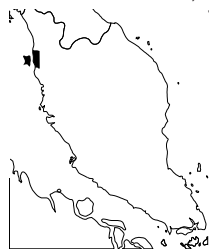


# Penang



Think of the term 'Southeast Asia'. South and east of what? Essentially, Asia's most influential countries: China and India. And for all the impact these titans have on the continent, there aren't many places where their societies meet in unfiltered, immediate cultural contact.

Then along comes Malaysia's smallest state: Penang. In a teak townhouse, an Indian man places joss sticks in front of a family altar studded with pictures of the Hindu god Rama, the Chinese bodhisattva Kuan Yin and black-and-white photos of his Chinese wife's departed ancestors. Later the couple may eat a curry of cinnamon bark, shallots, tamarind, coriander and chillies – ingredients sourced from Malaysia's mother cultures of Indian, Chinese and Malay.

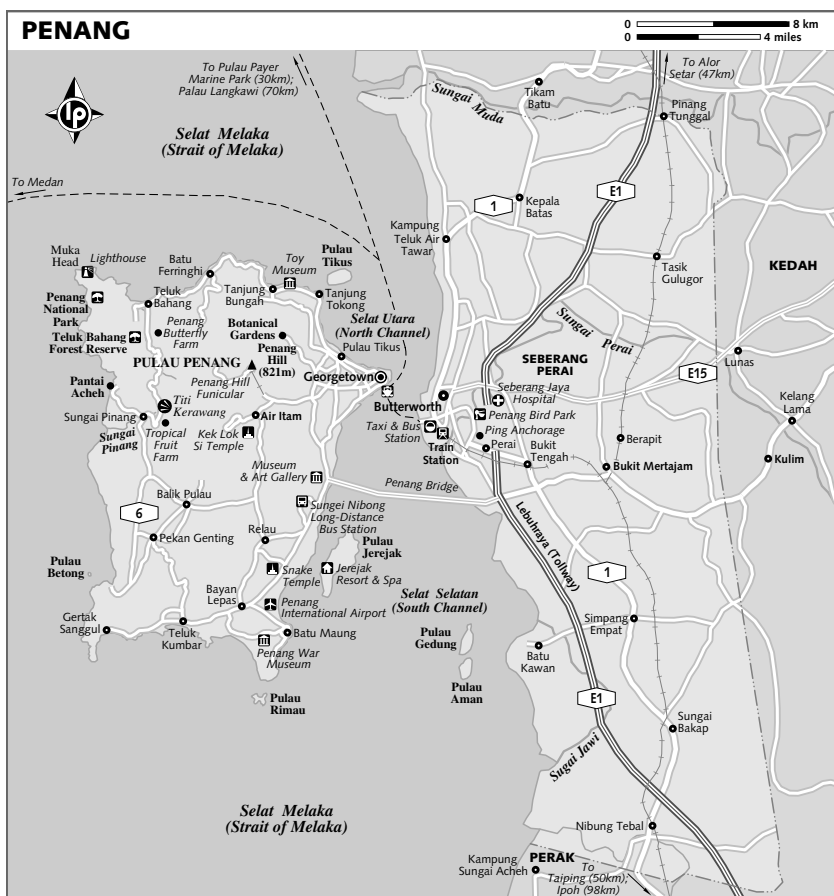
Local food, by the way, is one of the top draws of the 'Pearl of the Orient,' but the living cultures those dishes stem from are the real reason to visit. Penang is the only one of Malaysia's 13 states to have a Chinese majority population, but rather than feeling mono-ethnic, it exemplifies Asia-as-entrepôt that is this nation at its best. Physical vestiges of the colonial era – low slung townhouses, narrow alleyways, tea shops, temples, Chinese mansions and Little India districts – make a visit to Georgetown eminently rewarding, while beyond lies a landscape of jungle, lakes, beaches, a cosy national park and, yes, a cool hill station.

South of one Asia, east of another, and Asia condensed. This state is about experiencing the continent's culture and history at its oldest and most evolving. And obviously, trying the curry.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Chowing on charred pork on rice while watching life pass by in **Georgetown** (p192)
- Exploring Chinese Assembly Halls and clanhouses like **Khoo Kongsi** (p184)
- Wandering to the top of **Kek Lok Si Temple** (p199).
- Relaxing on the beach at **Batu Ferringhi** (p204)
- Grounding yourself in the state's past in the **Penang Museum** (p184)





## History

Little is known of Penang's early history. Chinese seafarers were aware of the island, which they called Pulo Pinang (Betelnut Island), as far back as the 15th century, but it appears to have been uninhabited at the time. The English merchant-adventurer Captain James Lancaster swung by in 1593, but it wasn't until the early 1700s that colonists arrived from Sumatra and established settlements at Batu Uban and the area now covered by southern Georgetown. The island came under the control of the sultan of Kedah, but in 1771 the sultan signed the first agreement with the British East India Company, handing it trading rights in exchange for military assistance against Siam.

In 1786 Captain Francis Light, on behalf of the East India Company, took possession of Penang, which was formally signed over to him in 1791. Light renamed it Prince of Wales Island, as the acquisition date fell on the prince's birthday. It's said Light fired silver dollars from his ship's cannons into the jungle to encourage his labourers to hack back the undergrowth for settlement.

Whatever the truth of the tale, he soon established Georgetown, also named after the Prince of Wales, who later became King George IV, with Lebuah Light, Lebuah Chulia, Lebuah Pitt and Lebuah Bishop as its boundaries. By 1800 Light had negotiated with the sultan for a strip of mainland adjacent to the island; this became known as Province Wellesley, after the governor of India.

Light permitted new arrivals to claim as much land as they could clear, and this, together with a duty-free port and an atmosphere of liberal tolerance, quickly attracted settlers from all over Asia. By the turn of the century Penang was home to over 10,000 people.

The local economy was slow to develop, as mostly European planters set up spice plantations – slow-growing crops requiring a high initial outlay. Although the planters later turned to sugar and coconut, agriculture was hindered by a limited labour force.

In 1805 Penang became a presidency government, on a par with the cities of Madras and Bombay in India, and so gained a much more sophisticated administrative structure.

Penang briefly became the capital of the Straits Settlements in 1826 (including Melaka and Singapore) until it was superseded by the more thriving Singapore. By the middle of the 19th century, Penang had become a major player in the Chinese opium trade, which provided more than half of the colony's revenue. It was a dangerous, rough-edged place, notorious for its brothels and gambling dens, all run by Chinese secret societies.

In 1867 the simmering violence came to a head when large-scale rioting broke out between two rival Chinese secret societies, who had each allied themselves with similar Malay groups. Once the fighting had been brought under control, the British authorities fined each group the then huge sum of \$10,000, the proceeds going to establish a permanent police force in the colony.

A royal charter awarded city status to Georgetown in January 1957, just seven months before Malaysian independence, and in the 1960s Penang became a free port. The island enjoyed rapid economic growth in the following decades, but lost its duty-free status to Langkawi in the 1980s. The 2000 repeal of a rent control law led to affordable housing issues that have yet to be totally resolved, as evidenced by Penang's architectural shift over the past few decades from townhouses to high-rise condos.

But this state also has the potential to be a good example of smart growth. Penang's economic engines are tourism and high-tech industries; thanks to the presence of international companies specializing in the latter sector, the 'Pearl of the Orient' is also known as the 'Silicon Valley of the East'. But the

sustainability of local tourism rests on preserving at least a facsimile of old Penang.

Residents and tourists have complained about construction development denigrating the island's historical character, and preservation advocates launched a large media campaign in 2004 aimed at conserving the state's unique architectural heritage. Their efforts, to a degree, have succeeded: in 2008 Georgetown (as well as Melaka) was awarded Unesco World Heritage Status. Development issues have not vanished, but they are being addressed with a commendably robust public dialogue.

In 2008, Pakatan Rakyat (PR), the opposition coalition, took control of the state's parliament by 29 seats to Barisan Nasional's (BN) 11, BN's worst performance in Malaysian history. The locally strong Gerakan party, which governed Penang since 1969, was also swept out of power. The platform of two of PR's constituent parties (anti-corruption and a secular, multi-ethnic state) went over well with Penang's large Chinese population, although the margin of the victory was a shock to many analysts.

## Orientation

Penang encompasses Pulau Penang, or Penang Island, where all of the state's destinations of note are concentrated, and the mainland. This narrow strip of coast is known as Seberang Perai. There's little to see or do other than change buses or trains in the mainland town of Butterworth, a major transport hub with many more bus connections to other cities in Peninsular Malaysia. Trains running between Kuala Lumpur and Thailand also pass through Butterworth.

## Climate

Penang has a tropical climate, with temperatures of between 21°C and 32°C year-round. Brief torrential downpours occur at all times of year, though the period between May and October sees more rain. Humidity is normally 85% to 90%.

# SEBERANG PERAI

## BUTTERWORTH

☎ 04 / pop 110,000

Butterworth is an industrial town defined to the outside world by its air-force base and ferry terminal. Most travellers use it strictly

as a transport hub. The sole point of interest is the **Penang Bird Park** (Taman Burung Pinang; ☎ 399 1899; Jln Todak; adult/child RM20/10; 🕒 9am-7.30pm), 7km east of the ferry terminal across the river. This landscaped park houses more than 300 species of birds, mostly from Southeast Asia, including parrots, hornbills and hawks. If you're waiting for the train (or bus or whatever), a visit to the park is a pleasant way to while the day.

Most of the land transport (buses, taxis) between Penang and other places in Peninsular Malaysia and Thailand leaves from Butterworth's taxi and bus station next to the terminal for ferries going to or from Georgetown.

## Sleeping & Eating

'You said the train was in the afternoon!' 'I'm sorry, I can't read military time.' 'Looks like we're stuck here for the night...'

**Ambassador Hotel** (☎ 332 7788; 4425 Jln Bagan Luar; r from RM40; 🍷) This sleepy Chinese hotel above a cheap *kedai kopi* (coffee shop) of the same name is a fair, if rather timeworn, budget option. Air-con rooms cost RM63, and all have attached bathrooms.

**Hotel Berlin** (☎ 332 1701; 4802 Jln Bagan Luar; s/d from RM100/120; 🍷) A few doors down from the Ambassador, the Berlin offers a bit more comfort, and discounts are normally available. It has a gym and sauna, and breakfast is included in the price, which is a good deal for Butterworth. We stress, for Butterworth.

**Sunway Hotel** (☎ 370 7788; www.sh.com.my; 11 Lebuhr Tenggiri Dua, Seberang Jaya; s/d RM242/288; 🍷) This modern tower close to the Penang Bird Park in the suburb of Seberang Jaya is aimed primarily at business travellers, with the usual smart international setup. Rooms sport 'oversized beds', and you can even get 'karaoke on demand' through your TV.

There are numerous cheap Chinese cafes scattered around the town centre. As ever, a reliable bet is **Sri Ananda Bahwan Restaurant** (☎ 323 6228; 2982 Jln Bagar Luar; mains from RM3; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner), which serves clean and consistently good Indian food (veg and nonveg); you'd be hard-pressed to spend over RM5. It has a particularly good selection of colourful, hand-made Indian sweets, which you can have wrapped up in a box to take away.

## Getting There & Away

The mainland strip of Seberang Perai is easily accessed by road and rail from other parts of

the peninsula. Butterworth is the transport hub, and the departure point for ferries to Penang, which is also linked to the mainland by road-bridge. For information on bus, ferry and air services, see *Getting There & Away* in the Georgetown section (p196).

## TAXI

Not a good option unless you like being overcharged. Long-distance taxis operate from a depot beside the Butterworth ferry terminal on the mainland. Typical whole-taxi fares (which are negotiable) include such rip-offs as Ipoh (RM210), KL (RM350), Kota Bharu (RM350), Lumut (RM240) and Taiping (RM220).

## TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 323 7962) is next to the ferry terminal and bus and taxi station in Butterworth. One daily train runs to KL and two run in the opposite direction to Hat Yai in Thailand; check with www.ktmb.com.my for the latest info on fares and schedules.

# PENANG

☎ 04 / pop 678,000

Penang, or Pulau Pinang, isn't the most physically beautiful island in Malaysia. In fact, it can be downright unsightly in places where the green jungle has been ploughed down by thickets of concrete condos. And having 'only' been inhabited for roughly 300 years, it's relatively young compared with much of Malaysia.

Yet Penang, along with Singapore, Hong Kong and Macau, is arguably one of the most fascinating islands in Asia. That comparison with former island colonies isn't superficial: this is the oldest of the British Straits settlements, predating both Singapore and Melaka. Look at the Straits on a map and their commercial importance vis-à-vis their geography is immediate and obvious: this was the watery road between Asia's two halves and the wet exit to the markets of Europe and the Middle East. As such, Penang straddles the juncture of Asia's two most influential cultures and the colonial empires that conquered them.

The island's mixed population, dominated by the business-savvy Chinese, is the genetic by-product of Penang's geographic location. The unique culture of this little fist of land,

forged over decades of colonialism, commercial activity, hosting tourists and preserving backyards, is one Malaysia's most tolerant and cosmopolitan.

## GEORGETOWN

☎ 04 / pop 300,000

For many, if not most visitors, Georgetown, the state's historic capital, is Penang, to the point that the two names become interchangeable. If your image of Penang is watermarked tumbledown Chinese shopfronts, British Raj-era architecture, trishaw-wide alleys and strings of paper Heavenly Lanterns casting street hawkers from the Malabar Coast to Macau under a blood-red celebratory glow – well, you're right on. That stuff is here.

So too are shopping malls, refurbished Chinese mansions and pubs, boutiques, design studios and cafes that wouldn't be out of place in a Western city centre. Traffic congestion and air pollution aside, it's easy to see why this is one of the most popular expat enclaves in Asia. Forgive us for employing the most overused cliché in the travel writer's phrasebook, but there really is a palpable collision of an older Asia and an Asia-that-will-be (and already is) in these narrow streets. The hotels and shops of Georgetown exemplify this phenomenon; the most popular stores seem to either sell antiques or electronics. The best hotels are gussied-up, well-amenitied heritage houses (see p192).

Georgetown is something of a mainstay on the Southeast Asian backpacker trail, and budget travellers will have no problems finding friends here. All classes of travellers should leave the hotel and hostel ghettos and wander through the sensory playground that are Georgetown's backstreets: fortune tellers, blue joss smoke, chicken rice, Chinese opera and the sharp roast of a chilli. Eat up – the food here may be the best in Malaysia – and leave having experienced one of Asia's great mini-entrepôts.

## Orientation

Georgetown is on the northeastern corner of the island, where the channel between island and mainland is narrowest.

A vehicle- and passenger-ferry service operates across the 3km-wide channel between Georgetown and Butterworth on the mainland. South of the ferry crossing is the Penang

Bridge, reputedly the longest in Southeast Asia, which links the island with Malaysia's Lebuhraya (North-South Hwy).

Most places in Georgetown can easily be reached on foot or by trishaw. The old colonial district centres on Fort Cornwallis. Lebu Pantai is the main street of the 'city', a financial district crammed with banks and stately buildings that once housed the colonial administration. After dark, exercise caution, as this area becomes eerily deserted.

You'll find many of Georgetown's budget hotels and hostels along Lebu Chulia in Chinatown, where the usual cast of backpackers congregates in restaurants and bars. At the northern end of Lebu Chulia, Jln Penang is a main thoroughfare and a popular shopping street. In this area are a number of midrange hotels and, at the waterfront end of the street, the venerable Eastern & Oriental (E&O) Hotel.

If you follow Jln Penang south, you'll pass the modern multipurpose Komtar shopping centre, and eventually leave town and continue towards Penang International Airport. If you turn west at the waterfront end of Jln Penang, you'll follow the coastline and eventually come to the northern beaches, including Batu Ferringhi. This road runs right around the island back into town, via the airport.

