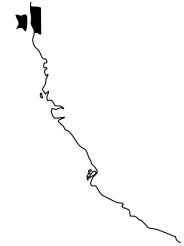


Penang



Affectionately known as the Pearl of the Orient, Penang, like the finest of its namesake gem has layers of multihued depth. Georgetown attracts tourists with its eclectic colonial architecture, temples and museums, lively Chinese culture, nonstop shopping and array of food. But don't forget the rest of the island where you'll find Penang National Park, Malaysia's newest and smallest national park with its secluded monkey beaches, a mainstream resort town on the northern coast, Penang Hill with its funicular railway and colonial hill station, and the crowded, brightly painted Kek Lok Si Temple – the largest Buddhist shrine in the country.

If you take a ride around the island, you'll go through sprawling urban mediocrity that suddenly gives way to primary rainforests, rocky coastline dotted with white-sand beaches, fruit plantations and rickety fishing villages. You could choose a tour where you'll be led through all the major sights or spend a day or two meandering through forgotten corners with your own transport. The beaches aren't as spectacular as on Malaysia's east-coast islands or even just north on Pulau Langkawi, but they do offer a peaceful respite from the city.

The strip of mainland coast known as Seberang Perai (or Province Wellesley) is the mainland portion of the state that many people don't even know is Penang. There's little to do other than hop on an onward train or catch the few sights of Butterworth – unless you take the local fishermen's ferry to Penang Island, a Malay side of Penang that few tourists ever see.

Fast and frequent flights make it possible to make a day trip to Penang from Kuala Lumpur (KL), but you'd miss much of what the island has to offer. For a more leisurely trip, come by bus or train and spend a few days soaking up the refreshingly unhurried island atmosphere.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Eating at Georgetown's myriad **hawker stalls** (p194)
- Hiking to white-sand monkey beaches in **Penang National Park** (p207) and enjoying the rainforest in **Teluk Bahang Forest Reserve** (p206)
- Grooving to Bollywood tunes, dining on banana-leaf meals or shopping for saris in Georgetown's **Little India** (p183)
- Exploring the baroque **Khoo Kongsi** (p181)
- Joining the mob of tourists visiting **Kek Lok Si Temple** (p202) and taking the cable car to the statue of Kuan Yin
- Touring Chinatown's **Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion** (p181) to learn about its original Chinese merchant-owner
- Taking a drive through Penang Island's sleepy southern **fishing villages** (p204)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 04

■ POPULATION: 1.31 MILLION

■ AREA: 1031 SQ KM

HISTORY

Little is known of Penang's early history. Chinese seafarers were aware of the island, which they called Betelnut Island, as far back as the 15th century, but it appears to have been uninhabited. An English merchant-adventurer called Captain James Lancaster, swung by in 1593 and at this time Penang was still an unpopulated jungly wilderness. 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 them trading rights in exchange for military assistance against Siam.

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

Unbeknownst to the sultan of Kedah, Light had promised military protection without getting the OK from the East India Company. When Kedah was later attacked by Siam, no aid was given. The sultan tried to take back

the island but was unsuccessful. His fumbled attempt only resulted in more land, a strip of the mainland now called Seberang Perai, being ceded to Light in 1800. The sultan did however manage to bargain for rental fees; the East India company agreed to an annual honorarium of 10,000 Spanish dollars payable to the sultan of Kedah. Through the years the amount has increased and today the state of Penang still pays the sultan of Kedah RM18,800 per year.

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 18th 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.

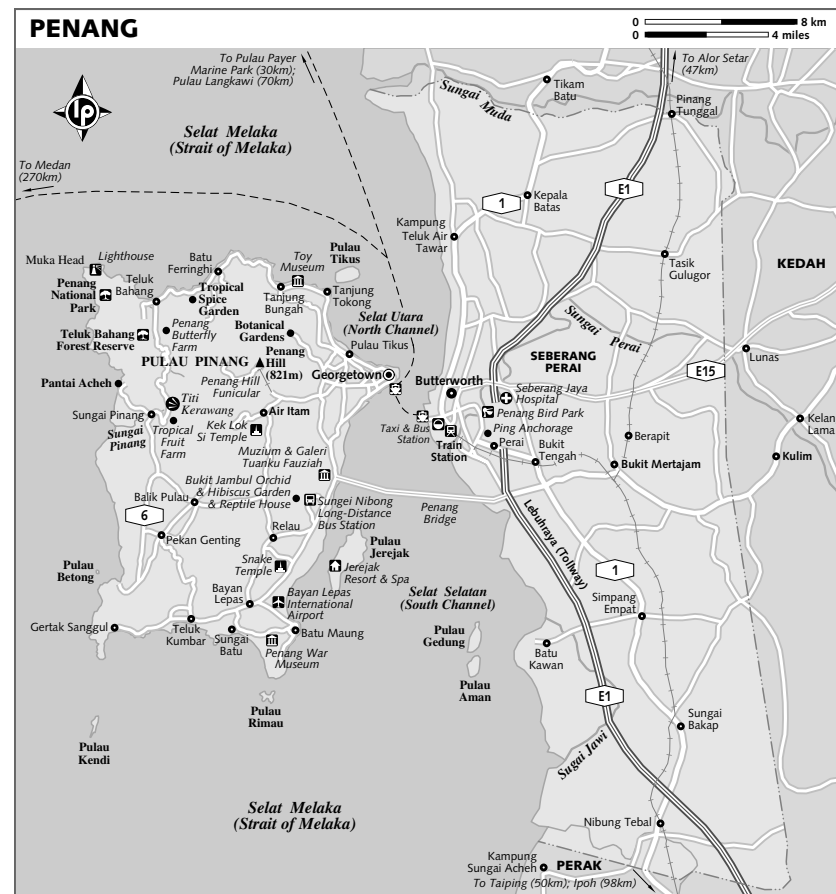
Penang briefly became the capital of the Straits Settlements (which included Melaka and Singapore) in 1826, until it was superseded by the more thriving Singapore. By the middle of the 19th century, Penang

TURNING JAPANESE?

The Japanese began bombing the island of Penang on 8 December 1941; after nine days of nonstop air raids the island surrendered. When the schools reopened, they taught only in Japanese, cinemas played only Japanese films and amusement parks were reborn as gambling halls. Many public buildings and private houses were taken over and rice was rationed. Soon consumer goods became hard to come by and the Japanese declared that Penang's currency was no longer legal. The new currency brought inflation and the development of a black market. Many Penang residents fended off starvation by growing their own fruits and vegetables and keeping chickens.

But all this was nothing compared to the terror that the new regime instilled in the people of Penang. The Japanese were accused of attempting to purge the island of its Chinese population, and the rigidity and militancy of the regime was difficult for everyone. In the early days rape was commonplace, and officers would spontaneously order beheadings as well as a slew of horrific tortures. Men were sent away to do forced labour on the Burma Railway in Thailand (also called the Death Railway) where many died of starvation, disease and overwork.

While the reign of terror was meant to scare the populace into accepting Japanese rule and culture, it had the opposite effect. An underground resistance, made up primarily of Chinese and Malay members of the communist party, quietly flourished. The shattered economy was no aid to the Japanese war effort. With the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the Japanese surrendered and the British limped back to re-establish their shaken authority.



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: the Cantonese-speaking Ghee Hin and the Hakka-speaking Hai San, who had each allied themselves with similar Malay groups. Today's Cannon St is so-named from the holes in the ground from cannon balls that had been fired from Khoo Kongsi (p181).

During the early 20th century the romance of Penang attracted visits by Somerset

Maughan, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling and Herman Hesse.

There was little action in Penang during WWI, but WWII was a different story. When it became evident that the Japanese would attack, Penang's Europeans were immediately evacuated leaving behind a largely defenceless population. Japan took over the island on 19 December 1941, only 12 days after the attack on Pearl Harbour in the US. The following three and a half years were the darkest of Penang's history (see opposite).

Things were not the same after the war. The local impression of the invincibility of the British had been irrevocably tainted and the end of British imperialism seemed imminent. The Straits Settlements were dissolved in

1946, Penang became a state of the Federation of Malaya in 1948, and it became one of independent Malaysia's 13 states in 1963.

With its free-port status withdrawn in 1969, Penang went through several years of decline and high unemployment. Over the next 20 years, the island was able to build itself up as one of the largest electronics manufacturing centres of Asia and is now sometimes dubbed the 'Silicon Valley of the East'. This development is centralised around the free industrial zone near Bayan Lepas International Airport and is not visible to most passing visitors. Even with its economic successes, Penang has never seen the rapid development experienced by Singapore, and much of its early colonial architecture remains intact to this day.

In 2004, 33 of the 68 deaths in Malaysia caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami occurred in Penang. While the island received minimal damage compared to its Indonesian and Thai

neighbours, it's estimated that the disaster cost the island's agriculture and fisheries sector tens of millions of ringgit.

ORIENTATION

The state of Penang, on the northwest coast of the Malaysian peninsula is divided both geographically and administratively into two sections: Penang Island, a 293km square island in the Strait of Melaka, and Seberang Perai, a narrow 760km square strip on the peninsular mainland. Georgetown, on Penang Island, is the state capital, while Butterworth is the largest town in Seberang Perai. Confusingly, the city of Georgetown is often referred to as just 'Penang', or even 'Pinang'.

The body of water dividing the island from the mainland is called Selat Utara (North Channel) to the north of Georgetown and Selat Selatan (South Channel) to the south of Georgetown. The Penang Bridge and a ferry

PENANG IN...

Two Days

In two days you'll have just enough time to fill up on some tasty food and get a feeling for this textured city. Stay in Georgetown the first day and begin by fuelling up on a dim sum breakfast on **Lebuh Cintra** (p195). From here walk through **Kuala Kangsar Market** (p195) to begin your immersion into the city's clamour. At this point you might choose to head up Jln Penang to browse the shops and begin the **Colonial District walking tour** (p185) in reverse. If you'd rather get to Chinatown, walk to Lebuh Pitt via Lebuh Chulia, Love Lane and Lg Stewart to begin the **Chinese Experience walking tour** (p186). Take a trishaw from wherever you end up to arrive by noon at **Teik Sen** (p196) for an amazing Chinese lunch and then get to **Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion** (p181) in time for the three o'clock tour. After this you'll be knackered, so rest up before strolling down to the waterfront to dine at the **Esplanade Food Centre** (p194).

Get out of town on day two to the Air Itam area starting with the **Kek Lok Si Temple** (p202) which you can lose yourself in for most of the morning. Have lunch at the excellent vegetarian restaurant on the premises. Next take a taxi (recommended) or take the hot and sticky 3km walk to the base of **Penang Hill** (p202) to ride the funicular railway to the top. Spend the rest of the afternoon strolling the trails in the cool air and watch the sunset from the top of the hill. That night walk around boisterous **Little India** (p183) and gorge yourself on spicy curries.

One Week

One week gives you much more time to savour Georgetown and to get out to see the rest of the island. Follow the two-day itinerary then stay in Georgetown again on the third day to do whichever walking tour you missed on day one. Have a tiffin lunch at **Sarkies Corner** (p198) then visit the **Pinang Peranakan Mansion** (p183) in the afternoon. For dinner head out to **Gurney Drive** (p194) to eat hawker food and shop the night away. For the next three days explore the rest of the island including **Penang National Park** (p207), **Batu Ferringhi** (p209) and the **southern fishing villages** (p204). Consider spending a night or two in Batu Ferringhi during this time. On your last day spend the morning at the **Botanical Gardens** (p203) then shop all afternoon along Jln Penang or at any of the city's many **shopping malls** (p201). Finish your trip with a luxurious dinner at **Thirty Two** (p198) or eat on the street with the locals at **Restoran Sup Hameed** (p197).

TOO BIG FOR ITS BRIDGES

Before 14 September 1985 Penang's only link to the mainland was an overcrowded ferry. Today an average of 70,000 people cross the 13.5km Penang Bridge, one of the longest bridges in the world. With its maximum capacity of 100,000 people per day being exceeded regularly, the bridge is now being expanded from four lanes to six and the work is expected to be completed by June 2008. Twelve new toll booths will be built to make sure traffic flows just as quickly.

Even though this increases the bridge's capacity by 50%, those in the know say this won't be enough to meet Penang's rapid development needs. Plans are already underway to build a second bridge linking Batu Maung at the southeastern tip of the island to Batu Kawan on the mainland. Construction was expected to begin in late 2007 and take five years.

link the 3km stretch between Butterworth and Georgetown.

Penang Island is a somewhat turtle-shaped island with a mostly forested interior, its highest point being the western peak of Penang Hill (821m). The coastal plains are narrow, the most extensive part forming a triangular peninsula in the northeast where Georgetown, the state capital is located. Many of Penang's sights such as the Botanical Gardens and Kek Lok Si Temple are located in this flat area between Georgetown and Penang Hill.

The coastal area around the island heading east from Georgetown is mostly urban, past the Penang Bridge and towards Bayan Lepas International Airport at the island's southeastern corner. From here, pass fishing villages and rural towns up to the island's northwestern point, where you'll find the walkable Teluk Bahang Forest Reserve and the 2300 hectare Penang National Park. Penang's best beaches are along the north coast at the resort town of Batu Ferringhi, only 13km from Georgetown.

There are a number of small islets off the coast of Penang, the biggest being Pulau Jerejak which is located in the narrow channel between Penang Island and the mainland.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

All the Malay festivals are celebrated in Penang, but with this island's extraordinary enthusiasm. Current events are listed in the *Penang Tourist Newspaper*. For more on festivals and events, see p219.

