

# Melaka



Outlined to the west by sandy coastline and filled inland with waves of jungle-carpeted hills, the sultry city-state of Melaka is the cradle of modern Malaysia. While everything from international trade to the country's political system (based on the Malaccan sultanate) began here, the city and state have, for the most part, avoided becoming a congested metropolis and instead remain peaceful enclaves basking in the memory of a majestic past. It's said that the soul of the country can be glimpsed here. It's true, this is Malaysia's good side and it has become one of the county's most popular destinations. The variations on traditional cuisine, including the famed Malay-Chinese Nonya food, are reason enough to visit.

The road from past glory has been potholed even in recent history. Massive land reclamation projects, begun during the economic boom only to taper off during the ensuing economic downturn, pushed the historic waterfront so far inland that it endangered the traditional livelihood of the Portuguese fishing community. Today, Melaka's rich seam of heritage is under threat from those twin fruits of development: commercialisation and modernisation.

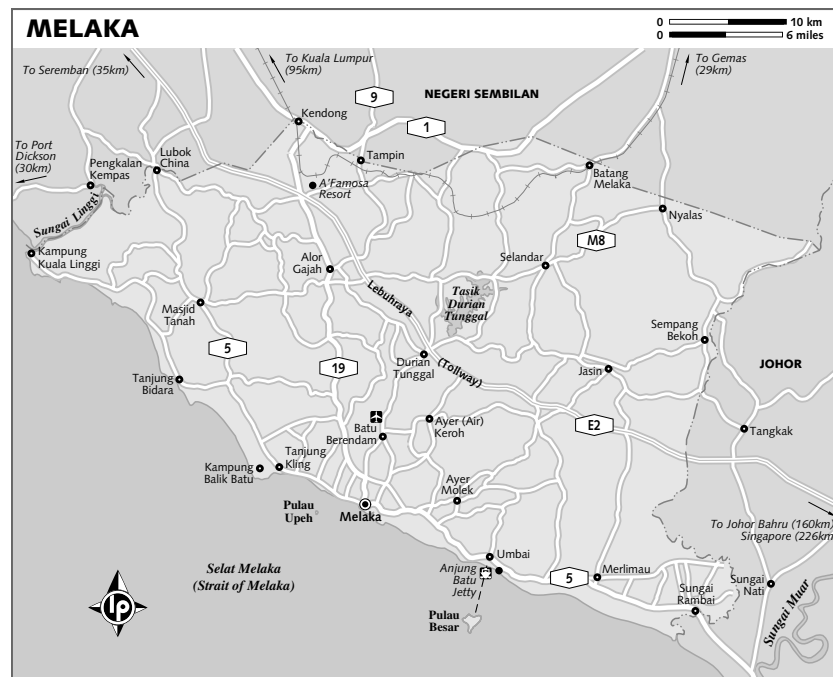
While the coastlines of Pulau Besar and Tanjung Bidara don't compare to the country's other beaches, they do make a relaxing getaway or day trip from the state's capital. Melaka is close enough to Kuala Lumpur (KL) for a day trip, but allow at least a couple of days to do justice to this fascinating historic enclave.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Browsing and grazing at Friday- and Saturday-night **Jonker's Walk Night Market** (p158) then stopping for a drink at an open-air café
- Indulging your tourist-tacky desires by taking a ride in one of Melaka city's uniquely kitsch **trishaws** (p151)
- Pondering *popiah* (spring roll), checking out chicken rice balls and lingering over *laksa lemak* (curry laksa) in Melaka city's **restaurants** (p156)
- Topping up your suitcase with spinning tops, creative clothing and perhaps an antique treasure after a day of **shopping** (p161) in Melaka city's Chinatown
- Getting an up-close tour of the Peranakan experience at the **Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum** (p144)
- Enjoying the views and the cool air of the sanctuary at **St Paul's Church** (p141)
- Driving through villages and farms to the coastline of the Strait of Melaka and its long white-sand beach, **Tanjung Bidara** (p166)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 06    ■ POPULATION: 688,694    ■ AREA: 1652 SQ KM



## MELAKA CITY

Back when KL was a malaria-ridden swamp and Penang was yet to become the 'Pearl of the Orient', Melaka was already one of the greatest trading ports in Southeast Asia. Today the city is a sleepy backwater compared with its high-rolling cousins, but that's exactly where its charm lies. There isn't even a major airport or city rail station so the only way in or out from within Malaysia is by road. With the oldest functioning mosque, Catholic church and Buddhist temple in the country, the city's past has been preserved, nearly pickled in fact, around its Chinatown and colonial centre. Yet despite being exceedingly old, Melaka manages to entice visitors with its present-day personality, a quirky amalgam best represented by its resident artists, cooks, fortune-tellers and fabulously creative trishaws (bicycle rickshaws). The action blends effortlessly with the surrounding Peranakan, Portuguese and Dutch architecture; Buddhist, Taoist and Indian temples; and Islamic mosques.

And have we mentioned the food? If you're eating local dishes, it's unlikely you'll have a bad meal. From the distinct Peranakan dishes to Eurasian Portuguese cooking and Indian banana-leaf shops, the citywide restaurant aromas add further colour to the cultural mosaic that makes Melaka such an astonishing destination.

## HISTORY

The history of the city-state of Melaka is a tale that begins with a legend then falls into the hands of battling colonial forces. However it's told, the story of the state is inseparable from that of the city for which it was named. Historians have not been able to pinpoint the exact year that Melaka was founded but most agree it was sometime in the late 14th century. Before this time, Melaka was a simple fishing village.

Parameswara, a Hindu prince from Sumatra, was the founder of Melaka (see the boxed text, p136). Under Parameswara, the city became a favoured port for waiting out monsoons and resupplying trading ships plying the strategic Selat Melaka (Strait of

Melaka). Halfway between China and India, and with easy access to the spice islands of Indonesia, Melaka attracted merchants from all over the East.

In 1405 the Chinese Muslim Admiral Cheng Ho (see p144), the 'three-jewelled eunuch prince', arrived in Melaka bearing gifts from the Ming emperor and the promise of protection from Siamese enemies. Chinese settlers followed, mixing with the local Malays to become known as the Baba and Nonya or Straits Chinese. The longest-settled Chinese people in Malaysia, they grafted many Malay customs to their own heritage.

Despite internal squabbles and intrigues, by the time of Parameswara's death in 1414, Melaka was already a powerful trading state. Its position was consolidated by the state's adoption of Islam in the mid-15th century (see p22).

In 1509 the Portuguese came seeking the wealth of the spice and China trades, but after an initially friendly reception, the Malaccans at-

tacked the Portuguese fleet and took a number of prisoners. This prompted an outright assault by the Portuguese, and in 1511 Alfonso de Albuquerque took the city, forcing the sultan to flee to Johor, where he re-established his kingdom. Under the Portuguese, the fortress of A'Famosa was constructed, and missionaries such as St Francis Xavier strove to implant Catholicism. While Portuguese cannons could easily conquer Melaka, they could not force Muslim merchants from Arabia and India to continue trading there, and other ports in the area, such as Islamic Demak on Java, grew to overshadow Melaka.

The period of Portuguese strength in the East was short-lived, as Melaka suffered harrying attacks from the rulers of neighbouring Johor and Negeri Sembilan, as well as from the Islamic power of Aceh in Sumatra. Melaka declined further as Dutch influence in Indonesia grew and Batavia (modern-day Jakarta) developed as the key European port of the region. Melaka passed into Dutch

### THE PIRATE PRINCE PARAMESWARA

Part legend and part fact, the story of the 14th-century Indonesian prince Parameswara is the accepted tale of the founding of both Singapore and Melaka. Known by many names in different cultures, Parameswara was said to be a direct descendant of Alexander the Great (also known as Raja Iskandar Zulkarnain), and he possessed many semimagical items, including a bejewelled crown thought to be part of the treasures of Solomon.

In different tellings, Parameswara either asks his father permission to colonise an island he saw in the distance (Temasek, the future Singapore) or was chased away from Indonesia by a Javanese enemy and fled to Temasek to hide. Either way, on route to the island Parameswara and his faithful crew sailed into a massive storm unlike any they had ever encountered. Just as everyone had accepted their fate to die, Parameswara threw his valuable crown into the sea as an offering to the sea god. The sea was calmed the instant the crown hit the water.

But their trials were far from over. When the stalwart sailors arrived on Temasek, they were met by a fierce lion. Parameswara drew his sword to slay the beast but just as he was about to strike, his eyes met those of the lion's. In an instant there was a communication of respect and understanding and the lion quietly absconded into the jungle. Parameswara named his new city Singapura, meaning the Lion City. Unfortunately, his piracy and other exploits provoked a Siamese attack, forcing him to flee once more, this time up the Malay peninsula to the town of Muar in the Johor province. While lions and rough seas had been but mere trifles for Parameswara, he and his men were driven from this new area by a particularly vicious band of monitor lizards. At another short stop, the refugees' freshly built fortress fell into ruins for no apparent reason, making them move on once more.

Not giving up, the group trudged further north and it was here that their luck would change. While hunting at the mouth of the Bertam River, Parameswara saw a white mouse-deer (*pelanduk*) kick one of his hunting dogs in its defence. The prince was so impressed by the valiant and courageous deer that he decided to build a new city on the spot. He asked one of his servants the name of the tree that was shading them and took the name to christen his town Melaka.

At the end of his life, Parameswara converted to Islam, opening the doors of the faith to the rest of the peninsula.

### MELAKA IN...

#### Two Days

Melaka is small enough that you'll be able to soak up many of its charms in only two days. Start the first day at **Roti Canai Terbang** (p159) to enjoy a flaky pancake with tea or coffee and to get a taste of the cultural mix of the city by people-watching from your table. Next head towards the historic city centre where you can snap the requisite photo of yourself in front of **Porta de Santiago** (p142). Work off your breakfast with a climb up the long stairway to explore the ruins of **St Paul's Church** (p141) then backtrack down the hill to the **Sultanate Palace** (p143). Visit the museums of your choice along the pedestrian road towards the **Stadthuys** (see p142). Grab a trishaw here for a city tour and then lunch in Little India afterwards – wander around the sari shops around here. In the evening (if it's Friday or Saturday) don't miss the **Jonker's Walk Night Market** (p158) to snack and peruse, then finish the night at a pavement pub table where you could stay till all hours of the morning.

Sleep in if you need to on day two then have a traditional dim sum breakfast at **Low Yong Mow** (p157) before losing yourself for most of the day in Chinatown. Take an afternoon **riverboat cruise** (p152) then treat yourself to a **reflexology foot massage** (p148) at the end of the day. Dine at **Capitol Satay** (p159) for a meal to end all meals.

#### One Week

Follow the two-day schedule then sweat out the next morning on a bike tour with **Eco Bike Tour** (p152) before chilling in the air-con for the afternoon with a cooking class at the **Hotel Equatorial** (p155). Rent a car for days four and five to visit **Tanjung Bidara** (p166) and **Alor Gajah** (p164) and have fun getting lost along side roads where you'll find sleepy *kampung* (villages) unused to foreign visitors. On days six and seven visit the rest of Melaka city including **Medan Portugis** (p147), **Bukit China** (p146) and **Villa Sentosa** (see p147).

hands after an eight-month siege in 1641. The Dutch ruled Melaka for only about 150 years. Melaka again became the centre for peninsular trade, but the Dutch directed more energy into their possessions in Indonesia. In Melaka they built fine public buildings and churches, which remain the most solid suggestions of European presence, while Medan Portugis is still home to Portuguese Eurasians, many of whom are practising Catholics who speak Kristang (Cristão), a creole (see the boxed text, p147) littered with archaic Portuguese.

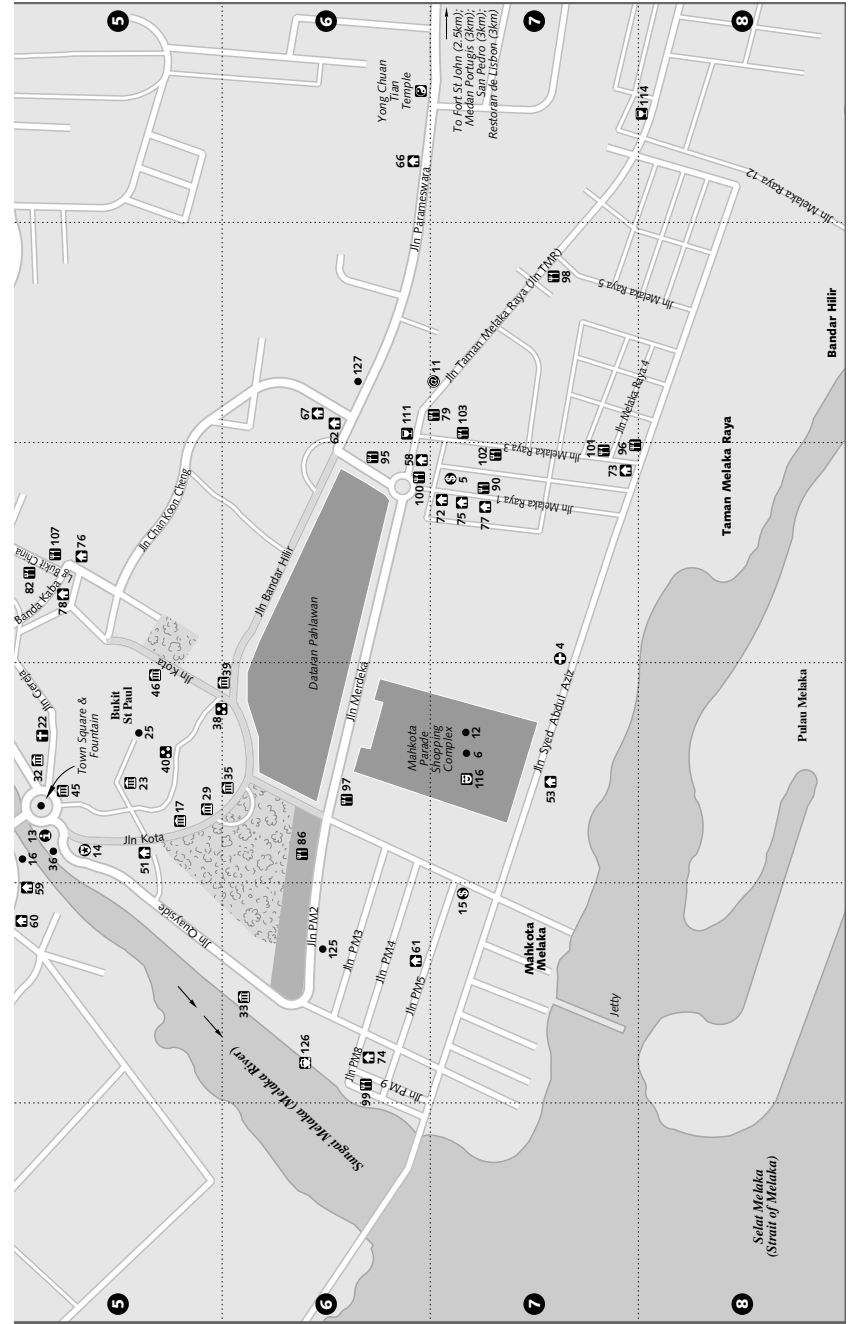
When the French occupied Holland in 1795, the British – Dutch allies – temporarily assumed administration of the Dutch colonies. The British administrators, essentially traders, were opposed to the Dutch policy of trade monopoly and saw the potential for fierce rivalry in Malaysia between themselves and the Dutch. Accordingly, in 1807 they began demolishing A'Famosa fortress and forcibly removing Melaka's Dutch population to Penang to prevent Melaka rivalling British Malayan centres if Dutch control was restored. Fortunately Sir Thomas

Stamford Raffles, the far-sighted founder of Singapore, stepped in before these destructive policies went too far, and in 1824 Melaka was permanently ceded to the British in exchange for the Sumatran port of Bencoolen (Bengkulu today).