Finding your way around Georgetown can be slightly complicated. Jln Penang may also be referred to as Jln Pinang or Penang Rd – but there's also a Penang St, which is officially called Lebu Pinang! (In Malay, 'Jalan' is technically 'road' while 'lebu' is 'street') Similarly, Chulia St is Lebu Chulia; Pitt St is sometimes Lebu Pitt, but is shown on some maps and signposts as Jln Masjid Kapitan Keling. Many streets are still referred to locally by their English names; Lebu Gereja, for example, is Church St, and Lebu Pantai is Beach St. Maps are sold at bookshops (below). Don't lose your head over the above; Georgetown is pretty small and finding your way around becomes intuitive after a day or two.

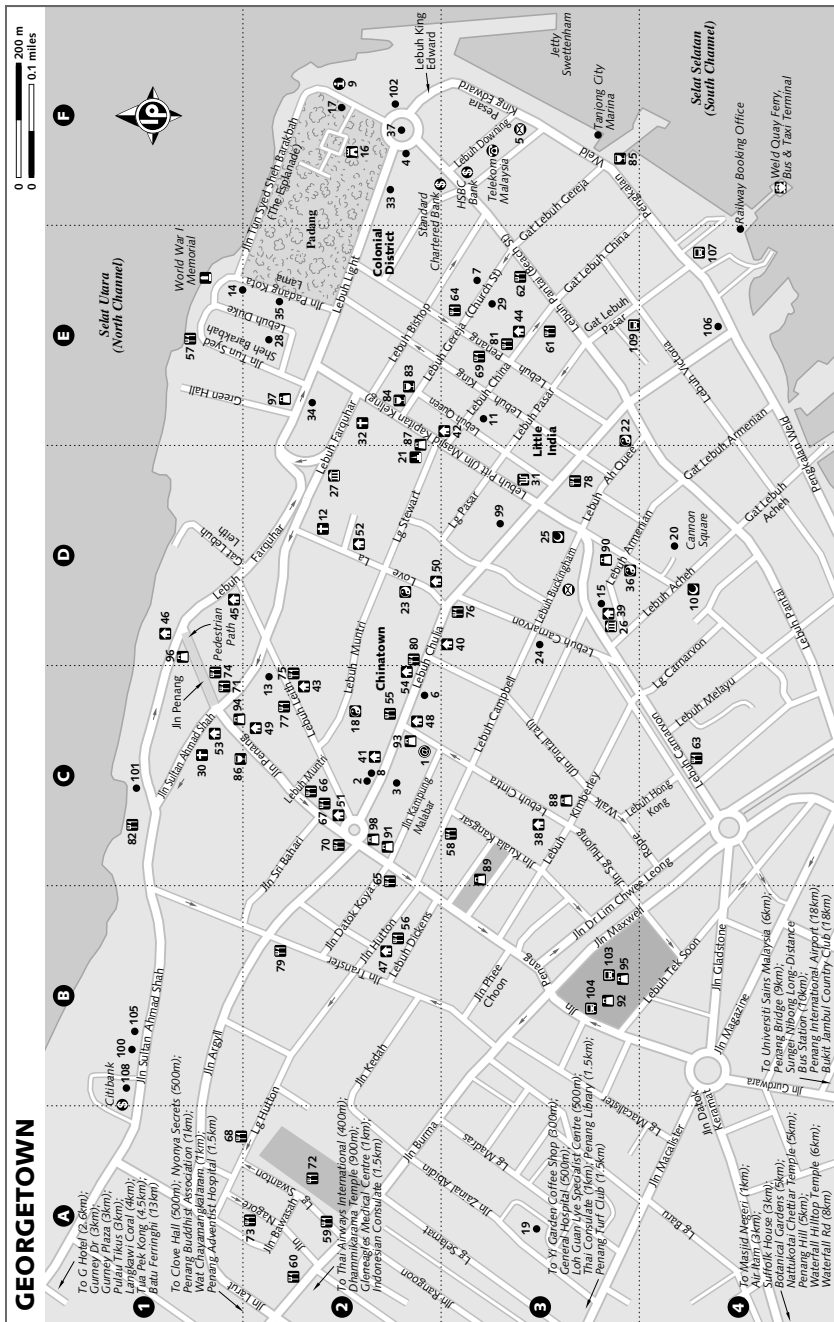
Your feet are a good way of getting around, but if you get tired or the heat just gets to you, trishaws are ideal, particularly at night when travelling this way takes on an almost magical quality. See p198 for more information.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

There are lots of small shops along Lebu Chulia.

GEORGETOWN



1 To G Hotel (2.6km);  
Gurney Dr (3km);  
Gurney Plaza (3km);  
Penang State Library (3km);  
Langkawi Coral (4km);  
Tuk Pek Kong (4.5km);  
Batu Ferringhi (13km)

To Clove Hill (500m); Nyonya Secrets (500m);  
Penang Buddhist Association (1km);  
Wat Chayamangkalamm (1km);  
Penang Adventist Hospital (1.5km)

2 To Thai Airways International (400m);  
Dharmikarama Temple (900m);  
Gleneagles Medical Centre (1km);  
Indonesian Consulate (1.5km)

3 To Yi Garden Coffee Shop (300m);  
General Hospital (500m);  
Loh Guan Yee Specialist Centre (500m);  
Penang State Library (1.5km);  
Penang Turf Club (1.5km)

4 To Masjid Negeer (1km);  
Arlinn (3km);  
Kiln Quay (3km);  
Botanical Gardens (5km);  
Nattakol Chettiar Temple (5km);  
Penang Hill (5km);  
Penang National Park (18km);  
Waterfall Rd (8km)



<b>INFORMATION</b>		<b>SLEEPING</b> 📄		Restoran Nasi Padang	
Eighteen Internet Café.....	1 C 2	100 Cintra Street.....	38 C3	Minang.....	79 B2
Happy Holidays.....	2 C 2	110 Armenian St.....	39 D3	Sarkies Corner.....	(see 46)
HS Sam Book Store.....	3 C 2	Banana Guesthouse.....	40 D3	Sky Hotel.....	80 D2
Immigration Office.....	4 F2	Blue Diamond Hotel.....	41 C2	Sri Ananda Bahwan.....	81 E3
Jim's Place.....	(see 48)	Broadway Heritage Hotel.....	42 E3	Thirty Two.....	82 C1
Main Post Office.....	5 F3	Cathay Heritage.....	43 C2		
NJ Books Centre.....	6 C 2	Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion.....	(see 13)	<b>DRINKING</b> 📄	
Penang Heritage Trust.....	7 E3	China Tiger.....	44 E3	B@92.....	83 E2
Popular Bookshop.....	(see 92)	City Bayview Hotel.....	45 D1	Farquhar's Bar.....	(see 46)
Silver-Econ Travel.....	8 C 2	Eastern & Oriental Hotel.....	46 D1	Pitt Street Corner.....	84 E2
Stardust.....	(see 54)	Hutton Lodge.....	47 B2	QEII.....	85 F3
Tourism Malaysia.....	9 F2	Jim's Place.....	48 C2	Slippery Senoritas.....	(see 96)
		Malaysia Hotel.....	49 C2	Soho Free House.....	86 C1
		Old Penang Guest House.....	50 D2		
		Oriental Hotel.....	51 C2	<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b>	
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		SD Guesthouse.....	52 D2	Dome.....	(see 92)
Acheen Street Mosque.....	10 D4	Segara Ninda.....	53 C1	Glo.....	(see 96)
Alpha Utara Gallery.....	11 E3	Stardust.....	54 C2		
Cathedral of the Assumption.....	12 D2			<b>SHOPPING</b> 📄	
Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion.....	13 C2	<b>EATING</b> 📄		100 Cintra Street.....	(see 38)
City Hall.....	14 E1	1885.....	(see 46)	Alpha Utara Gallery.....	(see 11)
Dr Sun Yat Sen's Penang Base.....	15 D3	Ecco Cafe.....	55 C2	Auntie Sim.....	87 E2
Fort Cornwallis.....	16 F2	Ee Beng Vegetarian Food.....	56 B2	Bee Chin Heong.....	88 C3
Fort Cornwallis Chapel.....	(see 16)	Esplanade Food Centre.....	57 E1	Chowraster Bazaar.....	89 C3
Fort Cornwallis Lighthouse.....	17 F2	Hammediyah.....	58 C3	Fuan Wong.....	90 D3
Hainan Temple.....	18 C2	Hawker Stalls.....	59 A2	Hong Giap Hang.....	91 C2
Jewish Cemetery.....	19 A3	Hot Wok.....	60 A2	Komtar.....	92 B3
Khoo Kongsi.....	20 D4	Hui Sin Vegetarian		Lean Giap Trading.....	93 C2
Kuan Yin Teng.....	21 D2	Restaurant.....	61 E3	Oriental Arts & Antiques.....	94 C1
Lim Kongsi.....	22 E3	Jing-Si Books & Cafe.....	62 E3	Prangin Mall.....	95 B3
Loo Pun Hong.....	23 D2	Jit Seng Duck Rice.....	63 C4	Renaissance Pewter.....	96 D1
Market.....	24 D3	Kafeteria Eng Loh.....	64 E3	Royal Selangor Pewter.....	97 E2
Masjid Kapitan Keling.....	25 D3	Kayu Nasi Kandar.....	65 C2	Sam's Batik House.....	98 C2
Penang Gelugpa Buddhist		Khaleel Restaurant.....	66 C2		
Association.....	(see 23)	Kheng Pin.....	67 C2	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
Penang Islamic Museum.....	26 D3	Kissa Koyotei.....	68 A1	AirAsia.....	99 D3
Penang Museum.....	27 D2	Madras New Woodlands		Cathay Pacific.....	100 B1
Peranakan Museum.....	(see 38)	Restaurant.....	69 E3	Ekspres Bahagia.....	(see 102)
Pinang Gallery.....	28 E2	Maharaj.....	70 C2	Firefly Airlines.....	(see 92)
Pinang Peranakan Mansion.....	29 E3	Mr Pot.....	71 C1	Hertz.....	101 C1
Protestant Cemetery.....	30 C1	New World Park Food Court.....	72 A2	Langkawi Ferry Service.....	102 F2
Seri Rambai.....	(see 16)	Nyonya Baba Cuisine.....	73 A2	Local Bus Station.....	103 B3
Sri Mariamman Temple.....	31 D3	Opera.....	74 C1	Long Distance Bus Services.....	104 B3
St George's Church.....	32 E2	Passage Thru India.....	75 C2	Malaysia Airlines.....	105 B1
State Assembly Building.....	33 F2	Rainforest Bakery.....	76 D3	Newsia Tours & Travel.....	106 E4
Supreme Court.....	34 E2	Red Garden Food Paradise &		Pengkalang Weld Bus Stop.....	107 E4
Town Hall.....	35 E2	Night Market.....	77 C2	Singapore Airlines.....	108 B1
Tua Pek Kong.....	36 D3	Restoran Kapitan.....	78 D3	TransitLink City Bus Station.....	109 E3
Victoria Memorial Clock					
Tower.....	37 F2				

**HS Sam Book Store** (☎ 262 2705; 473 Lebuah Chulia) One of the best for secondhand books, the 'most organised used bookshop in town' has a fair range of popular paperbacks. Organises car and bike rental, and luggage storage.

**NJ Books Centre** (☎ 261 6113; 425 Lebuah Chulia) Also buys and sells secondhand books.

**Popular Bookshop** (Komtar) Stocks novels, travel books, maps and a selection of books on Penang and Malaysia.

## IMMIGRATION OFFICES

**Immigration office** (☎ 250 3410; 29A Lebuah Pantai)

## INTERNET ACCESS

Almost every guesthouse along Lebuah Chulia and Love Lane operates a small internet cafe,

and it's pretty easy to pick up a wi-fi signal in much of the town. Midrange and top-end hotels (especially the latter) also tend to have their own wi-fi networks. Rates below are RM3 per hour.

**Eighteen Internet Café** (☎ 264 4754; 18 Lebuah Cintra; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat)

**Jim's Place** (☎ 261 8731; 431 Lebuah Chulia)

**Stardust** (☎ 263 5723; 370 Lebuah Chulia)

## LIBRARIES

**Penang Library** (☎ 229 3555; 2936 Jln Scotland; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun)

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**General Hospital** (☎ 229 3333; Jln Residensi)

**Gleneagles Medical Centre** (☎ 227 6111; www.gleneagles-penang.com; 1 Jln Pangkor)

**Loh Guan Lye Specialist Centre** (☎ 238 8888; www.lohguanlye.com; 19 Jln Logan)

**Penang Adventist Hospital** (☎ 222 7200; www.pah.com.my; 465 Jln Burma)

## MONEY

Branches of major banks are on Lebu Pantai and Lebu Downing near the main post office, and most have 24-hour ATMs. There are also ATMs at the base of Komtar.

At the northwestern end of Lebu Chulia, there are numerous moneychangers open longer hours than the banks and with more competitive rates. Moneychangers are also scattered around the banks on Lebu Pantai and at the ferry terminal, although you'll probably get better rates on the mainland from the moneychangers at the Butterworth taxi and bus station (Map p176).

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Penang Heritage Trust** (☎ 264 2631; www.pht.org.my; 26 Lebu Gereja; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Information on the history of Penang, conservation projects and heritage walking trails.

**Tourism Malaysia** (☎ 262 0066; 10 Jln Tun Syed Sheh Barakbah; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Georgetown's main tourist information office.

**www.globolethicpenang.net** Information on the Penang Global Ethic Project, a local interfaith group that organises talks and exhibitions on religions and peace issues. See 'Walk of Faith' (p189) for information on the project's excellent World Religions walking tour.

**www.igeorgetownpenang.com** An excellent newsletter aimed at Penang residents that gives good under-the-skin information on Georgetown.

**www.ilovepenang.com** Hey, we love you, ilovepenang.com. Comprehensive information and a nicely designed website.

**www.penang.ws** Fairly up-to-date clearing house of hotel and restaurant listings.

**www.penangfoods.com** Guess what this website focuses on?

**www.tourismpenang.gov.my** Details of sights and restaurants in Penang.

Also useful is the monthly *Penang Tourist Newspaper* (RM3), which has comprehensive listings of shops, tourist attractions and hotel promotions, as well as detailed pull-out maps. It's usually available free from tourist offices and some hotels.

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

Most, but not all, of the agencies in Georgetown are trustworthy. The following are reliable operators that many travellers use to purchase discounted airline tickets:

**Happy Holidays** (☎ 263 6666; www.happyholidays.com.my; 432 Lebu Chulia)

**Silver-Econ Travel** (☎ 262 9882; www.silverecon.com.my; 438 Lebu Chulia)

## Dangers & Annoyances

Georgetown, like any big city, has its seamy side. Foreign tourists have been attacked and mugged in Love Lane and other dimly lit side streets, and it may be unwise to linger in these areas alone after dark. There are a lot of public signs warning of snatch thieves on motorbikes who pluck away purses, handbags and backpacks, and prostitutes are considerably more visible in Georgetown than other parts of the country. With all of that said, be smart but not overtly cautious. Penang in general and Georgetown in particular are reasonably safe, and given the high number of tourists, police here tend to be easy to deal with in the unlikely event that something bad does happen.

Off the street, robberies have occurred in some backpacker hostels, so you should never leave valuables, especially your passport, unattended. There have also been reports of Peeping Toms spying through the walls of certain Love Lane hostels. Meanwhile, drug dealing still occurs in Georgetown, despite Malaysia's very stiff antidrug laws; don't get involved.

## Sights

### COLONIAL DISTRICT

Penang has one of the greatest concentrations of colonial architecture in Asia. Fort Cornwallis is a good place to start a tour of the colonial district around the waterfront. Many of the buildings in the area are marked with signs explaining their history and significance. You can follow the 'Heritage Trail' walking tours, which also take in temples and mosques in Chinatown – pick up a pamphlet of the routes at the tourist office or the Penang Heritage Trust. There's also a free bus shuttle (7am to 7pm Monday to Friday, to 2pm Saturday), which runs between the jetty and Komtar, winding its way through the colonial core of Georgetown. It's a good way to get a quick overview of the town, and you can get on and off at various numbered



stops. A map of the route is in the *Penang Tourist Newspaper*.