January–February

Thaipusam This masochistic festival is celebrated as fervently as in Singapore and KL, but without quite the same crowds. The Sri Mariamman temple (p183) and Nattukotai Chettiar and Waterfall Hilltop temples (p184) are the main centres of activity in Penang.

Chinese New Year Celebrated with particular gusto in Penang. The Khoo Kongsi 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 temple (p184). **Chap Goh Meh** The 15th day of the new year celebrations, during which local girls throw oranges into the sea; see the boxed text p172. 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. The 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 Floral Festival Held when many of the trees are flowering; experts show keen horticulturalists around (May/June).

Penang International Dragon Boat Festival A colourful and popular regatta (May/June) featuring traditional dragon boats.

Penang Beach Carnival In Batu Ferringhi (June); this carnival is highlighted by traditional sporting events such as *gas uri* (top spinning) and *sepak takraw* (a ball game played over a net, much like badminton but with the players using their feet).

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

Hungry Ghosts Festival (Phor Thor) The gates of hell are said to be opened every year on the 15th day of the seventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar. To appease the hungry ghosts, Penangites set out food offerings and endeavour to entertain them with puppet shows and street-side Chinese-opera performances. This is a magical time to be in the city (August).

September–December

Lantern Festival Celebrated by eating moon cakes, the Chinese sweets once used to carry secret messages for underground rebellions in ancient China (mid-September). **Deepavali** The Hindu Festival of Lights is celebrated with music and dancing at venues in Little India (October).

HOLY ORANGES *Celeste Brash*

Penang might be renowned for its festivals but that doesn't mean that events are the same as they were in ancient times. Case in point: on the 15th day of the Chinese New Year (Chap Goh Meh) it's the tradition for unmarried maidens to throw oranges into the sea so that they'll have luck finding a good husband (see p171). Feeling lucky to be in town researching the area at this time, I thought this would be the perfect chance to catch a glorious Penang cultural moment. It didn't turn out exactly as I expected.

By the time I reached Pitt St it was a chaotic mass of bodies. A tour bus covered with cartoon cut outs, feather-like garlands and sparkles, and blasting cheesy techno music, arrived on the scene and a group of beautiful young Chinese women dressed in glittering dresses descended into the crowd. The girls pressed their way through a group doing a dragon dance and I let myself be moved towards the sea with the human tide of photosnappers and babbling families.

Suddenly a group of older Chinese men dressed in sombre grey suits appeared from out of nowhere with military escorts. The crowd went nuts and cleared a red carpet-sized avenue for them to pass. Eventually we all stopped around a humble tent that had a funnel of netting strung across the top and a bunch of big blue buckets filled with water in the middle.

With the elegant women sidelined as onlookers, the old men began throwing oranges into the funnel net on the tent – the oranges would fall through the middle and, if tosser was lucky, it would plunk into a bucket. It looked just like one of those carnival games where you can win a giant stuffed St Bernard. When the men had gotten their share of oranges into the buckets, some boys passed fruit around to onlookers and everyone bombarded the tent, as if it were an oncoming flu bug, with citrus. Then everyone left. So much for beautiful maidens (who I don't think even got any oranges), but I could only laugh about never knowing what to expect from Southeast Asia.

Penang Island Jazz Festival Features local and international artists at Batu Ferringhi (November–December).

Pesta Pulau Penang (Penang Island Festival) This annual festival (November–December) features various cultural events, parades and a funfair.

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 Island, which is also linked to the mainland by road-bridge. Buses to all major towns on the peninsula leave from both Penang Island and Butterworth. Georgetown also has ferry links to Langkawi and Medan in Indonesia, and an airport with regular flights to KL, Singapore, Johor Bahru and Langkawi.

Air**DOMESTIC FLIGHTS**

There are several daily connections between Penang and KL (one-way from RM60) – Malaysia Airlines has more flights but Air Asia is far cheaper, particularly if you book

ahead. There are also flights to Langkawi (one-way from RM99).

Domestic flights to/from Penang are available through:

Air Asia (☎ 644 8701; www.airasia.com; ground fl, Kompleks Komtar)

Firefly (☎ 03-7845 4543; www.fireflyz.com.my; Bayan Lepas International Airport)

Malaysia Airlines (☎ 262 0011; www.malaysiaairlines.com; Menara KWSP, Jl Sultan Ahmad Shah)

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Penang is a major centre for cheap airline tickets, although international air fares are less competitive than they used to be. Sample fares: Singapore Airlines to Singapore RM393, Thai Airways to Bangkok RM900, and Malaysia Airlines to Sydney RM2650. Fares change from day to day so check locally for the latest prices – Air Asia has bargain flights to Bangkok from just RM186 online if you book well in advance.

Airline offices that have international connections to Penang Island are:

Air Asia (☎ 644 8701; www.airasia.com; ground fl, Kompleks Komtar)

Cathay Pacific (☎ 226 0411; www.cathaypacific.com; Menara Boustead, 39 Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah)

Firefly (☎ 03-7845 4543; www.fireflyz.com.my; Bayan Lepas International Airport)

Malaysia Airlines (☎ 262 0011; www.malaysiaairlines.com; Menara KWSP, Jl Sultan Ahmad Shah)

Singapore Airlines (☎ 226 6211; www.singaporeair.com; Wisma Penang Gardens, Jl Sultan Ahmad Shah)

Thai Airways International (THAI; ☎ 226 6000; www.thair.com; Wisma Central, 41 Jl Macalister)

Boat

Travellers can skip over to the Indonesian island of Sumatra from Penang Island via ferry. There are ferries each way in the morning, and times can change, but generally ferries depart Georgetown at 8.30am and return at 10.30am (one-way/return RM150/250); the trip takes 4½ to five hours. The boats leave from Georgetown's Swettenham jetty and land in Belawan where the remaining journey to Medan is completed by bus (included in the price). Buy tickets the day before to verify departure times. Upon arriving at Belawan port, most nationalities will need to pay a fee of US\$25 per person for a month-long Indonesian visa.

Langkawi Ferry Service (LFS; Map p176; ☎ 264 3088; 8 Lebuhr King, Georgetown) has offices near the Tourism Malaysia office in Georgetown. It runs daily ferries from Georgetown to Kuah on Langkawi (one-way/return RM50/90, two to 2½ hours). Boats leave at 8am and 8.30am; the second service takes slightly longer and calls in at Pulau Payer first, but you won't be able to disembark unless you're on a diving or snorkelling package (see p185). Boats return from Langkawi at 2.30pm and 5.30pm. Try to book a few days in advance to ensure a seat.

If you're arriving by sailboat, Penang's old Church Street Pier has been completely overhauled to become the **Tanjong City Marina** (www.tjctmarina.com.my), a lovely full-service docking area, including immigration services, with 102 berths and good security.

Bus

Long-distance bus services leave Georgetown from the express bus station on Jln Sungei Nibong, just to the south of Penang Bridge. While it may be more convenient to buy your tickets from travel agents on Lebuhr Chulia or some guesthouses and hotels, it's a safer bet to

buy your ticket in person at the bus-company offices at the station.

From Sungei Nibong there are several daily buses to KL (RM27, five hours), as well as less frequent buses to Melaka (RM35, seven hours, two daily), Kota Bharu (RM36, seven and a half hours; one daily), Kuala Terengganu (RM39, 10 hours, two daily) and elsewhere – book well in advance. There are five daily buses to Tanah Rata (RM30) in the Cameron Highlands.

Minibus 25 runs regularly between the more central Komtar bus station and Sungei Nibong.

Many more buses leave from next to the mainland ferry terminal in Butterworth, 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.

SINGAPORE

From the Komtar Bus Station: Singapore (RM50, 10 hours, two daily), to Johor Bharu's Larkin Bus Station (RM40, nine hours, one daily)

THAILAND

From the bus station at Komtar, there are also bus and minibus services to Thailand, including Hat Yai (RM22), Phuket (RM60), Ko Phi-Phi (including boat, RM68), Ko Samui (including boat, RM55) and even Bangkok (RM90), though it's a long haul. The minibuses usually 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 can be better to buy your ticket from a Thai guesthouse that contracts directly with a minibus agency, instead of from bucket shops on Lebuhr 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 be able to get cheaper tickets if you buy directly at the bus station.

Taxi

Long-distance taxis operate from a depot beside the Butterworth ferry terminal on the mainland. Typical whole-taxi fares are higher than anywhere else in Peninsular Malaysia, and include such rip-offs as KL RM300, Ipoh

RM180, Kota Bharu RM300, Lumut RM200 and Taiping RM180.

Train

The **train station** (Map p169; ☎ 323 7962) is next to the jetty and bus station in Butterworth, on the mainland. There is a nightly train to KL (economy/2nd class/berth RM17/38/48), arriving the next morning. In the opposite direction there is a daily train to Hat Yai, Thailand (economy/2nd class/berth RM19/27/68) early in the morning which arrives mid-morning Thai time (Thailand's one hour behind). There is also an international express train leaving Butterworth in the early afternoon which arrives in Hat Yai in the evening and in Bangkok around noon the next day. Fares and timetables change rapidly, so check with the station or the railway company website (www.ktmb.com.my) before you travel.

Advance bookings on long-distance trains can be made at the **Railway Booking Office** (Pengkalan Weld), near the Weld Quay terminal – see below for details of how to get to Butterworth; for more information on train services in Malaysia see p235.

GETTING AROUND

Seberang Perai and Penang Island are linked by road-bridge and a 24-hour ferry service. For information about getting around in Georgetown see p201.

Boat

There's a 24-hour ferry service between Georgetown and Butterworth. Ferries take passengers and cars every eight minutes from 6.20am to 9.30pm, every 20 minutes until 11.15pm, and hourly after that until 6.20am. The journey takes 15 minutes. Fares are charged only for the journey from Butterworth to Penang; returning to the mainland is free. The adult fare is RM1.20; cars cost RM7.70 (depending on the size).

Bus

All buses leave from Georgetown (see p201) and go as far as the Bayan Lepas International Airport on the east coast and to Teluk Bahang on the north coast. There are no buses on the west coast of the island.

Buses from Georgetown to other parts of the island are frequent but if you want to stop in several places in one day it's easiest to have your own transport. This is also convenient

USEFUL PENANG BUSES

Penang has streamlined its bus system. In Georgetown, buses can be caught at the Pengkalan Weld stop (Map p176), near the Weld Quay terminal or at Komtar. Most of the buses also have stops along Lebuah Chulia. Useful buses:

- Air Itam U201, U202 or U203
- Batu Ferringhi U105 or U101
- Bayan Lepas Airport U307 and U401
- Penang Hill U204
- Snake Temple U302
- Teluk Bahang U101

since the main road does not run along the coast except on the northern side, and you have to leave the main road to get to the small fishing villages and isolated beaches.

CAR

Penang Bridge is one of the longest bridges in Asia at 13.5km. If you drive across to the island there's a RM7.70 toll payable at the toll plaza on the mainland, but no charge to return.

RENTAL

Penang's a good 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; www.avis.com; Bayan Lepas International Airport)

Budget (☎ 643 6025; www.budget.com; Bayan Lepas International Airport)

Hawk (☎ 881 3886; www.hawkrentacar.com; Bayan Lepas International Airport)

Hertz (Map p176; ☎ 263 5914; www.hertz.com; 38 Lebuah Farquhar)

Motorcycle & Bicycle

You can hire bicycles and motorcycles from many places, including travellers' guesthouses and shops along Lebuah 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 motorbike just remember that if you don't have a motorcycle licence your travel insurance in all likelihood won't cover you.

Taxi

Outlying sights serviced by taxi from Georgetown include Batu Ferringhi (RM30), Penang Hill/Kek Lok Si Temple (RM20), Pulau Tikus (RM14), the Botanical Gardens (RM20), the Snake Temple (RM30) and Bayan Lepas International Airport (RM38).

GEORGETOWN

It's full of car exhaust and has a marked lack of sidewalks, but Georgetown is able to woo even the most acute cityphobe with its never-ending cultural surprises. Dodge traffic while strolling past Chinese shophouses where folks might be roasting coffee over a fire or sculpting giant incense for a ceremony. Trishaws, peddling tourists and the occasional local, cruise around the maze of chaotic streets and narrow lanes past scenes that look like they've been created for a movie set. Outside the historic centre, soaring skyscrapers and massive shopping complexes gleam high above.

Just when you get the gist of Chinatown, you enter Little India, which is like a street party at night with its twinkling lights, blaring Bollywood music and countless shops with a rainbow of silk saris in the windows and on the streetsides. Blocks away the serious white buildings of the Colonial District sit mutely along the waterfront.

Though each district is distinct, they do overlap; you'll find Chinese temples in Little India and mosques in Chinatown. Along certain streets you'll have your pick of delicious Indian curries, spicy Malay specialities or local Chinese noodle creations all lined up one after the other. Arrive on an empty stomach and graze at will. Between the city's outrageous hawk food and fine restaurants this is the food capital of Malaysia.