Melaka, together with Penang and Singapore, formed the Straits settlements, the three British territories that were the centres for later expansion into the peninsula. However, under British rule Melaka was eclipsed by other Straits settlements and was soon quickly superseded by the rapidly growing commercial importance of Singapore. Apart from a brief upturn in the early 20th century when rubber was an important crop, Melaka returned again to being a quiet backwater, awaiting its renaissance as a tourist drawcard.

### ORIENTATION

Melaka is a medium-sized town that's easy to navigate and compact enough to explore on foot or trishaw. While the city is the perfect size for getting around by bike, the traffic, lack of a hard shoulder and an excessive quantity





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of parked cars could make this option too adrenalin-charged for some people.

The city is cleaved in two by the Sungai Melaka (Melaka River). The colonial, historic centre of Melaka is situated on the eastern side of the river, focussed around Town Sq (also known as Dutch Sq) where the old Stadthuys (town hall) and Christ Church are standout physical reminders of the Dutch presence. Bukit St Paul (St Paul's Hill), site

of the original Portuguese fort of A'Famosa, rises above Town Sq.

Further north is Melaka's tiny Little India, with its night-time hawker stalls and sari shops. This area spreads east where it is abruptly stopped by Bukit China (China Hill), a tomb-laden bump that rises incongruously from the city flats. Chinatown to the west of the river is lined with Chinese Peranakan shophouses and antique shops, atmospheric Buddhist temples

and ancient mosques. The centre of Chinatown is Jln Hang Jebat, which is more commonly called 'Jonker's Walk', meaning 'junk walk', for the many antique shops found here.

South of Melaka's old historical quarter are Mahkota Melaka and Taman Melaka Raya, two areas built on reclaimed land. While much of this area is bustling with shops and cheap places to stay, the southeastern region of Taman Melaka Raya, has become deserted after a short-lived economic boom; it's now home mostly to bird hotels, set up for collecting bird's nests for birds-nest soup. Bridging Mahkota Melaka to the historic quarter is the Dataran Pahlawan, a dwarfing new mall and shopping/restaurant complex.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**MPH Bookstores** (☎ 283 3050; G73B, ground fl, Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex, Jln Merdeka; ☎ 9am-10pm) Has the city's best selection of English-language titles.

**Syarikat Buku Thai Kuang** (☎ 282 0511; F59 & 60, 1st fl, Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex, Jln Merdeka; ☎ 10am-10pm) Mostly textbooks plus some dusty English titles.

### Emergency

**Melaka Police Hotline** (☎ 285 1999; Jln Kota)

### Immigration Office

**Immigration office** (☎ 282 4958; 2nd fl, Wisma Persekutuan, Jln Hang Tuah)

### Internet Access

Several cafés in Chinatown have a computer for clients and charge around RM3 per hour.

**Fenix Internet Centre** (Fenix Hotel, 156 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; per hr RM2.5) Also has fax and full business services.

**Internet Centre** (54 Jln Bunga Raya; per hr RM3.50)

**Surf Zone** (120 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; per hr RM2.50)

### Medical Services

**Mahkota Medical Centre** (☎ 281 3333, 284 8222; Jln Merdeka) A private hospital offering a full range of services.

**Southern Hospital** (☎ 283 5888; 16 Jln Bendahara) Private hospital with a 24-hour clinic.

### Money

Moneychangers are scattered about, mainly in Chinatown and near the bus stations.

**HSBC** (Jln Hang Tuah) Has 24-hour ATMs (MasterCard, Visa, Maestro, Cirrus and Plus).

**Maybank** (Jln Melaka Raya 2)

**OCBC Bank** (Lorong Hang Jebat) Just over the bridge in Chinatown, it has a 24-hour ATM that takes Visa and Plus.

**Public Bank** (Jln Laksmana)

**United Overseas Bank** (Jln PMS) Has a 24-hour ATM (Mastercard, Visa, Maestro, Cirrus and Plus)

### Post

**Post office** (Jln Laksamana; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Off Town Sq.

### Tourist information

**Tourist office** (☎ 281 4803, 1800-889483; www.melaka.gov.my; Jln Kota; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm) Free maps of Melaka and other bump. It's opposite Christ Church.

**Tourist police** (☎ 281 4803; Jln Kota; ☎ 8am-11pm)

### SIGHTS

Melaka's sights veer unmistakably towards the historical. While several of the listings following (with the exception of museums) could be seen in a 30-second glance, there is a remarkable richness of stories surrounding each edifice that increases its charm exponentially. Most central sights can be visited on the walking tour (p148).

### Historic Town Centre

Melaka has a ridiculous number of museums clustered along Jln Kota. Notables include the dusty **Islamic Museum** (admission RM2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) and the small but worthwhile **Architecture Museum** (admission RM2; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) that focuses on local housing design. Most of the other superfluous institutions use a bland diorama format where visitors walk through a maze of wordy displays. Anyone without the attention span of a law student is advised to sprint past this area and hop into the nearest technicolour trishaw. If you're going to visit any museum here, make it the **Muzium Rakyat** (People's Museum; adult RM2; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Mon), with its lengthy descriptions of the local sports of *gasing uri* (top-spinning) and *silat* (a martial art) downstairs, a meagre kite display on the 2nd floor and a creepy yet compelling 'Beauty Museum' on the 3rd floor which explores how different cultures mutilate themselves in order to look good (Western plastic surgery hasn't made it in yet).

### ST PAUL'S CHURCH

This church is a wonderfully breezy sanctuary reached after a steep and sweaty climb

### VOICES FROM THE STREET

We began by listening to the voices of ordinary Malaccans. We listened to the city's streets, as we searched out hidden corners and abandoned alleyways. Listened to houses and temples, ruins and cemeteries. Even to the murmurs and whispers of empty spaces. We listened at every turn, at every step. To the living and the dead. The past and the present. In the hope that the story of an extraordinary place and its people would be told. And we heard them speak.

*Extract from Malacca: Voices from the Street by Lim Huck Chin and Fernando Jorge (2005)*

Lim Huck Chin and Fernando Jorge are two architects who worked on the restoration of a Dutch period shophouse (8 Heeren St) and have since produced *Malacca: Voices from the Street*, a gorgeous book of photos and stories about the town. You can learn about their work by visiting the website [www.malaccavoices.com](http://www.malaccavoices.com) or by visiting the house at **8 Heeren Street** (admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue-Sat). Note that although this building is called 8 Heeren St, the street name today is Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

Lim and Jorge's words and pictures capture the magic of Melaka that many residents fear is under threat in the rush to paint heritage buildings in garish colours in the name of conservation.

up a flight of stairs. Originally built by a Portuguese captain in 1521 as the small Our Lady of the Hill chapel, St Paul's Church is a sublime testament to Catholicism in East Asia and offers bright views over Melaka from the summit of knobby Bukit St Paul. Inside the decaying stone interior are hefty, intricately engraved tombstones (of the Dutch nobility that are buried here) that lend an eerie air to an otherwise light atmosphere. The church was regularly visited by St Francis Xavier, who performed several 'miracles' in the church (see the boxed text, p154), and following his death in China the saint's body was temporarily interred here for nine months before being transferred to Goa, where it remains today. Visitors can now look into his ancient tomb (surrounded by a wire fence) in the centre of the church, and a marble statue of the saint gazes wistfully over his beloved city.

In 1556 St Paul's was enlarged to two storeys, and a tower was added to the front in 1590. The church was renamed following the Dutch takeover, but when the Dutch completed their own Christ Church at the base of the hill, it fell into disuse. Under the British it lost the tower, although a lighthouse was built, and the church eventually ended up as a storehouse for gunpowder. It has been in ruins for more than 150 years.

### PORTA DE SANTIAGO (A'FAMOSA)

A quick photo stop but a must for anyone visiting Melaka, Porta de Santiago was built by the Portuguese as a fortress in 1511. The

Dutch were busy destroying the bulk of the fort when forward-thinking Sir Stamford Raffles came by in 1810 and saved what remains today. Look for the 'VOC' inscription of the Dutch East India Company on the arch; ironically, this part of the fort was used by the Dutch after their takeover in 1670.

In November 2006, work on a highly controversial 110m revolving tower at a site near the tourist office, uncovered another part of the famous wall, thus halting further tower construction. Locals are thrilled that the surebet eyesore will be relocated, presumably further away from the city's historic centre, and the archaeological site will be excavated and turned into yet another of Melaka's historical sites. Check with the minuscule **Maritime Archaeological Museum** (Jln Laksamana; admission free; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Sun) near the clock tower for the most authoritative and up-to-date news of the recently discovered wall.

### STADTHUYS

Melaka's most unmistakable landmark and favourite trishaw pick-up spot is the **Stadthuys** (☎ 282 6526; Town Sq; admission adult/child RM5/2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5.30pm Fri), the imposing salmon-pink town hall and governor's residence. It's believed to be the oldest Dutch building in the East, built shortly after Melaka was captured by the Dutch in 1641, and is a reproduction of the former Stadhuis (town hall) of the Frisian town of Hoorn in the Netherlands. With substantial solid doors and louvred windows, it is typical

of Dutch colonial architecture. Its red paint job is thanks to the British, who brightened it up from a sombre Dutch white in 1911, 87 years after they were ceded the colony. Numerous scenarios have been proposed as to why the British painted the building this colour, but the most likely theory is that the red laterite stone used to build the Stadthuys showed through the whitewashed plastering, and/or heavy tropical rain splashed red soil up the white walls – the thrifty Brits decided to paint it all red to save on maintenance costs. The vivid colour theme extends to the other buildings around Town Sq and the old clock tower.

Housed inside the Stadthuys is the informative **History & Ethnography Museum** (☎ guided tours 10.30am & 2.30pm Sat & Sun), which has a re-created 17th-century Dutch dining room as well as displays of Chinese and Malay weapons and ceramics. Upstairs there's a room on Melaka's history. Unfortunately there's very little information about the building, which is what intrigues most people who visit the site. Up the hill is the mildly interesting **Literature Museum**, focusing on Malaysian writers. Admission to both museums (as well as the **Governor's House**

and the **Democratic Government Museum**) is included in the admission price to Stadthuys.

### SULTANATE PALACE

Housing a cultural museum, this wooden replica of the **palace of Mansur Shah** (Jln Kota; admission RM2; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) of Mansur Shah, the famous sultan who ruled Melaka from 1456 to 1477, is based on descriptions from the *Malay Annals* of the original palace, and is built entirely without nails. The three-storey building is divided into eight chambers and three galleries containing a mishmash of artefacts, photographs and drawings depicting the sultan and the Malay communities of this period.

### Chinatown

Now you're talking. This is Melaka's most vibrant area, where you could easily entertain yourself for a few days simply by strolling through the teeter-tottering lanes. Surreptitiously peer into small shops where you might see a painter at work, an old man fabricating bicycle parts with a blow-torch or a stout woman plucking chickens for the restaurant next door. When your feet get sore

### HANG TUAH & MELAKA'S STREET-NAME MUSKETEERS

If you start looking around at Melaka's street names you'll notice that several begin with the word 'Hang', which was an honorary title in ancient times. The Hang of Melaka's street signs were in fact some of the region's greatest *laksmana* (admirals) of the 15th century – Hang Tuah and his friends Hang Kasturi, Hang Jebat, Hang Lekir and Hang Lekiu. Their stories are some of the most beloved in Malaysia and are chronicled in both the *Malay Annals* (see p36) and the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, a romantic collection of tales involving Hang Tuah.

The undisputed leader of the band of buddies was Hang Tuah who, with his friends, mastered techniques of *silat* (a martial art) and meditation. The group was recognised early on by the sultan of the day, Tun Perak, when it managed to fight off a band of pirates that were attacking a village. Hang Tuah soon became inseparable from the sultan to whom he pledged his absolute loyalty.

While there are many heroic tales of Hang Tuah, the most famous is his battle with near-brother Hang Jebat (or according to some versions, Hang Kasturi). A rumour had circulated that Hang Tuah was having an affair with one of the sultan's concubines. The sultan unfairly sentenced Hang Tuah to death without a trial but the executioner disobeyed the sultan's orders and secretly hid the admiral in a remote corner of Melaka. Believing that Hang Tuah had been killed for a crime he didn't commit, Hang Jebat went on a kung-fu-blockbuster-style killing spree in the palace and the sultan and his army found themselves in a losing battle. Word reached the sultan that Hang Tuah was still alive, so the sultan called his faithful servant back knowing that he was the only man alive who could defeat Hang Jebat. It took seven days, but Hang Tuah finally killed his old friend who had been fighting for his name.

The story is still highly discussed today as it represents a paradox in the Malay psyche between loyalty and justice. It has also been adapted into several major Malay films including, most recently, *Puteri Gunung Ledang* (2004) starring M Nasir.

just pop in for a half-hour of foot reflexology or a massage.

### BABA-NONYA HERITAGE MUSEUM

Touring this traditional Peranakan town-house brings you back to a time when women hid behind elaborate partitions when guests dropped by, and every social situation had its specific location within the house. The captivating **museum** (☎ 283 1273; 48-50 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; adult/child RM8/4; 🕒 10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Wed-Mon) is arranged to look like a typical 19th-century Baba-Nonya residence. Furniture consists of Chinese hardwoods fashioned in a mixture of Chinese, Victorian and Dutch designs with mother-of-pearl inlay. Displays of 'Nonya ware', multicoloured ceramic designs from Jiāngxī and Guǎngdōng provinces in China and made for Straits Chinese, add to the presentation. The highlight is the tour guides, who tell tales of the past with a distinctly Peranakan sense of humour. The admission price includes a tour if there are enough people.

### CHENG HO CULTURAL MUSEUM

A lengthy paeon to Ming Admiral Cheng Ho (Zhenghe), this extensive **museum** (☎ 283 1135; 51 Lorong Hang Jebat; adult/child RM20/10; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-7pm Fri-Sun) charts the tremendous

voyages of the intrepid Chinese Muslim seafarer. At the age of 13, Cheng Ho was castrated and became a eunuch servant to the Chinese emperor's fourth son, Prince Zhu Di. He proved an exceptional servant, and later became an army officer and ultimately the admiral of China's 'Treasure Fleet', a convoy that solidified China's control over most of Asia during the 15th century. The admiral visited Melaka at least five times during his extraordinary voyages and set up a warehouse complex somewhere along the northern side of the Sungai Melaka (Melaka River) – the exact location is unknown. Photographs of Chinese descendants in Africa are intriguing while the puppet show is entertaining (despite its gruesome side). It's a great stop for history buffs although there's too much information here for anyone expecting to casually visit. The ticket price includes a 15-minute film presentation on Cheng Ho.