Opposite the southeastern corner of Fort Cornwallis is the **Victoria Memorial Clock Tower**, a gleaming white tower topped by a Moorish dome. Donated by a local Chinese millionaire to honour Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, it stands 18m (60ft) tall – one foot for each year of her reign. West of the clock tower are the offices of the Penang Heritage Trust on Lebuah Gereja (Church St); Lebuah Gereja, Lebuah Bishop and Lebuah Farquhar were the historical heartland of Penang's Eurasian community, mixed-race Catholic settlers who came here fleeing persecution in other parts of Asia.

A typical feature of Malaysian colonial cities is the *padang*, which is an open playing field surrounded by public buildings. Georgetown's *padang* stretches west from Fort Cornwallis to the **Town Hall** and **City Hall**, two of Penang's most imposing buildings, both of which have fine porticos. The Town Hall, completed in 1880, is Penang's oldest municipal building, and its beautiful restored ballroom is a regular venue for temporary exhibitions. The Town Hall's Hokkien nickname during colonial days was Ang Moh Kong Kuan: 'White Man's Club'. Behind it is the modern **Pinang Gallery** (Lebuah Duke; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), with a rotating display of contemporary local art; it's a hit-or-miss thing, but the air-con is refreshing. The gallery is housed in Dewan Sri Pinang, the island's first multi-purpose hall.

On the southern side of the *padang* is the neoclassical **State Assembly building** (Dewan Undangan Negeri), and northwest along Lebuah Light is the equally impressive **Supreme Court**. In front of the court is a statue of James Richardson Logan, a British lawyer who earned his reputation, and much popularity, for representing non-whites in the 19th century. Logan's work resulted in the official recognition of a number of Chinese secret societies and their festivals, and he pushed for the Transfer of 1867, which resulted in the Straits Settlements becoming their own colony, as opposed to a subset of British India.

Behind the Supreme Court, **St George's Church** (☎ 261 2739; Lebuah Farquhar; ☎ services 8.30am & 10.30am Sun) is the oldest Anglican church in Southeast Asia. This gracefully proportioned building, with its marble floor and towering spire, was built in 1818 with convict labour. In the grounds there is an elegant little pavilion,

housing a memorial plaque to Captain Francis Light. Also on Lebuah Farquhar is the double-spired **Cathedral of the Assumption**, named for the feast day on which its Catholic founders landed here from Kedah.

In the **Protestant Cemetery** on Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah, the mouldering tombs of colonial officials huddle together under a canopy of magnolia trees. Here you'll find the graves of Captain Light and many others, including governors, merchants, sailors and Chinese Christians who had fled the Boxer Rebellion (1900) only to die of fever in Penang. Also here is the tomb of Thomas Leonowens, the young officer who married Anna – the schoolmistress to the King of Siam made famous by Deborah Kerr in the *King and I*. The 1999 remake, *Anna and the King*, was filmed in Malaysia, including some scenes in Penang (partly because the Thai government considered the movie insulting to the Thai monarchy).

### Fort Cornwallis

For all its size, **Fort Cornwallis** (☎ 261 0262; Lebuah Light; adult/child RM3/2; ☎ 9am-6.30pm) isn't particularly impressive; only the outer walls stand, enclosing a pleasant park within. The star-shaped structure houses some vaguely informative exhibits, a poor Malaysian man is made to stand in full British colonial uniform at the gate and a speaker system seems to play the *1812 Overture* on repeat loop. It's all wonderfully surreal.

The fort is named for Charles Cornwallis, perhaps best known for surrendering at the Battle of Yorktown to George Washington, effectively ending the American Revolution. Visitors from the USA: have some apple pie. It was at the fort that Captain Light first set foot on the virtually uninhabited island in 1786 and established the free port where trade would, he hoped, be lured from Britain's Dutch rivals. Between 1808 and 1810 convict labour replaced the then-wooden building materials with stone. The star-profile shape of the walls allowed for overlapping fields of fire against enemies.

A bronze statue of Captain Light stands near the entrance, modelled on the likeness of his son, William because no pictures of him could be found. Said son was the founder of Adelaide, so visitors from Australia: have a pie floater. The small **chapel** in the southwest corner was the first to be built in Penang; **the first recorded service was the marriage in**

1799 of Francis Light's widow, Martina (rumoured to have been Eurasian), to a certain John Timmers.

**Seri Rambai**, the most important and largest cannon, faces the north coast and was cast in 1603. It has a chequered history; the Dutch gave it to the sultan of Johor, after which it fell into the hands of the Acehnese. It was later given to the sultan of Selangor, and then stolen by pirates before ending up at the fort.

In 2009, the state government announced it was opening tenders to private organisations interested in managing and possibly renovating the fort site, so the situation inside may be very different by the time you read this.

### Penang Museum

From the town's foundation site, it's only a short stroll to the **Penang Museum** (☎ 261 3144; www.penangmuseum.com; Lebuhr Farquhar; admission RM1; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu), one of Malaysia's best presented museums. The permanent exhibition is a comprehensive walk-through of Penang's history, festivals and cultures. No settler group is left out and all are admirably described in sympathetic detail, a testament to this state's admirable record of tolerance. Look out for the beautifully carved opium beds, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and the incredible silk-brocade outfits once worn by the Baba-Nonya (Straits Chinese) population. Temporary exhibitions are eclectic, ranging from galleries of colonial prints to displays on traditional Malay seamanship.

Outside, one of the original Penang Hill funicular railcars is now a kiosk selling souvenirs, including antique costume jewellery and coins; all proceeds benefit the Penang Heritage Trust. The museum's front desk has good information and pamphlets on walking tours of Georgetown.

### CHINATOWN

If the imposing profile of the colonial district's buildings represent Penang at its most stately and dignified, the spaghetti of worm-narrow streets clotted to its south is Penang at its most quintessential. Chinatown, which stretches from Lebuhr Pantai to Jln Penang, centres on Lebuhr Chulia and encloses Little India, Chinese Assembly Halls and the back-packer ghetto. The Penang of tiny tea shops owned by iron Chinese grandmothers, busted Indian stereo systems blaring 'Chuma chuma jai - blgrfzzzzl' and calls to prayer mingling

with the loud slap of mahjong tiles? All right here, folks.

What's there to do? Walk around some, soak up, walk s'more, soak, rinse, repeat. Peek into a temple, haggle at a vegetable market, slurp up some noodle soup and a sweaty bottle of beer with the locals. Political correctness and stereotypes be damned: this is Asia at its most alluring and romantic.

### Khoong Kongsi

The *kongsi*, or clanhouse, is a major node of overseas Chinese communities. It is both a benevolent organisation for individuals with the same surname (in this instance, Khoo) and, in its way, an economic collective (indeed, the word as used in modern Chinese means 'company'). But it is also symbolises a deeper social, even spiritual contract between an extended clan, its ancestors and its social obligations. To this end, clanhouses and assembly halls are both the civic and religious backbone for many overseas Chinese, and the most impressive one in Penang is the Khoo clanhouse, or **Khoong Kongsi** (☎ 261 4609; www.khoongkongsi.com.my; 18 Cannon Sq; adult/child RM5/free; ☎ 9am-5pm), also known as Dragon Mountain Hall.

The Khoo are a successful clan, and they're letting the world know. Stone carvings dance across the entrance hall and pavilions, many of which symbolise, or are meant to attract, good luck and wealth. Note at the entrance a turbaned Sikh guardian watchman. The interior is dominated by incredible murals depicting birthdays, weddings and, most impressively, the 36 celestial guardians (divided into two panels of 18 guardians each). The fiery overhead lighting comes courtesy of enormous paper lamps. Gorgeous ceramic sculptures of immortals, carp, dragons, and carp becoming dragons (a traditional Chinese motif symbolising success) dance across the roof ridges. As impressive as all of this is, Khoong Kongsi was once more ostentatious; the roof caught fire on the night it was completed in 1901, an event put down to divine jealousy. The present *kongsi* dates from 1906.

### Kuan Yin Teng

On Lebuhr Pitt is the temple of **Kuan Yin Teng** (☎ 9am-6pm) – the goddess of mercy, good fortune, peace and fertility. Built in the early 19th century by the first Hokkien and Cantonese settlers in Penang, the temple is not large or especially impressive, but it's very central

and popular with the Chinese community. It seems to be forever swathed in smoke from the outside furnaces, where worshippers burn paper money, and from the incense sticks waved around inside. It's a very busy place, and Chinese theatre takes place on the goddess' birthday, celebrated on the 19th day of the second, sixth and ninth lunar months.

### Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion

Built in the 1880s, the magnificent **Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion** (☎ 262 0006; www.cheongfattzemansion.com; 14 Lebu Leith; admission RM12) was commissioned by Cheong Fatt Tze, a Hakka merchant-trader who left China as a penniless teenager and eventually established a vast financial empire throughout east Asia, earning himself the dual sobriquets 'Rockefeller of the East' and the 'last Mandarin'.

The mansion, rescued from ruin in the 1990s, blends Eastern and Western designs, with louvered windows, art nouveau stained glass and beautiful floor tiles, and is a rare surviving example of the eclectic architectural style preferred by wealthy Straits Chinese of the time. The best way to experience the house, now a boutique hotel, is to stay here (see p192); otherwise hour-long guided tours (11am and 3pm Monday to Saturday) give you a glimpse of the beautiful interior.

### Acheen Street Mosque

If you're entranced by the call to prayer wafting over the short walk from Khoo Kongsi, the Malay **Acheen Street Mosque** (Lebu Acheh) is unusual for its Egyptian-style minaret (most Malay mosques have Moorish minarets). Built in 1808 by a wealthy Arab trader, the mosque was the focal point for the Malay and Arab traders in this quarter – the oldest Malay *kampung* (village) in Georgetown. Only Muslims can enter the mosque.

### Penang Islamic Museum

The **Penang Islamic Museum** (☎ 262 0172; www.penangislamicmuseum.net; 128 Lebu Armenian; adult/child RM3/1; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Wed-Mon) is housed in a restored villa that was once the residence of Syed Alatas, a powerful Acehnese merchant (really) of the Indian Chettiar community. Today it holds a wordy exhibition on the history of Islam in Malaysia and Penang, along with some 19th-century furniture. The main event is an upstairs life-sized diorama of a

dock scene that depicts a maritime-oriented *haj* (pilgrimage to Mecca).

### Hainan Temple

Probably the coolest feature of this temple is its impressive stone courtyard and the carved pillar work throughout said space, which is bedecked with more red paper lanterns than usual. This duochrome backdrop of slate and crimson looks like it should be the scene of the final fight in a kung fu movie or a *Mortal Kombat* video game. In fact, the **Hainan Temple** (Lebu Muntri), completed in 1895, is dedicated to Mar Chor, China's patron saint of seafarers.

### Tua Pek Kong

The name is ostensibly **Tua Pek Kong** (Lebu Armenian), but this recently renovated structure, resplendent in red and gold and with polished black columns, has quite a few more aliases: Hock Teik Cheng Sin, Poh Hock Seah, Hokkien Kongsu and Tong Kheng Seah, among others. What's with all the names? Well, besides serving as a temple and assembly hall, this building has also been the registered headquarters of several secret societies (Aside: secret societies register their headquarters? Really? With who?). Each society occupied a different portion of the temple, which became a focal point during the 1867 riots/war between societies. The fighting got so intense a secret passage was built between here and Khoo Kongsi for the purpose of a quick escape. While you search for the corridor, be sure to admire the gilded filigree and lacquered roof beams that give this once underground HQ such an imperial Chinese vibe.

### Loo Pun Hong

The tiny **Loo Pun Hong** (70 Love Lane) is one of the most unobtrusive of Penang's Chinese temples. Built in the 1880s, it is dedicated to Lo Pan, legendary inventor of carpentry tools, and is Malaysia's oldest carpenters' guild house. Set back from the lane, it has an ornate altar inside along with a giant drum and bell.

### Penang Gelugpa Buddhist Association

This small **Buddhist Temple** (Love Lane), next to Loo Pun Hong, isn't particularly impressive compared to Penang's other religious buildings. But it is unique for being the major representative structure of the Gelugpa (Yellow

Hat) school of Buddhism. The Yellow Hats are a Tibetan order, and as such there are some beautiful Tibetan wall hangings in this temple that you'd be hard-pressed to find outside of a museum.

### 100 Cintra Street

At the time of research this property was being renovated, but usually the old house at **100 Cintra Street** (☎ 264 3581; adult/child RM5/2.50; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) houses the tiny Peranakan Museum, which celebrates Penang's Baba-Nonya heritage. Furniture, costumes, porcelain and household items are displayed in recreations of late-19th-century interiors (the house itself dates from 1881 and was restored a century later). A small antiques bazaar and a cafe are downstairs. There's accommodation on the middle floor.

### Dr Sun Yat Sen's Penang Base

This well-preserved 19th-century **townhouse** (☎ 262 0123; 120 Lebuah Armenian; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Sat) was where the founder of modern China, Dr Sun Yat Sen, organised the Penang Conference and planned the Canton Uprising, which established the Republic of China in 1911. The ground floor, with original tiled floors, furniture and Nonya-style kitchen, is open to visitors by advance reservation.

### LITTLE INDIA

As Little Indias go, this one fills all the criteria: it's quite small and it's intensely, well, Indian. Men stand on the street and yell at you to come see their shop/restaurant/stall; pausing to look will result in the inevitable hard sell as folks try to hustle you into their business. Bright lights and scratchy music and purple saris and small Himalayas of spice take turns smashing up your normal dull sensory apparatus. All in all, this is one of the most evocative areas of the city.

### Sri Mariamman Temple

Penang, as we have stressed, is a crossroads and cross-pollination of cultures, and to this end, one of the interesting elements of its houses of worship is their emphasis on providing a reference point for expatriates far from home. For local Tamils, the **Sri Mariamman Temple** (Lebuah Pitt; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-9pm) fulfils the purpose of a Hokkien clanhouse: it's a reminder of the motherland and the community bonds forged within the diaspora. In

this case, those bonds don't come from a benevolent society, but a typically South Indian temple, dominated by its entrance tower or *gopuram*. Erupting with sculpture, the tower serves several purposes: it represents Mt Meru, the cosmic mountain that supports the heavens, and delineates the line between this world and the realm of the gods, which begins in the temple compound. Local Tamils pay homage to Tamil Nadu by worshipping Mariamman, a mother goddess popular with diaspora Indians who represents the soil of, if not home, at least the land of sometimes distant origin. This temple was built in 1883 and is Georgetown's oldest Hindu house of worship.

Penang's **Thaipusam** procession begins here (see p189), and in October a wooden chariot takes the temple's deity for a spin around the neighbourhood during **Vijayadasami** festivities.

### Pinang Peranakan Mansion

The wealthy Baba-Nonyas of the Straits colonial period had some of the most eclectic tastes of their time; their wealth and their home's position on so many trade routes afforded access to English tilework, Scottish iron embellishments, continental European art and furniture and, of course, the heights of Chinese opulence in interior design. All of the above crash together rather beautifully in the restored **Pinang Peranakan Mansion** (☎ 264 2929; www.pinangperanakanmansion.com.my; 29 Lebuah Gereja; adult/child RM10/free; ☎ 9:30am-5pm Mon-Sat), former home of Chung Keng Quee, 19th-century merchant, secret-society leader and all-round community pillar. His ornate home is full of antiques and furniture of the period he lived in. There's also an exhibition on Nonya customs, and guided tours take place at 11.30am and 3.30pm.

### Masjid Kapitan Keling

Penang's first Indian Muslim settlers (East India Company troops) built **Masjid Kapitan Keling** (☎ 9am-5.30pm) in 1801 at the junction of Lebuah Buckingham and Lebuah Pitt. The mosque's domes are yellow, in a typically Indian-influenced Islamic style, and it has a single minaret. It looks sublime at sunset. Mosque officials can grant permission to enter.

### Alpha Utara Gallery

Housed in an attractively renovated traditional townhouse, **Alpha Utara Gallery** (☎ 262 6840;

www.alpha-utara.com; 83 Lebuh China; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is an exhibition space for paintings by contemporary local artists, based around the works of Penang-born artist Khoo Sui Hoe. There are temporary exhibitions spread over two floors, and a bookshop downstairs.