HISTORY

Georgetown officially became a city in 1957 (with the status granted by Queen Elizabeth II), making it the first official city in the Federation of Malaya – KL wasn't official until 1972. Ironically, the town's citydom has come into

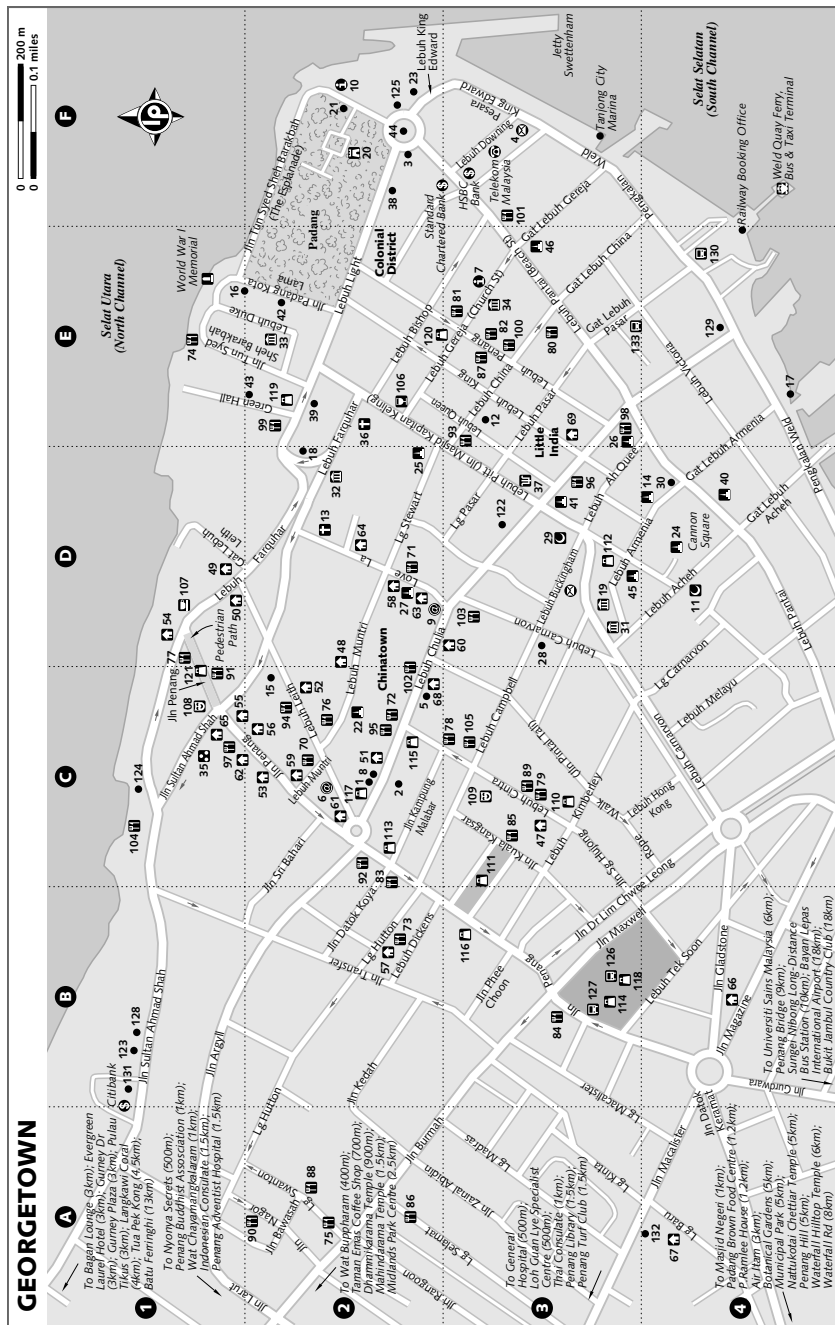
question since Georgetown merged with rural Penang in 1974 to form the Municipal Council of Penang Island. Technically, some argue, the city of Georgetown no longer exists. The debate continues, creating quite a spark among locals, but no conclusion has been reached.

Whatever the documents state, it's fairly obvious that Georgetown is an important dot on the map. The city's (if you care to call it that) true creation was when Captain Francis Light established Georgetown as a fort in 1786; he named the settlement after the Prince of Wales who later became King George IV. While the site was ideal for a port, the terrain (a swamp) was not, so Light and his economically driven men cleared, levelled and filled the area. The fort soon became a trading nexus and the island's population reached 12,000 by 1804.

The town's original boundaries were Lebuah Light, Lebuah Chulia (originally called Malabar St), Lebuah Pitt (now officially called Jln Masjid Kapitan Keling but still referred to as Pitt St) and Lebuah Bishop; for more on confusing street names see Orientation, p177. The warehouses and godowns extended from Lebuah Pantai (Beach St) to the sea. The land around Beach St began to erode away into the 1800s and thus Weld Quay, the new waterfront, was built in the 1880s; commercial buildings sprang up like mushrooms. Today, historical Beach St is dominated by the old buildings of shipping companies, import/exporters and bankers that have been working with port activities for generations.

Thanks to some strict rent controls, Georgetown retained many colonial-era shophouses that make the city such an architectural gem. Unfortunately, the controls were repealed in 2000 and many prewar buildings have given way to generic high-rises. While the city is full of enthusiasts bent on saving its heritage, the local government has few preservation rules or guidelines and risks losing many of its gorgeous old buildings to big business. Even so, the city still has enough ambience to have been voted the most liveable city in Asia by Employment Conditions Abroad Limited (ECA International) in 2007.

In 2006 the federal government announced a plan to build a monorail transit system connecting Georgetown to Tanjung Tokong in the north and Bayan Lepas International Airport in the south. No date has been projected for the completion.



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ORIENTATION

Georgetown is on the northeastern corner of the island, where the channel between island and mainland is narrowest. This city centre is fairly compact and most places 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, be cautious about personal safety as this area becomes eerily deserted.

You'll find many of Georgetown's budget hotels and hostels along Lebuah Chulia in

CLAN JETTY LEGACY AT WELD QUAY

During the late 18th century and early 19th century, Weld Quay in Georgetown was the centre for one of the world's most thriving ports and provided plentiful work for local people and the never-ending influx of immigrants. Soon a community of Chinese grew up around the quay, with floating and stilt houses along rickety docks; these docking and home areas became known as the clan jetties. Six of the seven jetties that developed were owned by the individual clans: Lim, Chew, Tan, Lee, Yeoh and Koay; the seventh jetty was a mixed-clan dock known as Chap Seh Keo.

It's a wonderful image: a port full of Chinese junks unloading their cargo onto the docks, where a human chain of workers carry the sacks across the gangplank out to the port clerk. *Sampans* (small boats) would row to the larger ships to unload passengers (often new immigrants) and more cargo.

The first setback to this ocean-based way of life came with the Japanese occupation in WWII (see p168) when the Lim Jetty was entirely destroyed during the bombing and the Yeoh jetty had its bridge wrecked. At the beginning of the occupation, trading nearly came to a halt and the only trade that managed to continue were small smuggling operations from Indonesia and Thailand. Soon the jetty folk became peddlers for contraband and the women, who had previously stayed at home, went out to sell the goods. The jetties began to get a reputation as an area for thugs and thieves.

After the war, port activity picked up again and peaked in the late '50s. Unfortunately the era was shortlived and when the port reorganised in the '60s, many of the jetty residents had to leave their way of life for more inland city areas to find work.

Today the clan jetties have become a low-income area with a jumble of dilapidated floating houses and planks. The only jetty that retains any communal clan-based activity is the Chew jetty whose people come together once a year to worship their temple deity. Many of Penang's heritage enthusiasts are pressing for preservation of the area. On the forefront is Dr Chan Lean Heng who wrote an indepth report on the jetties entitled *The Case of the Clan Jetties*, which was presented at the Penang Story International Conference in 2002; it can be read at www.asiaexplorers.com.

Chinatown, where backpackers congregate in the cheap restaurants and bars. At the western 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 Hotel (E&O); see p193 for the hotel's story.

If you follow Jln Penang south, you'll pass the modern multipurpose Kompleks Tun Abdul Razak (Komtar) shopping mall, and eventually leave town and continue towards Bayan Lepas 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 as Penang Rd – but there's also a Penang St, which may also be called Lebu Pinang! Similarly, Chulia St is Lebu Chulia; Pitt St is sometimes Lebu Pitt, but is also 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. Fortunately, since June 2007, the street signs started to be replaced with ones that have both the current Malay name and the old English name. Maps are sold at bookshops (see below).

Trishaws are the ideal way of getting around Georgetown, particularly at night when travelling this way takes on an almost magical quality.

INFORMATION Bookshops

For secondhand books, check out the small shops along Lebu Chulia.

HS Sam Book Store (☎ 262 2705; 473 Lebu Chulia)

One of the best, the self-proclaimed 'most organised used-book shop in town' has a fair range of popular paperbacks.

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

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

Immigration offices

Immigration Office (☎ 261 5122; 29A Lebu Pantai)

Internet Access

Internet cafés have a lifespan slightly longer than a housefly, so don't count on these listings being there forever. Loads of internet places can be found along Lebu Chulia.

Omegatec (☎ 629 9901; 50 Lebu Leith; per hr RM4;

☎ 11am-2pm & 5-9pm Mon-Sat)

Spider Web Internet (☎ 263 3335; 322 Lebu Chulia; per hr RM3.50)

Internet Resources

www.asiaexplorers.com A phenomenally good website with indepth information about the sights and heritage of Penang, as well as other points around Malaysia and Asia.

www.globalethicpenang.net Information on the Penang Global Ethic Project, a local interfaith group which organises talks and exhibitions on religions and peace issues.

www.tourismpenang.gov.my Details of sights and restaurants in Penang, not updated too often.

Libraries

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

Medical Services

The Community Directory put out by the Penang Heritage Trust (right) has listings of traditional and modern healthcare centres.

General Hospital (☎ 229 3333; Jln Hospital)

Loh Guan Lye Specialist Centre (☎ 228 8501; 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. 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 bus station.

Post

Post Office (Lebu Buckingham)

Tourist Information

The extremely useful monthly **Penang Tourist Newspaper** (RM3) 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.

Forestry Department (☎ 262 5272; 20th fl, Komtar, Jln Penang) Provides pamphlets and information about Penang's parks and forests.

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

Penang Tourist Guide Association (☎ 261 4461; www.ptga.org.my; 3rd fl, Komtar, Jln Penang; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Hard to find but much better than the official tourist office. Look for signs near the McDonald's on the 3rd floor.

Tourism Malaysia (☎ 262 0066; 10 Jln Tun Syed Sheh Barakbah; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Georgetown's main tourist information office gives out maps and bus schedules but little else.

Travel Agencies

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

Happy Holidays (☎ 262 9222; 432 Lebu Chulia)

Silver-Econ Travel (☎ 262 9882; 436 Lebu Chulia)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Although a reasonably safe place to wander around in, Georgetown, like any big city, does have its seamy side. Foreign tourists have been attacked and mugged in Love Lane and other dimly lit sidestreets at night, and it's unwise to linger in these areas alone after dark. Lone women have a particularly rough time of it and can expect some hoots, leering and occasional rude gestures. Dressing appropriately by wearing loose (not see-through) clothing that covers shoulders to knees helps, but doesn't entirely alleviate the problem. Violence is rare but do be cautious.

Robberies have occurred in some backpacker hostels, so you should never leave valuables, especially your passport, unattended. Meanwhile, drug dealing still occurs in Georgetown, despite Malaysia's very stiff antidrug laws; don't get involved.

SIGHTS Colonial District

As the oldest British settlement in Malaysia, many grand colonial buildings can still be found in Penang and many of the buildings

are marked with signs explaining their history and significance. You can follow the Heritage Trail walking tours that also take in temples and mosques in Chinatown – pick up a pamphlet of the routes at the tourist offices or the Penang Heritage Trust (p179). 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 again at various numbered stops. A map of the route is in the *Penang Tourist Newspaper*.

FORT CORNWALLIS

Among Penang's oldest sights are the time-worn walls of **Fort Cornwallis** (☎ 261 0262; Lebu Light; adult/child RM3/2; ☎ 9am-6.30pm). It was here 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. At first a wooden fort was built, but between 1808 and 1810 convict labour replaced it with the present stone structure.

Today only the outer walls of the fort are standing, and the area within is now a park. A bronze statue of Captain Light stands near the entrance, although as no pictures of him could be found, it was modelled on the likeness of his son, William, who founded Adelaide in Australia. The small **chapel** in the southwest corner was the first to be built in Penang; ironically, the first recorded service was the 1799 marriage of Francis Light's widow, Martina, to a certain John Timmers. There are exhibitions on the history of Penang in a series of cells on the south flank of the fort, and you can also wander around the battlements, which are liberally studded with old cannons.

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.

PENANG MUSEUM

Penang Museum (☎ 261 3144; Lebu Farquhar; admission RM1; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu) is one of the best presented museums in Malaysia. There are engaging exhibits on the customs and traditions of Penang's various ethnic groups, with

photos, documents, costumes, furniture and other well labelled displays. Look out for the beautifully carved opium beds, inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

Upstairs is the history gallery, with a collection of early-19th-century watercolours by Captain Robert Smith, an engineer with the East India Company, and prints showing landscapes of old Penang. You can also play some videos of Penang's many cultural festivals.

Outside, one of the original Penang Hill funicular railcars is now a kiosk selling an unusual array of souvenirs including antique costume jewellery and coins; all proceeds benefit the Penang Heritage Trust.

PROTESTANT CEMETERY

Here 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 Francis Light and many others, including governors, merchants, sailors and Chinese Christians who had fled the Boxer Rebellion 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.

Chinatown

Inland from the old colonial district lie the twisting streets of the old city, dotted with temples, mosques and traditional businesses. The large Chinatown stretches from Lebu Pantai to Jln Penang. It's centred on Lebu Chulia, which is still the lively heart of Georgetown, although pockets of Indian and Malay areas remain within and around it.

Chinatown is a delight to wander around any time of day. Set off in any direction and you're certain to find plenty of interest, whether it's the beautiful old Chinese shop-houses, an early morning vegetable market, a temple ceremony, the crowded antique shops or a late *pasar malam* (night market).

All the usual Chinese events are likely to be taking place: colourful parades at festival times or elderly women setting up their stalls for a day's business. All around you'll hear those distinctively Chinese noises – the whining, high-pitched music of TVs inside houses, the trilling of caged songbirds and excited conversations at numerous coffeshop tables.