### CHENG HOON TENG TEMPLE

Malaysia's oldest traditional Chinese temple (dating from 1646) remains a central place of worship for the Buddhist community in Melaka. Notable for its carved woodwork, the **temple** (Qing Yun Ting or Green Clouds Temple; 25 Jln Tokong; 🕒 7am-7pm) is dedicated to Kuan Yin, the

### BABA-NONYA'S LAST STAND

It's impossible to be in Melaka for even a day without hearing about the Baba-Nonya, also called the Peranakans. In Malay the word 'Peranakan' means 'descendant', and nowadays this word usually refers to the Chinese descendants who intermarried with Malays. Men are called Baba and the women Nonya; this creates the second name for the culture, the Baba-Nonya.

While the history of Chinese descendants in Melaka has recently become more questioned, the common story is that the mix of cultures began with the arrival of Hang Li Po, daughter of the 15th-century emperor of China, who brought an entourage of 500 family members and servants with her to her new home in Melaka. The Straits-born Chinese descendants retained their religion (Buddhism and ancestor worship) and ethical beliefs but absorbed the Malay language and some cultural habits. The food, commonly called Nonya food, in honour of the women who did most of the cooking, is another delicious story entirely (see p46).

While some Straits-born Chinese intermarried with local Malays, many families imported Chinese brides or sent daughters to China to find husbands; in this way, the culture stayed ethnically predominantly Chinese. Because of their mixed cultural background, the Peranakans flourished during the British colonial era when they became British educated and usually filled important civil service and administration posts. This led to them frequently being called the 'King's Chinese'. While some converted to Christianity, many still retained their ancestral religion. Once the British departed, the special treatment from being cultural go-betweens for the Europeans to both the Chinese and Malay communities ended and the Peranakans gradually began to become absorbed by the newer Chinese community. Melaka is the stronghold of what remains of the culture, and the tourism that this attracts has helped strengthen and prolong the graceful nuances of the dying culture.

### WHAT'S THAT SMELL?

Sungai Melaka (Melaka River) winds romantically past the banks of Chinatown and the Stadthuys, carrying with it colourful wooden ships, fishermen in small boats and a disconcerting amount of industrial waste. Starting in 2005 the city invested about RM100 million to clean up the sludgy river and build grassy areas and walking paths along its shores. A catamaran designed to clean up oil slicks was employed to remove rubbish then compress it into a material that could be used to reinforce the banks. The next step, underway in 2007, was the beautification of the banks followed by domestic wastewater and cesspool treatment; reservoirs were built to trap scum, oil and refuse.

Unfortunately, these measures are not enough for a community that has become used to throwing its waste, such as greasy residue from restaurants and plastic bags, into the river. Industrial waste from agriculture (including pesticides and herbicides) and factories accounts for approximately 45% of the slime, much of which, even after the river's cleanup and new reservoirs, will make its way to the sea. The odour rises with the falling tides.

goddess of mercy. All building materials for the temple were imported from China, along with the artisans involved in its construction. More recently (in 2003), the structure won a Unesco award for outstanding architectural restoration. A robed effigy of Kuan Yin can be found within the main temple hall, itself an explosion of black, gold and red. Worshipers also pray to the altar of Tianhou, goddess of seafarers, to the left of Kuan Yin. Across the street from the main temple is a traditional opera theatre.

### MASJID KAMPUNG HULU

Yet another aged superlative, **Masjid Kampung Hulu** (Jln Masjid Kampung Hulu) is the oldest functioning mosque in Malaysia and was, surprisingly, commissioned by the Dutch in 1728. The Portuguese had destroyed all non-Christian establishments during their occupation, including Melaka's first mosque, which had reputedly stood across from where the Stadthuys stands today. Aiming for a kinder, gentler form of colonisation involving cultural and religious pluralism, the Dutch decided to help the locals re-build their places of worship instead of smashing them to bits. The resulting mosque is made up of predominantly Javanese architecture with a multitiered roof in place of the standard dome; at the time of construction, domes and minarets had not yet come into fashion. Chinese touches include the crownlike pinnacle surmounting the roofs and the curved eaves and ceramic roof and floor tiles that were imported from China.

### MASJID TRANQUERAH

**Masjid Tranquerah** (Masjid Tengkerah; Jln Tengkerah) takes a back seat to Masjid Kampung Hulu in terms

of age but is still one of the oldest mosques in Malaysia (over 150 years old). In its graveyard is the tomb of Sultan Hussein of Johor, who signed over the island of Singapore to Stamford Raffles in 1819. The sultan later retired to Melaka, where he died in 1853. The mosque is out of Chinatown about 2km towards Port Dickson along Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock, which turns into Jln Tengkerah.

Avoid visiting this and any Malaysian mosque during prayer times, always remove your shoes and dress conservatively (knees to elbows covered). Although not required, women should wear a headscarf if possible.

### Around the City Centre

#### KAMPUNG CHITTY

As well as the Baba-Nonya, Melaka also has a small community of Chitty – Straits-born Indians, offspring of the Indian traders who intermarried with Malay women. Having arrived in the 1400s, the Chitties are regarded as older than the Chinese-Malay Peranakan community (see the boxed text, opposite). Their area of town, known as Kampung Chitty, lies west of Jl Gajah Berang, about 1km northwest of Chinatown; look for the archway with elephant sculptures beside the Mutamariman Temple. It's a pretty district in which to wander and see traditional Malay-style houses. The tiny **Chitty Museum** (☎ 281 1289; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) makes a great excuse to stroll to Kampung Chitty. It's a community effort with a collection of colourful artefacts such as traditional water-pots, multitiered brass oil lamps, serving trays, sculptures, handicrafts and photographs.

The best time to visit is in May, during the Mariamman Festival (Pesta Datuk Charchar),



a Hindu celebration when you might also be fortunate enough to witness a traditional Indian wedding ceremony.

### LITTLE INDIA

Heading east from Kampung Chitty, past Chinatown and across the river, is Melaka's surprisingly plain Little India. While it's not nearly as charming as the historic centre or Chinatown, this busy area along Jln Bendahara and Jln Temenggong is a worthwhile place for soaking in some Indian influence and grabbing an excellent banana-leaf meal. During Deepavali (see p220) a section of Jln Temenggong closes to traffic to make way for Indian cultural performances and street-food vendors.

### BUKIT CHINA

Further east is Bukit China, which, besides being the largest Chinese graveyard outside of China, is also Melaka's best jogging track (see opposite). More than 12,500 graves, including about 20 Muslim tombs, cover the 25 grassy hectares. Since the times of British rule until today there have been several attempts to acquire Bukit China for road widening, land reclamation or development purposes. Fortunately, Cheng Hoon Teng Temple (p144), along with strong community support, has thwarted these attempts.

In the middle of the 15th century the sultan of Melaka imported the Ming emperor's daughter from China as his bride, in a move to seal relations between the two countries. She brought with her a vast retinue, including 500 handmaidens, and Bukit China was chosen to be their residence. It has been a Chinese area ever since, along with the two adjoining hills and eventually became the burial ground for Chinese traders. Chinese graveyards are often built on hillsides to maximise positive feng shui. At the foot of Bukit China, called San Bao Shan (Three Treasures Mount) in Mandarin,

**Poh San Teng Temple** was built in 1795 and contains images of Kuan Yin and the Taoist entity Dabo Gong. To the right of the temple is the **Sultan's Well**, a 15th-century well built by Sultan Mansor Shah for his Chinese wife, Princess Hang Li Poh. It was an important source of water for Melaka and a prime target for opposition forces wanting to take the city.

### ST PETER'S CHURCH

Melaka has Malaysia's oldest traditional Chinese temple (p144) and functioning mosque (p145), so it's no surprise that **St Peter's Church** (Jln Bendahara) is the oldest functioning Catholic church in Malaysia, built in 1710 by descendants of early Portuguese settlers. The church has a striking white façade, stained-glass windows, the Latin words 'Tu es Petrus' (You are the Rock) above the altar and a bell cast in Goa (India) in 1608. On Good Friday the church comes alive when Malaccan Christians flock here, many of them making it the occasion for a trip home from far-flung parts of the country.

### FORT ST JOHN

Although the British demolished most of Porta de Santiago (p142), they spared this small Dutch **fort** (Bukit Senjuang) off Jln Bukit Senjuang. Originally a Portuguese chapel dedicated to St John the Baptist (until the Dutch rebuilt it in the 18th century), it stands on a hilltop to the east of town just before the turn-off to Medan Portugis. Only a few walls and cannon emplacements of the fort remain, but there are fine views from the hilltop. In the mornings a group of locals practice t'ai chi on the grassy field next to the fort.

### The Riverfront

#### MARITIME MUSEUM & NAVAL MUSEUM

Housed in a huge re-creation of the *Flor de la Mar*, a Portuguese ship that sank off the coast of Melaka (see the boxed text, below),

### SUNKEN TREASURE OF THE FLOR DE LA MAR

The Portuguese takeover of Melaka in 1511 was no peaceful affair. After 40 days of fighting the city fell to the European forces and about two months later it was sacked for its treasures for three days. The spoils were taken and stored on the *Flor de la Mar* and three other vessels bound for Portugal. Admiral Alfonso de Albuquerque claimed that the booty, including 60 tonnes of gold, the sultan's throne, 200 chests of diamonds and two bronze lion sculptures that had been a gift to the sultan from the emperor of China, were the finest treasures he had ever seen.

No sooner had the ships set sail than they encountered a storm off the coast of Sumatra. The three ships sank and have never been recovered.

### KRISTANG

The creole language of Kristang (also called Papiah Kristang, Cristão or Cristan – derived from the word Christian) has survived in Melaka for half a millennium. Spoken by descendants of the Portuguese who first came to Melaka, Kristang employs a grammatical structure similar to Malay although its vocabulary is largely extracted from archaic Portuguese, making it partially comprehensible to visitors from Portugal. Most speakers of the creole live in Melaka, but small populations lie scattered in Singapore and elsewhere in Malaysia. Its shrinking population of speakers and an increasing preference for English among the younger generations is endangering the language, but many speakers of Kristang are fighting for its preservation. Some Kristang expressions include *bong pamiang* (good morning), *mutu merseh* (thank you) and *teng bong?* (how are you?). For further information on the Kristang language, go to [www.joanmarbeck.net](http://www.joanmarbeck.net).

the **Maritime Museum** (admission RM2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) merits a visit. Clamber up for a detailed examination of Melaka's history picked out by rather faded and dated props. The museum continues in the building next door with more absorbing exhibits featuring local vessels, including the striking *Kepala Burung* (a boat carved like a feathered bird) plus an assortment of nautical devices.

### VILLA SENTOSA

While not an official museum, this 1920s Malay *kampung* (village) house called **Villa Sentosa** (Peaceful Villa; ☎ 282 3988; [www.travel.to/villa-sentosa](http://www.travel.to/villa-sentosa); entry by donation; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat-Thu, 2.45-5pm Fri), on the Melaka River in Kampung Morten, is well worth a visit. A member of the family will show you around the house, accessed via a bridge, introducing a varied collection of objects, including Ming dynasty ceramics, a 100-year-old copy of the Quran and a certificate of honour awarded by King George V to the late Tuan Haji Hashim Bin Dato Demang Haji Abdul Ghani (who lived here). Most of all, it's an opportunity to wander through a genuine *kampung* house. You can also add to the visitors' book, copious volumes of which record congratulatory remarks from legions of visitors, some well known. Afterwards, stroll around Kampung Morten and its other traditional *kampung* houses.

### Medan Portugis

Roughly 3km east of the city centre on the coast is **Medan Portugis** (Portuguese Sq). The small *kampung* centred on the square is the heart of Melaka's Eurasian community, descended from marriages between the colonial Portuguese and Malays 400 years ago, many of whom speak Kristang (see the boxed text, above). A French missionary first proposed

the settlement to the British colonial government in the 1920s, but the square, styled after a typical Portuguese *mercado* (markets) and lending the settlement a cultural focus, wasn't completed until the late 1980s.

In the open square area, the Portuguese community office bulletin board displays advertisements for cultural events and news articles, some relating to how Melaka's land reclamation has damaged local family-run fisheries.

The *kampung* is unexceptional, however, and the square is often empty, except on Saturday evenings when cultural events are staged. But the sea breeze is lovely while enjoying a relaxing beer or meal at the many restaurants in and around the square. Town bus 17 from the local bus station will get you here; see p163.

### ACTIVITIES Walking & Jogging

If you're searching for a patch of green in the city centre head straight to Bukit China (opposite). Of course, this is historical Melaka, so the popular walking and jogging hill also happens to be a major Chinese cemetery.

To walk or jog Bukit China, take Jln Puteri Hang Li Po from the Poh San Teng Temple on the corner of Jln Munshi and take the first right into the driveway of SJKC Pay Fong III School. The steps leading to the trail can be seen from here. The well-marked path winds up and down for about 3km, passing many ancient graves. The huge horseshoe-shaped tombs are those of the Kapitan China, the heads of the Chinese community in colonial times. Two 15th-century Malay chieftains are buried on Bukit Tempurong Plain at the south of the trail, and several *kernat* (sacred Muslim graves) are found on the northeast foot of

the hill. The oldest tomb (located near the basketball court of SRJK Pay Fong III School) is a double burial of Mr and Mrs Huang Wei-Hung and was built in 1622. In 1933 the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple (p144) restored the headstones; the aging tomb was brought back to life a second time (so to speak) in 2001. From the top of the hill, there is a full-circle panorama of the city across paddy fields and to Pulau Besar.

### Reflexology & Massage

You're probably not going to be developing any stress headaches from visiting laid-back Melaka, but just to melt you even more there are several reflexology and traditional massage therapy centres around the city.

**Putuo Traditional Chinese Medical Therapy Centre** (☎ 286 1052; 134 Jln Hang Jebat; 1hr reflexology RM38, 1hr chi body massage RM60; ☞ 10am–10pm Mon–Thu, 10am–midnight Fri–Sun) The women here know their stuff and offer straightforward, excellent-value services. Get your feet expertly massaged while watching Chinese soap operas with the giggling staff or get a full body chi massage in a quieter back room. If you have specific ailments, anything from migraines to water retention, the owner will create a special treatment for you. There are also ear candles, fire cupping, body scrubs and more. The centre's ambience is no-frills Chinese institutional.

**Body in Balance** (☎ 13 23 10512; 123 Jln Tun Tan Cheng; 30min/1hr massage RM30/60) Attached to Baba House (p153); traditional Malay, Thai and aromatherapy massages are offered here. Sweet, soothing smells emanate from the curtained hutlike room that would look quite at home on a tropical beach. It's a simple set-up but charmingly Malay.