## OTHER SIGHTS

### Wat Chayamangkalaram & Dhammikarama Temple

An interesting study in the diversity of Buddhist architecture are two temples just off Jln Burma on the main road to Batu Ferringhi. The **Temple of the Reclining Buddha** (Wat Chayamangkalaram; ☎ early morning-5.30pm) is a typically Thai temple with its sharp-eaved roofs and ceiling accents; inside it houses a 33m-long reclining Buddha draped in a gold-leafed saffron robe. The icon represents the Buddha's attainment of nirvana and peaceful passage from this existence, although the claim that it's the third-longest reclining Buddha in the world is dubious. The symbols on the Buddha's feet represent the marks of a true Buddha (a title that means 'enlightened one' as opposed to a name). Also note the entrance and exit; the former is set off by a Naga, a Southeast Asian water dragon, while the latter is marked by a Chinese dragon, the East Asian equivalent of the same mythical animal – another example of two Asias on one island.

The **Dhammikarama Burmese Buddhist Temple** stands opposite and is a rare instance of a Burmese Buddhist temple outside Burma (now Myanmar). There's a series of panel paintings on the life of the Buddha lining the walkways, the characters dressed in typical Burmese costume, while inside typically round-eyed, serene-faced Burmese Buddha statues stare out at worshippers. A pleasant garden and apartments for monks occupy the back grounds, while two large stone elephants flank the gates. Built in 1805, this was Penang's first Buddhist temple; it has been significantly added to over the years.

You can get to both temples on TransitLink bus 202; Minibus 26, 31 or 88; or Hin Bus 93 from Komtar or along Lebuh Chulia.

### Penang Buddhist Association

Completed in 1931, this unusual Buddhist temple is situated on Jln Anson about 1km west of town. Instead of the typical colourful

design of most Chinese temples, this particular temple shows art deco influences and looks like a frosted cake, all white and pastel. Interior Buddha figures are carved from Italian marble, and glass chandeliers hang above. Penang's Buddhist community gathers here on **Wesak Day** (April/May) to celebrate the triple holiday of the Buddha's birthday, attainment of enlightenment and death.

### Other Mosques & Temples

The glossy, modern **Masjid Negeri** (State Mosque) is at Air Itam, about 1km west of town. It's the biggest in Penang with a striking 50m-high minaret.

**Nattukotai Chettiar Temple** on Waterfall Rd, near the Botanical Gardens (see p200), is the largest Hindu temple in Penang and is dedicated to Bala Subramaniam, the young incarnation of Murugan, patron deity of Tamil Nadu (where most Malay Indians trace their roots). Further along on the left side is a gate leading up to the **Waterfall Hilltop Temple**, the destination of the Thaipusam procession from Little India's Sri Mariamman Temple.

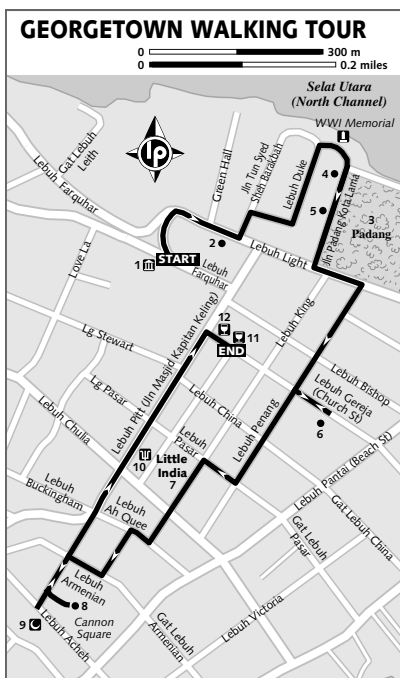
Northwest of Georgetown, past Gurney Dr out at Tanjung Tokong, **Tua Pek Kong** is dedicated to the Chinese God of Prosperity and dates from 1837.

### Suffolk House

On the banks of the Air Itam river, 6.5km west of Georgetown's centre, is the most impressive piece of Anglo-Indian architecture outside of India and one of the flagship causes of the Penang Heritage Trust: **Suffolk House**. This grand home was the original residence of Francis Light, founder of the colony and native of Suffolk, England. Many of the British residences in Penang owe at least some of their features to the ancestral influence of Suffolk House. Paintings of the house in its heyday suggest something like Cotswold-on-Itam.

In 1974 the house was in such poor repair that it was declared structurally unsafe and sealed off. For many years its future looked dire, but in one of Malaysia's rare conservation successes, funds were eventually secured for its full restoration, which was completed in 2007. At the time of research there were plans to open the mansion to the public – check the websites of the **Penang Heritage Trust** ([www.pht.org.my](http://www.pht.org.my)) and **Badan Warisan** ([www.badanwarisan.org.my](http://www.badanwarisan.org.my)) for details.





### WALK FACTS

**Start** Penang Museum  
**Finish** Pitt Street Corner  
**Distance** 3.1km  
**Duration** Two to three hours

### Activities

Penang has some exceptionally affordable international-standard golf courses. The island's premier course is located at **Bukit Jambul Country Club** (☎ 644 2255; www.bjcc.com.my; 2 Jln Bukit Jambul; 18 holes from RM90) near the airport. *Golf Malaysia* magazine rated it the second most beautiful course in Malaysia; the stunning and very challenging 18 holes were carved straight out of the rocky jungle terrain.

At the **Penang Turf Club** (☎ 229 3233; www.penangturfclub.com; Batu Gantong) horse-racing events take place over two consecutive weekends every two months. Seats are cheap, but gambling is illegal. **Horse riding** is sometimes offered Monday to Friday.

Diving and snorkelling excursions to tiny Pulau Payar, around 32 nautical miles

north of Penang, are run by **Langkawi Coral** (☎ 899 8822; www.langkawicoral.com; 16 Jln Tanjung Tokong; snorkelling/diving RM240/380), which also does day trips to Langkawi (RM300/200 per adult/child).

### Walking Tour

It's a tall order, but in one walk we'd like to give you a taste (sometimes literal) of Penang's history, architecture, food and, most importantly, imagery. Don't feel obligated to stick to our exact route; half the fun is exploring little side streets and letting serendipity guide your journey.

The natural starting point is the **Penang Museum** (1; p184), where you can read up on everything you're about to walk past. Head east, then up to the waterfront, passing the **Supreme Court** (2; p183) as you go; check the statue of James Richardson Logan, an advocate for non-whites during the colonial era. Walk up to the not-so-impressive waterfront, then head briefly east before turning down Jln Padang Kota past the green **padang** (3) and the grandiose architecture of the **City Hall** (4; p183) and the **Town Hall** (5; p183). Now proceed east along Lebuhraya, then south on Lebuhraya. A short detour will pop you into the impressive **Pinang Peranakan Mansion** (6; p186), the old digs of one of Georgetown's great merchant barons.

Continue south into **Little India** (7; p186) and take a deep breath of all that spice and sense of place. If you're hungry, grab a curry. (If you don't like Indian food, there's Chinese just up on Lebuhraya. If you don't like either, really, you're in the wrong city). At Lebuhraya, head west past rows of shops selling milky Bengali sweets, then south along Lebuhraya to the intersection of King and Lebuhraya Ah Quee.

Pause for a minute and look around. This intersection is our favourite in the city, the most quintessential crossroads in all of Georgetown. To your south is a Chinese Assembly hall and rows of slate-grey, fading Chinese shopfronts, their wooden eaves rotting into water-splotted walls. To your north is a small Indian mosque, and just across the street is a large Malaysian cafeteria where folks watch televised badminton while snacking on *nasi lemak*.

Phew. OK, head west and south on Lebuhraya into **Khoo Kongsi** (8; p184), the most impressive Chinese assembly hall in the city,



### WALK OF FAITH

One of the best walking tours of Penang on offer (and there are many) is Global Ethic Penang's **World Religions Walk**, which takes you past the iconography and houses of worship of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Chinese traditional religion. Rather than crib the tour here, we'd prefer to direct you to the website: [www.globalethicpenang.net/webpages/act\\_02b.htm](http://www.globalethicpenang.net/webpages/act_02b.htm). We'd just add (to round out the world's belief systems) Penang's old **Jewish cemetery**, located on Jln Zainal Abidin between Jln Burma and Jln Macalister.

then continue a short distance to the Malay **Acheen Street Mosque** (9; p185). Head north along Lebuh Pitt to the Hindu **Sri Mariamman Temple** (10; p186). And then...enough diversity. You need a beer. Sink one in style at **B@92** (11; p195) or opt for the more dive-meets-Chennai vibe of **Pitt Street Corner** (12; p195).

### Tours

**Ping Anchorage** (☎ 397 7993; [www.pinganchorage.com.my](http://www.pinganchorage.com.my); 25B Jln Todok 2, Seberang Jaya) over on the mainland runs several tours, including the four-hour Hill and Temple tour, which visits Penang Hill and the Kek Lok Si Temple (p199), round-island tours and trips to Penang National Park (p203). Tours cost between RM88 and RM129 (cheaper for groups of three or more), including pick-up from your hotel.

**Penang Heritage Trust** (☎ 264 2631; [www.pht.org.my](http://www.pht.org.my); 26A Lg Stewart; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) organises a few walking tours, including the 'Little India Experience' and the 'Heritage Trail', taking in the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion (p185). Both last around three hours and cost RM60, including entry fees. It also has free brochures detailing self-guided walks, such as the 'World Religions Walk' and 'Historic Georgetown Trails'.

Several agents around town book a range of tours at similar prices, including **Happy Holidays** (☎ 263 6666; [www.happyholidays.com.my](http://www.happyholidays.com.my); 432 Lebuh Chulia).

### Festivals & Events

All the usual festivals are celebrated in Penang, and are spiced with this island's extraordinary enthusiasm. Current events are listed in the

*Penang Tourist Newspaper* and at the website [www.igeorgetownpenang.com](http://www.igeorgetownpenang.com).

### January–February

**Thaipusam** This masochistic-looking festival is celebrated as fervently here as in Singapore and KL, but without quite the same crowds. The Sri Mariamman (p186), Nattukotai Chettiar (p187) and Waterfall Hilltop (p187) temples are the main centres of activity in Penang.

**Chinese New Year** Celebrated with particular gusto in Penang. The Khoo Kongsi (p184) is done up for the event, and dance troupes and Chinese opera groups perform all over the city. On the night before the 15th day of the new year, a fire ceremony takes place at Tua Pek Kong (p185) temple. Numerous Chinese mansions and assembly halls throw their doors open to the public at this time as well.

**Chap Goh Meh** The 15th day of the New Year celebrations, during which local girls throw oranges into the sea from the Esplanade. Traditionally, the girls would chant: 'throw a good orange, get a good husband', while local boys watched and later contacted their dream girl through matchmakers. New Year is also one of the only times to see Baba-Nonya performances of *dondang sayang* (spontaneous and traditional love ballads).

### May–August

#### Penang International Dragon Boat Festival

(May/June) A colourful and popular regatta, featuring the traditional dragon boats.

**Penang Food & Cultural Festivals** (August) Highlights the best of Penang's multi-ethnic heritage.

### September–December

**Lantern Festival** (mid-September) Commemorates the end of Mongol rule in China. It's celebrated by eating moon cakes, Chinese sweets once used to carry secret messages to underground rebel leaders in ancient China.

**Deepavali** (October) The Hindu 'Festival of Lights' is celebrated with music and dancing at venues in Little India.

**Pesta Pulau Penang** (November–December) The annual Penang Islands Festival features various cultural events, parades and a fun-fair.

### Sleeping

Penang has a variety of accommodation, ranging from dives to big corporate-like block towers to boutique heritage properties. Lebuh Chulia and Love Lane make up the heart of Penang's backpacker land, crammed with cheap hostels and hotels. Quality varies enormously, and it pays to check a few out before parting with your cash. Midrange options are mostly found along Jln Penang, where you'll find a string of high-rises. If you're going top-end, there are some large

uber-resorts to choose from (although these tend to be concentrated in Batu Ferrenghi), but we'd recommend opting for one of Penang's excellent heritage-house-cum-hotels.

Be warned that during holidays, most notably Chinese New Year, hotels tend to fill up very quickly and prices can become ridiculously inflated; if you intend to stay at this time, book well in advance.

All budget options listed have shared bathrooms unless otherwise noted, while midrange and top end all have private bathrooms.

## BUDGET

**Blue Diamond Hotel** (☎ 261 1089; 422 Lebu Chulia; dm/s/d from RM8/20/28; 📶 📺 📺) The Diamond is set in a beautiful old Chinese warehouse that contains one of...well, the most *memorable* hostels in Malaysia. The owner, a 30-year veteran of Penang's post office, is almost un-naturally friendly and helpful. If you don't mind a bit of grot (especially in your toilets), this is a good bet. If you like to drink, it's a better one: beer and spirits magically coalesce into guests' hands at all hours. The worst cover band in Malaysia often plays in the courtyard; their follow-up show is to hit on every female guest within arms' reach. This may not sound appealing, yet there's an unmistakably fun vibe here, like that crazy uncle you can't help but love, and lots of return backpackers (male and female) swear by this joint. The on-site Mexican restaurant is as good as you'd expect, which is to say: not very. Air-con rooms with private showers cost RM45.

**100 Cintra Street** (☎ 264 3561/3581; 100 Lebu Cintra; dm/s/d RM12/28/40) This place puts us in a pickle. Set in a wonderful old Peranakan house that also incorporates a cafe and small museum (p186), this hotel is one of the most atmospheric places to stay in the city (which is saying something). But at the time of research we weren't able to visit due to renovations. However, in the past the simple, striking budget rooms were spare, more Zen minimalist than cheapskate corner-cutting. There was a mattress on a wooden platform with a mosquito net and small fan and, all in all, guests were made to feel like junior agents of the East India Company.

**Old Penang Guest House** (☎ 263-8805; 53 Love Lane; dm/s/d RM15/26/32.50) This hotel is probably the only budget heritage hotel in town that feels as if it's been put through a laundry machine. Particularly a boutique-ish laundry machine.

Hardwood floors, white walls, high ceilings and splashes of red paint add a hip solid-coloured vibe to this hostel, otherwise set in a restored pre-WWII house that could easily serve as set piece in a Maugham or Theroux short story. Air-con rooms cost RM50.

**Banana Guest House** (☎ 262 6171; [www.banana.newguesthouse.com](http://www.banana.newguesthouse.com); 355 Lebu Chulia; s/d from RM18/25; 📶 📺 📺) The Banana Pancake Trail (the Southeast Asian backpacker route) lands very firmly in Banana Guest House, another one of those all-purpose hostels/bars/internet cafes/travel agencies you encounter from Bangkok to Bali. Rooms are OK, although some are sectioned off by the thinnest of walls. Come night this is a good spot to meet other travellers, and the bar staff are the friendliest on the island. Pricier air-con digs come with or without toilet (RM50/60).

**SD Guesthouse** (☎ 264 3743; 15 Love Lane; s/d/t from RM18/25/35; 📶 📺 📺) There's creaky floors and cubicle walls, but also free wi-fi and a social vibe; the ups and downs must balance out, because SD is very popular with Georgetown backpackers.

**Jim's Place** (☎ 016-653 6963, 261 8731; 431 Lebu Chulia; r RM20-30; 📶 📺 📺) This handful of fan and air-con rooms are above a popular travellers' cafe. It's the usual backpacker-basic arrangement, with shared bathrooms, and the owner can arrange bus tickets and Thai visas.

**Stardust** (☎ 263 5723; 370 Lebu Chulia; s/d from RM25/35; 📶 📺 📺) Despite having a name that sounds like an ABBA album, Stardust is several cuts above the average Chulia hotel or Love Lane flophouse. Rooms are spotlessly clean and refreshingly airy, and there's wi-fi throughout (plus an internet cafe downstairs).