STALWART SIKHS

You'll notice that the steps of the decadent Khoo Kongsi (below) clan house are guarded by two, life-sized granite Sikh sentinels. While this might seem strange for a Chinese edifice, the guards are a testament to an important ingredient in Penang's melting pot background: the Sikhs from the Punjab region of India.

Brought from India in the 19th century by the British, the Sikhs were employed as guards due to their reputation as honest and reliable people. The fact that one of the country's greatest temples would use Sikhs as symbolic protectors shows how deep the confidence was in these people.

Today's Penang is home to some 2,000 Sikh families but very few still work in their traditional profession of guardians. Many still speak Punjabi and hold high-placed jobs in several areas of Penang business.

The Sikhs' shrine was once housed inside Fort Cornwallis because most of the first Sikh arrivals were with the British military. Eventually this location proved impractical and the government allotted the Sikhs land on Brick Kiln Rd for a new temple. While most of the Sikh's religious activity revolves around the new shrine, their annual festival of Vaisakhi, the traditional harvest festival held on 14 April every year, still takes place inside of the walls of ancient Fort Cornwallis. Visitors can expect plenty of Sikh folk dancing (including the lively traditional Punjabi *bhangra*), music and art.

KHOO KONGSI

Near the end of Lebu Pitt (Jln Masjid Kapitan Keling) is the **Khoo Kongsi** (☎ 261 4609; 18 Cannon Sq; adult/child RM5/free; ☎ 9am-5pm). A *kongsi* is a clan house, a building that's partly a temple and partly a meeting hall for Chinese of the same clan or surname.

Penang has many *kongsi*, but the clan house of the Khoo is by far the finest and is not to be missed. Work began in the 1890s, and the clan house was so magnificent and elaborate that nobody was surprised when the roof caught fire on the night it was completed in 1901; the misfortune was put down to divine jealousy of the ostentatious design, so the Khoo clan rebuilt it in a marginally less extravagant style.

The present *kongsi*, which dates from 1906, is also known as the Dragon Mountain Hall. It's a wildly colourful mix of dragons, carved columns, lanterns, paintings and ceramic tiles, while at ground level there is an exhibition on the lineage of the Khoo clan. Facing the *kongsi* is a permanent stage for Chinese opera.

KUAN YIN TENG

On Lebu Pitt (Jln Masjid Kapitan Keling) is the temple of Kuan Yin – 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 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 active place, and Chinese-theatre shows take place on the goddess' birthday, celebrated on the 19th day of the second, sixth and ninth lunar months (see festivals and events listings on p219).

CHEONG FATT TZE MANSION

Built in the 1880s, the magnificent 38-room, 220-window **Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion** (☎ 262 0006; 14 Lebu Leith; admission RM10) was commissioned by Cheong Fatt Tze, a local Hakka merchant-trader. The future entrepreneur 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 blends Eastern and Western designs, with louvred 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 house sits on the 'dragon's throne', meaning that there is a mountain (Penang Hill) behind and water (the channel) in front – the site was chosen for its excellent feng shui. Walking into this house, you feel like you could stay here forever. A tour (11am and 3pm Monday to Saturday) is the only way you can see the house (unless you stay here) – the best way to linger and learn about the

CLAN RIVALS

Between the mid-1800s and the mid-1900s Penang welcomed a huge influx of Chinese immigrants primarily from the Fujian province of China. In order to help introduce uncles, aunts, cousins, 10th cousins, old neighbourhood buddies and so on to their new home, the Chinese formed clan associations and built clan houses to create a sense of community, provide lodging, help find employment, and more, for newcomers. In the associated temples the clan would worship patron deities.

As time went on, many clan associations became extremely prosperous and their buildings grew to be more and more ornate. Clans began to compete with each other over the decadence and number of their temples. Thanks to this rivalry, today's Penang has a one of the densest concentrations of clan architecture found outside of China.

These are the houses of the five great Hokkein clans that formed the backbone of early Penang:

Cheah Kongsi (8 Lebuh Armenia) A simple but welcoming house that retains its community feel.

Kho Kongsi (18 Cannon Sq) This is Penang's most famous and ornate clan house; see p181.

Yeoh Kongsi (3 Gat Lebu Chulia) Apparently unchanged since WWII, this 1841 building is gracefully authentic.

Lim Kongsi (234 Lebu Pantai) Set up in 1860, this house is currently under restoration and is known as *Kew Leong Tong*, which means Hall of Nine Dragons. The association is open to anyone with the surname Lim, no matter their origin, and is the only clan house in Penang with a female patron deity. At the entrance to the shrine, look for the well of Mar Chor Poh, the patron saint of sailors, who also happens to be a Lim.

Tan Kongsi (Seah Tan Crt, off Lebu Pantai) Built in 1878, the ornate interior of this temple of the Tan clan is reminiscent of Kho Kongsi. Today, Tan is one of Penang's most common surnames.

Cheah and Kho Kongsi can be visited on the Chinese Experience walking tour, p186.

mansion's quirks. Note that it's not allowed to take pictures in the interior of the mansion.

The building was rescued from ruin in the 1990s and is currently run as an exclusive homestay hotel (see p192). You may have seen the house shortly after its restoration in the 1992 Catherine Deneuve film *Indochine*.

DR SUN YAT SEN'S PENANG BASE

The leader of the 1911 Chinese revolution (which overturned the Ching dynasty and established China as the first republic in Asia) Dr Sun Yat Sen, had his **headquarters** (120 Lebu Armenia; admission free; ☎ hours vary) in this building from 1909–11. It was here the 1910 Canton uprising was planned – although unsuccessful, the uprising was a turning point for the revolution's success. The shophouse is a humble building, chosen in this obscure area of town for its low profile.

Dr Sun Yat Sen lived in Penang with his family for about six months in 1910. This house was not his residence but was the central meeting place for his political party, and some members did live here. His office on Dato Keramat Rd was demolished.

Today the house has been restored in a refreshingly low-key way, in fact it almost feels

as if you're walking into someone's home. Take time to browse the interesting paraphernalia about and from the doctor's life. There are no set opening hours so you have to ring the bell and hope that someone is in (which is often the case).

ACHEEN ST MOSQUE

A short walk from Kho Kongsi, the **Acheen St 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. It's open to visitors but all the usual mosque etiquette should be exercised: conservative clothing, take your shoes off, avoid prayer times and be respectfully quiet.

PENANG ISLAMIC MUSEUM

The **Penang Islamic Museum** (☎ 262 0172; 128 Lebu Armenia; 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 of Arab descent who led the local Acehnese community during the Penang riots of 1867. Today it holds a wordy exhibition on

the history of Islam in Malaysia, along with some 19th-century furniture and a life-sized diorama of a dock scene upstairs.

HAINAN TEMPLE

This small gem demands a closer look. Dedicated to Mar Chor Poh, the patron saint of seafarers, the **Hainan Temple** (Lebu Muntri) was founded in 1866 but not completed until 1895. A thorough remodelling for its centenary in 1995 refreshed its distinctive swirling dragon pillars and brightened up the ornate carvings. The compound is usually buzzing with activity.

LOO PUN HONG

The tiny **Loo Pun Hong** (70 Love Lane) is one of the most unobtrusive of Penang's many Chinese temples. This one, built in the 1880s, is dedicated to Lo Pan, the 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.

100 CINTRA STREET

Dating from 1881 and restored a century later, this old house at **100 Cintra Street** (☎ 264 3581; adult/child RM5/2.50; ☎ 11am–6pm Tue–Sun) contains the tiny Peranakan Museum celebrating Penang's rich Baba-Nonya heritage. Furniture, costumes, porcelain and household items are displayed in recreations of late-19th-century interiors. There's a small antiques bazaar and a café downstairs. While the museum was closed when we passed, it was scheduled to reopen. See also sleeping review, p190.

Little India

Centred on Lebu Pasar, Little India is a bustling enclave suffused with the scents of sandalwood and spices and alive with the sounds of Hindi music blaring from numerous Bollywood video stores. It's an area full of sari shops, elaborate temples and restaurants, and although relatively small, it has a distinct atmosphere and is an inviting place to wander around.

SRI MARIAMMAN TEMPLE

About midway between Kuan Yin Teng and the Kapitan Keling Mosque you'll find this Hindu temple, another example of Penang's religious diversity. The **Sri Mariamman Temple** (Lebu Pitt) is typically South Indian; an elaborately sculpted and painted superstructure representing Mt

Meru (the cosmic mountain that supports the heavens) rises above its shrine. Built in 1883, it's Georgetown's oldest Hindu temple and a testimony to the strong Indian influence you'll find in this otherwise most Chinese of towns. Penang's Thaipusam (p221) procession begins here, and in October a wooden chariot takes the temple's deity for a spin around the neighbourhood during Vijayadasami festivities. It's open from 8am to 12pm and from 4pm to 9pm daily. It's polite to ask permission from the staff to enter and be sure to take your shoes off.

PINANG PERANAKAN MANSION

The beautifully restored **Pinang Peranakan Mansion** (☎ 264 2929; www.pinangperanakanmansion.com; 29 Lebu Gereja; adult/child RM10/free; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Sat) re-creates the typically ornate home of a wealthy Baba-Nonya family of the late 19th century. It's filled with antiques and furniture of the period, and architectural features such as the colourful tiled floors and ironwork have been preserved. 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** (cnr Lebu Buckingham & Lebu Pitt) in 1801; Lebu Pitt is now also known as Jln Masjid Kapitan Keling. The mosque's domes are yellow, in a typically Indian-influenced Islamic style, and it has a single minaret. It looks sublime at sunset. All the usual mosque etiquette applies: conservative dress, avoid prayer times, take your shoes off and be respectfully quiet. Also, ask permission from the mosque officials before entering.

ALPHA UTARA GALLERY

Housed in an attractively renovated traditional town house, the **Alpha Utara Gallery** (☎ 262 6840; www.alpha-utara.com; 83 Lebu China; admission free; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Sat, noon–5pm Sun) was opened in 2005 as an exhibition space for paintings by contemporary local artists, based around the works of Penang-born artist Kho Sui Hoe. There are temporary exhibitions spread over two floors, and a bookshop downstairs.

Other Sights

P RAMLEE HOUSE

Who would have guessed that this humble, and now thoroughly restored *kampung* house

BUDDHISM IN PENANG

While Malaysia is officially and predominantly Muslim, the Chinese population has remained mostly Buddhist. As one of Malaysia's most Chinese states, Penang has an uncommonly diverse and burgeoning Buddhist community that embraces not only traditional Chinese Buddhism, but also the Thai, Burmese, Sinhalese and Tibetan schools of Buddhist philosophy.

Kuan Yin Teng (Goddess of Mercy; p181) was built in the early 1800s, making it the oldest Chinese temple in Penang and the second oldest in the country; **Cheng Hoon Teng Temple** (p144), in Melaka, grabs the first place title by a hundred years or so. Later in the century the venerable Miao Lian came from China to construct the **Kek Lok Si Monastery** (p202), near Penang Hill, which would become Malaysia's biggest Buddhist temple, and in 1925 the **Penang Buddhist Association** (below) was founded.

Several Thai temples around the island attract Chinese worshippers, in addition to members of the local Thai community, and Malaysia's only Burmese temple, **Dhammikarama Temple** (below), is in central Georgetown. A Sinhalese temple **Mahindarama Temple** (☎ 282 5944; 2 Kampar Rd) attracts an English-educated crowd. Zen Buddhism has yet to make much of an impact, while Tibetan Buddhism is becoming increasingly popular since the Dalai Lama's much publicised visit to Malaysia in 1981.

(4A Jln P Ramlee; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun, closed from noon-3pm Fri) was the birthplace of Malaysia's biggest megastar, P Ramlee. Ramlee was particularly known for his singing voice and acted in and directed 66 films in his lifetime. No other Malaysian celebrity has ever reached the same iconic status. He died of a heart attack at the age of 44 in 1973. Artefacts and photos are displayed in the main room, while the other areas of the house are furnished as they would have been when Ramlee grew up and are scattered with his personal items.

WAT CHAYAMANGKALARAM & DHAMMIKARAMA

Just off Jln Burma, the main road to Batu Ferringhi, is this **wat** (Temple of the Reclining Buddha; Lorong Burma). This brightly painted Thai temple houses a 33m-long reclining Buddha, draped in a gold-leafed saffron robe. The claim that it's the third longest in the world is a dubious one, but it's a colourful temple and worth a visit.

The **Dhammikarama Burmese Buddhist Temple** (☎ 226 95755; 24 Jln Burma) stands opposite, with two large stone elephants flanking the gates. Penang's first Buddhist temple, built in 1805, it has been significantly added to over the years.

You can get to both temples on the Teluk Bahang-bound bus U101 from Weld Quay or Komtar.

PENANG BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION

Completed in 1931, this unusual Buddhist temple (Jln Anson) is about 1km west of town.

Instead of the typical colourful design of most Chinese temples, this one 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 holy-day 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 5km 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, is the largest Hindu temple in Penang and is dedicated to Bala Subramaniam. 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 god of prosperity and dates from 1837.

ACTIVITIES

Malaysia is becoming a popular golfing destination and Penang has some exceptionally affordable international-standard golf courses – Japanese businessmen fly in for just a day or two to take advantage of them. The island's

premier course is located at **Bukit Jambul Country Club** (☎ 644 2255; 2 Jln Bukit Jambul; 18 holes from RM50) near Bayan Lepas International Airport. Golf Malaysia rated it the second-most-beautiful course in Malaysia, and 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 on two consecutive weekends every two months. Seats are cheap, but gambling on the race outcome is illegal. **Horse riding** is sometimes offered Monday to Friday.