**Biosentials Puri Spa** (☎ 282 5588; www.hotelpuri.com; Hotel Puri, 118 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; spa services from RM50; ☞ Thu–Mon) This international calibre spa in a sensual garden has a delicious menu of treatments including steams, body wraps, scrubs, facials and a variety of massage. There are several packages available including the sublime two-hour Vitality Purification (RM265) which includes a Thai herbal steam bath, skin tapping for circulation, detoxifying marine body mask, herbal bath and a deep-tissue massage. Bliss!

### WALKING TOUR

Melaka's Chinatown is a compact area packed to the brim with interesting edifices and museums. This tour takes you to the principal

sights but you'll find plenty of other ones on your own to entertain you along the way.

Start at the delightful Town Sq, Melaka's historic hub. The most imposing relic of the Dutch period in Melaka is the **Stadthuys** (1; p142). Exit the Stadthuys and contemplate **Christ Church** (2), constructed from pink laterite bricks brought from Zeeland in Holland. Dutch and Armenian tombstones still lie in the floor of the church's interior, while the massive 15m-long ceiling beams overhead were each cut from a single tree. Sit down and admire the marvellous **fountain** (3) in Town Sq, emblazoned with four bas-relief images of Queen Victoria's face in profile and affixed with an inscribed plaque reading: 'Victoria Regina 1837–1901. Erected by the people of Malacca in memory of a Great Queen 1904.'

Walk west across the bridge over the Melaka River (for information on riverboat cruises see p152). On the far shore, turn left and stroll along Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock, but watch out for racing traffic. Formerly called Heeren St, this narrow thoroughfare was the preferred address for wealthy Baba (Straits-born Chinese; see the boxed text, p144) traders who were most active during the short-lived

rubber boom of the early 20th century. These typical Peranakan houses, with their intricate tiles and plasterwork, fuse Chinese, Dutch and British influences in a style that has been described as Chinese Palladian and Chinese baroque. The interiors open into airy courtyards that admit sun and rain – similar to Chinese courtyard houses. A finely restored example of this architectural style can be found at **8 Heeren St** (4), a 1700s Dutch period shophouse. Thanks to a RM57,000 grant from the US Department of State's Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation, the Badan Warisan (Heritage Trust of Malaysia) was able to re-visit the building while retaining its original features as much as possible. The project was partially chronicled by Lim Huck Chin and Fernando Jorge in their beautifully designed coffee-table book *Malacca: Voices from the Street* (see the boxed text, p142).

An intriguing insight into the local vernacular can be gleaned from the **Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum** (5; p143). Pop into **Malaqa House** (6; p161) and pick over its horde of antiques before continuing to the elegant **Hotel Puri** (7; p153); the Chinese characters emblazoned on the door literally mean 'Longevity Mountain, Fortuitous Sea'. The impressive classical-style building set back from the street opposite is the **Chee Mansion** (8; 115–117 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock), a Chinese family shrine not open to the public.

Another traditional house now serving as a hotel, **Baba House** (9; p153), is just ahead. The **Eng Choon (Yong Chun) Association** (10; 122 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock) is an impressively well-kept Chinese guildhall, containing a small shrine to two Taoist deities. Admire the painted gods on the doors and the carved dragons adorning the stone pillars. Chinese characters written on the building mean 'Peace to the country and the people' – which you see elsewhere in Chinatown.

Backtrack along Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock and walk north up Jln Hang Lekir (Third Cross St), past a string of restaurants and antique shops. Opposite Howard's restaurant (p158) is the dignified **Leong San Thong** (11; Dragon Hill Hall; 8 Jln Hang Lekir), built in 1928. At the junction, turn left onto Jln Hang Jebat, formerly known as Jonker's St (or Junk St Melaka), famed for its antique and craft shops (browse at will, but bargains can be elusive). On Friday and Saturday nights, the street is for pedestrians only and is transformed into a market of stalls.

Continuing west, you'll approach the all-white **Hang Kasturi's Tomb** (12; boxed text, p143) on your right; there is no historical evidence that the tomb is the final resting place of the great warrior. Beyond here is the tempting **Putuo Traditional Chinese Medicine Therapy Centre** (13; opposite) – just the spot for a revitalising foot massage and doses of reflexology. Further along on your left is the small, modern and pink **Guanyin Temple** (14; Guanyin Tang) dedicated to the Buddhist goddess of compassion. Seated in the second hall is the Taoist Jade Emperor, flanked by two attendants. The central effigy of Kuan Yin is a modern Qianshou (1000-arm) version.

Turn right here and head up Jln Tokong (Temple St) and past a couple of small Chinese shrines, the **Wah Teck Kiong Temple** (15) and the **Guangfu Temple** (16; Guangfu Gong). Ahead is the **Wan Aik Shoemaker** (17; p161) shop on your left – the specialist manufacturer crafts doll-like shoes for bound feet, once the height of gruesome fashion for well-to-do Chinese women in Melaka.

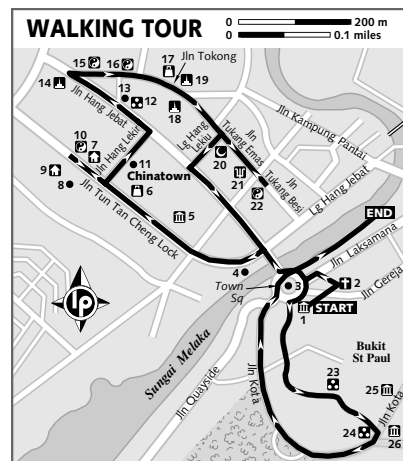
Chinatown's most elaborate and celebrated Chinese temple, the **Cheng Hoon Teng Temple** (18; p144), is opposite the more recently constructed **Xianglin (Fragrant Forest) Temple** (19), which endeavours to follow the layout of a traditional Chinese Buddhist temple. Adding splashes of colour to Jln Tokong are the Chinese shops selling red and gold lanterns, paper money and funerary preparations. The street used to be famed for its goldsmiths, but most have moved to other areas.

Continue east to the **Kampung Kling Mosque** (20). This hoary mosque has a multitiered *meru* roof (a stacked form similar to that seen in Balinese Hindu architecture), which owes its inspiration to Hindu temples, and a Moorish watchtower minaret typical of early mosques in Sumatra. Further along is the **Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple** (21), one of the first Hindu temples built in the country. It was built in 1781 on the plot given by the religiously tolerant Dutch and dedicated to the Hindu deity Vinayagar. Slightly further ahead is the **Sanduo Temple** (22; Sanduo Miao), another Chinese shrine encapsulating effigies of Dabo Gong, Jinhua Niangniang (who women entreat for children) and Kuan Yin.

Backtrack and turn left along the exterior wall of the mosque back along Lorong Hang Lekiu (Fourth Cross St) to Jln Hang Jebat. Stroll back to Lorong Hang Jebat

#### WALK FACTS

**Start** Town Sq  
**Finish** Melaka River  
**Distance** 2.5km  
**Duration** Three hours





### TOP 10 WAYS TO ENJOY MELAKA'S CHINATOWN

- Start the day with a traditional dim sum breakfast
- Hunt for antiques in creaky old shops
- Buy a pair of bright Nonya clogs then clack your way around town
- Buy knick-knacks such as spinning tops, Chinese good-luck charms and chopsticks
- Peruse quiet artist's studios
- Slurp an icy science-experiment-gone-wrong-looking *cendol* (mung-bean-flour noodles and shaved ice doused in coconut milk, palm-sugar syrup and condensed milk) in the day's heat
- Cure tired, hot feet, blistered by your new clogs, with a reflexology foot massage
- Enjoy the local's favourite meal of chicken rice ball
- Have your fortune read at the Jonker's Walk Night Market
- Chill to live music at a streetside bar on a balmy Friday or Saturday night

(First Cross St) and the bridge, noting the decorative touches along the way – mosaics, tiling, inlaid coloured stones, carvings, Western-style balustrades, balconies, shutters and ornamentalments.

Traverse the bridge, cross Town Sq back to the Stadthuys and clamber up the steps leading to the top of Bukit St Paul, topped by the fabulous ruins of **St Paul's Church** (23; p141).

There are steps from St Paul's Church down the hill to **Porta de Santiago** (24; p142), once the main gate of the Portuguese fortress A'Famosa, originally constructed by Alfonso de Albuquerque in 1512.

To the east, at the base of Bukit St Paul, is the **Sultanate Palace** (25; p143). Across the way, in a British villa dating from 1911 is the **Proclamation of Independence Memorial** (26; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat-Thu, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Fri), a museum charting the history of Malaysia's progression to independence. There's too much to read and perhaps not enough to look at (although the Japanese officer's sword from occupation days is noteworthy). Ironically, this grand building topped by Mogul-inspired domes was once the Melaka Club, a bastion of colonialism.

Follow Jln Kota around the base of Bukit St Paul and head back to Town Sq. Conclude your walk by ambling along the short brick promenade on the eastern bank of the Melaka River (parallel with Jln Laksamana), and take in riverine views, bars, the occasional barber and walls of distinctive Dutch bricks.

### COURSES

The best souvenir you can bring home from Melaka is the cuisine. The **Hotel Equatorial**

(p155) runs the only cookery course in town, which is available both as part of a hotel package and as an independent course. Instruction in Nonya cooking is given at the hotel's Seri Peranakan Restaurant by its head chef, Bong Geok Choo. The hotel package, the **'Wok & Walk'** (per person sharing a double RM265), includes a one-night stay in a 'superior' room, one buffet breakfast, one Nonya set lunch, one buffet dinner, two cooking workshop sessions, a walking tour of historical Melaka and a souvenir cookbook. It's quite a bargain when you consider that the published price of a one-night stay in a superior room without all the extras is nearly twice this amount.

If you'd rather take the course à la carte, two-hour classes are given for either **lunch** (RM55; ☎ 10.30am-12.30pm) or **dinner** (RM60; ☎ 4.40-6.30pm) and include a set meal and a certificate of completion. You'll cook three Nonya dishes, including specialties such as *ayam pong teh* (miso soy chicken) or *udang lemak nenas* (prawns with pineapple and spicy coconut), hands-on with the chef.

It's advised to book these courses at least one month in advance to secure the availability of the chef, but if you're running late you could always contact the hotel to see if there's space available on an already scheduled course.

Those interested in learning the beadwork techniques for Nonya shoes should inquire at **Souvenir Menj** (☎ 676 1926; 111 Jln Hang Jebat; ☎ closed Tue), a huge shoe shop that can help organise private courses. Since there aren't too many inquiries, prices aren't set and are up for discussion – also be warned that teachers aren't

always available. Of course if more people ask, classes will become more regular. Ask for Dawn Tan.

### MELAKA FOR CHILDREN

Melaka is a popular family destination although most of the child-friendly activities are found out of town in Ayer Keroh (p163) and at the A'Famosa Resort (p165) in Alor Gajah. The city of Melaka is mellow enough for walking around with kids, particularly around the pedestrian promenade at the historic centre (where there is also a small playground), but, as in most Malay towns, traffic can be a problem midcity and crossing the road means bolting ahead at full speed while dodging cars. Chinatown lacks sidewalks but the traffic is light. Trishaw rides are sure to be a favourite activity and the Jonker's Walk Night Market (p158), with its street performers, endless snacks and trinkets, is sure to please. Kids will want to go into the Maritime Museum (p146) because it's in a great big, cartoonlike ship, but know that the interior isn't nearly as fun as the exterior.

Check out the Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex (p162) for scheduled children's events such as dance performances or even paint-ball (for bigger kids). The cinema in the same complex occasionally shows big-name children's films, and just about every fast-food chain in existence has an outlet in this mall. To entice children to eat local food, try a food court where kids can see what they are getting before they order and have a wide range of choices. Newton Food Court (p159) is the best for kids, with lots of open spaces, an adjacent grassy area and a playground. Don't forget to make a stop for an ice *cendol* (shaved ice with syrup, coconut milk, strange jellies, beans and sometimes sweet corn)!

### WACKY MELAKA

Melaka is an atypical Malay town, not only for its historical importance, but for its creative, off-beat residents who add spice to more than their laksa.

You can't miss Melaka's **trishaws**. Nowhere else in Malaysia will you find such a wild and crazy collection of trishaws. These guys seem to be competing for who can bedeck their vehicles in the most outrageously kitsch plastic flowers, semimacabre baby-doll heads, religious paraphernalia and tinsel. Add some flashing Christmas lights, a satin parasol and

a sound system and you've got one proud peddler. While taking a ride in one of these things is the most high-profile 'I'm a tourist' things you might ever do outside of Disneyland, it's an unabashed hoot and is great support for an industry that is dying nearly everywhere else in the country. As a spectator, keep an eye out for big tourist groups hiring out trishaws en masse: the effect, with several '80s dance hits blaring at the same time, cameras snapping and all that glitzy decoration, turns the streets of Melaka into a giant circuslike parade. Main trishaw pick-up spots include the Hotel Equatorial, Porta de Santiago and the Stadthuys; a 20-minute ride should cost RM10 to RM15.

Uncover your destiny at one of several little Chinese **fortune-teller booths** along Jonker's Walk on Friday and Saturday nights. The local Chinese in Malaysia frequently consult these mystics to ask for advice or to find out the most auspicious times of the year for certain occasions (such as weddings, financial investments, travel etc). Techniques range from card reading to fortune sticks, palm reading and Chinese astrology.

**Dr Ho Eng Hui** eats fire and throws knives, but the real reason to stick around and watch this Jonker's Walk Night Market kung fu master is to see him pummel his index finger into a coconut. If you're not familiar with the strength of a coconut's husk, think back to Tom Hanks in the film *Castaway*. Remember how he spends hours hurling a coconut on the rocks trying to break the damn thing open? Now a soft little human finger just shouldn't be able to pierce through a coconut's husk, let alone the interior nut – but this guy really does it and has been entertaining folks by doing so for more than 35 years. With the slogan 'Malaysia Boleh!' (literally 'Malaysia can do!') Dr Ho Eng Hui is in fact a doctor, and the purpose of his performance is to sell a miracle oil (RM10) that cures aches and pains. Find him at the southern end of Jln Hang Jebat between about 6.30pm and 9pm on Friday and Saturday.

### TOURS

A handful of local tour guides hang out at the **Discovery Café** (3 Jln Bunga Raya) and charge RM70 to RM100 for a half-day of guiding. Particularly recommended is party-loving Nonya guide **Peck Choo** (☎ 13 208 0024; wickdepch@yahoo.com), who knows every nook and cranny of Melaka better than just about anyone. She

can lead tours on anything from short historic walks to several-day jaunts around the province and beyond. She is buddies with most of the other guides and can help set potential clients up with another guide or a specialist if need be. For tours originating from KL see p99.

**Parameswara Tours** (☎ 286 5468; RM10; 📄 every hr 11am-3pm) This company has daily riverboat cruises along the Melaka River from the quay behind the tourist office on Jln Kota. The trip takes 40 minutes, and at least eight people are needed for a trip. The boat travels to Kampung Morten, where Villa Sentosa is located, past old *godown* (river warehouses). You can also charter a minimum 12-person boat to Pulau Besar (return adult/child RM25/15, departs 9am and returns 5pm). For regularly scheduled ferries to Pulau Besar, see p163.