**Hutton Lodge** (☎ 263 6003; [www.huttonlodge.com](http://www.huttonlodge.com); 17 Jln Hutton; dm/s/d from 28/50/60; 📶 📺 📺) The Hutton's exterior promises a bit more than its interior delivers. From the outside, you see and expect an Old World jaunt with the allure of Asia during the Jazz Age. But the rooms, while comfy and spacious, look like Ikea bed sets for children. It's a decent deal price-wise, but don't expect a heritage-hotel atmosphere a la Old Penang.

**Broadway Budget Hotel** (☎ 262 8550; [www.broadwaybudgethotel.com](http://www.broadwaybudgethotel.com); 35 Lebu Pitt; s/d/t from 35/45/55; 📶 📺 📺) Hovering between the budget and midrange price categories, the Broadway is a good deal if you want some comfort minus a heck of a lot of atmosphere. Its centrally

located, the rooms are large (if bland) and the beds are comfy. There's in-room wi-fi for RM7 a day.

### MIDRANGE

**Segara Ninda** (☎ 262 8748; www.segaraninda.com; 20 Jln Penang; r RM70-110; ☺ ☑) This elegant century-old villa was once the town residence of Ku Din Ku Meh, a wealthy timber merchant and colonial administrator in what is now southern Thailand. His home has been tastefully renovated, incorporating original features such as the carved wooden ventilation panels and staircase and tiled floors. There are 14 simply furnished rooms of varying sizes, and some are very compact, so it pays to check a few out before deciding.

**Malaysia Hotel** (☎ 263 3311; www.hotelregalmalaysia.com.my; 7 Jln Penang; s/d from RM108/138; ☺ ☑) This well-located tower is good for travellers needing the experience of staying in a decently mid-market high-rise. Rooms at the back are quieter and have views of the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion and the Penang Bridge.

**Cathay Heritage** (☎ 262 6271; 15 Lebu Leith; r from RM115; ☺) Once the Cathay Hotel, the owners of this spot clearly picked up on the marketing trend of the moment and made the appropriate name switch to 'Heritage'. And to be fair, this hotel is set in a very atmospheric Chinese mansion, something like a cross between a traditional assembly hall and a Comfort Inn. Rooms aren't as colourful as the lobby and exterior, but they're perfectly serviceable.

**Oriental Hotel** (☎ 263 4218/4211; www.oriental.com.my; 105 Jln Penang; r from RM120; ☺) On the corner of Jln Penang and Lebu Leith, the Oriental is handily placed and pretty vanilla. The decor doesn't seem to have been changed in decades, which is OK, since rooms are clean and comfortable.

**City Bayview Hotel** (☎ 263 3161; www.bayviewhotels.com; 25A Lebu Farquhar; r RM150-185; ☺ ☑) The Bayview pretty much tops out the corporate-tower genre of Penang hotels, both in terms of quality and price, although seasonal specials keep rates competitive. You know what to expect: a big shiny lobby with glass and steel, several different types of restaurant and quite nicely appointed rooms – the top ones have good views out over the Straits.

### TOP END

**G Hotel** (☎ 238 0000; www.ghotel.com.my; 168 Persiaran Gurney; r from RM295; ☺ ☑ ☑) The antithesis of

the E&O is the G, which exemplifies (and aggregates) the contemporary tides of design, lifestyle and luxury amenities sweeping Malaysia's best hotels. Rooms are studies in minimalist, cubist cool, collections of geometric form set off by swatches of blocky colour. Wi-fi, a yoga studio, a spa and a gym round out an exhaustive list of perks. There's a good crowd of creative and simply successful professionals blowing through the doors, giving the G a vibe that's as Manhattan as it is Malaysia.

**Eastern & Oriental Hotel** (☎ 222 2000; www.e-o-hotel.com; 10 Lebu Farquhar; ste from RM1000; ☺ ☑ ☑) One of the classic grande-dame hotels of the famous Sarkies brothers, hoteliers extraordinaire to the British Empire in Asia, the E&O isn't so much a throwback to the colonial era (the building is not the original hotel) as a concerted effort at recreating that time period within a modern building. All in all, the E&O pulls it off. Porters are deferential and dressed (rather humiliatingly) in white shorts, knee socks and pith helmets; the rooms, decked out with white linens, polished marble floors and earth tone accents, look like the sort of suites where Kipling or Maugham would sip port and smoke cigars. Of course, cleverly concealed within the Victorian facade are modern amenities like cable TV, wi-fi, the works. The sea-facing lawn, where you'll find the biggest and oldest java tree in Penang, is a nice spot for relaxing, sipping your gin rickey and yelling for more ice before waxing your moustache.

### Eating

In 2009, Penang was voted by *New York Times* readers one of 44 must-see destinations – and the bulk of public opinion seemed to focus on the state's cuisine, particularly its street food. Well, big surprise: culture combinations tend to produce good food, and Penang's position in the Straits means interesting ingredients were always just the next merchant ship away.

Coming to Penang and not sampling the local food is like going to a Thai island without ever setting foot on the sand or in the sea – you're missing the whole point. And while some menu items might seem a little strange to the uninitiated, in general Penang cooks produce food that is easy even on conservative pallets; you don't need that much daring to enjoy some perfectly prepped chicken-rice.

## THE BUSINESS OF HERITAGE

Ever since Georgetown's inscription on Unesco's World Heritage list in 2008, dilapidated shophouses and mansions have been snapped up and fought over as both savvy investors and heritage lovers scrutinise one of the most unique urban landscapes in Malaysia.

Several private investors have followed the lead established over a decade ago by architect Laurence Loh, whose restoration of the **Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion** (see p185; ☎ 262 5289; www.cheongfattzemansion.com; 14 Lebuhs Leith; r from RM250; 📍) resulted in one of the country's most atmospheric boutique heritage hotels. Even if you don't have a clue what feng shui is, by the time you leave you'll realise it's powerful stuff. The house is arranged around a plant-filled central courtyard from which the greatest *chi* energy emanates. Each room is uniquely themed. Wi-fi is available.

The following recommended boutique heritage properties were open, or about to open, during our research:

**110 Armenian St** (☎ 955 1688; www.bontonresort.com.my; 110 Armenian St; d/house from RM900/1200; 📍 📍) Beautifully restored three-bed shophouse in a rapidly gentrifying but still authentic part of the Heritage Zone. The owner is planning on adding several more hotel-style rooms in a row of yet-to-be-converted houses across the street, as well as a shop stocking arty local products.

**China Tiger** (☎ 012-501 5360; www.tigerrock.info; 25 Lebuhs China; d RM 950; 📍 📍) This place offers just two suites, but they're wonderful. The two levels are connected by spiral staircases, original art decorates the walls, and guests have access to a serene courtyard. Next door, an art gallery is planned.

**Clove Hall** (☎ 229 0818; www.clovehall.com; 11 Clove Hall Rd; d RM500; 📍 📍) Standing on land where the Sarkies Brothers had their first home in Penang, this expertly restored 1920s mansion has five suites: three in the main house and two in smaller buildings in the surrounding gardens, which include a lovely pool.

One of the most famous local dishes is *asam* laksa, or Penang laksa, a fish soup with a sour taste from tamarind (*asam*) paste. It's served with special white laksa noodles in street stalls all around the island.

## CHINESE

There are so many Chinese restaurants in Georgetown that it's impossible to cover them all here. So, in addition to trying the places listed below, go for a wander, find a place that's crowded, ask a local what's good and order up.

**Kafeteria Eng Loh** (cnr Jln Gereja & Lebuhs Penang; mains from RM2.50; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A very simple and rather frayed coffee shop, always full of locals chatting over bowls of *kway teow* (broad rice noodles) and chicken-rice.

**Jit Seng Duck Rice** (☎ 262 2172; 246 Lebuhs Carnarvon; RM3-6; ☎ noon-3pm) This hawker stall on Lebuhs Carnarvon (Jln Cheong Fatt Tze) has an enviable reputation as one of the best providers of duck-rice in town. For the record, duck-rice is exactly what it sounds like: lovingly seasoned and roasted duck with a crisp, sweet skin, concealing firm, juicy flesh below, served with rice softened by a rich gravy and, often enough, a clean, clear soup. The roast pork is great too. Located by the Star Hotel.

**Hui Sin Vegetarian Restaurant** (☎ 262 1443; 11 Lebuhs China; meals around RM4; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) This excellent value buffet restaurant is the place to go for a filling meat-free lunch. Take what you want from the selection of vegetables, curries and different beancurds on offer, and you'll be charged accordingly. Wash it down with a glass of Chinese tea.

**Kheng Pin** (80 Jln Penang; mains from RM4; ☎ 7am-3pm, closed Mon) This hawker stand has a few specialities locals swear by, most famously *lorbak* (spiced ground pork wrapped in bean curd dipped in black gravy) and Hainan chicken-rice, one of the great fast foods of East Asia. The latter is deceptively simple – steamed chicken and rice cooked in chicken broth – easy to muck up and so good when executed right, as it is here. The state government sends Kheng Pin's owner to Adelaide in Australia every year to promote Penang cuisine, so you know he's doing something right.

**Ye Beng Vegetarian Food** (☎ 262 9161; 20 Lebuhs Dickens; meals around RM5; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A popular self-service place for cheap and mostly vegetarian food of the tofu and green vegetables variety. It also serves fish curry.

**Sky Hotel** (☎ 262 2322; 348 Lebuhs Chulia; around RM6; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm) It's incredible that this gem sits in the middle of the greatest concentration

of travellers in Georgetown, yet is somehow almost exclusively patronised (in huge, enthusiastic numbers) by locals. People – what’s happening? *Sigh*. It is incumbent on you to try the *char siew* (barbecued pork), *siew bak* (pork belly), *siew cheong* (honey-sweetened pork) and roast duck. Order your pork *pun fei sau* (half fat, half lean) to get that proper combination of slightly wet and firm roasted goodness.

**Yi Garden Coffee Shop** (150 Jln Macalister; mains from RM6; ☎ dinner & late night) There’s all kinds of hawker stalls here that serve, according to locals, some of the best *pan mee* (flat, sour noodles) and oyster omelettes in town. Very much a Georgetown hangout, this is the kind of street food that attracts lots of mothers with children – in case you were worried about catching any kind of bug off the road.

## INDIAN

Little India is replete with cheap eating places, especially along Lebuah Pasar and Lebuah Penang, serving up curries, roti, tandoori and biryani. Other places are scattered all around town. Several small restaurants and stalls in this area offer cheap North and South Indian food.

**Restoran Kapitan** (☎ 264 1191; 93 Lebuah Chulia; mains from RM3; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Very busy restaurant specialising in tandoori chicken and biryani, along with fish and mutton curries. They do a mean masala tea, too.

**Madras New Woodlands Restaurant** (☎ 263 9764; 60 Lebuah Penang; mains from RM3; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) One of the best bets for vegetarians offers tasty banana-leaf meals and North Indian specialities, including lots of traditional sweets.

**Sri Ananda Bahwan** (☎ 264 4204; www.sriananda.bahwan.com; 55 Lebuah Penang; mains from RM3; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Basic Indian eatery, seemingly forever full of chatting locals, serving up tandoori chicken, *roti canai* (unleavened flaky flat bread) and *murtabak* (roti canai filled with meat or vegetables). There’s an air-con dining hall if you prefer more comfort.

**Khaleel Restaurant** (☎ 885 1469; 48 Jln Penang; mains from RM4; ☎ 24hr) When you’ve hit the sauce too hard, there’s always Khaleel, a 24-hour curry house that is consistently packed with happy, masticating Tamil customers. In point of fact, the chow is just as good sober as sloshed.

**Passage Thru India** (☎ 263 0306; 11 Lebuah Leith; mains from RM12; ☎ lunch & dinner) Top-notch Indian

cuisine is on offer at this smart restaurant in a restored townhouse, decked out with traditional carvings and paintings. The feed is what you would expect at a fine Indian dining establishment in a Western city.

**Maharaj** (☎ 262 0263; 132 Jln Penang; mains from RM14; ☎ lunch & dinner) For a slightly more refined take on your banana-leaf meal, hit up the dark and intimate Maharaj, which serves some fine cuisine with a regional focus on Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, India’s spicy south.

## MALAY

**New World Park** (102 Jln Burma; ☎ lunch & dinner) If you’re nervous about eating street food, this is the place to come. The famous hawker stalls of Swatow Lane have been moved into this flash pavilion, where gems of the Malaysian street are prepped in a sanitized, almost mall-like atmosphere. Laughing families and friends all line up (seriously line up) for *curry mee* (noodles in a curry-like soup), fishball soup and other specialities, served under indisputably clean and safe conditions.

**Hammediyah** (164 Lebuah Campbell; mains from RM3; ☎ lunch & dinner) There’s lots of halal food available in the kitchen, but you, like all the locals in line, shouldn’t leave without trying the *murtabak*, a crepe-esque dish filled with beef and minced onions.

**Kayu Nasi Kandar** (☎ 264 4767; 216 Jln Penang; mains from RM4; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Popular food court-style place serving up cheap and tasty Malay and Indian dishes, including fish curry, tandoori chicken and vegetarian options.

**Restoran Nasi Padang Minang** (☎ 262 9161; 92 Transfer Rd; meals around RM5; ☎ lunch & dinner) Considered the best restaurant in town for Padang food, essentially a large buffet of rice that you scoop selected meats and vegetables onto – think fried fish, fried chicken, veg cooked in chilli paste and the like.

## NONYA

Penang, like Melaka and Singapore, was the home of the Straits-born Chinese, or Baba-Nonya, who combined Chinese and Malay traditions, especially in their kitchens. Penang’s Nonya cuisine is a tad more fiery due to the island’s proximity to Thailand. These days, though, true Nonya cuisine is becoming harder to find and the restaurants are a bit out of the way.

**Hot Wok** (☎ 227 3368; 124 Jln Burma; mains from RM9; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Located in a grand



Nonya mansion, this restaurant feels slightly upscale but is pretty reasonably priced. Try the *otak-otak* (fish wrapped in banana leaves) and *sambal sotong* (chilli squid).

**Our pick Nyonya Baba Cuisine** (☎ 227 8035; 44 Jln Nagore; mains from RM12; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon, dinner only Tue) Located in a beautiful old Chinese household, this is a great place to sample authentic Nonya food – try the *curry kapitan* (chicken curry) or *hong bak* (pork in thick gravy).

## JAPANESE

**Kissa Koyotei** (☎ 226 6272; 148 Jln Hutton; mains from RM15; ☎ lunch & dinner) Get good sushi and ponderous set Japanese lunches in this vaguely surreal restaurant, where the waitresses prance about in pink maid and schoolgirl outfits to loud J-pop.

## WESTERN

There's a concentration of smart Western restaurants and coffee bars on the short pedestrianised section of Jln Penang leading up towards the E&O Hotel.

**Ecco Cafe** (☎ 262 3178; 402 Lebuhs Chulia; from RM15; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Sun) We'd normally be wary of a place selling pizza in the heart of backpacker land, but Ecco shows up our prejudice for the small-mindedness it is. Equally popular with hip locals and travellers, there is some damn fine thin-crust European-style pizza on offer in a cosy space that's as contemporary as it is intimate.

**Opera** (☎ 263 2893; 3E Jln Penang; mains from RM18; ☎ lunch & dinner) Cool jazz murmuring in the background, Oriental artworks and crisp linen tablecloths provide a chic atmosphere for some interesting Western and Asian dishes, including 'hazelnut fish and chips' and stir-fried ostrich. The space also doubles as a lifestyle/design store, in case the ostrich wasn't posh enough.

**Thirty Two** (☎ 262 2232; 32 Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah; mains from RM40; ☎ dinner) Some of the finest dining in the city occurs at this genteel restaurant located in an elegant seaside mansion. The menu is upscale haute French with a touch of Asian fusion (mainly in the form of local ingredients); it's all very good stuff. It offers a cocktail bar and live jazz on Friday and Saturday evenings, but don't forget to dress smart casual.

**Sarkies Corner** (☎ 222 2000; 10 Lebuhs Farquhar; lunch buffet RM42, dinner buffet from RM58; ☎ lunch & dinner)

Sarkies offers different themed dinner buffets every day of the week; the focus shifts from Asian to Western to fusion to the kitchen sink, and its uniformly good stuff (you'll want to dress up). The lunch buffet is gorgeous – it plucks menu items from across the globe, and if you can't find something you want, you're a very picky eater. Finally, for the nascent colonialist deep in your soul, high tea (RM46) is served in the garden from noon to 3pm every Sunday.