Diving and snorkelling excursions to tiny, uninhabited Pulau Payer, 32 nautical miles north of Penang, are run by **Langkawi Coral** (☎ 899 8822; www.langkawicoral.com; 64 Jln Tanjung Tokong; snorkelling/diving RM260/350). The trips include a buffet lunch and time for sunbathing and fish-feeding. It also does day trips and overnight sojourns to the resort area of Pulau Langkawi (day trip adult/child RM300/200, overnight adult/child RM550/350) which include a set lunch, tours to islands around Langkawi and lodging where applicable – the set snack is at McDonald's.

WALKING TOURS Colonial District

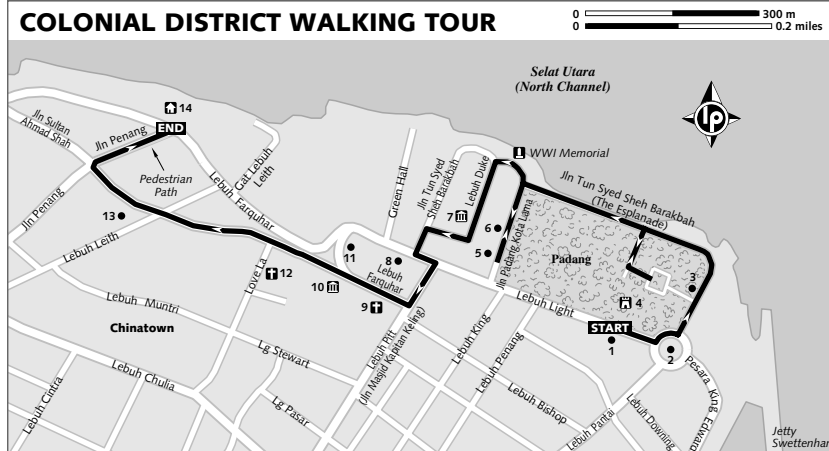
With so much traffic, Georgetown isn't the most pedestrian-friendly city. This tour takes you through one of the more relaxing, less traffic-filled areas of the city where you'll find most of the main colonial landmarks. It could take up to three hours depending

on how long you stop at Fort Cornwallis and the museums.

Start off at the eastern end of Lebuah Light, at the neoclassical **State Assembly Building** (1; Dewan Undangan Negeri), where it's a short stroll to the **Victoria Memorial Clocktower** (2). This gleaming white tower topped by a Moorish dome was 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. Walk northwards along Jln Tun Syed Sheh Barakbah, past the tourist information centre to the **Fort Cornwallis Lighthouse** (3; admission RM1) on your left. The 21m-high lighthouse was opened in 2007 and serves no navigational purposes but about half the city can be seen from the top. Continue up the street towards the waterfront where the sidewalk veers to the left. Follow the walls of **Fort Cornwallis** (4; p180), where Captain Francis Light first set up what would become the city you are visiting today. Enter through the main gate, read about the fort's history in the air-con display rooms and check out the cannon. Exit from the same main gate and continue west along the waterfront. On your left is Georgetown's *padang*, an open playing

WALK FACTS

Start State Assembly Building
Finish Eastern & Oriental Hotel (E&O)
Distance 2km
Duration Two hours



AUTHOR KHOO SALMA

Khoo Salma is the respected author of several books on Penang's cultural heritage and history. Find out more about her work at www.lestariheritage.net.

Where is your favourite area to wander in Penang? The 'Street of Harmony' (also called Pitt Street or Jln Masjid Kapitan Keling) where we have a church, three Confucian-Buddhist-Taoist temples, two mosques and a Hindu temple. You can savour the relaxed multicultural and multilingual environment. At the southern end is the 'Secret Society' enclave, where sociopolitical organisations carved out their territories in the 19th century. They fought not along ethnic lines, but rather formed cross-cultural alliances to gain control over territory, manpower, opium and other concessions. Today, it is a marvellous neighbourhood of mosques and Chinese clan temples, with clandestine gateways and hidden passageways leading to courtyards. We can literally retrace the covert trails and escape routes of the days of the 'wild, wild east'.

field surrounded by public buildings, which is a typical feature of Malaysian colonial cities. On your right is the Esplanade promenade which borders Selat Utara (North Channel). When you reach the end of the *padang*, turn left down Jln Padang Kota Lama, admiring the grandiose architecture of the **Town Hall (5)** and **City Hall (6)**, two of Penang's most imposing buildings, with fine porticos. The Town Hall, completed in 1880, is Penang's oldest municipal building and was once a venue for performances, including a group of Filipino musicians who played here from 1890 to 1954. The courtroom segment of the 1999 film *Anna and the King* was filmed here also but, at the time of writing, the building was closed and its future unsure.

Backtrack up Jln Padang Kota Lama to the seafront, then turn left; there's a WW1 memorial here on the water side of the road. Continue on, taking a left onto Lebuhi Duke to the modern **Pinang Gallery (7)**; Lebuhi Duke; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) which has a rotating display of contemporary local art. Take a left on exiting the museum. Lebuhi Duke veers right then intersects with Jln Tun Syed Sheh Barakbah. Turn left and watch out as you cross the horrendously busy road to come face-to-face with the impressive **Supreme Court (8)**.

Continue east along Lebuhi Light and turn right onto Lebuhi Pitt (Jln Masjid Kapitan Keling), then take your first right onto Lebuhi Farquhar. The elegant **St George's Church (9)**; ☎ services 8.30am & 10.30am Sun) on your left 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 Francis Light. A little further

on is the **Penang Museum (10)**; p180) which is worth a visit. At the corner of Lebuhi Light you will see **Convent Lebuhi Light (11)**, a girls' school established in 1852. The building was the office of the Penang government in the early 19th century. Continuing on Lebuhi Farquhar you'll pass the double-spired **Cathedral of the Assumption (12)**, named for the feast day on which its Catholic founders landed here from Kedah.

Keep going west, where, at the corner of Lebuhi Leith, you'll come upon the deep-blue façade of the **Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion (13)**; p181) where, if your timing is right you can take a tour, before moving onto Jln Penang. Turn right (north) up the pedestrianised section of this street, finally reaching the majestic **Eastern & Oriental Hotel (14)**; p193) where you can reward yourself with tiffin or a cocktail on the lawn.

Chinese Experience

One of the most atmospheric parts of Penang's Chinatown is slightly south of Little India. On these rickety lanes, there's a laid-back neighbourhood vibe, set away from the tourist centres and stinky traffic. This tour takes you to a few of the major Chinese sights and some smaller ones, partially via the major thoroughfare of Lebuhi Pitt (Jln Masjid Kapitan Keling) and along some smaller roads and alleyways.

Begin your tour at the incense-clad **Kuan Yin Teng (1)**; Temple of the Goddess of Mercy; p181); on the 1st and 15th of each lunar month the temple is particularly bustling and smoky with joss-stick offerings. After the temple, start the hoof heading south (don't worry, this is the longest you'll have to walk). Lebuhi Pitt is one of the borders of

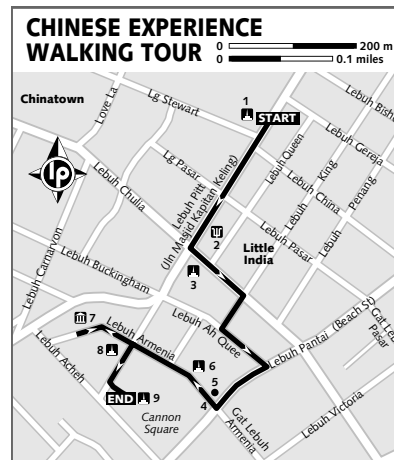
WALK FACTS

Start Kuan Yin Teng

Finish Khoo Kongsi

Distance 1.2km

Duration 1½ hours



Little India; if you wish to mix in a little Indian with your Chinese, cross the road at Lebuhi Pasar and continue down Lebuhi Pitt to the **Sri Mariamman Temple (2)**; p183), Georgetown's oldest Hindu temple, which holds a magnificent diamond-and-emerald encrusted statue of Lord Subramaniam. Turn left at Lebuhi Chulia and walk to the peaceful refuge of the **Teochew Temple (3)** on the right hand side of the road. Browse the diorama explaining the impressive restoration of this 1870 building that was built by Penang's Teochew (Chaozhou) community, which originated from southern China. Ask the attendant if any Teochew opera or music performances are scheduled. Continue down Lebuhi Chulia, turning right on Lebuhi King, left on Lebuhi Ah Quee then right onto Lebuhi Pantai (Beach St). Take your next right onto **Lebuhi Armenia (4)**, which was turned into a 19th-century Bangkok street (including elephants) for the 1999 film *Anna and the King*. Although the street is named for Penang's Armenian population (such as the famous Sarkies who established the Eastern & Oriental Hotel, see p193), there's no evidence that any Armenians actually ever lived here. In the early 1800s the street was known as

Malay Lane from a *kampung* settlement here, and later the Chinese named it *pak thang-ah kay* (copper worker's street) because this is where brass- and copperwares were sold. It later became a centre for Chinese secret societies and was one of the main fighting stages of the 1867 Penang riots (see p168). There are some benches here so take a little break if you need to. Just across the street from the benches is the **Nonya shoe maker (5)**; 4 Lebuhi Armenia), which has no sign. No English is spoken but there's a paper on the wall explaining the Nonya shoe beading technique. Enjoy your stroll down Lebuhi Armenia, passing dusty barber shops and private homes till you reach the **Cheah Kongsi Temple (6)** on the right side of the road, home to the oldest Straits Chinese clan association in Penang. It's a down-home sort of place, with some displays of old newspaper clippings and photos and a re-creation of a Nonya kitchen c 1910-50. Continue down Lebuhi Armenia to **Dr Sun Yat Sen's Penang Base (7)**; p182). The *Kwong Wah Jit Poh* newspaper was started here by Dr Sun and his followers; today it is one of the oldest Chinese-language newspapers in the world. Knock on the door and hope that someone's home.

Cross the street and backtrack to the corner of Lebuhi Pitt to the small 1924 Hokkien clan house **Yap Kongsi (8)** with its outer altar decorated in symbols from the *Tao Teh Ching*. Visitors are welcome inside but you have to get permission at the kongsi's office first, located on the premises of the clan house. Turn right on Lebuhi Pitt, which is very quiet down this end, with many older Chinese homes. Go left onto Cannon Sq, which brings you straight to the magnificently ornate **Khoo Kongsi (9)**; p181). From here you can catch a trishaw to explore farther a field.

COURSES

Penang has no organised cookery courses but you can contact the **Chef Association** (www.campg.org; ☎ 226 8659) to see if any of their chefs would be interested in giving a lesson or two. The earlier you get in touch with the association, the more likely you are to find an instructor. Prices are not set and will need to be agreed upon by you and the chef and will depend on the venue, menu, group number and number of lessons.

Yogis and yoginis come from all over the world to get their teacher training and certification at **Trisula Yoga** (☎ 263 7155; www.trisulayoga)

.com; 22 Jln Green Hall), as it's one of only four yoga schools in Malaysia that is a registered yoga school (RSA) with Yoga Alliance USA and Asia Yoga Alliance India. Certification is in 'nondenominational' hatha yoga and generally takes six weeks. Occasionally the school also runs reiki training courses so check the website if you're interested. For regular lay-person classes, call or email for times (which change regularly); pilates is also available.

For pewter-making workshops, see the review of the Royal Selangor Pewter outlet, p200.

GEORGETOWN FOR CHILDREN

Inner-city Georgetown with its busy streets and lack of sidewalks isn't the greatest place to stroll with kids but there are plenty of diversions to entertain. Trishaw rides are always fun, the *padang* next to Fort Cornwallis, along the waterfront esplanade, is a relaxing place with lots of open spaces, and eating at food courts offer some kid-friendly options. Along with the beaches of Batu Ferringhi (good for little kids to play in the sand and the gentle surf) and the available watersports (p209), the Butterfly Park (p207) in Titi Kerawang and the Botanical Gardens (p203), the following are family favourites:

If your kids have seen *Toy Story 2*, they might feel bad for the more than 100,000 toys locked up in the **Toy Museum** (☎ 460 2096; Jln Tanjung Bungah; admission adult/child RM10/6; 🕒 9am-9pm) with nobody to really love them; no one has tried to break Woody free yet. Don't miss the Chamber of Horrors (not suitable for very young or sensitive kids), Chamber of Monsters, Cave of Dinosaurs, Hall of Cartoons, Chamber of Comic Book Heroes and Hall of Beauties (for lovers of Barbie). Some displays have voiceovers and sound effects but other than that there's not much action. Still it's a fun kitsch place to visit; chances are that everyone will see some old friends in the collection. The most expensive toy is a RM9000, 1.8m tall Gundam Robot from Japan – but we're betting even a Stinky Pete original would garner more than that.

The huge shopping-cum-recreation complex **Midlands Park Centre** (☎ 226 8588; Jln Burma) has everything from myriad shops and fast-food places, to a bowling alley and Adventure Island – a water theme park on the roof of the 8-storey building. The water park is the

main draw. It has a giant pool, plenty of thrill rides and views of Pulau Tikus and the northern beaches.

Near the Botanical gardens, and signposted as Taman Perbandaran, the well-maintained, landscaped **Municipal Park** (Jln Burma), formerly known as Youth Park, has good playgrounds, some splash pools, basketball courts, walking trails, biking and roller-blading trails and, generally, lots of room to run around. For older kids there are chess tables and an internet station, and there's a cafeteria where you can get basic fare.