**Eco Bike Tour** (☎ 019-652 5029; www.melakaonbike.com; per person RM50) For something different and to explore the fascinating landscape around Melaka, join Alias for his popular three-hour bike ride through 20km of oil-palm and rubber-tree plantations and delightful *kampung* communities surrounding town. Pick-up is from the Travellers' Lodge (p155). The tour changes depending on local events or festivals in the area; some may stop at a local wedding ceremony (only when available, of course). The tour can leave at either 8am or 3pm any day of the week as long as there are at least two people. There aren't any big hills and water is supplied.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Melaka celebrates all the major Malaysian holidays, including Chinese New Year, Thaipusam and National Day (see p219). While the festivals here might not be as big

as in KL or Penang, they are more manageable and intimate.

**Masimugam Festival** A Malaccan version of Thaipusam, just as gory but without the crowds, takes place shortly after Chinese New Year in Kampong Cheng, about 15km outside of Melaka city in February/March.

**Easter** Good Friday and Easter Sunday processions are held outside at St Peter's Church in March/April.

**Melaka Historical City Day** Public holiday on 15 April in celebration of the founding of Melaka.

**Vesak Day Parade** Celebrates the birth, death and enlightenment of Buddha on the first full moon of the fourth month of the Chinese calendar (May). In Melaka there is a big and colourful parade.

**Festa San Juan** In late June, just before the Festa San Pedro, Melaka's Eurasian community hosts this festival at the chapel on top of St John's Hill.

**Festa San Pedro** Honouring this patron saint of the Portuguese fishing community, celebrations take place at St Peter's Church in late June and normally include a float procession from the Porta de Santiago to Medan Portugis, with cooking, fishing, handicraft and carnival festivities.

**Dragon Boat Festival** This Chinese festival, marked by a dragon boat race in the Strait of Melaka in June/July, commemorates the death by drowning of 3rd-century BC Chinese poet and statesman Qu Yuan.

**Hungry Ghosts (Phor Thor) Festival** Smaller than the same festival in Penang, the Melaka version in August is still worthwhile. Offerings and prayers are given to dead relatives who are temporarily released to roam the earth.

**Festa Santa Cruz** This festival in mid-September finishes with a candlelight procession of Malaccan and Singaporean Catholics to Malim chapel.

**Christmas** Malaccans descend on Medan Portugis to view the brightly decorated homes.

## SLEEPING

Melaka has an exceptional selection of budget options, many of which exceed the quality of the lesser midrange choices. Jln Melaka

has become a sort of tourist ghetto, in a low-key Malaccan sort of way, and is only a short walk from Chinatown – midrange in this area tends to be geared towards Malay family and business travellers. The few top-end establishments in Melaka are in high-rises that are nearly all clustered along or near busy Jln Bendahara in Little India. While this might be convenient for folks coming to Melaka on business, Chinatown and areas around the historic centre are much more pleasant for the casual tourist. Some midrange and top-end hotels raise their tariff from Friday to Sunday; the weekday rate is quoted here.

## Chinatown

If you have the option of staying in Chinatown, do it. Staying here elevates the Melaka experience.

**Sama-Sama Guest House** (☎ 305 1980; www.sama-sama-guesthouse.com; 26 Jln Tukang Besi; dm RM10, d RM15-30) Reggae music softly sings from the entrance/common area while cats (and the odd human) snooze through the afternoon. This place is so mellow that it feels like you should be on a beach somewhere but in fact you're very much in central Melaka. The rooms and building are just as quirky as their hippy-ish Swiss-Chinese owners, with a courtyard overflowing with potted plants, miniponds, wind chimes and wooden statues. Some rooms open up to the courtyard while others overlook the street, but they all feel intimately linked by the creaky wood floors and the breezes that run through the wide walkways. The whole place, including the shared toilets and showers, is kept sparkling clean.

**Chong Hoe Hotel** (☎ 282 6102; 26 Jln Tukang Emas; s/d RM25/43; 📄) In an enviable location in Chinatown just up the street from Sama-Sama, this standard Chinese cheapy is no-nonsense good value and, although it's worn, it's clean.

**Baba House** (☎ 281 1216; thebabahouse@pd.jaring.my; 125-127 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; s/d/f RM59/75/190; 📄) In a row of restored Peranakan shophouses, this elegant Baba building is beautifully arranged with tilework, carved panels and a cool interior courtyard. Rooms, many windowless, aren't nearly as glitzy as the lobby and are dark, drab and worn. Some claim the hotel is haunted but the spooks appear to be friendly in nature.

**Heeren Inn** (☎ 288 3600; heerenin@streamyx.com; 23 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; d RM78-145; 📄) While

this place is housed in an attractive and deep Chinatown building that seemingly goes on forever, the motel-like, windowless rooms here lack the ancient flair of the building. Rooms bordering the light-filled central courtyard (complete with water garden) are the brightest of the bunch. The sinks are little bigger than soap dishes, but shower rooms are otherwise new and clean and the family-run atmosphere throughout is comforting.

**Our pick** **Number Twenty Guesthouse** (☎ /fax 281 9761; www.selesalifestyle.com; 20 Jln Hang Jebat; d incl breakfast RM96; 📄) A 1673 Dutch mansion meets urban-Zen chic at Melaka's most stylish digs. This place maintains a perfect balance of old and new with its dark wood beam construction and high ceilings, a touch of Chinese art, low opium beds and modern lighting. The common area has elongated windows that look over Jln Hang Jebat (and hence the Jonker's Walk Night Market on Friday and Saturday nights) and you can kick back on plush soft couches and watch DVDs on the plasma TV. Not all rooms have windows, but you can always get a little air on the rooftop garden, which is ideal for taking in the sunset. To conform with Melaka city's preservation standards, the guesthouse wasn't allowed to build en-suite bathrooms so all rooms here have shared bathrooms. It's gay friendly.

**Hotel Puri** (☎ 282 5588; www.hotelpuri.com; 118 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; d/f RM110/305; 📄) One of Chinatown's gems, Hotel Puri is an elegant creation in a superb old renovated Peranakan manor house. Its elaborate lobby, decked out with beautiful old cane and inlaid furniture, opens to a gorgeous courtyard garden (a wi-fi area) which leads to a 'history room' where guests can peruse Melaka's past through books and photographs. Standard rooms have butter-yellow walls, crisp sheets, satellite TV, wi-fi and shuttered windows. There's an on-site spa (p148), and breakfast, taken in the courtyard or air-conditioned dining area, is included.

**Aldy Hotel** (☎ 283 3232; www.aldyhotel.com.my; 27 Jln Kota; d RM118-280, tr/f RM220/260; 📄) Standing out like a red, sore thumb atop a bistro opposite the foot of Bukit St Paul, this boutique-style hotel has a location to die for and is a great choice for families. Old grey carpet and decades-old décor darken the halls but things perk up again in the rooms, which are newly remodelled, modern and equipped with satellite TV. Wi-fi, rooftop Jacuzzi and barbecues

## ISLAM'S JOURNEY TO MELAKA

Islam was introduced to Malaysia from the same source as Hinduism – Indian traders. The earliest Indian visitors came from the southeast peninsula (which is Hindu) while later Indian businessmen arrived from northeast India and were Muslim. The traders were very influential and those Malaccans who converted to Islam found it bettered business relations. It's no wonder that the upper classes and rulers such as Prince Parameswara, tantalised by Indian prosperity, who first converted to the new religion. Once the rulers became faithful, the trickle down was rapid.

While Parameswara was the first sultan of Melaka and also the first to embrace Islam, not all of the following sultans were Muslim. Once converted, the Malay names inevitably would change; Parameswara became Raja Iskandar Shah. His son Raja Ibrahim kept the name Parameswara although he did keep to the Persian trend of adding 'Shah' to his name to highlight the fact that he was a ruler.

## CREEPY MELAKA

Melaka is really, really old so it's no wonder there are some strange tales floating around town. Ask a local for a ghost story and you're sure to get several.

- Ghosts – sightings of a white figure next to a tombstone are common throughout the city.
- Vampires – in ancient Melaka there were reports of *pontianak*, beautiful female vampire-like creatures that would lurk in the trees waiting for their next victim. Their piercing laughter would sometimes wail through the night.
- The would-be-saint Francis performed a number of miracles during his time in Melaka but his most famous was bringing a young girl back to life after she had been dead and buried for three days.
- In 1948 the Dutch freighter *Orang Medan* sent out an SOS from the Strait of Melaka. When the ship was found drifting, all the crew members, including the radio operator with his finger still on the button, were found dead. No wounds were found on the sailors, but soon after the boat was boarded by its hopeful saviours it burst into flames.

on Thursday nights add to the package. There's no additional charge for children under 12 sharing a room with parents but room rates go up during holidays and peak season. Prices include a set breakfast.

**Heeren House** (☎ 281 4241; www.melaka.net/heerenhouse; 1 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; s RM129, d RM119-139; ☹) Lodging here positions you right in the heart of Chinatown, on the waterfront and within range of top local restaurants and sights. The airy, clean and lovely rooms (six in all) in this former warehouse largely overlook the river, with polished floorboards, traditional furniture (some with four-post beds) and clean showers. The least expensive room (with twin beds and no river view) on the ground floor is the best choice when the weather is very hot; it stays cool in the shade of a mango tree right outside. A popular café is in the foyer and breakfast comes with the price of the room.

## Jalan Taman Melaka Raya & Around

**Shirah's Guest House** (☎ 286 1041; shirahgh@tm.ent.my; 2nd fl, 207-209 Jln Melaka Raya 1; dm/s RM10/15, d RM20-45; ☹ ☹) Brightly painted walls and a gentle Malay welcome make this place sit somewhere between a backpackers and a home-stay. There's an inviting common room, a rooftop garden, informative bulletin boards, bike hire, internet access and kitchen facilities. Some rooms have balconies (one with a four-post bed) and all have high ceilings. Humane dorms are single-sex and have only four beds apiece. Add a small library and free movies and you have a real winner.

**Samudra Inn** (☎ 282 7441; samudrainn@hotmail.com; 348B Jln Melaka Raya 3; dm RM12, s RM18-35, d RM24-45; ☹)

A short walk from the historic centre, this charming place is for lovers of peace and quiet. Caged birds chirp softly in the courtyard area but other than that, you won't hear a peep out of anyone. TV time (satellite) is till 10pm and there are kitchen facilities if you want to cook. The ex-teacher owners take extra steps to make sure their guests are comfortable such as taking lone visitors out to dinner and giving great advice about where to eat and shop. You won't find a more secure or wholesome place. Pricier rooms have a shower, and balcony and laundry service is available.

**Samudera Backpacker's Hostel** (☎ 283 4231; 205B Jln Melaka Raya 1; s RM18-30, d RM25-35, tr RM55; ☹) Not to be confused with the much more cosy Samudra Inn, this backpackers isn't a bad choice. The cheaper rooms are windowless boxes but the higher-priced room with air-con and private bathroom have arty exposed-brick walls and are more comfortable. The place is new, clean and well looked after – it hasn't drawn in much of backpacker crowd yet so you might just have the place to yourself.

**Kancil Guesthouse** (☎ 281 4044; www.machinta.com.sg/kancil; 177 Jln Parameswara; s/tw/d RM18/28/30; ☹) West of the small Taoist Yong Chuan Tian Temple, quite a way from the city centre, this pleasant guesthouse offers spacious, secure lodgings along a road studded with picturesque Malaccan houses. The road itself is lethal with traffic, but the house is lovely and deep, with a gorgeous garden out back, and the owners are pleasant and helpful. There's also bike rental (per day RM10) and internet access (per hour RM3.50). Bus 17 from Melaka Sentral passes by here.

**Travellers' Lodge** (☎ 226 5709; 214b Jln Melaka Raya 1; d RM26-46; ☹) This is one of the more social and deservedly popular backpacker places in town. The kick-up-your-feet common area has an elevated-platform TV lounge with cushions and mats strewn about – perfect for lounging. Rooms are all clean, with windows and tiled floors, and a handful of them span two levels making a sort of miniloft; pricier air-con rooms have showers. The sheltered roof terrace up the vertigo-inducing steps is a boon, dotted with flowers and plants, and the lodge runs to a café (alcohol-free). Management is friendly, helpful and is further enlivened by Alias, who runs Melaka's only bike tour (p152).

**Hollitel** (☎ 286 0607; mollykoo@yahoo.com; G-20K Jln PM 5, Plaza Mahkota; d RM50-120; ☹ ☹) In the grid of blocks southwest of Jln Merdeka, this place, one of the better of a cluster down here, offers clean rooms with electric showers (except in the cheapest rooms), TV and air-con (no phones), internet access (RM3 per hour) and free drinking water in the foyer. It's really just a crash pad designed for low-budget Malaysian business travellers and families.

**Fenix Inn** (☎ 281 5511; www.fenixinn.com; 156 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; d RM128-168; ☹ ☹) Efficiency is the name and business is the game at this crisp, new hotel. Rooms are small and characterless but have new carpet and coffee- and tea-making appliances; most have a window. Polite management, drinking water on each floor and the business centre with a particularly good crop of terminals for internet access (RM2.5 per hour) make this a good choice for anyone who has to work on the road. Discounts offered.

**Malacca Straits Hotel** (☎ 286 1888; www.malaccastraitshotel.com.my; 27 Jln Chan Koon Cheng; r/s RM128/188; ☹ ☹) Smack up against the Hotel Equatorial, this hotel calls itself a 'batik boutique' hotel, and it's not a bad description. While the hotel opened in 2007, it's a remodel of an older building so the hallways and lobby area still have an air of old funk. The spacious rooms however have been given greater attention and are furnished to the hilt with some exquisite teak furniture including four-post beds in every room and batik fabrics everywhere. While standard rooms all have bathtubs, an upgrade to a suite adds a Jacuzzi. Don't overlook the authentic *songket* (gold-and-silver-threaded-fabric) that lines the hallways and, of course, the smiling service. Wi-fi is available at the on-site café.

**Seri Costa Hotel** (☎ 281 6666; fax 286 4931; Jln PM 8, Plaza Mahkota; r RM145; ☹) This is a modern, clean and smart three-star hotel southwest of Jln Merdeka catering mainly to Malaysian guests. Rooms are fully equipped with satellite TV and coffee- and tea-making facilities, and come with teakwood beds and furniture. Good promotional rates are offered.

**Century Mahkota Hotel** (☎ 281 2828; www.melaka.net/centurymahkota; Jln Syed Abdul Aziz; 1-bed apt Sun-Thu RM178, Fri & Sat RM198, 2-bed apt Sun-Thu RM298, Fri & Sat RM318; ☹ ☹) Filling a huge section of reclaimed waterfront south of the Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex, this resort-style hotel has a range of suites and apartments, plus an ample range of facilities including two large swimming pools, restaurants, bars and tennis and squash courts. It's very popular with Singaporean and Malaysian families. We've heard complaints about the cleanliness and service for short stays, but the long-stay apartments can be an OK deal if you get an apartment with a good view. Apartment prices rise further during holiday periods.