**1885** (☎ 261 8333; 10 Lebuhs Farquhar; mains from RM45; ☎ dinner) The elegant main restaurant of the E&O Hotel serves excellent Western cuisine, such as sea bass with truffle sauce, and roast duck. Open for dinner only, with a smart-casual dress code (no T-shirts, shorts or sandals).

## QUICK EATS

We've listed some of Georgetown's best hawker stalls, but there are too many to catalogue in this book. The seafont Esplanade Food Centre is good, as much for delightful sea breezes as the Malay stalls serving delicious Penang specialities. Gurney Drive is packed with cheap and cheerful goodness, and at night the Red Garden behind Hotel Continental offers up stall food and cheesy karaoke – is there a better combination?

Smaller hawker congregations flash up all around town every evening. Lebuhs Chulia has a concentration of Western-style cafes catering to backpackers.

**Mr Pot** (☎ 228-8303; cnr Jln Penang and Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah; mains from RM3; ☎ 24hrs) The name of this place suggests it traffics in one of two forms of custom, and seeing as one of those is punishable by death, you can safely assume you will get very fine coffee (especially iced) at all hours, 365 days a year.

**Rainforest Bakery** (☎ 261 4641; 300 Lebuhs Chulia; ☎ 11am-7pm) This darling little take-away bakery, run by twin brothers Jesse and Jerry Tan, produces European-style baked treats such as scones, cookies and bagels.

**Jing-Si Books & Cafe** (☎ 261 6561; 31 Lebuhs Pantai; RM3; ☎ noon-8pm) A stylish oasis of spiritual calm, this outlet for a Taiwanese Buddhist group's teachings is a wonderful place to revive yourself over a pot of one of its interesting teas or coffees (all only RM3).

Komtar has a supermarket and numerous fast-food outlets. On the 5th floor there's another hawker centre serving all the usual Chinese and Malay dishes, plus some Indian food.



## Drinking

Most of the backpacker hostels serve beer, but it's not terribly cheap and places tend to shut by 11pm. The exception is Blue Diamond, which seems to close whenever the last person passes out.

**our pick** **Pitt Street Corner** (94 Lebu Pitt) Pitt Street Corner feels like the offspring of a hipster bar crossed with a sports pub plunked in Tamil Nadu. It's not a dive but it sure isn't posh, either. Basically, it's a friendly spot for Tamil guys to get together, sink some beer, watch some football and Bollywood and sink a few rounds of pool. While we imagine women would be treated fine here, we never saw any inside the bar on any of our visits.

**Farquhar's Bar** (10 Lebu Farquhar) Colonial British-style bar inside the E&O Hotel, serving beer, traditional pub food and cocktails; try its signature drink, the Eastern & Oriental Sling (RM16.50) brought to you by a white-coated barman.

**Soho Free House** (50A Jln Penang; ☎ noon-midnight) Rather dimly-lit British-style pub spread out over two floors serving, allegedly, Malaysia's biggest selection of draught beers. It shows live sports on satellite TVs on Saturday and gets rowdy in an expat sort of way some nights.

**Slippery Senoritas** (The Garage, 2 Jln Penang) Vaguely Spanish-style bar that has occasional live music. The dress code is smart casual and it's popular with Western expats and the Malaysians who love them (or is that the other way round?).

**B@92** (92 Lebu Gereja) Hip bar with a laid-back attitude that features some live acts and hosts a pretty large – and mixed – expat and well-to-do locals crowd. Has an atmosphere somewhere between a British pub, American chain bar and small music venue.

## Entertainment

**Glo** (☎ 261 1066; The Garage, 2 Jln Penang) If you've been longing for superclubs/meat markets while travelling in Malaysia, here's a taste of what you've been missing. Here you'll encounter ear-splitting bass, big lights, lots of smoke, guys with slicked hair and ladies in little dresses. You know the drill.

**QEII** (☎ 261 2126; 8 Pengkalan Weld) Seemingly surrounded by the Straits, QEII serves passable pizza and better ambience; this spot usually snags a good DJ who keeps funk and slow house grooving over the waterfront views.

**Dome** (Komtar) This geodesic dome is one of those structures that looked dated the minute it was finished but, in any case, it still hosts some pretty good rock shows and other live acts.

## Shopping

Penang is a good place to shop, with plenty of outlets for local crafts and antiques as well as cameras and electronics at competitive prices, although KL has a wider range. Bargaining is usually required, except in department stores. Jln Penang is the best shopping street in Georgetown. A good souvenir is Penang Pewter, a rather more affordable version of the better-known Royal Selangor Pewter, though of equal quality.

## ANTIQUES

**Lean Giap Trading** (☎ 262 0520; 449 Lebu Chulia; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) This jumbled-up little store sells a miscellany of goods, including silverware, Oriental furniture, porcelain and glass. It's got some high quality stuff among the shelves, but you need to poke around with a fair bit of background knowledge.

**Oriental Arts & Antiques** (☎ 261 2748; 440 Jln Penang; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat) Anything old seems to end up in this place, which has a selection of porcelain, furniture, jewellery, toys and general bric-a-brac.

**100 Cintra Street** (100 Lebu Cintra) A small collection of antique stalls occupies the ground floor of this old building. One sells only drinking glasses, others sell porcelain and assorted knick-knacks. For more information about this place, see p186.

## ARTS & CRAFTS

**Alpha Utara Gallery** (☎ 262 6840; www.alpha-utara.com; 83 Lebu China; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) Penang's best gallery displays the work of native son Khoo Sui Hoe and other excellent local artists like Eaton Tam and Dom Ke Pa.

**Auntie Sim** (☎ 016-489 4511; 20 Lebu Pitt; ☎ 10am-6pm) The hours aren't exact, but the fortunate might be: Auntie Sim is a reader of cards, palms, your face and the fates. This author, for instance, will apparently be engaged by 30 and is 'not very smart.' Go figure.

**Bee Chin Heong** (☎ 261 4113; 58 Lebu Kimberley; ☎ 10am-8.30pm) This interesting outlet sells a colourful, bewildering assortment of religious statues, furniture and temple supplies;

if you're after a huge Chinese couch, a household shrine or have RM55,000 to spend on a 2m-tall carved wood Buddha, this is the place to come. Even if you're not buying, it's still worth a look round.

**Fuan Wong** (☎ 262 9079; www.fuanwong.com; 88 Lebuh Armenian; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat) This small gallery showcases the exquisite fused-glass creations of Penang artist Wong Keng Fuan. Also in the same building is Studio Howard (www.studiohoward.com), which showcases excellent photography of Penang street scenes, architecture, etc.

**Hong Giap Hang** (☎ 261 3288; 193-195 Jln Penang; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) If you're looking for pewter products, this place has one of the best ranges in town. It also sells woodcarvings, jewellery, porcelain, crystal and batik.

**Renaissance Pewter** (☎ 264 5410; the Garage, 2 Jln Penang; ☎ 10.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) Locally made Renaissance pewter is another, much cheaper, alternative to Royal Selangor. Decorative tankards, tea caddies, vases and keyrings can be had here.

**Royal Selangor Pewter** (☎ 263 6742; 30 Lebu Light) The top name in Malaysian pewter. This outlet stocks the current range, and pewter-making workshops can be arranged here, costing RM50 for about one hour. Book at least two days in advance.

**Sam's Batik House** (☎ 261 8528; http://samsbatik.house.com; 159 Penang St) When the late Mr Shamdas was dubbed 'Sam' by American soldiers, a legend was born. This is the best place in town for buying sarongs, batik shirts and Indian fabrics and fashions; where else are guys going to find tops that could fit them in on a Bollywood video set?

## SHOPPING CENTRES

**Chowraster Bazaar** (Jln Penang) This shabby old market hall is full of food stalls downstairs, with lots of fruit on display. Upstairs there are clothes stalls, secondhand-book stalls and simple cafes.

**Komtar** (Jln Penang) A vast modern mall with hundreds of shops selling everything from clothes, shoes and electronics to everyday goods.

**Prangin Mall** (Jln Penang) Adjoins Komtar and houses a huge number of shops and restaurants, including smarter chain stores such as Parkson Grand, with a wide range of clothes, cosmetics, household goods and suchlike.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

In 2007 Firefly Airlines, based out of Penang, threw its hat into the Asia budget airlines stakes.

### Airline Offices

**AirAsia** (☎ 261 5642; 332 Lebu Chulia, Georgetown)

**Cathay Pacific** (☎ 226 0411; Menara Boustead, 39 Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah, Georgetown)

**Firefly** (☎ 250 2000; Komtar, Penang Rd, Georgetown)

**Malaysia Airlines** (☎ 217 6321/3/6; 38 Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah, Georgetown)

**Singapore Airlines** (☎ 226 3201; Wisma Penang Gardens, 42 Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah, Georgetown)

**Thai Airways International** (☎ 226 6000; Wisma Central, 142 Jln Burma, Georgetown)

### Domestic Flights

There are several daily connections between Penang and KL, Johor Bahru and Langkawi. Prices vary depending on how far in advance you book, with some fares (for all towns) hovering as low as 38RM (that's basically free with just taxes) and others as expensive as 500RM or more.

### International Flights

Penang is a major centre for cheap airline tickets, although international airfares are less competitive than they used to be. For long-running, reliable agents in Georgetown, see p182.

### BOAT

Eight ferries constantly run (at least every 15 minutes) from Butterworth to **Pulau Penang** (☎ 310 2377, mainland ferry) from 6am to 12.30am and from 5.30am to 1am from the **island** (☎ 210 2363, island ferry). The fare is adult/child RM1.20/60, with free returns.

Both **Langkawi Ferry Service** (LFS; ☎ 264 3088, 263 1398; www.langkawi-ferry.com; PPC Bldg, Pesara King Edward) and **Ekspres Bahagia** (☎ 263 1943; PPC Bldg, Pesara King Edward) operate a shared ferry service to Medan in Sumatra. Travel agencies will book you into whichever company has open seats, but the boats are all the same. These land in Belawan, and the journey to Medan is completed by bus (included in the price), usually taking about 4¼ hours (but sometimes as long as five or six). The ferry leaves both Sumatra and Georgetown at 9am every day (one way/return RM110/180, child RM60/100).

The same two companies also run daily ferries from Georgetown to Kuah on Langkawi (one way/return RM60/115, child RM45/85, 1¼ to 2½ hours). Boats leave at 8.30am and 8.45am; the second service calls in at Pulau Payar first, but you won't be able to disembark unless you're on a diving or snorkelling package (see p188). Boats return from Langkawi at 2.30pm and 5.30pm. Book a few days in advance to ensure a seat.

## BUS

Long-distance bus services leave from the express bus station on Jln Sungei Nibong, just to the south of Penang Bridge. Although travel agents, guesthouses and hotels on Lebuah Chulia sell tickets, it's generally safer to buy them in person at the bus company offices at the station. Taxis to the express bus station cost around RM25 from central Georgetown. You can also take a 303 or 401/401A bus from Komtar mall in central Georgetown (RM2).

From Sungei Nibong there are several daily buses to KL (RM27 to RM60), as well as less frequent buses to Kota Bharu, Melaka, Kuala Terengganu and elsewhere – book well in advance. There are five daily buses to Tanah Rata in the Cameron Highlands (RM23.50 to RM28). Please note that the above prices are especially subject to change.

Many more buses leave from across the channel in Butterworth next to the mainland ferry terminal, and a few long-distance buses also leave from other parts of Georgetown. **Newsia Tours & Travel** (☎ 261 7933; 35-36 Pengkalan Weld) is a major agent.

Many long-distance buses depart in the evening. Typical one-way fares:

Destination	Fare
Alor Setar	RM6.30
Cameron Highlands	RM23.50-28
Ipoh	RM10.70
Johor Bahru	RM49
Kota Bharu	RM27.90-35
Kuala Lumpur	RM27-60
Kuala Perlis	RM9-13
Kuala Terengganu	RM40-53
Kuantan	RM43
Lumut	RM14.90
Melaka	RM36.20
Singapore	RM53
Taiping	RM11.35
Tapah	RM40

From the bus station at Komtar, there are also bus and minibus services to Thailand,

including Hat Yai (RM35); Phuket (RM61 to RM70); Ko Pipi (RM88 to RM90); Ko Samui (RM80); and even Bangkok (RM105 to RM120), though it's a long haul and the train is a lot more comfortable. The minibuses don't go directly to some destinations; you'll probably be dumped for a change of vehicle in Hat Yai or Surat Thani, sometimes with significant waiting times. It's better to buy your ticket from a guesthouse that contracts directly with a minibuss agency, instead of from bucket shops on Lebuah Chulia. Then, in the case of your minibus showing up two hours late, or not at all, you have someone to hold responsible. However, you might get cheaper tickets if you buy directly at the bus station.

## Getting Around

Seberang Perai and Penang are linked by road-bridge and a 24-hour ferry service. Georgetown is well served by bus, and trishaws (see p198) are a popular way to get around the city centre. Buses from Georgetown to other parts of the island are less frequent and getting around the island by road is easiest with your own transport.

## TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

**Penang International Airport** (PEN; ☎ 643 4411) is 18km south of Georgetown. There's a coupon system for taxis from the airport. The fare to Georgetown is RM40.

Taxis take about 45 minutes from the centre of town, while the bus takes at least an hour. Yellow Bus 83 runs to and from the airport (RM1.50) hourly from 6am to 9pm, with stops along Pengkalan Weld, Komtar and Lebuah Chulia.

## BOAT

Ferries between Georgetown and Butterworth run roughly every 20 minutes from 6am to 12.30am; boats leave Georgetown from 5.30am to 1am. The journey takes 15 minutes. The adult/child fare is RM1.20/60 sen; cars cost RM7.70 (depending on the size), motorcycles RM2. Return is free.

## BUS

As in Kuala Lumpur, the federal, as opposed to state government, runs the locals air-conditioned bus service under the auspices of **Rapid Penang** (☎ 238 1313; www.rapidpg.com.my).

Eight colour-coded 'corridors' further divided into 34 routes connect the entire island and the mainland; a comprehensive map can be found at [www.rapidpg.com.my/journey-planner/route-maps](http://www.rapidpg.com.my/journey-planner/route-maps). Buses tend to run every 20 to 45 minutes, usually from 6am to 11pm daily, but check ahead at the Rapid Penang website. There are stops all around the state, with many concentrated at Georgetown and its ferry points.

Fares are a minimum RM1.40, maximum RM4; most trips shouldn't cost more than RM3. By the time you read this, international tourists should be able to buy a RM20 'passport' that provides unlimited rides for one week. Popular routes and prices from Komtar (Kompleks Tun Abdul Razak, Jln Penang) in central Georgetown are listed below:

**Snake Temple** 302/401/401E; RM2.70

**Kek Lok Si** 201/203; RM2

**Penang Hill** 204; RM2

**Teluk Bahang** 101; RM2.50

**Batu Ferringhi** 101; RM2

**Butterworth** (via Penang Megamall) 704 and 701; RM4.8

Although they are supposedly being replaced by the Rapid Penang fleet, we were able to ride some of the older, non-air conditioned state public buses during research. The fares were similar to Rapid Penang; the only difference seemed to be that the driver didn't mind if passengers smoked out the window.

## CAR

Penang Bridge is one of the longest bridges in Asia at 13.5km. If you drive across to the island, there's a RM7 toll payable at the toll plaza on the mainland, but no charge to return.

## Rental

Penang's an easy place to rent a car, but you'll probably have to reserve in advance, especially for weekends and holidays or if you need an automatic car. Rates start at around RM100 per day plus insurance, but drop for longer rentals. Good deals can be found at smaller agents, though the main companies are also worth trying for special deals.