PECULIAR PENANG

Is there a question in your life that needs answering? Head to **Wat Buppharam** (☎ 227 7430; 8 Perak Rd), a 1942 Buddhist temple bursting with cartoonlike sculptures of Thai, Taoist and Hindu religious figures. The ornate Thai entrance archway is the largest in the state. The wat is home to the 'Lifting Buddha', a 100-year-old, gold-leaf encrusted Buddha statue about the size of a well-fed house cat. As a seeker, kneel in front of the statue, pay respects to the figure with a clear mind and then ask, in your mind, the yes or no question you wish to have answered; ask also that you wish for the figure to become light for an affirmative answer. Try to lift the statue. To verify the answer, ask your question again, only this time ask that the statue become heavy. Lift again. We tried this and got a very firm 'no' answer while a friend received a 'yes'. Months down the line it ended up that the statue was right in both cases. When the statue is heavy it won't budge and when it's light it lifts off the platform like a butterfly. You can decide for yourself if there's something cosmic going on.

TOURS

Most sights on the island are easily reached independently but only expect to see one or two in a day if you're taking local transport, perhaps three or four if you're getting lost in traffic with your own car. For folks on a small-time budget, taking a tour can be a wise choice. Several agents around town book a range of tours at similar prices. **Happy Holidays** (☎ 262 9222; 432 Lebu Chulia), **Ping Anchorage** (Map p169; ☎ 397 7993; www.pinganchorage.com.my; 25B Jln Todok 2, Seberang Jaya, Seberang Perai) and **Hawaii Travel & Tours** (☎ 262 6755; 1 Jln Tun Syed Sheh Barakbah), a few doors from the Tourism Malaysia office,

sell tickets for a half-day Round-Island Tour (RM69) which includes a visit to a fishing village, and a Georgetown by Night trishaw tour (RM69), among others.

For more in-depth coverage of Georgetown, go with the highly recommended Penang Heritage Trust (see p179) which organises a few walking tours, including the Little India Experience and the Heritage Trail walks, (which takes in the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion). Both last around three hours, and cost RM60, including entry fees. Penang Heritage Trust also has free brochures with details of self-guided walks such as the World Religions Walk and Historic Georgetown Trails.

The **Penang Tourist Guide Association** (p179) can also get you in touch with excellent guides who lead themed tours on everything from food to symbology. These tours are the most economical option in town (RM50 to RM60, minimum two people, three hours). Member Joann Khaw, who leads many of the tours through the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion (p181), leads architecture tours (particularly recommended) through the city and tours to the clan jetties (see boxed text, p178), as well as several others.

VOLUNTEERING

There is no end of volunteering opportunities in Penang. The **Penang Heritage Trust** (☎ 264 2631; www.pht.org.my; 26 Lebuh Gereja; 🕒 9.30am-2.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) puts out a free community directory which provides contact information for nonprofit organisations, including

those dealing with environmental, social and cultural issues. Of course monetary donations to any of these grassroots organisations is another great way to help out.

The Christian-oriented **Eden Handicap Centre** (☎ 228 2758; www.edenhandicap.org; Kompleks Masyarakat Penyayang, Jln Utama) always needs volunteers, for any length of time. Activities might include helping with sports, chaperoning outings with disabled children, gardening, teaching computer skills and so on. Call Mr Lee Sin Kok to arrange times.

Most volunteering at the **Penang SPCA** (☎ 281 6559; www.spcapenang.net; Jln Jeti Jelutong) will involve bathing dogs or just socialising with the animals in the pound. If you're staying longer you might help with fundraising projects or you could even foster a kitten or puppy (although most hotels won't allow this!) until it can be vaccinated and find a permanent home.

SLEEPING

Georgetown has all the accommodation possibilities you would expect in a big, bustling tourist city, from the grungiest hostels to the swankiest hotels. Midrange options are mostly found along Jln Penang, consisting of a string of high-rises. Cacaphonic Lebu Chulia and quieter Love Lane make up the heart of Penang's backpacker-land, crammed with cheap hostels and hotels where it pays to check a few out before parting with your cash. There are some pretty ropery dives here, and some are fronts for brothels; back rooms full of scantily clad ladies and

CAUSTIC RIVER

Winding and farting through the heart of Georgetown before spewing into Selat Selatan (South Channel), Sungai Pinang is considered the filthiest river in Malaysia. Over the years it's become a drain for a 50km urban spread of factories, markets and tightly quartered residents who have freely dumped whatever they've wanted into the flowing sludge. Today it not-so-proudly bears a Class V classification, which means it is unable to sustain life and contact with the water is dangerous for humans.

In December 2005 a clean-up project began with goals of turning what many consider to be a sewer into a clean Class II river for swimming and boating. Optimists imagined fish fluttering through clear waters, and a tourist jetty was built in hopes of offering scenic river tours. As the 2007 projected completion date approached, it became obvious that it wasn't that easy. The river still stinks, no one in their right mind would go picnicking on the banks and the jetty has been happily claimed by local fishermen.

A new study of the river has been implemented by the government and it's now estimated that clean up will cost another RM2 billion, on top of the RM21 million that's already been spent. While residents hope to see the river return to a reasonable state, few are confident that the measures will work, let alone be sustainable.

ladyboys in the lobby offering massages might arouse your suspicions. There are a handful of top-end hotels in Georgetown, but most are strung out along Gurney Dr and Batu Ferringhi, and tend to be of the gargantuan chain-resort persuasion.

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.

Budget

75 Travellers' Lodge (☎ 262 3378; 75 Lebu Muntir; dm RM7, s RM15-18, d RM18-40; 🏠) In a great location away from the hullabaloo of Lebu Chulia, but still in the heart of Chinatown, the 75 doesn't have much character but is an OK place to crash. Rooms are the standard backpacker box, but are among some of the few budget ones in town that have windows. Mr Low is a friendly and helpful owner and it's easy to be social over a beer or coffee on the balcony. It was spic and span when we passed but we've received the odd grumble about the cleanliness of this place.

Blue Diamond Hotel (☎ 261 1089; 422 Lebu Chulia; dm/s/d from RM8/20/30; 🏠 📺) The staff have stiff drinks in hand by 11am, and the party continues into the wee hours of the night at the popular beer garden, Coco Island Traveller's Corner (p199), which dominates this hotel. Rooms are in a potentially gorgeous old Chinese mansion. There's plenty of light pouring in, but carved panels are paint-chipped, there's an unfortunate coating of dust everywhere and tubs are rust-stained; the whole place is crying out for a dose of TLC. It's a very social hub with a busy internet area at the back. Air-con rooms with private showers cost RM45.

100 Cintra Street (☎ 264 3581; 100 Lebu Cintra; dm/s/d RM9.50/25/38) Upstairs, in a wonderful old Peranakan house which incorporates a café and a small sometimes-open museum (p183) is this collection of very simple but striking budget rooms. Open the sliding iron door to your room and step into the past (thankfully a cleaned-up version). You get a mattress on a wooden platform with a mosquito net and fan for that colonial Eastern experience. The dorm, though, is less private, with five beds arranged on an open landing. A proper dorm room has been in the planning for ages but doesn't look likely in the near future.

Love Lane Inn (☎ 412 9002; 54 Love Lane; s/d/t RM16/30/40; 🏠) Pastel colours brighten the dim corridors opening up to the tiny courtyards and sitting areas of this basic hotel. Singles are boxy and windowless but doubles are bigger and usually have three beds. The entire establishment is sparkling clean. While owner Jimmy gets good reviews from travellers, we've heard complaints about some rude staff. There's a little on-site café and travel centre where you can book travel or organise tours.

Swiss Hotel (☎ 262 0133; 431F Lebu Chulia; s/d without bathroom RM17/21, s/d RM19/24) Depending on your attitude, you could find this very un-Swiss place either depressingly bleak or sparked with grungy character. It has a distinctly Chinese institutional style and the management is very insistent that it's a hotel and not a guesthouse. The rooms upstairs are bigger than those downstairs and all are dark but clean; a bathroom means a toilet and a *mandi* (the local style bath where you scoop water out of a tub and pour it on yourself to bathe). You might have to turn sideways, or lose weight to fit up the skinny back stairway.

SD Guesthouse (☎ 264 3763; www.sdguesthouse.com.my; 16 Love Lane; s/d 18/25) Clean, modern, windowless rooms line bright corridors and a sweet little garden. Baths get all the proper scrubbing. This would be one of the quietest places in town were it not for the 'bird hotel' (for collecting nests for birds-nest soup) next door. Luckily the squawkers are slumbering by around 9pm.

Pin Seng Hotel (☎ 261 9004; 82 Love Lane; s/d RM20/25) This small hotel tucked down a little alley has the usual bottom budget set-up with slightly shabby fan rooms and shirtless locals snoozing in the foyer. It's friendly and a decent place to try if you're looking for an 'authentic' experience. Although in the heart of backpacker-land, it caters to a more local crowd.

Vintage Coral Shine Hostel (☎ 261 8407; 99 Lebu King; s/d from RM20/30; 🏠) The main draw of this place is its location in the heart of bustling Little India. The fan rooms are very simple, with thin mattresses and no windows; it's worth paying the extra RM10 for a larger air-con room. The shared bathrooms are very modern. Staff aren't super-friendly at first but warm up once you're booked in.

New Banana Guesthouse (☎ 262 6171; 355 Lebu Chulia; d with air-con RM25-30; 🏠 📺) Hey this place really is new! While it lacks the rickety charm

of the competition, there's a lot to be said for a coat of fresh paint, unmouldy carpeting and no scum caked in the corners. Attached bathrooms are equally spotless but all rooms are windowless. Take a drink in the downstairs restaurant-bar that promises to become a popular travellers' hang-out.

Peking Hotel (☎ 263 6191; 50A Jln Penang; r RM57-69; 🏠) While the architecture here is technically Art Deco, it's descended irretrievably into what might be called 'retro-hospital', with baby blue-and-white walls, lots of light pouring in and tiled floors. The upside is that the building materials of this place age much less noticeably than the darkly carpeted competition. It's good value, institutionally clean and quite friendly. There's a pub in the same building that is popular with local Chinese, so bring ear-plugs if you're a light sleeper.

Oriental Hotel (☎ 263 4211; www.oriental.com.my; 105 Jln Penang; r from RM69; 🏠) It's just like the disco days of 1977 at the Oriental, although the flashy look is obviously a hangover rather than a modern re-creation. Still, it's remarkably clean and well kept, especially when you consider that those technicolour curtains could only be vintage. There are good views (most rooms overlook the city) and the location, on the corner of Jln Penang and Lebu Chulia, couldn't be more central. Try out your best Donna Summer impersonation in the karaoke lounge downstairs.

our pick Hutton Lodge (☎ 263 6003; www.huttonlodge.com; 175 Lorong Hutton; dm/s/d/t without bathroom RM20/40/55/75, s/d/t RM50/70/90; 🏠 📺) Opened in 2007, this hotel in a refurbished colonial home is much better value than many mid-range options. The butter-yellow building with hardwood detail has an airy patio lined with potted palms and an entrance/common area with high ceilings and internet stations. Unfortunately the rest of the house was gutted for the renovation and has been rebuilt into a plain, but well-lit and ventilated, lodge. Shared bathrooms are deluxe-hotel standard, the entire place is immaculate and the staff are friendly and eager to make the place a hit; we have no doubt that they'll succeed. All rooms have air-con, the showers are hot and a basic continental breakfast is included in the price. It's a gay-friendly establishment.

Midrange

Cathay Hotel (☎ 262 6271; 15 Lebu Leith; s/d RM69/92; 🏠) It's trying hard to be as bland as the big-

ger hotels, but the spacious colonial Chinese building of this place, with its light-infused courtyard, high ceilings and latticed windows, can't help but remain atmospheric. Everything from the grand entrance to the massive carved wooden doors on the rooms give hints of an era when this must have been an elegant beauty. Today it's faded, decorated with shabby furniture and the tiles are permanently stained from who knows what. Friendly Chinese caretakers can be found reading the paper, an old lady seems to endlessly sweep around the lobby and there's a pervasive sense of peace. You may remember seeing the hotel in the 1995 film *Beyond Rangoon*.

Segara Ninda (☎ 262 8748; www.segaraninda.com; 20 Jln Penang; s & d RM70-100; 🏠) 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. A courtyard with fountains and plants is a midcity oasis and the homestay atmosphere is soothing. There are 14 simply but elegantly furnished rooms of varying sizes; the cheaper ones are very 'compact' and room price increases with room size. This place books up very fast so be sure to reserve in advance.

Merchant Hotel (☎ 263 2828; 55 Jln Penang; s & d from RM78, tr from RM98; 🏠) The rather dark, spooky lobby is hardly inviting, but this hotel has clean and well-lit, though somewhat tatty, rooms, all with TV and fridge. However, there's the R&B Pub (p199) on the 1st floor which goes on till the early hours.

Hotel Continental (☎ 263 6388; www.hotelcontinental.com.my; 5 Jln Penang; r/st from RM80.50/172.50; 🏠 📺 📺) Another accidentally retro place, the Continental brings us into the bright-geometric-print '80s. It's a gigantic hotel with 200 comfortable midrange rooms with fridges and TV. As the price indicates, this is a slight step up from some other midrange choices in town. There are some nice touches such as wooden, louvered closets, turned-down sheets and a small rooftop pool. Standard rooms don't have windows, which makes them airless and cave-like, so be sure to upgrade to a superior if you can. Prices vary throughout the year.