**Hotel Equatorial** (☎ 282 8333; www.equatorial.com; Jln Parameswara; d RM420-500; ☹ ☹) The Hotel Equatorial can't be beat for its location near the historic centre. While it's a bit frayed around the edges, this somehow just adds to the colonial charm of the hotel. Good discounts online can cut prices nearly in half, making this elegant choice (weekday and promotional rates usually start at around RM248) excellent value. Service is well mannered and the overall presentation is crisp. There's a swimming pool, ladies-only pool, a quality fitness centre, tennis court and wi-fi access. It's worth upgrading to one of the deluxe rooms (RM500), which have either balconies or heaps of extra room space. Special packages are available through the hotel, including tours and specials such as cookery courses (see p150). Room price includes RM88 meal credit at any of the hotel's four restaurants.

## Little India to Bukit China

**Eastern Heritage Guest House** (☎ 283 3026; 8 Jln Bukit China; dm/s/d/tr RM8/22/26/33) This well-located guesthouse (the neighbourhood has one foot in Chinatown and the other in Little India) has an authentic antique feel – as in maybe the walls haven't been painted in a few decades. Yet that's part of the charm of the superb old Melaka building dating from 1918, with Peranakan tiling, impressive carved panelling



and lots of wide open spaces with plenty of natural light. There's a dipping pool, sunroof area, a downstairs common room, reception doubles as a bar, and breakfast is thrown in. The upstairs dorm is airless and bland but double and single rooms are brightened up by original murals on the walls. Angle for the RM26 double with balcony.

**Tony's Guesthouse** (☎ 688 0119; 24 Jln Banda Kaba; d/tr RM20/27) Backpacker-friendly, with some long-stayers clinging to cheap rooms, Tony's has been nurtured to popularity by its travel-minded namesake mentor. The lobby, hung with images of Che Guevara, Marilyn Monroe and Elvis, has a café.

**Yellow Mansion Hotel** (☎ 283 8885; www.yellowmansion.com; 45 Jln Banda Kaba; s/tw/tr/f RM50/60/90/130; ☎) This Malay-run hotel is very clean with polite staff. Some doubles (all with shower) are windowless, so check them first, but the family room offers tremendous space.

**Mimosa Hotel** (☎ 282 1113; www.mimosahotel.com; 108 Jln Bunga Raya; r incl breakfast RM98-166; ☎) You can tell this place caters to a local clientele from the 'No Durian' signs on the elevator. It's somewhat bland and functional, but it's also clean, modern and fully equipped. The hotel is in a great location in a bustling Chinese area, with good discounts on rates found online, but there's not much in the way of a view.

**Hotel Grand Continental** (☎ 284 0088; www.ghihotels.com.my; 20 Jln Tun Sri Lanang; d incl breakfast RM210) It's in the characterless north and there's a lack of charm, but promotional rates make it good value.

**Hotel Orkid** (☎ 282 5555; www.hotelorkidmelaka.com; 138 Jln Bendahara; r incl breakfast RM250; ☎) A centrally located modern high-rise hotel, all rooms here have in-house video, coffee- and tea-making facilities and minibar. Blankets on the beds (no bedspreads) are a little ratty, but the place is clean and many rooms have fabulous views. Bathrooms are the size of a small closet. There's a health spa, restaurant and lounge with live music.

**Emperor Hotel** (☎ 284 0777; www.theemperorhotel.com; 123 Jln Munshi Abdullah; r incl breakfast RM250; ☎) This is probably the least appealing of the hotels in this category, but excellent promotional rates (around RM80 to RM100 for a double) make it a better option – despite the deserted carbuncular eyesore attached. Upper floors have good views, all rooms come with bathroom, fridge and TV with in-house video, and there's a fitness centre and restaurants.

**City Bayview Hotel** (☎ 283 9888; www.bayviewintl.com; Jln Bendahara; r RM398; ☎) This hotel was newly renovated in 2006 and complete with a fresh and invigorating edge, it has a sports bar, smallish kidney-shaped pool, dance club and breakfast included in the room price. Sheets and all bedding are new and crisp, and the views over the old town from some rooms are quite spectacular. This is a favourite with families, and kids will enjoy the rather weird computerised speaking lift. The glass lobby is refreshingly modern for such a historically oriented town. Fish for promotional prices.

**Renaissance Melaka Hotel** (☎ 284 8888; infomkz@po.jaring.my; Jln Bendahara; d RM470; ☎) By far the ritziest of Melaka's top-end hotels, the Renaissance offers five-star service and old-school luxury. Large windows in the rooms take advantage of views that sweep over Melaka in all directions, while the spacious rooms, equipped with comfy Renaissance beds, are modern and chic while incorporating classic Chinese touches. You can relax in the tasteful Famosa Lounge off the lobby (open 11am to midnight), build up a sweat in the squash courts or at a yoga class then sink a drink in the pub (with regular live music).

## EATING

Melaka's food mirrors the city's eclectic, multicultural DNA. Nonya cuisine (prepared here with a salty Indonesian influence) is a celebrated school of cooking with the classic dish of Melaka, laksa. It's also the home of Portuguese Eurasian food: hunt down Portuguese-influenced Kristang cuisine in the Medan Portugis – it's mostly seafood and rice, but the fiery 'devil curry' is worth an encounter. Melaka's Chinese speciality is chicken rice ball, a Hokkien-style chicken served with rice that's been rolled up into savoury ping-pong-ball-sized dumplings.

Eats on the streets include *youtiao* (fried bread sticks; 40 sen), *rougan* (dried meat strips; RM26 for 250gms) and Nonya pineapple tarts. For drinks, quaff sugarcane juice (RM1) or soy milk (RM1), or stop by Chinese street vendors for sweet water-chestnut tea (RM1) – hot or cold, it's a real thirst-quencher. Also look out for Chinese pharmacies such as **Teck Ann Pharmacy** (58 Jln Bunga Raya) serving tall glasses of chrysanthemum tea (RM1).

The Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex is mostly a centre for Western fast food, though

## DON'T LEAVE MELAKA WITHOUT TRYING...

- Laksa – the regional version is distinguished by its broth infused with coconut milk and lemongrass.
- *Popiah* – an uber-spring roll stuffed with shredded turnip, carrots, prawns, chilli, garlic, palm sugar and much, much more.
- *Cendol* – shaved-ice monstrosity with jellies, syrup and coconut milk – looks gross, tastes great.
- Nonya pineapple tarts – buttery pastries with a chewy pineapple-jam filling.
- Chicken rice ball – self-explanatory dish with Hokkien-style chicken and balled-up rice dumplings.
- *Asam* fish heads – spicy tamarind fish-head stew.
- *Satay celup* – like fondue but better – dunk tofu, prawns and more into bubbling soup to cook it to your liking.
- Selvam's Friday vegetarian special – 10 different Indian vegetarian dishes let you sample the many flavours of Melaka's Indian heritage (see p159).

the food court on the 1st floor has the usual Malaysian hawker favourites. Just across the street, the colossal Dataran Pahlawan on Jln Merdeka is a vast complex of shops, salons, cafés, restaurant and entertainment and cultural facilities.

Most restaurants are open from 11.30am to 10pm, while more simple cafés open around 10am and close at about 5pm.

## Chinatown

**Our pick Low Yong Mow** (☎ 282 1235; Jln Tokong; dim sum RM1-6; ☎) 5am-noon, closed Tue) Famous Malaysia-wide for large and delectably well-stuffed *pao* (steamed pork buns), this place is Chinatown's biggest breakfast treat. With high ceilings, plenty of fans running and a view of Masjid Kampung Kling, the atmosphere oozes all the charms of Chinatown. Take your pick from the endless variety of dumplings, sticky rice dishes and mysterious treats that are wheeled to your table. It's great for early-bus-departure breakfasts and is usually packed with talkative, newspaper-reading locals by around 7am.

**Tart & Tart Bakery** (☎ 282 1181; 45 Lorong Hang Jebat; snacks from RM2.50) This simple, relaxing Malay-run Chinatown snack shop does a small range of bite-size snacks, from blueberry and cheese tarts (RM2.50) to pineapple pies (RM3.50), apple pies (RM3.50) and *kaya* (RM2.50) – coconut cream that you spread on bread.

**Kenny's Nonya Delights** (Jln Tun Tang Heng Lock; mains RM2.50-5; ☎) 8am-5pm, closed Mon) It's a hole-in-the-wall café, but this friendly little place, right

near the junction of Jln Hang Kasturi, serves up some of the best Nonya food bargains in Melaka. This is an excellent place to have a quick snack of Nonya-style laksa (RM3), *popiah* (spring roll; RM4) or a *nasi lemak* breakfast (curry laksa; RM1.50). The restaurant bottles its sauces, which make delicious (albeit heavy) souvenirs.

**Donald & Lily's** (☎ 284 8907; snacks RM3; ☎) 9.30am-4pm, closed Tue) Just finding this place is an adventure. Take the alleyway across from Malaqa House to the west until you reach another alley on your left that leads behind the buildings of Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock. You'll see what looks like a few hawker stalls selling *cendol* but if you look closer there's a little stairway behind 31 Jln Tun Tan Chen Lock leading to hidden, but very popular Donald & Lily's. Why bother looking? This is Melaka locals' favourite stop for the regional-style laksa (RM3) and Nonya *cendol* (RM1.20). The setting is like being in someone's living room and the service is beaming.

**Limau-Limau Café** (☎ 698 4917; 89 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; cappuccinos RM6.90; ☎) Decorated with dark-coloured ceramics and an arty twist, this quiet café extends through several rooms and a pleasant interior courtyard. Take a seat for salads, sandwiches (RM3.90 to RM6.90), fruit juices (RM4 to RM5), milk shakes (RM6.50 to RM7.50) or internet access (RM3 per half-hour). Its second location on Jln Hang Jebat has similar décor and the same menu.

**Cafe 1511** (☎ 286 0151; www.cafe1511.com; 52 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; meals RM8; ☎) 10am-6pm, closed

Wed; ☒) Next to the Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum is this high-ceilinged Peranakan café, with original tiles along the wall, lovely carved screens, a mishmash of decorative objects from Southeast Asia and a Nonya menu. There's free 15-minute internet for guests and this is one of the few places in Chinatown where you'll find a Western set breakfast (RM5).

**Heeren House** (☎ 281 4241; sandwiches RM9; ☎ 11am-6pm) In the hotel of the same name: make this a lunch slot for a light meal of sandwiches on fresh baked bread, salads (from RM11) and yummy brownies (RM4). You can browse the integrated shop for a wonderful selection of upscale batik and other crafts from all around Southeast Asia, while you wait for your food to arrive.

**Nancy's Kitchen** (15 Jln Hang Lekir; meals RM10; ☎ 11am-5.30pm, closed Tue) In a town already known for its graciousness, this home-cooking Nonya restaurant is our favourite for friendly service. If you want an intimate meal, head elsewhere. The server is as chatty and full of suggestions as they come, and will have you making conversation with the other handful of customers in no time. It's like a happy dinner (or lunch) party with particularly good food. Try the house speciality, chicken candlenut (RM10).

**Vegan Salad & Herbs House** (☎ 282 9466; 22 Jln Kubu; meals RM10; ☎ 10am-4pm Fri-Wed) Around the corner from the Buddhist Guanyin Temple, this health-conscious spot offers a range of healthy uncooked, crisp vegetables, brown rice set lunches and wholemeal bread buns.

**Hoe Kee Chicken Rice** (☎ 283 34751; 4 Jln Hang Jebat; meals RM11; ☎ 8.30am-3pm, closed last Wed of month) Just look for the queue along the street past the peanut vendor to find Melaka's busiest restaurant, serving the local speciality of chicken rice ball and *asam* fish head (fish heads in a spicy tamarind gravy; price depends on market value). You'll need to arrive here off-hours (try around 10am) or expect to wait – for a long time. Is it worth it? What's already good tastes better after you've been smelling it in anticipation for 45 minutes, and the restaurant's setting, with wood floors and ceiling fans, seems to further bring out the exotic flavours.

**Teachew Cuisine** (☎ 282 2353; 55 Jln Hang Kasturi; meals RM20; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 6-11.30pm, closed Mon) We walked past this place for about a week before we realised there was a restaurant here,

and yet it's Melaka's claim to *haute cuisine*. Duck past mum, who washes the dishes on the pavement and spends all day chopping veggies and dismembering chickens. Smile at uncle who runs the rickety soup stall that efficiently covers the restaurant's doorway, and then you're in for a surprise. The secret interior room is air-conditioned, the tables are set with China's finest and the walls are decorated with an impressive collection of hard liquor bottles and odd landscape paintings. There's no menu but everyone knows that you're supposed to order the soft-shell crab or the prawns. The chef, a northern China native, has apparently cooked for the president of Singapore, and Malaysian notables have their visits documented with pictures on the walls. It's expensive, we found the food just OK, but the experience of eating here is worth every sen.

**Coconut House** (☎ 282 9128; 128 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; meals RM30; ☎ 2pm-midnight Mon-Thu, 2pm-1am Fri, 11am-midnight Sat & Sun) It's a cheesy name, but there's oodles of inviting space and atmosphere upstairs and down at this bar-restaurant. The menu boasts a popular pizza selection, rosemary roast chicken (RM22), slow-roasted shoulder of pork (RM25) and other tasty offerings. The namesake coconut tree rises proudly into sunlight from an interior courtyard.

**Howard's** (☎ 286 8727; 5 Jln Hang Lekir; meals RM40; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) A finely crafted ambience of creaseless linen, elegant furniture, black-and-white check tile floor, flavour-some international cuisine (lobster bisque, roast rack of lamb) and unobtrusive service, Howard's is a thoroughly unhurried and intimate experience and a top romantic dining choice. Topped off with an impressive wine list, this is definitely Chinatown's swankiest choice.

On Friday and Saturday nights, Jln Hang Jebat turns into the not-to-be-missed Jonker's Walk Night Market. Here you'll find heaps of snacks and hawkers stalls where you can graze and nibble to make a satisfying meal. For self-catering or curiosity, there's a local **vegetable market** (Taman Laksmana) on Saturday night from around 5.30pm.

### Jalan Melaka Raya & Around

**Restoran Amitufoh** (☎ 292 6426; 2-20 Jln PM9, Plaza Mahkota, Bandar Hilir; meals free, contributions welcome; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Conventional wisdom

dictates that there's no such thing as a free meal. This Buddhist vegetarian restaurant – the gift of a Chinese philanthropist – generously breaks the rules by providing food on the house. You may make a contribution (and we highly advise you do), otherwise there are few conditions: you must wash your own plates and cutlery, and taking food away is not permitted.

**Roti Canai Terbang** (Jln Melaka Raya 3; 70 sen-RM3; ☎ breakfast) Get excellent *roti canai* (flaky flat-bread) either plain or stuffed with your choice of onion, egg, cheese or all three. This is the biggest *roti canai* establishment we've ever seen and it packs with locals. Wash down your pancake with a thick, sweet milky coffee or tea.

**Ind Ori** (☎ 282 4777; 236 Jln Melaka Raya 1; dishes RM1-15; ☎ 8am-midnight) Mmm, Indonesian Padang food, fresh and heated in a point-and-ask buffet. It's just like the real thing but without the flies and dubious sanitation issues. House specialities include delicious avocado juice with chocolate sauce (RM4.50) and *sekotang* (sweet cream and peanut dumplings with green beans and hot ginger; RM5.80).