There are many car-hire companies in Georgetown:

**Avis** (☎ 643 9633; Penang International Airport)

**Hawk** (☎ 881 3886; Penang International Airport)

**Hertz** Penang International Airport (☎ 643 0209); Georgetown (☎ 263 5914; 38 Lebuhr Farquhar)

## MOTORCYCLE & BICYCLE

You can hire bicycles from many places, including travellers' guesthouses and shops along Lebuhr Chulia, or out at Batu Ferringhi. It costs RM10 to rent a bicycle, and motorcycles start at RM30 per day. Before heading off on a motorcycle, just remember that if you don't have a motorcycle licence, your travel insurance probably won't cover you.

## TAXI

Penang's taxi drivers flatly refuse to use their meters, so negotiate the fare before you set off. Typical fares around town cost around RM6 to RM12. Outlying sights serviced by taxi from Georgetown include Pulau Tikus (RM15), Batu Ferringhi (RM45), Botanical Gardens (RM40), Penang Hill Funicular/Kek Lok Si Temple (RM40), Snake Temple (RM35) and Penang International Airport (RM35).

## TRISHAW

Bicycle rickshaws are an ideal way to negotiate Georgetown's backstreets and cost around RM30 per hour – but, as with taxis, it's important to make sure you agree on the fare before departure. You won't have any trouble finding a trishaw – more often than not, the drivers will hail you! From the ferry terminal, a trishaw to the hotel area around Lebuhr Chulia should cost RM10 (or you can walk there in about 15 minutes).

## AROUND THE ISLAND

You can make a circuit of the island by car, motorcycle or bicycle, but it's not possible to circle the whole island by bus. If travelling by motorcycle or car, plan to spend about five hours, with plenty of sightseeing and refreshment stops. If you're on a bicycle, allow all day.

It's 70km all the way round, but only the north-coast road runs beside the beaches. The route takes you from Georgetown around the island clockwise. The road to the airport is congested and built up, but it gets much quieter further around on the island's western side.

## Penang Hill (Bukit Bendera)

Rising 821m above Georgetown, the top of Penang Hill (Map p176) provides a cool retreat

from the sticky heat below, being generally about 5°C cooler than at sea level. From the summit there's a spectacular view over the island and across to the mainland. There are some gardens, a simple food court, with one of the original cable-cars kept on show outside, a hotel, police station and post office at the upper funicular station. At the top are an exuberantly decorated **Hindu temple** and a **mosque**. Penang Hill is wonderful at dusk as Georgetown, far below, starts to light up.

Penang Hill was first cleared by Captain Light soon after British settlement in order to grow strawberries (it was originally known as Strawberry Hill). A trail to the top was opened from the Botanical Gardens waterfall and access was by foot, packhorse or sedan chair. The official name of the hill was Flagstaff Hill (now translated as Bukit Bendera), but it is universally known as Penang Hill.

Efforts to make it a popular hill resort were thwarted by difficult access, and the first attempt at a mountain railway, begun in 1897, proved to be a failure. In 1923 a Swiss-built funicular (one way/return RM3/4, every 30 minutes 6.30am to 9.30pm Sunday to Friday, to 11.30pm Saturday) was completed. A tiny **museum** (admission free) inside the station displays some photographs and oddments from those early days. The trip takes a crawling 30 minutes, with a change of carriages at the halfway point. On the way, you pass the bungalows originally built for British officials and other wealthy citizens. Queues on weekends and public holidays can be annoyingly long, with waits of up to 30 minutes.

If you're fit, a number of roads and **walking trails** traverse the hill; you can walk the 5.5km to the Botanical Gardens (Moon Gate; p200) in about three hours from the trail near the upper funicular station. The easier Jeep track from the top also leads to the gardens, just beyond Moon Gate. A signboard on the hill shows walking trails going as far as Teluk Bahang, but these are not well marked and not recommended.

The 11-room **Bellevue Hotel** (☎ 829 9500; penbell@streamyx.com; s & d RM179, f RM219) is the only place to stay here, but while the garden offers some splendid views over Georgetown, it's a little frayed at the edges and very overpriced. The hotel has a restaurant that's nice for a hilltop drink and a small **aviary garden** (adult/child RM4/2; ☎ 9am-6pm) featuring exotic birds.

**David Brown's Restaurant** (☎ 828 8337; info@penanghillco.com.my; mains from RM15; ☎ 9am-9pm) occupies a hillock on Penang Hill once set aside by Francis Light for strawberry planting. Run by an Anglophone Malay-Chinese (of course), the restaurant serves steak-and-kidney pies, Beef Wellington, bubble and squeak and rainbow trout. No pork bacon, though; we're still in Malaysia.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Komtar, or along Lebuah Chulia, you can catch one of the frequent Rt 204 Rapid Penang buses (RM2) to the funicular station at Stesen Bukit Bendera. From Air Itam, walk five minutes to the funicular railway station. A taxi from the ferry terminal in Georgetown to the funicular station is RM40.

The energetic can take one of the walking trails to/from the Botanical Gardens.

## Kek Lok Si Temple

The 'Temple of Supreme Bliss' is also the largest Buddhist **temple** (Map p176; ☎ 9am-6pm) in Malaysia and one of the most recognisable buildings in the country, in its way as much a part of the national iconography as the Petronas Towers and the orang-utan. Built by an immigrant Chinese Buddhist in 1890, Kek Lok Si is a cornerstone of the Malay-Chinese community, who provided the funding for its two-decade long construction (and ongoing additions). The temple both stands atop and is carved into the slope of Air Itam, near Penang Hill.

To reach the entrance, walk through a maze of souvenir stalls, past a tightly packed turtle pond and murky fish ponds, until you reach the heart of the complex, where you'll find **Ban Po Thar** (Ten Thousand Buddhas Pagoda; admission RM2), the seven-tier, 30m-high tower that is the 'face' of Kek Lok Si. The design is said to be Burmese at the top, Chinese at the bottom and Thai in between. In another three-storey shrine, there's a large Thai Buddha image that was donated by King Bhumibol of Thailand. There are several other temples here, as well as shops and a **vegetarian restaurant** (☎ 828 8142; mains from RM5; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun). A **cable-car** (one-way/return RM4/2) whisks you to the highest level, presided over by an awesome 36.5m-high bronze statue of **Kuan Yin**, goddess of mercy. Sixteen highly decorated bronze columns will eventually support a roof over the statue, and 1000



2m-high statues of the goddess are planned to surround this area.

Also up here are a couple more temples, a fish pool, extensive gardens and statues of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac.

It's an impressive complex, though crowded with tourists and shoppers as much as worshippers. The temple is about a 3km walk from Penang Hill (p198), or you can hop a Rapid Penang bus 201/203 from central Georgetown to Air Itam (RM2), at the foot of the temple.

## Botanical Gardens

The 30-hectare **Botanical Gardens** (Map p176; ☎ 227 0428; www.penangbotanicgardens.gov.my; Waterfall Rd; admission free; 🕒 5am-8pm) are also known as the Waterfall Gardens, after the stream that cascades down from Penang Hill. They've also been dubbed the Monkey Gardens for the many long-tailed macaques that scamper around (they've taken over the well-executed website as well). Don't be tempted to feed them; monkeys do bite, and there's a RM500 fine if you're caught. Within the grounds are an orchid house, palm house, bromeliad house, cactus garden and numerous tropical trees, all labelled in English. A path leads to the top of Penang Hill.

TransitLink bus 202 runs past on the way to Teluk Bahang.

## Museum & Art Gallery

Six kilometres south of Georgetown, on the sprawling campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia, is the **Museum and Art Gallery** (Map p176; ☎ 261 3144; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Sun-Thu, 10am-12.15pm & 2.45-5pm Fri, 10am-1pm Sat). There's a collection of traditional Malaysian and Indonesian musical instruments (including several full gamelan orchestras), aboriginal and Baba-Nonya pieces, and fascinating contemporary Malaysian art and photography.

To get here you'll need to take a 304 bus from Georgetown (RM1.40) to Universiti Sains Malaysia.

## Pulau Jerejak

Lying 1.5 nautical miles off Penang's southeast coast, Pulau Jerejak is a thickly forested private island that has been home to a leper colony and a prison in its time, and is today occupied by the **Jerejak Resort & Spa** (Map p176; ☎ 658 7111; www.jerejakresort.com; r RM182-450; 🍷 🍷). The resort has some beautifully furnished chalets and a

spa offering various kinds of massage, as well as a less luxurious 'adventure village' complex with simple doubles and dorms, though you will need to book the whole dorm room.

The resort has its own jetty on Penang Island, and day-trippers are welcome. Boats leave roughly every two hours (RM20/16 per adult/child). The price includes a light snack, or one-hour bike rental, and activities on the island include jungle-trekking (one hour, RM20). There's also a suspension-bridge trail (RM15).

No buses run past the jetty; a taxi from Georgetown will cost around RM50.

## Snake Temple

Perhaps the most misleadingly named destination in Penang is about 3km before the airport. Not that there's not snakes in the **Snake Temple** (Temple of the Azure Cloud; Map p176; 🕒 9am-6pm). But c'mon – you read 'Snake Temple' and expect beating drums, pythons coiled around lithesome sacrificial virgins, mad monks wielding trained vipers...nah. It's just a temple with some doped up (or seemingly doped up) snakes. It's dedicated to Chor Soo Kong, a Buddhist priest and healer, and was built in 1850 by one of his grateful patients. The several resident venomous Wagler's pit vipers and green tree snakes are said to be slightly stoned by the incense smoke drifting around the temple during the day, but at night they slither down to eat the offerings and apparently throw a huge party, leaving them too messed up to do anything but lay around all the next day. There's a small **snake exhibition** (adult/child RM5/3) with tanks containing various snakes, including pythons and cobras. Persistent snake handlers will charge RM30 for taking your photo holding a snake.

From Georgetown, take a 302 or 401/401E bus to Bayan Lepas (RM2.70) and ask to be let off at the Snake Temple.

## Fishing Villages

About 3km after the Snake Temple, you reach the turn-off to the Chinese fishing village of **Batu Maung** (Map p176). The renovated seaside temple here has a shrine dedicated to the legendary Admiral Cheng Ho, also known as Sam Poh. The temple sanctifies a huge 'footprint' on the rock that reputedly belonged to the famous navigator. Devotees pray before his statue and drop coins into the water-filled footprint before catching a bite to eat at Best



## A KOPEL ECOTOURISM IDEAS

A new ecotourism project is trying to extract tourists from the Georgetown-Northern Beaches region to Balik Pulau and the oft-ignored other sides of Pulau Pinang. KOPEL (Koperasi Pelancongan Pulau Pinang Berhad/Penang Tourism Cooperative Ltd), originally started as a cooperative for trishaw drivers, now puts visitors face to face with many of the traditional folkways that have dominated Malay life. In Balik Pulau this includes tours of traditional handicrafts, a goat farm, paddy fields, seafood markets, palm sap harvesting and the like.

And now KOPEL is sponsoring nine homestays in villages scattered across rarely visited corners of Penang, including the oft-ignored mainland. This is a pretty incredible opportunity for those missing a sense of 'old Asia' to connect to a way of life that is hard to grasp in rapidly modernising Malaysia. Under the auspices of a KOPEL homestay you'll be living life in tune with the rhythms of your hosts, who may be rice farmers, catfish fishermen and the like. Besides being a way of learning about a side of Malay life tourists rarely get to experience, some of the KOPEL homestay sites, like Pulau Betong, a small island off Pulau Penang's coast, are gorgeous, undisturbed slices of nature in their own right.

Rates vary hugely depending on season, length of stay and number of visitors – check the website and get in touch with **KOPEL** (☎ 04-250 5500; www.kopel.com.my) directly for more information on the above.

View seafood restaurant outside. Buses 302 (RM3.40) and 207 (RM4) from Georgetown go past Batu Maung.

Back on the highway, the road climbs up, then drops down to **Teluk Kumbang** (Map p176), from where you can detour to the village of **Gertak Sanggul** (Map p176), which has stalls on the seaside selling fresh fish. You'll pass some pint-sized scenic beaches on the way; none are particularly good for swimming.

## Penang War Museum

Heading west of Batu Maung on the road to Teluk Kumbang, you'll soon come upon the **Penang War Museum** (Map p176; ☎ 626 5142; Bukit Batu Maung; adult/child RM25/12.50; ☎ 9am-7pm), perched on top of the steep Bukit Batu Maung. The former British fort, built in the 1930s, was used as a prison and torture camp by the Japanese during WWII. Today, the crumbling buildings have been restored as a memorial to those dark days. Barracks, ammunition stores, cookhouses, gun emplacements and other structures can be explored in this eerie, atmospheric place, and there are information boards in English all over the site.

Yellow Bus 69 from Georgetown swings by below the hill.

## Balik Pulau

☎ 04 / pop 195,000

Balik Pulau (Map p176) is the main town on the island circuit. There are a number of restaurants, food stalls and a daily market here,

but no accommodation, or at least none of note. If you want to stay out here, just walk around with a smile on your face; locals have a habit of offering to put you up for the night. It's a good place for lunch and the local speciality, *laksa balik pulau*, is a must; it's a tasty rice-noodle concoction in a thick fish-broth, with mint leaves, pineapple slivers, onions and fresh chillies.

Balik's Catholic **Holy Name of Jesus Church** was built in 1854, and its twin spires stand impressively against the jungle behind. The town's other claim to fame is its orchards of durian, clove and nutmeg trees.

You can reach Balik Pulau via bus 401/401E or 404 (tickets cost approximately RM4) from Georgetown and Bayan Lepas, bus 501 from Batu Feringghi (RM3.40) and bus 502 from Kek Lok Si (RM2.70).

## Sungai Pinang to Pantai Acheh

After Balik Pulau you pass through an area of Malay *kampung* and clove, nutmeg, rubber and durian plantations. Sungai Pinang, a busy Chinese village built along a stagnant river, and Pantai Acheh, an isolated fishing village, are both worth a peek, if only because you'll likely be peeked back at; very few tourists make it out this way.

About 2km further along the road to Teluk Bahang, the **Tropical Fruit Farm** (Map p176; ☎ 227 6223; ☎ 9am-6pm) cultivates over 140 types of tropical and subtropical fruit trees, native and hybrid. The two-hour tours (RM25/17

per adult/child) are pretty educational and include a fruit sampler tasting. Most visitors come on organised trips. Bus 501 from Balik Pulau (RM2) travels past the Tropical Fruit Farm.

## Titi Kerawang

☎ 04

After the turn-off to Pantai Acheh, the road starts to climb and twist, offering glimpses of the coast and the sea far below. During durian season, stalls are set up along the road selling the spiky orbs, and you can see nets strung below the trees themselves to protect the precious fruits when they fall.

The jungle becomes denser here before you reach Titi Kerawang. Once the waterfall flowed into a natural swimming pool just off the road, but the nearby dam has left the stream a trickle.

As you descend towards the north coast you'll pass the new dam and come upon the **Teluk Bahang Forest Reserve** (Map p176; ☎ ranger's office 885 1280; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun, 9am-noon & 2.45-5pm Friday). Several kilometres south of Teluk Bahang, it has gentle trails through

the jungle, a few waterfall pools and a small, specialist **Forestry Museum** (☎ 885 2388; admission RM1; 🕒 9am-5pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun, 9am-noon & 2.45-5pm Fri).

