and what remains of the theatre today (above).