**Restoran Sek Yow Fook** (☎ 284 0452; cnr Jln Melaka Raya 3 & Jln Melaka Raya 4; meals RM3-6; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) There's a little of everything at this hodge-podge Chinese place but it's all surprisingly good. English cooked breakfasts (RM5) are available from 8am or there's a little *congee* (rice porridge) stall for those wanting to start the day local-style. For lunch dive into the excellent Chinese buffet (around RM4), but don't arrive past around 2.30pm when the dregs have been sitting out *sans* refrigeration for hours. For kids (or fussy grown-ups) there's an 'Elvis Presley' peanut-butter-and-banana sandwich (RM1.50) on offer. A bar in the back serves beer.

**Restoran Banya** (☎ 282 8297; 154 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; meals RM9; ☎ 10am-10pm, closed Thu) Friendly staff will help you decode the menu at this centrally located place. The reputation here isn't as strong as some of the other Nonya restaurants in town but we found the food delicious.

**Ole Sayang** (☎ 283 1966; 198 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; meals RM13; ☎ 10am-10pm, closed Wed) Go here for ambient Nonya atmosphere, decorated with old wooden furniture and dim lighting. While this place is one of the best known in Melaka, we found that the food wasn't of a higher standard than the other Nonya places around town.

**Bayonya** (☎ 292 2192; 164 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; meals RM15; ☎ 10am-10pm, closed Tue) This authentic eatery is a locals' favourite for its excellent and inexpensive home-cooked Peranakan cuisine. One of the must-tries here is the durian *cendol* (RM5).

**Restoran Wuguzhan** (☎ 282 1918; 256-257 Jln Melaka Raya 3; meals RM15) This Chinese organic vegetarian health-food eatery was temporarily closed when we passed, but it's got a good reputation for delivering carrion-free calories in the form of inexpensive Chinese-style veggie dishes. Handy for the local guesthouses, the menu runs to sweet-and-sour 'veggie chicken' (RM8), seaweed wholemeal bread roll (RM3), veggie duck noodle soup (RM4) and beyond.

Two **Malay hawker centres** (meals around RM4) are in the eastern region of this area, one near the Jln TMR roundabout and the other just east of the base of Jln Melaka Raya 3 on Jln Sayed Abdul Aziz. The former is the larger of the two in a covered area and serves everything from fresh juices to fish-head curry and Nonya food.

Serving a wider range of fare with Chinese in the main hall and halal food at the back, **Newton Food Court** (Jln Merdeka), just west of Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex, is Melaka's newest and most attractive hawker centre. It's under an immense, sweeping thatched roof and is bordered by palms. Little dessert stalls set up along the adjoining grassy area perfect for picnicking.

Further west, also on Jln Merdeka, is Glutton's Corner, which is more of a group of restaurants than stalls. Prices are higher than at other hawker centres and the clientele more upscale.

### Little India to Bukit China

**Ourpick Capitol Satay** (☎ 283 5508; 41 Lorong Bukit China; meals RM8) Famous for its *satay celup* (a Melaka adaptation of satay steamboat), this place is usually packed to the gills and is one of the cheapest outfits in town. Stainless-steel tables have bubbling vats of soup in the middle where you dunk skewers of okra stuffed with tofu, sausages, chicken, prawns and bok choy. Side dishes include pickled eggs and ginger. Dining here is not only satisfying to the gut and palate, but great fun and a chance for some gregarious feasting.

**Selvam** (☎ 281 9223; 3 Jln Temenggong; meals RM8) This is a classic banana-leaf restaurant always busy with its loyal band of local patrons



ordering tasty and cheap curries, roti and tandoori chicken sets (RM5.50). Even devout carnivores will second-guess their food preferences after trying the Friday-afternoon vegetarian special with 10 varieties of veg for only RM6.

**UE Tea House** (20 Lorong Bukit China; meals RM8) Another dim sum place, more simple than Chinatown's Low Yong Mow, but very tasty just the same. Sip Chinese tea and gorge yourself on the impressive array of steamed dumplings.

**Bulldog Café** (☎ 292 1920; 145 Jln Bendahara; meals RM10) Nonya, Chinese, Thai and Western dishes. For cheap snacks, sample the Nonya *popiah* – lettuce, bean sprouts, egg and chilli paste in a soft sleeve (RM2) or the *pai tee* (crispy cone-shaped morsels of rice flour, stuffed with vegetables; RM3).

Follow the sounds of a chopping meat cleaver to **Medan Makan Bunga Raya** (Hungry Lane; btwn Jln Bendahara & Jln Bunga Raya) where you can feast on Indian-style curry-pork rice in the very busy evenings or try the local speciality of *gula melaka* (palm sugar) during the day. The **CentrepoinT food court** (Jln Munshi Abdullah) is a recommended place to seek out Indian and Malay treats for lunch. Further north, **Hang Tuah Mall** (Jln Hang Tuah), a pedestrian walk, swarms with open-air food stalls every evening.

### Medan Portugis

There's really not much reason to head out to this nondescript neighbourhood other than to eat. On Friday and Saturday evenings, head to **Restoran de Lisbon** (Medan Portugis; meals RM30), where you can sample Malay-Portuguese dishes at outdoor tables. Try the delicious local specialities of chilli crabs (RM20) or the distinctly Eurasian devil curry (RM10). Also visit **San Pedro** (4 Jln D'Arango), on the street immediately behind the square, with a cosy, local atmosphere for Malay-Portuguese meals. Any other time of the week, Medan Portugis has food stalls, serving similar dishes to those found at restaurants at seaside tables.

### DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Bars often open midday and, although they technically close at 1am, will stay open longer if there's enough fun still going on.

Unfortunately Melaka's beloved and long-running Sound and Light Show had closed at the time of writing due to the exorbitant amount of light that emanates from the new

#### GAY & LESBIAN MELAKA

Although it's not what you'd call a thriving gay scene, Melaka's proximity to Kuala Lumpur (KL) and eclectic population make it a popular stop for both foreign and local gay travellers. The atmosphere is relaxed and uncommonly open for Malaysia.

Try **Pure Bar** (591a Jln Taman Melaka Raya), a former gay-friendly guesthouse that has become a fun bar-nightclub, popular with locals and welcoming to visiting gay and lesbian travellers.

Dataran Pahlawan shopping centre into the now defunct theatre. No immediate plans have been made to relocate the show. For a darkened cinema experience head to the four-screen **Golden Screen Cinemas** in the Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex, which usually shows a few blockbusters as well as the standard Malay and Bollywood flicks.

Melaka is studded with watering holes, and your best bet for anything from a mellow night out to a late night of drinking is in Chinatown. The Friday and Saturday night Jonker's Walk Night Market (p158) closes down Jln Heng Lekir to traffic and the handful of bars along the lane become a mini street party with tables oozing beyond the sidewalks, live music and plenty of good-natured revelry.

**Geographér Café** (☎ 281 6813; www.geographer.com.my; 83 Jln Hang Jebat; large Tiger beers RM17.20; ☎ 10am-1am Wed-Sun) This ventilated, breezy bar with outside seating and late hours in a prewar corner shophouse is a godsend. Seat yourself with a beer amid the throngs and applaud resident artist-musician Mr Burns as he eases through gnarled classics from Chuck Berry to JJ Cale. A tasty choice of local and Western dishes and laid-back but professional service round it all off. The apple pie (RM8) is to die for.

**ourpick Calanthe Art Café** (☎ 292 2960; 11 Hang Kasturi; coffees RM2.50; ☎ noon-11pm Tue-Thu, noon-midnight Fri-Sun; ☎) The Zen water garden atmosphere of this light- and plant-filled café is like reflexology for the travel-weary soul. Try coffees from each of the 13 Malaysian states, either hot or cold or in a RM12 coffee cocktail. There are also smoothies (RM8), espresso drinks (from RM4.50) and light Malaysian and Western meals from RM4.50. A quiet internet terminal at the back will cost you RM3 per hour.

**Honky Tonk Haven** (68 Lorong Hang Jebat; ☎ 11am-1am Wed-Mon, 4pm-1am Tue) A great new addition to the Melaka jazz scene, this music bar is run by Kiwi jazz pianist Joe 'Itchy Fingers' Webster and his singing wife Jill. Jazz memorabilia photos line the walls and spontaneous sessions of live music are performed by Joe, Jill and their collection of talented friends. It's a place to make fast friends, grab a quick meal (including real New Zealand-style burgers for RM8, and RM7 all-day breakfasts) and find out how funky you really are.

**Voyager Travellers Lounge** (☎ 281 5216; 40 Lorong Hang Jebat; ☎) It'll draw you in with promises of free internet and its 9.30pm Wednesday movie nights, but you'll keep coming back to this place for the mellow and surprisingly local vibe. Ease back into a wicker chair and order a cold beer from the glowing bar built out of recycled bottles. The young owner can help arrange activities throughout Melaka.

**Friends Café** (Jln TMR; ☎ noon-2am) Buzzing with everyone from businessmen to young and hip locals, this convivial spot serves espresso drinks (RM5.50 to RM10) in the day and becomes a lively bar at night. It's a hard-to-miss spot right where Jln Melaka Raya 3 meets Jln Tanaman Melaka Raya. There are light meals including sandwiches (RM10) and *tom yam* (red chilli-based hot-and-sour soup; RM8) and the whole place is a wi-fi zone.

**Discovery Café** (3 Jln Bunga Raya; ☎) The staff take things at a serious stroll and the food is mediocre, but the location near the Melaka River, the late hours and the outside seating maintain a somewhat shaky allure. Stop by if you're looking for a tour guide (see p151).

### SHOPPING

Taking time to browse Chinatown's eclectic mix of shops is an activity in itself, even if you hate shopping. Start with the antique shops along Jln Hang Jebat (Jonker's Walk) and Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock where you'll see dusty old junk, polished ancient relics and everything in between. Unless you really know your antiques, be very cautious about spending money in these shops. Prices are high and haggling is essential.

Other Malaccan favourites are Nonya beaded shoes which, depending on the quality and intricacy of the beadwork, can cost from RM70 to RM2000. A cheaper alternative is Nonya 'clogs', colourful slap-arounds with a wooden base and a single plastic-strip upper.

Browse other shops for funky Southeast Asian and Indian clothing, shoulder bags, incense, hand-made tiles, charms and crystals, cheap jewellery and more. Peek into the growing array of silent artists studios where you might see a painter busy at work in a back room.

The following Chinatown shops are real standouts.

**Top Spinning Academy** (79 Jln Tokong; ☎ 10am-4pm) If you enter this shop, be prepared for a very enthusiastic traditional top-spinning lesson by *gasing uri* extraordinaire Simpson Wong. You aren't expected to purchase anything although you probably will if you get the hang of the spin – a top is only RM2. Mr Wong is a charming fellow who genuinely appears to just want people to play tops with him. Go in and make his day.

**Tile Shop** (☎ 283 1815; 31 Jln Tokong) Intricately beautiful minireplicas of the fine European tiles that grace some of Melaka's fine colonial buildings can be found here. You'll also find flat ceramic pictures of teapots and Chinese household items in stylish frames. A tile or art piece will cost around RM30. While here, peep into the shop next door that makes papier-mâché temple offerings.

**Wan Aik Shoemaker** (56 Jln Tokong) Raymond Yeo continues the tradition began by his grandfather in the same little shoemaker's shop that has been in his family for generations. The beaded Nonya shoes here are considered Melaka's finest and begin at a steep, but merited RM300. Tiny silk-bound-feet shoes (from RM90) are also available, although nowadays they are just a curiosity rather than a necessity.

**Lim Trading** (☎ 292 6812; 63 Jln Tokong) Across from Wan Aik, busy Mr Lim is a second-generation craftsman (his apprenticeship began at the age of six) who also fashions gorgeous handmade Nonya bead slippers (from RM180).

**Malaga House** (☎ 281 4770; 70 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) This is a huge museum-like shop in an elegant building stuffed with the gills with antiques and replicas – it's not cheap, but it bursts with character.

**Orangutan House** (59 Lorong Hang Jebat; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue) Having mushroomed to an impressive three outlets, this hip and brightly painted T-shirt shop adds its own brand of zest and colour to Chinatown's multifaceted personality. All shirts are the work of local artist Charles Cham (see the boxed text, p162)



### ARTIST CHARLES CHAM

Charles Cham ([www.charlescham.com](http://www.charlescham.com)) is a Melaka-born artist whose bright Orangutan art and T-shirt shops have become Melaka institutions.

**What is the best thing about being an artist in Melaka?** Melaka is small, old, colourful and sandwiched between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. This makes it a popular tourist destination and many artists make a living here. More and more artists from other towns and new art graduates are moving in. Being an artist in Melaka means you can work in a 'living museum'. The face of the city is changing but the feeling remains the same.

**If your best friend were coming to town where would you go?** I'd bring them to Jln Hang in the day to hunt for some bargains then we'd take a sunset riverboat cruise. On weekend nights we'd check out Jonker's Walk Night Market (p158) and end up at the watering holes between Jln Hang Jebat and Jln Hang Lekir – some are open till 4am!

and have themes spanning from Chinese astrology animals to rather edgy topics (at least for Malaysia) such as 'Use Malaysian Rubber' above a sketch of a condom. Other branches are at 96 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lok (closed Tuesday) and 12 Jln Hang Jebat (closed Thursday).

**Dataran Pahlawan** (Jln Merdeka) is Melaka's largest mall, with a collection of upscale designer shops and restaurants in the western half and an odd, nearly underground-feeling craft and souvenir market in the eastern portion. For practical needs such as camera shops, a pharmacy or electronics store, head to **Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex** (☎ 282 6151; Lot 802, Jln Merdeka), which is invariably packed with locals and often has some sort of performance or event going on.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Melaka is 144km from Kuala Lumpur, 224km from Johor Bahru and just 94km from Port Dickson. The North–South Hwy (Lebuhraya), linking Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur, is the main route through the state. Most travellers arrive and depart from Melaka overland, as the airport outside town does not handle domestic flights. Express buses to KL and Singapore are plentiful and bus connections link with other peninsular destinations. Trains do not stop at Melaka but at Tampin, 38km north of town. Daily boats connect with Dumai in Sumatra.

### Boat

High-speed ferries (☎ 281 6766) make the trip from Melaka to Dumai in Sumatra twice daily at 9am and 3pm (one-way/return RM80/150, two hours). Boats return from Dumai at 10.30am and 1pm. Dumai is a visa-free entry

port into Indonesia for citizens of most countries. Ferries also run to Pekan Baru (one-way/return RM120/210, six hours) in Sumatra. Tickets are available at the **Dumai Ferry Service** (☎ 286 1811; G35 Jln PM2, Plaza Mahkota) and other ticket offices near the wharf. Same-day tickets are on sale after 8.30am, but it's best to book the day before.