Hotel Malaysia (☎ 263 3311; www.hotelmalaysia.com.my; 7 Jln Penang; r from RM99; 🏠) At the high end of this price category, Hotel Malaysia is slightly

more luxurious than the other standard hotel-style places in this range. Standout features include new crisp sheets, professional service and views over the Cheong Fatt Tze mansion to the Penang Bridge. With TVs, both baths and showers in all rooms and a great location, this place is a winner in the bland category. A buffet breakfast is included in the price.

Bayview Hotel (☎ 263 3161; www.bayviewhotels.com; 25A Lebuhr Farquhar; r RM150-185; 🏠 📺 📺) A plush and sparkling high-rise chain hotel, topped by a revolving restaurant (p198) with 360-degree views of Georgetown, this is a fun and central place to stay. Standard rooms are in the dark and musty 'old wing', while uncommonly spacious deluxe rooms and above maximise the waterfront views of the 'new wing'. There are a couple of other restaurants in the hotel, as well as a 'fun pub' with regular live music.

Sunway Hotel (☎ 229 9988; www.sh.com.my; 33 Lorong Baru; d RM180; 🏠 📺 📺) Near Komtar, which could be convenient for those visiting Penang on business, this efficient hotel has clean, modern rooms which more or less resemble a Western Holiday Inn. The surrounding area is particularly traffic clogged, noisy and rubbish laden but you are isolated from all that once inside the hotel. All the amenities of a top-end hotel are available including a spa, gym, baby-sitting services and wi-fi.

Top End

ourpick Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion (☎ 262 5289; www.cheongfattzemansion.com; 14 Lebuhr Leith; r from RM250; 🏠 📺 📺) Stay in the world-famous Blue Mansion for the ultimate Eastern colonial experience; as the hotel staff will tell you, this option is an 'heirloom with rooms'. The house has near perfect feng shui that draws you in, pampers the senses and makes you want to nest here – 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. This 'heart' of the house was specially chosen by a feng shui master; the rest of the house, with its twin wings of rooms, evolved from here. What can't be seen is gold that has been auspiciously buried in special corners of the house – don't go digging for it though since it's encrusted somewhere in the foundation. Each room is uniquely themed and has dreamy names like 'fragrant poem' and 'jolie', and represent a moment of Cheong Fatt Tze's life – the

particularly beautiful 'old kitchen' room for example has artefacts and documentation of the original owner's interest in wine. A delicious breakfast is included in the price and is served in the courtyard which is also a wi-fi area. Some guests say they have trouble sleeping here despite the wonderful energy, peace and quiet; old folks say it's the ghosts. The mansion is also a tourist attraction (see review, p181) and is gay-friendly.

Cititel Hotel (☎ 370 1188; www.cititelpenang.com; 66 Jln Penang; s/d from RM255/300; 🏠 📺 📺) Don't bring any mangosteens to this concrete giant lordling over Jln Penang. While durians are usually the offending fruit, this hotel puts a second fruit on the forbidden list in order avoid staining its fluffy white duvets. The views from the large modern rooms are particularly lovely, especially from the ones that overlook the sea. It's brightly lit, always busy and offers regulation business-traveller comforts, along with a few restaurants. Discounts are normally available.

Shangri-La Traders Hotel (☎ 262 2622; www.shangri-la.com; Jln Magazine; r from RM285; 🏠 📺 📺) Right near the Komtar shopping centre in an area swarming with traffic but little charm, this massive, shiny hotel rides the line between very classy and old-fashioned. Rooms are spacious, with comfy beds and views of the city, but could do with a remodel. Guests are encouraged by the staff to stay on the more pricey Trader's Club floor (rooms from RM335) where there is greater security as well as other perks like wi-fi, free breakfast and an exclusive cocktail bar; however, all the top-end facilities you could expect, including a gym, several restaurants and a mediocre outdoor pool, are available to everyone. Guests can also enjoy the facilities of the much more upscale Shangri-La Resort in Batu Ferringhi at no extra charge, with a free shuttle bus between the two.

Evergreen Laurel Hotel (☎ 226 9988; www.evergreen-hotels.com; 58 Gurney Dr; s & d from RM485; 🏠 📺 📺) One of several five-star high-rises strung out along the shoreline on Gurney Dr, 4km west of the city centre, this hotel has reliably good service although, for the price, rooms are getting to be on the old side. It has tennis courts, a gym, business centre, all the other top-end facilities, and rooms at the front have great sea views. The area around the hotel is great for taking a stroll and at night hawker's stalls abound. Wi-fi is in the lobby only, but the staff can give

you a cable for room connection. Breakfasts here get rave reviews from travellers.

Eastern & Oriental Hotel (E&O; ☎ 222 2000; www.e-o-hotel.com; 10 Lebuhr Farquhar; ste from RM485; 🏠 📺 📺) This is one of the rare hotels in the world where historic opulence has gracefully moved into the present (see boxed text, below). It's undoubtedly Penang's and, arguably, Malaysia's most grand hotel, established by the Sarkies brothers in 1884. Rooms (which are all suites) were completely refurbished in 2001, and seamlessly blend European comfort with Malaysian style using hardwood antiques and sumptuous linens; those with a sea view (RM574) are worth the extra outlay. The sea-facing, British-manicured lawn, is shaded by the biggest and oldest Java tree in Penang and conjures images of colonial suit-clad gentlemen and parasol-wielding ladies picnicking. If

you ever wanted to foray into the lives of the rich and famous, this is the place to do it.

EATING

People come to Penang just to eat. Even if you thought you came here for another reason, your goals might change dramatically once you start digging into the Indian, Chinese, Malay, Thai and various hybrid treats available. Days revolve around where and what to eat, and three meals a day starts to sound depressingly scant. It's the same for locals for whom eating out is a daily event. Any restaurant worth its salt (or chilli as the case may be) will be swarming with customers from opening to closing.

Don't leave town without trying *asam* laksa (Penang laksa). Locals are very opinionated about which places serve the best laksa – a fun

THE EASTERN & ORIENTAL HOTEL

Dominating the seafront end of Jln Penang is the historic **Eastern & Oriental Hotel** (E&O; 10 Lebuhr Farquhar). Originally built in 1884 as the Eastern Hotel, it became so popular that the following year it was expanded and renamed the Eastern & Oriental Hotel. The stylish E&O was the archetypal 19th-century colonial grand hotel, established by two of the famous Armenian Sarkies brothers, Tigran and Martin, the most famous hoteliers in the East, who later founded Raffles Hotel in Singapore.

In the 1920s the Sarkies promoted the E&O as 'The Premier Hotel East of Suez' (a catchy phrase the brothers later used to advertise *all* their hotels) which supposedly had the 'longest seafront of any hotel' in the world, at 842ft. High-ranking colonial officials and wealthy planters and merchants filed through its grand lobby, and the E&O became firmly established as a centre for Penang's social elite. Rudyard Kipling, Noel Coward and Somerset Maugham were just some of the famous faces who passed through its doors.

The Sarkies almost closed the E&O when the rent was raised from £200 to £350 a month. Arshak Sarkies, a third brother (a gambler by nature), convinced the family to open the Raffles Hotel instead. Arshak's generosity was legendary: he often paid the £50 to £60 passage back to England for broken-hearted (and empty-pocketed) rubber planters and tin miners. Some observers said that Arshak ran the E&O not to make money, but to entertain: he seemed more keen on waltzing around the ballroom with a whisky-and-soda balanced on his head than in adding up a balance sheet. Shortly before his death, Arshak began lavish renovations to the E&O. This expense, coupled with loans to friends that were conveniently forgotten, finally bankrupted the family business in 1931. Still, Arshak's funeral was one of the grandest Penang had ever seen.

In the 1990s the E&O closed and fell into disrepair, but a huge renovation programme was begun to rescue one of Georgetown's most prominent and glamorous landmarks. In 2001 it once again opened for business, as a luxury, all-suite grand hotel with elegant, spacious rooms decorated with the best of colonial style. Today, the E&O offers some fine dining, and the colonial Penang experience isn't complete until you've taken tiffin on its grand lawn (p198).

The E&O features in several stories by Somerset Maugham, who was a regular (and often difficult) guest. For more on dashing Arshak Sarkies, read George Bilainikin's entertaining *Hail Penang! Being the Narrative of Comedies and Tragedies in a Tropical Outpost Among Europeans, Chinese, Malays and Indians*.

See also the hotel review, above.

experiment is to ask around and try everyone's favourite till you find your own, otherwise the hawker stalls on Gurney Dr are a good hunting ground. Laksa lemak is a coconut milk-laden version of the dish; originally a Thai dish, it's been wholeheartedly adopted by Penang.

Like Melaka, Penang is also a place to try Nonya (Straits Chinese) cuisine, but it's not nearly as easy to find here and even when you do it's not as authentic as its southern cousin. Seafood is found all over and there are many restaurants that specialise in fresh fish, crabs and prawns.

Despite its Chinese character, Penang has a strong Indian presence which adds another fantastic dimension to the dining scene. A popular speciality to sample is Curry Kapitan, a chicken curry that is supposed to have been named when a Dutch sea captain asked his Indonesian mess boy what was to eat that night. The answer was 'curry, Kapitan' and it's been on the menu ever since.

Opening hours are flexible but you can expect most places to be open from 8-10am for breakfast, 12-2pm for lunch and 6-10pm for dinner.

Hawker Centres & Food Courts

Penang is known as the hawker capital of Malaysia and most of Georgetown's specialities – claiming mixed Malay and Chinese extraction – are best fetched from a portable cart or food centre. Each area has its own personality, and often a speciality, and the settings range from slap-up umbrella markets, to modern covered buildings. At night, the seaside venues bring

out all the sultriness of the island, delicious smells linger in the air and snacking becomes paramount. Eating like a queen (or king) at these places is so cheap it's nearly free.

Esplanade Food Centre (Jln Tun Syed Sheh Barakbah; ☎ dinner) You can't beat the seaside setting of this food centre that's nestled right in the heart of Penang's colonial district. One side is called 'Islam' and serves halal Malay food and the other is called 'Cina' and serves Chinese and Malay specialities including delicious *rojak* (a fruit-and-vegetable salad) and fresh fruit-juices. If you're sitting on the heathen's side you can also enjoy some of the cheapest beer in town (a small Tiger costs RM5.50). When you're done with your meal, stroll along the breezy seafront esplanade with the city's budding couples.

Gurney Drive (Gurney Dr; ☎ dinner) Penang's most famous food area was once known as North Beach but was later named for Sir Henry Gurney, a British High Commissioner who was assassinated by Malayan communist guerrillas in 1951. Today it's a mish-mash of the city's most modern high-rises and some of the grandest colonial mansions on the island. It's posh for a hawker area so the food is a bit more pricey here than elsewhere but it's worth that few extra ringgit to have a table facing the sea. You'll find absolutely everything from Malay to Western food, and it's known for its laksa stalls and good people-watching. For the best *rojak* try the Penang-famous Aye Chye stall. The area around is also home to the Gurney Plaza shopping centre (p201) where you can grab a coffee at Coffee Bean or

Starbucks (which will cost far more than your meal) or shop the night away.

Kuala Kangsar Market (Jln Kuala Kangsar; ☎ 6am-noon) Here you'll find vendors dexterously folding and stuffing slippery *chee cheong fun* (broad rice noodles filled with prawns or meat); watching the creation of the dish is much easier than wrestling the noodles into your mouth (good luck). Wander through the lush veggie-and-fish market to snack on fruit and Chinese baked goods.

Padang Brown Food Court (Jln Pantai; ☎ lunch & dinner) Everyone in town knows that this is the spot for delectable *popiah* (spring rolls) although the *won ton mee* (egg vermicelli served with pork dumplings or sliced roast pork) and *bubur caca* (it's pronounced *cha cha* – don't be so childish – and it's a delicious dessert porridge made with coconut milk and banana) is another good reason to try the food in this area. In the afternoons try the *yong tau foo* (clear Chinese soup with fish balls, lettuce, crab sticks, cuttlefish and more).

Lorong Selamat Food Stalls (off Jln Burma; ☎ dinner) This is the place to go for the city's best *char kway teow*, but you'll also find lip-smacking *won ton mee* and other Chinese Penang favourites. The setting, on a dingy lane off one of Penang's busiest streets isn't spectacular but the locals' enthusiasm for the food here creates a lively ambience.

New World Park Food Court (Lorong Swanton; ☎ lunch & dinner) Every stall serves something different (as opposed to the centre having a particular speciality) at this ultramodern, covered food court with mist-blowing fans and shiny industrial décor. It's new, spotlessly clean and garnering a good reputation among Penangites. The *ais kacang* (shaved-ice desert with syrup, jellies, beans and, sometimes, even corn on top) here gets particularly good reviews.

Sri Weld Food Court (Lebuh Pantai; ☎ lunch & dinner) A good hunting ground for *nasi lemak* (coconut rice with a variety of accompaniments) wrapped up in a banana-leaf packet.

Red Garden Food Paradise & Night Market (Lebuh Leith; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Groove to '80s hits in this red-themed courtyard – the chairs and tables are red and the walls are white and red. This place has yet to win over the locals, but it has an excellent location in the heart of Chinatown and has a wide selection of food including most local specialities, dim sum (for breakfast), pizza and even sushi. Green Hut

(p198) has an outlet here, selling its outrageous Australian desserts. It's not a bad choice for families looking for something low-key, and is one of the few hawker centres with plenty of parking.

Chinese

There are so many Chinese restaurants in Georgetown that it is difficult to give recommendations. A wander down any street in Chinatown is likely to turn up hidden gems and there are very basic coffee shops all over the city. A classic Penang breakfast is dim sum – search around Lebuh Cintra for the best options.