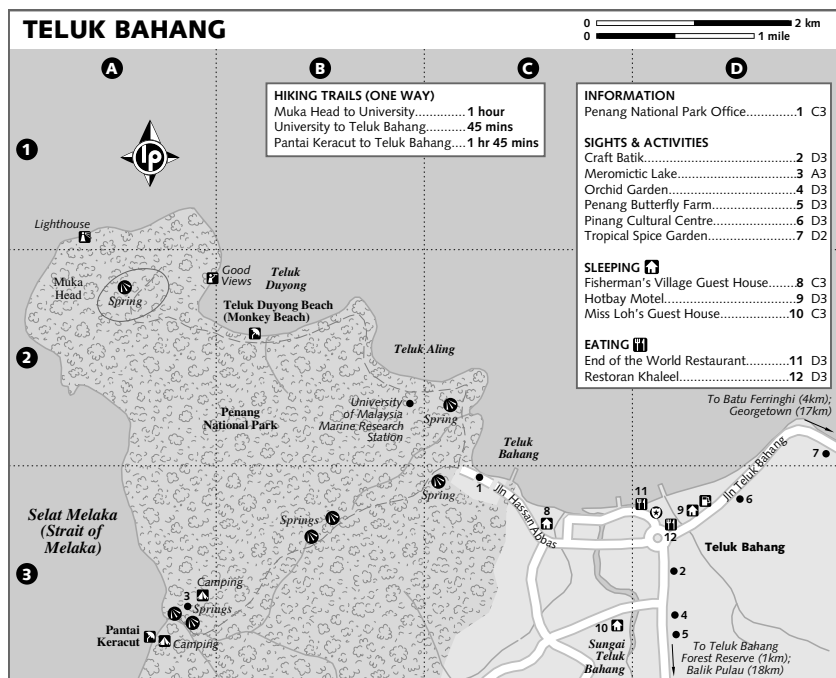
A little nearer the coast is the **Penang Butterfly Farm** (Map p202; ☎ 885 1253; www.butterfly-insect.com; 830 Jln Teluk Bahang; adult/child RM20/10; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun), with several thousand live butterflies representing over 150 species flapping around like buttery pastel clouds. There are also some fascinating beetles, lizards and spiders crawling about.

From here it's 1km north to the bus stop in Teluk Bahang, passing along the way an **Orchid Garden** (Map p202), where the colourful display of blooms is sure to delight horticulturalists, and **Craft Batik** (Map p202; ☎ 885 1302) factory and shop, a somewhat touristy and overpriced outlet for sarongs and the like.

## Teluk Bahang

☎ 04 / pop 2500

If Batu Ferringhi is Penang's version of Cancun, Teluk Bahang is the quiet (sometimes deathly quiet) beach a few kilometres past



the party. There's not enough beach here for any resorts to crop up, so the main thing to do is tool around **Penang National Park** (Taman Negara Pulau Pinang), which at just 2300 hectares is the smallest in Malaysia. It encompasses the headland, and has some interesting and challenging trails through the jungle.

From Teluk Bahang you can trek down the beach to **Muka Head**, the isolated rocky promontory at the extreme northwestern corner of the island marked by a lighthouse, which is off limits. This is a reasonably easy walk, taking around 3½ hours. The trail passes the University of Malaysia Marine Research Station and the privately owned Teluk Duyong beach, also called Monkey Beach, named for the numerous primates who scamper about here. A **canopy walk** over some of the trees was in the works during our visit, but had yet to be completed.

A more difficult trail heads inland towards **Pantai Keracut**, a beautiful white-sand beach which is a popular spot for picnics. Nearby is the unusual **meromictic lake**, a fascinating rarity as lakes go (bear with us): it's composed of two separate layers of unmixed freshwater on top and seawater below. The resulting layered freshwater and saltwater support a unique ecosystem. Learn more by pitching your tent on the nearby shore.

The small **Penang National Park office** (☎ 881 3530/3500; Jln Hassan Abbas; ☎ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 8am–noon & 2–4pm Sat & Sun) is near the park entrance in Teluk Bahang. It has a few maps and leaflets. Guides cost RM100 for a full day, although they may be hard to find on weekdays.

The **Pinang Cultural Centre** (☎ 885 1175; Jln Teluk Bahang), down the road from the Penang Mutiara Beach Resort, only opens for large, pre-arranged tour groups. Local handicraft exhibitions, cultural shows and buffets are held here. Your hotel should have the latest details and costs.

Nearby is the **Tropical Spice Garden** (☎ 881 1797; www.tropicalspicegarden.com; Jln Teluk Bahang; adult/child RM14/8; ☎ 9am–6pm), which is not to be confused with Tropical Fruit Farm! This former rubber plantation is now basically one of the best smelling places in the world, overflowing as it is with cinnamon, pepper plants, star anise and everything else culled from your mum's spice rack, growing here in explosive fecundity.

## SLEEPING

Rooms have private bathrooms unless otherwise noted.

**Miss Loh's Guest House** (☎ 885 1227; off Jln Teluk Bahang; dm/s/d with shared bathroom from RM8/15/30; ☎) Miss Loh's is a bit of an anomaly, a throw-back to the good old days of long-term back-packing. Her ramshackle guesthouse feels as much run by the guests (most of whom are sticking around for a bit) as anyone else, although we suppose the real masters of the house are the cats and dogs who have the run of the grounds. Rates are negotiable for longer stays, but Miss Loh won't accept telephone reservations. There are communal shower and toilet blocks. To find the guesthouse, look for a store on Teluk Bahang's main street (the one street) that says 'GH Information' – this is your contact into Miss Loh's little world.

**Fisherman's Village Guest House** (☎ 885 2936; 60 Jln Hassan Abbas, Kampong Nelayan; dm/d from RM7/18; ☎) Fisherman's Village isn't quite as laid-back as Miss Loh's, but that's being pretty relative. This is just the sort of garden spot to fully immerse yourself in some indolent idleness. It feels more like a homestay than anything, and you'll probably be tempted to let yourself get accustomed to the slow pace of life here.

**Hotbay Motel** (☎ 016-455 9062; 48 Jln Teluk Bahang; rRM65-85; ☎) Situated in the main shopping area east of the roundabout, Hotbay Motel offers fair motel-style rooms, with a communal TV lounge at the front. Rooms with five and seven beds are also available (RM150/210); prices here are pretty negotiable.

## EATING

With all those fishing boats in the harbour, fresh and tasty seafood is guaranteed.

**Restoran Khaleel** (Jln Teluk Bahang; mains from RM4; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner). This little food court next to the Hotbay Motel offers the best value along here. The usual Malay specialities like *nasi goreng* and fish-head curry are available.

**End of the World Restaurant** (☎ 885 1189; mains from RM15; ☎ lunch & dinner) At the western end of the village by the jetty, this restaurant is famous for its fish dishes and huge range of seafood, but it's a little overpriced.

The main shopping area along the road heading east to Batu Ferringhi also has a few coffee shops where travellers can find cheaper Chinese dishes and seafood, as well as a couple of good South Indian places, which sell dishes like *murtabak* and *dosa* (savoury Indian pancakes).

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

Bus 101 runs from Georgetown to Teluk Bahang (RM2.50) from roughly 6am to 11pm.

**Batu Ferringhi**

☎ 04

The road from Teluk Bahang along the coast to Batu Ferringhi is a picturesque stretch of small coves and more beaches. Batu Ferringhi (Foreigner's Rock) is a resort strip stretching along Jln Batu Ferringhi, the main drag, which is lined with big hotels, tourist shops and restaurants. A lot of package resort types end up here, as do an increasing amount of tourists from the Gulf States – you'll likely see men walking shirtless next to women in full *chador* and veil on the beach.

There's a good night market and the **Yahong Art Gallery** (☎ 881 1251; [www.yahongart.com](http://www.yahongart.com); 58D Jln Batu Ferringhi; ☎ 9.30am-9pm) sells a vast range of Asian antiques and art, including jewellery, pewter, batik paintings, woodcarvings and, less appealingly, ivory.

The beach is fine for sunbathing, but doesn't compare to Malaysia's best. The water isn't very clear, the sand is more rocky and

silty than powdery, and there are too many ATVs roaring up and down the sand, which is hardly relaxing. That said, it's a nice place to get a tan or soak after getting a tan.

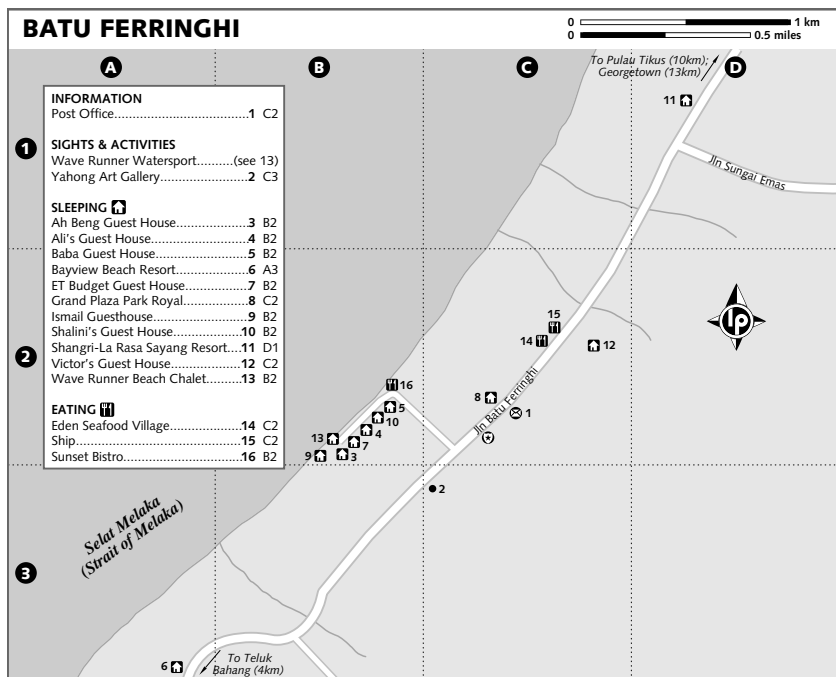
**ACTIVITIES**

There are plenty of watersports outfits along the beach; they tend to rent out waverunners (RM120 for 30 minutes) and run water-skiing (RM100 for 15 minutes) and parasailing (RM80 for 15 minutes) trips.

After which you might need a relaxing massage. All sorts of foot masseuses will offer you their services; expect to pay around RM40 for a 30-minute deep-tissue massage. And yes, they feel heavenly.

**SLEEPING**

Batu Ferringhi, along with Teluk Bahang, was once a favourite stopover on the budget travellers' trail, and although there's still a clutch of backpacker hostels near the beach, these days the place is dominated by huge luxury developments. Outside high season (roughly December to February), big discounts are often available. Budget places all have shared bath-



rooms except where indicated; midrange and top-end options all have private bathrooms. The budget places here are all practically carbon copies of each other: nice if bland rooms in shared family-run houses, clean conditions and easy access to the beach.

### Budget

The following are all practically carbon copies of each other: nice if bland rooms in shared family-run houses, clean conditions and easy access to the beach.

**ET Budget Guest House** (☎ 881 1553; 47 Batu Ferringhi; r RM25-60; 🏠) A double-storey house with basic rooms, most with shared bathroom. The pricier air-con rooms come with TVs and showers.

**Victor's Guest House** (☎ 881 1005; 399 Jln Batu Ferringhi; r RM30-45; 🏠) Down a dusty lane off the main road, Victor's is a friendly Indian guest-house with large clean rooms upstairs and down. The bare brick walls are a bit cheerless, but it's good value and in a quiet location with chickens pecking about outside.

**Baba Guest House** (☎ 881 1686; babaguesthouse2000@yahoo.com; 52 Batu Ferringhi; r RM30-60; 🏠) Tidy family home with plain rooms, most with shared bathrooms. The dearer air-con rooms come with fridges and showers.

**Shalini's Guest House** (☎ 881 1859; 56 Batu Ferringhi; r RM30-60, apt 120-200; 🏠) This old wooden two-storey house has a friendly family atmosphere. Rooms are basic but neat and some have balconies. The priciest ones have private bathrooms.

**Ah Beng Guesthouse** (☎ 881 1036; 54C Batu Ferringhi; r RM50-70; 🏠) Pricier than most of the beach chalets here, this place has small but comfortable rooms, some with sea-facing balconies. The most expensive rooms have hot water, TVs and fridges.

**Ali's Guest House** (☎ 881 1316; 53 Batu Ferringhi; r RM60-100; 🏠) Simple budget place with a popular open-air restaurant at the front. It's a little pricier and subsequently a little nicer than the above properties, but heads up: no alcohol allowed on site. Breakfast is included.

### Midrange

The following rates may be negotiable in low season.

**Ismail Guesthouse** (☎ 881 2599; Batu Ferringhi; r RM80-160; 🏠) Like its next-door neighbour, Wave Runner, Ismail boasts comfy, cool concrete beach chalets plopped right on the sand.

**Wave Runner Beach Chalet** (☎ 881 4753; 54 Batu Ferringhi; r RM120-150; 🏠) Right on the sand, this brick chalet block has just five rooms, so it's often full. Rooms are fresh and clean, with tiled floors, two double beds, TVs, kettles and private showers. There are a few food stalls on the doorstep.

### Top End

**Grand Plaza Park Royal** (☎ 881 1133; [www.penang.parkplazahotels.com](http://www.penang.parkplazahotels.com); Jln Batu Ferringhi; r/ste from RM284/418; 🏠 📺 🚰) With 330 rooms, this place still isn't the biggest resort here, but it is one of the better ones. The lobby lounge, with its squashy sofas and piano bar, leads out onto a clean and attractive stretch of beach. Rooms are large and those with sea views are, of course, preferable. Nonguests can use the gardens and pools for RM25 per day, including lunch.

**Bayview Beach Resort** (☎ 881 2123; [www.bayviewbeach.com](http://www.bayviewbeach.com); Jln Batu Ferringhi; r/ste from RM293/540; 🏠 📺 🚰) At the western, and quieter, end of the beach, this is a gigantic place set in lovely palm-filled gardens. It has everything you could wish for, including a watersports centre, a gym, squash courts, shops and bars, including one in the middle of the large swimming pool.

**Shangri-La Rasa Sayang Resort** (☎ 888 8888; [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com); Jln Batu Ferringhi; r from RM650; 🏠 📺 🚰) A vast luxury resort on a fine stretch of beach. All rooms have balconies, many with sea views. There's a health club, tennis courts, putting green, several restaurants and all the bowling, scraping service and grandiosity you'd expect at such a price.

### EATING & DRINKING

**Sunset Bistro** (☎ 012-553 1313; Batu Ferringhi; mains from RM9; 🍷 noon-1am, to 3am Fri & Sat) Sunset sets the tone for several other beach restaurants in Batu Ferringhi: decent, overpriced executions of pasta, burgers, Chinese, seafood and Malaysian standards. The hiked prices are basically sand-between-your-toes tax.

**Ship** (☎ 881 2142; [www.theship.com.my](http://www.theship.com.my); 69B Jln Batu Ferringhi; mains from RM15; 🍷 lunch & dinner) You can't miss this one: it's a full-sized replica of a wooden sailing ship, specialising in hefty steaks and seafood. Escargots and oysters are also on the rather overpriced menu. It's quite smart inside, but rather dark.

**Eden Seafood Village** (☎ 881 1236; 69A Jln Batu Ferringhi; mains from RM20; 🍷 dinner) A huge barn-like place serving seafood plucked from

aquariums at the entrance, Cantonese style. Oysters, crab, lobster and a veritable ocean of fish are available. There's a free dance show every evening at 8.30pm. A lot of locals eat here for nice nights out.

There are basic food stalls on the beach-front near the budget guesthouses, where you can enjoy fresh fish. On the corner of Jln Sungai Emas, Global Bay Food Court has cheap Western and Chinese meals.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus 101 runs from Georgetown to Batu Ferringhi (RM2) from roughly 6am to 11pm.

#### Pulau Tikus

☎ 04

Heading back into Georgetown from Batu Ferringhi, you'll pass **Tanjung Bungah** (Cape of Flowers), the first real beach close to the city, but it's not good for swimming. Even so, big hotels

and apartment blocks are cropping up everywhere. Batu Ferringhi is still a better option.

After Tanjung Bungah, you'll enter the Pulau Tikus (Midlands) suburbs, full of discos, wining-and-dining venues, cinemas, and megamalls like Midlands 1-Stop and Island Plaza. A taxi from Lebuah Chulia to Midlands costs RM20.

Pulau Tikus is the beginning of scenic Gurney Dr, with its great sea views and hawker food. Eventually it intersects with Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah, formerly Millionaire's Row, where nouveau riche Chinese in the early 20th century competed to see who could build the most impressive mansion. Many of these mansions have now been demolished or abandoned, or taken over by squatters, fronted by office space or even converted into fast-food outlets.

Buses 101, 104 and 304 all run from Georgetown to Pulau Tikus (RM1.40).



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