### Bus

Melaka Sentral, the well-designed modern long-distance bus station, is inconveniently located on Jln Cempaka, off Jln Tun Razak in the north of town. A taxi into town should cost around RM20, or you can take bus 17 (which leaves about every 15 minutes) to Chinatown. Frequent buses head to Kuala Lumpur (RM9 to RM10, two hours) and further afield to Singapore (RM18, 4½ hours, departures approximately hourly) and Johor Bahru (RM16, 3½ hours). There are also less frequent departures for Georgetown (RM35, eight hours), Jerantut (RM17, five hours), Mersing (RM17.50, 4½ hours) and Kota Bharu (RM42, 10 hours). Luggage deposit at Melaka Sentral is RM2 per bag. There is also an accommodation reservation counter for hotels in Melaka, a money changer and restaurants. **Luxury buses** (☎ 645 3218) also depart once daily (RM22, 4½ hours) to Singapore from the Century Mahkota Hotel (p155).

### Car

Car-hire prices begin at around RM145 per day (RM2000 per month) for a Proton Wira 1.5L automatic; prices are inclusive of insurance and tax. If you're driving, Melaka's one-way traffic system and scattered traffic requires patience. Try **Hawk** (☎ 283 7878; 52 Jln Cempaka, Taman Seri Cempaka, Peringkat Jaya) opposite Melaka Sentral.

### Taxi

Long-distance taxis leave from Melaka Sentral. Whole-taxi rates include KL (RM155), Kuala Lumpur International Airport (RM140), Johor Bahru (RM250) and Mersing (RM250).

### Train

The nearest train station is 38km north of Melaka at **Tampin** (☎ 441 1034) on the main north–south line from KL to Singapore. Taxis from Melaka cost around RM50.

### GETTING AROUND

Melaka is easily explored on foot, but a useful service is town bus 17, which runs every 15 minutes from Melaka Sentral to the centre of town, past the huge Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex, to Taman Melaka Raya (40 sen) and on to Medan Portugis (80 sen).

Bicycles can be hired at some guesthouses and hotels for around RM10 a day; there are also a few bike-hire outfits around town, including **Jin Fu Shin** (55 Jln Parameswara; per day RM6; ☎ 9.30am–7pm).

Taking to Melaka's streets by trishaw is a popular tourist option. Competition among the old drivers is keen and their vehicles are becoming increasingly kitsch, festooned with flashing lights, plastic garlands of flowers, gaudy parasols and bells – a bit like aging mods. See p151 for more. By the hour they should cost about RM35 to RM40, or RM15 for any one-way trip within the town, but you'll have to bargain.

Taxis should cost around RM10 to RM12 for a trip anywhere around town with a 50% surcharge between 1am and 6am.

## AROUND MELAKA

Melaka state sits demurely in the shadow of its namesake city and consists of some peaceful off-the-beaten track *kampung* as well as two fabricated and arguably tacky resort areas popular with Malaysian and Singaporean tourists. Most of the sights outside Melaka city can be visited on a day trip from town although staying in Alor Gajah or at Tanjung Bidara will introduce you to a sleepy, village Melaka unavailable in the capital.

### AYER KEROH

About 15km northeast of Melaka, Ayer Keroh (also spelled Air Keroh) has several

contrived tourist attractions that are largely deserted on weekdays. Kids will like the lushly landscaped **Melaka Zoo** (adult/child RM7/4, night zoo adult/child RM10/5; ☎ 9am–6pm daily, night zoo 8–11pm Fri & Sat) with plenty of shady, open spaces and a playground close to the entrance. It's the second-largest zoo in the country (with 200 different species) and the animals' conditions aren't bad compared with many Asian zoos. The best time to go is at night when the nocturnal animals awaken; take the Friday- and Saturday-night shuttle bus (RM12) that picks up at larger hotels in Melaka city. It's also possible to volunteer at the zoo by cleaning cages and helping out with educational activities; those curious should contact the education unit at [education@zoomelaka.org.my](mailto:education@zoomelaka.org.my).

Just across from the zoo is the **Butterfly & Reptile Sanctuary** (adult/child RM5/3; ☎ 9am–6pm), which has a collection of exotic creepy crawlies, snakes and some sad crocodiles at the reptile park. The highlight are the free-flying local butterflies that flutter about the gardens.

But the main attraction in Ayer Keroh is the **Taman Mini Malaysia/Asean** (adult/child RM4/2; ☎ 9am–6pm), a large theme park that has examples of traditional houses from all 13 Malaysian states, as well as neighbouring Asian countries. Also here is **Hutan Rekreasi Air Keroh** (Air Keroh Recreational Forest; admission free), part secondary jungle and part landscaped park with paved trails, a 250m canopy walk, picnic areas and a forestry museum.

It's a pricey decision to stay in Ayer Keroh. The best of the area's resorts is **INB Resort** (☎ 553 3023; [www.inbresort.com](http://www.inbresort.com); d/f RM90/160; ☎ ☎ ☎), which has tidy air-con villas arranged on pleasant grounds with a good pool. Prices go up during weekends, holidays and high season.

Ayer Keroh can be reached on town bus 19 from Melaka (RM1, 30 minutes), or a taxi will cost around RM30.

### PULAU BESAR

The small island of Pulau Besar, southeast of Melaka and 5km off the coast, is a popular weekend getaway, with a few historic graves and reminders of the Japanese occupation during WWII, but the main reason to come here is for the clean white-sand beaches. The water is a little clearer than on the mainland (but remember this is still the polluted Strait of Melaka) and the hilly island is cloaked in greenery with jungle walks.

## A HAVEN FOR HAWKBILLS

Environmentalists went into a tizzy when it was announced that Pulau Upeh, a 2.8-hectare island 3.2km off the coast of Melaka, was for sale. The weed-covered island might not be a beach-laden beauty, but it's the second most important nesting ground for the hawksbill turtle on the Malay peninsula. The good news is that the Malaysian government wants to buy Pulau Upeh and turn it into a turtle sanctuary; the bad news is that all the bureaucratic red tape to buy the island could take years. During this time poachers could decimate the easy-to-reach, unprotected island's turtle population.

While Peninsular Malaysia has lost nearly all of its once-numerous leatherback turtles (recorded nestings in the region now hover around 10 per year), hope remains for the hawksbill turtle. With only 15,000 female hawksbill turtles left worldwide (according to the US Fish & Wildlife Service), about 1000 hawksbills nest in Malaysia, one-third of which lay on beaches around Melaka.

The intrepid voyagers make a perilous journey year after year through the debris, oil spills and ship traffic of the Strait of Melaka, yet their real enemy awaits on the beach. The Malaccan people have been harvesting turtle eggs throughout known memory and they believe that eating them increases male virility and can protect the health of a fetus in utero. A recent study concluded that over 70% of Malaccan children living near turtle beaches had tasted turtle eggs. The World Wide Fund for Nature Malaysia has begun community projects sensitising local communities to the turtle's plight but also offering cash (RM1.30 per egg) to harvesters if they bring eggs to their hatchery. It's asked that only half the eggs are brought in while the other half can be consumed by the population.

Turtle tourism is not practised as yet in Melaka. If by chance you are offered a chance to watch nesting turtles, go in very small groups, be very still and quiet, keep at least 2m away from the animals, don't use flash cameras or lights, and remain behind the turtles where they can't see you. Use the same precautions during hatchings.

To find out how you can help with hawksbill turtle projects, go to the website for the World Wide Fund for Nature Malaysia at [www.wwfmalaysia.org](http://www.wwfmalaysia.org).

At the time of research the island's only hotel, **Chandek Kura Resort** (☎ 295 5899; d/tr RM118/138; 📶 📶), had closed down with unclear plans for the future. The only available lodging option nowadays is in a tent, which you can pitch at the **camp site** (☎ 281 8007; per person with tent rental RM20) next to the resort; call before arrival to secure a site. A handful of basic *kedai kopi* (coffee shops) can be found nearby.

Boats (adult/child RM12/9, 25 minutes) depart from the jetty at **Anjung Batu** (☎ 261 0492) at 8am, 10am, noon, 2.30pm, 5pm and 6.30pm (last boat returns at 7pm). The jetty is several kilometres past the old pier at Umbai, southeast of Melaka city.

Pulau Besar can also be reached by chartering a boat from the jetty behind the tourist office on Jln Kota in Melaka city. From Umbai you'll need to charter a boat from enterprises such as **Azrin Boat Services** (☎ 019-307 7775) for RM100 return; service is 24 hours. You can reach either jetty in less than an hour by the local bus 2 from Melaka.

## ALOR GAJAH

Just off the road to KL, 24km north of Melaka, is the crisp, countryside town of Alor Gajah. In the town centre is peaceful and grassy Alor Gajah Sq, which is bordered by a charming array of gaily painted and aging shophouses. It's hard to believe that only 10 minutes' drive from this honest Malay town is A'Famosa Resort, a place Malaysia Tourism loves to tout as the region's foremost leisure and holiday stop; if you're into man-made and cleaned-up versions of the natural world, don't miss it. Most Melaka-KL buses stop in Alor Gajah so it's possible to make a short stop here if you're willing to change buses. A taxi to A'Famosa from the bus station should cost around RM15.

## Sights

Right in Alor Gajah Sq is the **Museum of Custom & Tradition** (admission RM1; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Wed-Thu, Sat & Sun, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5.30pm Fri), which exhibits a modest collection of Malay wedding customs, bridal gifts and ceremonial rites. Ask

in the museum about the tombs of British soldiers killed in 1832 situated in the primary school just off the square, and someone may escort you over for a quick inspection.

Half an hour away from historic Melaka and one hour from KL, the 520-hectare **A'Famosa Resort** ([www.afamosa.com](http://www.afamosa.com)) is an all-encompassing resort popular with Malay and Singaporean tourists. Even though the whole place is contrived and cheesy, you'd be hard pressed not to have fun at the 8-hectare **Water World** (adult/child RM30/23; 🕒 11am-7pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 9am-8pm Sat & Sun), which has two seven-story-high speed slides, a tube ride and even a man-made beach with a wave pool. Less adrenalin-oriented activities for families include a tot's activity pool and a giant family raft ride. **Animal World Safari** (admission with all rides & shows adult/child RM59/49; 🕒 9am-6pm) spreads over another 61 hectares. The animal shows have an array of critters dressed in human clothing and doing human activities (for example an orang-utan that plays golf) and are not something that animal lovers will enjoy; the safari bus ride only takes half an hour but is fun for kids. A special rate of adult/child RM73/59 gets you into both the Animal World Safari and Water World. Also within the resort is a 27-hole **golf course** that is rated in the country's top 10.

## Sleeping & Eating

You can stay at **A'Famosa Resort** (☎ 522 0777; [www.afamosa.com](http://www.afamosa.com); hotel r from RM158, villas from RM488, condotel from RM198) in either the standard hotel, large villas (three to five bedrooms) designed for groups and families, or 'condotels' (one to three bedrooms) with sweeping views over the resort. Prices go up on weekends, holidays and during peak season.

A more authentic way to visit Alor Gajah is with a visit or stay at the upscale antitheses of A'Famosa, the over-the-top lush **Desa Paku House & Garden** (☎ 556 2639; [mush@tm.net.my](mailto:mush@tm.net.my); Alor Gajah; d incl 4 meals per day RM750) about 2km from the village of Alor Gajah. Retired Royal Malaysian Air Force officer Muslim Musa has turned his attention away from the sky and very deeply into plants, to the point that his spiritual philosophies have become intertwined with his garden. His endless work on and passion for the fruits, rare flowers, blooming heliconias (200 of the world's 500 varieties are represented here), graceful palms and lazy water gardens make the entire jungle beam with health. The house is no less grand and contains some spectacular antiques and fascinating painted tiles within its distinctly Malaccan hardwood walls. Rooms are available in the main house or in a secluded bungalow bordering one of

## SPICES TO OIL: MODERN-DAY PIRACY IN THE STRAIT OF MELAKA

Piracy has been rife in the Strait of Melaka since before legendary Prince Parameswara (see the boxed text, p136) founded Melaka with his faithful pirate crew in the late 1400s. The geography of the Strait of Melaka, which creates a shipping bottleneck among thousands of islands, makes the region perfect for piracy – bandits can simply disappear beyond the sea. Today, the strait's importance is no less than it was in the day of the spice trade and is considered as economically significant as the Suez or Panama Canals. Linking three of the world's most populous nations (India, Indonesia and China), the 805km-long route carries between one fifth and one quarter of the world's sea trade including one quarter of all sea-transported oil; in 2003 there were an estimated 11 million barrels per day passing through the Strait of Melaka. Traffic is expected to expand as oil consumption rises in China.

While pirate attacks in the strait have been dropping recently (50 attacks in 2006 down from 79 in 2005), the figures had been steadily climbing in previous years (from only 25 in 1994 to 220 in the year 2000). By mid-2007, 42 acts of piracy had already been documented. The pirates are estimated to hail primarily from Indonesia and the often-violent attacks are aimed at petty theft of ship's stores, cash, motor parts and the crew's personal items. While these attacks stem from the poor economic conditions in Indonesia, more rare, organised attacks that target the ships' cargo are now considered acts of terrorism.

In 2004, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia began to coordinate their naval patrols of the area. More recently, antipiracy patrols have gone high-tech with security systems, which include real-time ship-locator devices, now required for vessels over 500 gross tons.

Most pirate attacks take place in Indonesian waters, and they are never a threat to visitors to Melaka.

the garden's many lotus-filled ponds. A garden and house tour (per person RM50; 9am to noon or 3pm to 6pm, by reservation) is available for a minimum of 10 people and includes morning or afternoon tea with a selection of Malay cakes. If the rest of the food here is on par with the delicately perfect Malay cake we tried, it wouldn't be hard eating the four meals a day that are included in the room rate. Remember that this is a homestay in the middle of a tamed jungle, so don't expect an insect-free, hotel-like experience. There is no public transport to Desa Paku so you'll need to have your own means of transportation or else organise a taxi. To get there from Melaka, go through Alor Gajah town, straight through the roundabout, and then take a right at the Masjid Tanah junction. After about a kilometre, turn right at the sign for Kampung Paku. After about 600m turn left into a gate, then take your first right.

### TANJUNG BIDARA

To really get away from it all, head to lovely white-sand Tanjung Bidara, about 30km northwest of Melaka. It's well away from the main highway, requiring you to take back roads through rice paddies and farms to get to

the shore. While this is a popular weekend trip for Malaccan families, it's deserted midweek except for maybe one or two fishermen casting from the beach. There's a large food court at the main entrance to the beach but only one valiant stall is open outside of Saturday and Sunday. The water lapping on the fine sand is brown with sediment and pollution so it's not the best place for swimming, but it is fun to sit against the jungle and watch the massive freighters head down the famous Strait of Melaka.

The main beach area is at **Tanjung Bidara Beach Resort** (☎ 384 2990; fax 384 2995; tw Sun-Thu RM70, Fri & Sat RM100, chalets Thu-Sun RM130, Fri & Sat RM150; ♿ ♿), a quiet, relaxing but musty resort with a small swimming pool and restaurant.

Further budget accommodation is strung out over several kilometres along the beach, broken only by a large military camp. In the colourful, friendly Malay village of Kampung Balik Batu, about 20km south of Tanjung Bidara, are several simple beachside chalet guesthouses.

Buses 42 and 47 from Melaka go to Masjid Tanah, from where a taxi to Tanjung Bidara Beach Resort or Kampung Balik Batu costs RM7.