Ng Kee Cake Shop (☎ 261 2229; 61 Lebuh Cintra; takes 60 sen-RM3; ☎ 9am-9pm, closed Sun) A great place for a snack; pick up some delicious nut brittle or a pastry filled with slightly sweet bean-paste. The egg-custard tarts aren't so bad either.

Tho Yuen Restaurant (☎ 261 4672; 92 Lebuh Campbell; dim sum 90 sen-RM5; ☎ breakfast & lunch, closed Tue) Our favourite place in town for dim sum. It's packed with newspaper-reading loners and chattering groups of locals all morning long, but you can usually squeeze in somewhere. Servers speak minimal English but do their best to explain the contents of their carts to the clueless round-eye. Do try the steamed sticky rice with mushrooms but remember not to take too much from the first cart that comes by, although you'll be tempted – save room because there's more to come.

Hsiang Yang Fast Food (97 Lebuh Cintra; meals RM2-6; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Chinatown is full of coffee shops and this is one of the most popular with an inexpensive Chinese buffet serving seafood, meat and vegetarian dishes in stainless-steel trays. There are also a collection of minivendors peddling noodles, satay and *popiah* (spring rolls). It's best to arrive around noon for the buffet, when the food is still fresh.

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

Hui Sin Vegetarian Restaurant (☎ 262 1443; 11 Lebuh China; meals around RM4; ☎ 8am-4pm 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 veggie tables, curries and variety of different beancurds on offer, and you'll be charged accordingly. Wash it down with a glass of Chinese tea.

PENANG MUST EATS

Char kway teow Medium-width rice noodles are stir-fried with egg, vegetables, shrimp and Chinese sausage in a dark soy sauce.

Chee cheong fun A popular dim sum dish, these are broad, paper-thin rice noodles that are steamed and rolled around a filling of prawns served with an oily, chilli dipping sauce.

Curry mee *Mee* (curly egg noodles) are served in a spicy coconut-curry soup, garnished with bean sprouts, prawn, cuttlefish, cockles, beancurd and mint.

Hokkien mee A busy and spicy pork-broth soup crowded with egg noodles, prawns, bean sprouts, *kangkong* (water convolvulus), egg and pork.

Asam laksa Also known as Penang laksa, this is a fish-broth soup spiked with a sour tang from *asam* (tamarind paste) and a mint garnish; it comes with thick, white, rice noodles.

Rojak A fruit-and-vegetable salad tossed in a sweet-tamarind-and-palm-sugar sauce and garnished with crushed peanuts, sesame seeds and chillies.

Won ton mee This is a Cantonese clear-broth soup of wheat-and-egg noodles swimming with wontons (rice-paper dumplings stuffed with shrimp), vegetables and *char siew* (barbecued pork); the regional twist adds *belacan* (fermented shrimp paste).

Peace & Joy (87 Lebu China; mains from RM4; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Basic and ever-busy Chinese coffee shop serving up cheap roast pork and rice dishes.

Be Beng Vegetarian Food (☎ 262 9161; 20 Lebu Dickens; meals around RM5; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Popular self-service place for cheap, mostly vegetarian food, of the tofu and green vegetables variety. It also offers fish curry for those craving something more meat-like.

East Xiamen Delicacies (53 Love Lane; lunch set RM5.40; ☺ lunch & dinner, closed Mon) With tables made from antique sewing-machine stands, ageing tiled floors, overhead fans and scrolls for menus, this quaint little café is one of Penang's most atmospheric. The food is equally interesting with tasty homestyle recipes such as *teochew lor ark* (stewed duck; RM6) eaten with rice or congee, *mangkuang* (vegetarian dumplings stuffed with shredded yam-bean and chives, also known as *kuchai kueh*; RM5) and *kuang cheang Teluk Anson* (yam blended with groundnuts, wrapped in soya bean skin and deep fried; RM4).

Hong Kong Restaurant (☎ 264 4375; 29 Lebu Cintra; mains from RM6; ☺ lunch & dinner) Very popular seafood and dim sum restaurant with an extensive menu.

our pick Teik Sen (Lebu Carnavon; meals around RM10; ☺ noon-2.30pm & 5.30-8.30pm) Located just steps away from Lebu Chulia, at first glance this open café looks like any other popular Chinatown establishment. On closer look you'll notice that patrons are dressed up – button shirts and high heels. Once you try the food you'll understand. This is a step up from the everyday delicacies of Chinatown – just when you thought it couldn't get better, it did. There's a menu translated into English but chances are you'll be the only one among the tightly packed throngs who needs it. Try the curry prawns (RM12), crispy chicken with plum sauce (RM12) or fried eggplant with bean paste (RM8). The adventurous can try other specialities like the braised sea cucumber and fish maws (RM20 to RM24). Arrive by noon for lunch and 6.30pm for dinner, unless you want to wrestle a local for a table.

Indian

Finding good Indian food in Penang is a no-brainer. Little India is replete with cheap eating places, especially along Lebu Pasar and Lebu Penang, serving up curries, roti,

tandoori and biryani – you'll find restaurants usually specialise in either southern or northern Indian fare. Other places are scattered all around town. While eating in a restaurant offers a greater selection of dishes and more refined atmosphere, the food at streetside cafés is often just as good.

Madras New Woodlands Restaurant (☎ 263 9764; 60 Lebu Penang; mains from RM3; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) It draws you in with its display of Indian sweets outside, but once you try the food you might not have room for dessert. Tasty banana-leaf meals and North Indian specialities are served, as well as the best mango lassi in town.

Sri Ananda Bahwan (☎ 264 4204; 55 Lebu 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 served with curry dhal) and *murtabak* (*roti canai* filled with meat or vegetables). There's an air-con dining hall if you prefer more comfort.

Restoran Kapitan (☎ 264 1191; 93 Lebu Chulia; mains from RM3; ☺ 24hr) Very busy restaurant specialising in tandoori chicken and biryani, along with fish and mutton curries. It also serves some excellent masala tea.

Kaliammans (☎ 262 8953; 43 Lebu Penang; mains from RM4; ☺ lunch & dinner) Smart, air-con restaurant serving North and South Indian cuisine, as well as Western food such as pizza. It's regarded as one of the better Indian budget places in town. The best value is the tasty banana-leaf set meals, but the garlic naan with *palak paneer* (spinach and cottage cheese) is to die for.

Spice & Rice (☎ 261 8585; 1 Green Hall; mains from RM10; ☺ noon-1am) Southern Indian food is served with class on crisp white table clothes laden with wine glasses and candles. There's an OK (but good for Penang) wine list, cocktails are on offer and the service is excellent. Goanese fish curry, chicken tikka and, ahem, goat-brain masala are just some of the menu items. There's live jazz on Thursday and Friday nights from 8.30pm; otherwise you'll have to suffer through the pseudo-soft rock and country and western music that's pumped through the stereo. If you're cold, ask the staff to turn down the air-con.

Passage Thru India (☎ 262 0263; 132 Lebu Penang; mains RM12; ☺ lunch & dinner) The ambiance here is nearly as enjoyable as the food: swirly Indian frescoes liven up the walls, sparkly

sheer curtains drape effortlessly about and the collection of eclectic light fixtures inspires creative ideas of what to do with your own place when you return home. Soothing Indian music tops of the experience. Specialities from all over India are on offer, served on a banana leaf. The tandoori and fish dishes are particularly recommended. A great place but a bit overpriced.

Malay

Hovering somewhere between Indian and Malay is *roti canai* (unleavened, flaky flat bread served with curry dhal) that is an all-time breakfast favourite. You'll find most stalls and restaurants serving this around Jln Penang.

Taman Emas Coffee Shop (1W Jln Gottlieb; laksa RM3; ☺ breakfast & lunch, closed Mon) A complete pain to find (you'll need the help of a local or a particularly friendly taxi driver), but this is our choice for Penang's best laksa. There are also a few minivendors here selling *popiah* (spring rolls) and other treats.

Kek Seng Café (Jln Penang; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner; from RM3) Other folks argue that this place serves the best laksa in town. It's between Jln Burma and Jln Macalister. You decide.

Restoran Ali Selamat (☎ 262 6794; 416 Lebu Chulia; mains from RM3; ☺ 24hr) This typical *nasi kandar* (mixed dishes to go with rice) café specialises in fish and chicken curries. It's a busy place, and you serve yourself.

Restoran Sup Hameed (☎ 261 8007; 48 Jln Penang; mains from RM3; ☺ 24hr) With sprawling tables well beyond the actual restaurant like a trail of busy, dining ants down the sidewalk this ultrapopular smorgasbord at the north end of Jln Penang has everything from spicy *sup* (soup!) and *nasi kandar* to *roti canai*. Curried squid is the house speciality.

Kayu Nasi Kandar (☎ 264 4767; 216 Jln Penang; mains from RM4; ☺ 24hr) Popular food court-style place serving cheap and tasty Malay and Indian dishes, including fish curry, tandoori chicken and vegetarian options.

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 (or Nyonya) 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 restaurants are a bit out of the way. The best hunting ground is on Jln Nagor where a line of Chinese shophouses have been converted to house chic restaurants and bars.

Nyonya Baba Cuisine (☎ 227 8035; 44 Jln Nagor; mains from RM6; ☺ lunch & dinner Thu-Tue) Near Nyonya Secrets, this is another great place to sample authentic Nonya food – try the deep-fried fish or *hong bak* (pork in thick gravy).

Nyonya Secrets (☎ 227 5289; 32 Jln Service; mains from RM8; ☺ noon-3pm & 6-10pm Wed-Mon) This tiny place hidden down a nondescript side street offers a menu of spicy Nonya favourites such as *otak-otak* (fish wrapped in banana leaves) and sweet-and-spicy *kerabu* (flavoured with lemongrass, chillies and coconut) prawns. It does excellent-value set lunches for RM12.

Thai & Japanese

Restoran Tomyam (☎ 632 592; 21 Lebu Chulia; mains from RM6; ☺ lunch & dinner) A hole-in-the-wall place serving interesting spicy combinations from Islamic southern Thailand, like steamed fish with garlic and sour plum. The green mango salad (RM4) is particularly delicious, the staff uncommonly friendly.

Hana Shima (☎ 263 1819; The Garage, 2 Jln Penang; mains from RM15; ☺ lunch & dinner) Good-quality Japanese restaurant offering sushi and sashimi set menus (RM15 to RM29). Right next door is the associated Hana K Bar, which is a popular after-work hang-out for locals, and not a bad choice for a drink.

Kirishima (☎ 370 0108; Cititel Hotel, 66 Jln Penang; meals from RM28; ☺ lunch & dinner) Japanese living in or visiting Penang head straight here, and many foreigners cite it the best sushi they've ever had. The setting is dark Japanese chic, with saki bottles lining the walls. As well as sushi there is also excellent seafood. Reserve in advance for peak hours.

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. Komtar has a super-market and numerous fast-food outlets.

Bake 'n' Take (☎ 263 8323; Lebu Muntri; mains from RM5; ☺ 8.15am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) Small bakery with a sit-down café serving light snacks, rolls, sandwiches and cakes.

Stardust (☎ 263 5723; 370D Lebu Chulia; mains from RM5; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Busy backpacker

café serving up economical breakfasts and light meals, with films showing in the evenings. There are also a few fan-only rooms upstairs (RM25) if you want to stay.

Ecco (☎ 262 3178; 402 Lebu Chulia; mains around RM9; ☺ lunch & dinner, closed Sun) Those craving Mediterranean-inspired fare will find this place a godsend. It's extremely popular with locals but draws in its share of hungry Lebu Chulia backpackers as well. The speciality is pizza, but dishes like Cajun spiced chicken and roasted aubergine sandwiches on focaccia will keep you coming back. The chef is so concerned about quality that he purportedly grows his own basil for the pesto.

Green Hut (102 Lebu Muntri; daily specials RM10; ☺ breakfast & lunch, Wed-Sun) Any homesick Westerners should head straight here where the Australian expat owners do a great stand-in for mum and dad, as well as offering heaps of travel advice and comfort foods like shepherds pie (RM12). Coffees, pizzas, quiches and sandwiches are good but the desserts, such as the now Penang-renowned sticky date pudding (RM5), are what makes the place tick. The hut also has a small outlet selling only desserts at the Red Garden Food Paradise & Night Market (p195).

Opera (☎ 263 2893; 3E Jln Penang; mains from RM18; ☺ lunch & dinner) This place is all about fusion with steel-grey walls, black-and-white table cloths, all accented with Asian hardwoods. Cool jazz murmurs in the background. The food mixes things up even more with some interesting Western and Asian dishes including hazelnut fish and chips' and stir-fried ostrich.

Sarkies Corner (☎ 222 2000; 10 Lebu Farquhar; tiffin lunch RM19) The colonial Penang experience isn't complete without sitting down to a fine tiffin lunch at the Eastern & Oriental Hotel. Served between noon and 2pm from Monday to Friday in elegant surroundings, lunch is a filling and surprisingly inexpensive meal consisting of various items such as mussels, carried chicken and lamb, with a view out onto the lawn and the sea beyond. Try a pot of Prince of Wales tea afterwards. The staff say they don't care if you're dressed like a vagabond, but after checking out the other diners you might. For other dining options at the hotel see 1885, right.

Revolving Restaurant (☎ 262 9493; Bayview Hotel, Lebu Farquhar; buffet adult/child RM38/22; ☺ dinner) Get your city bearings while filling your belly at this restaurant-cum-tourist attraction. It takes an hour for the disc to make a complete rotation during which you can fill your plate as

often as you like from the well-spread buffet of Western dishes (such as roast lamb) to Malay and even Japanese specialities. There's live music from 8.30pm.

Thirty Two (☎ 262 2232; 32 Jln Sultan Ahmad Shah; mains from RM40; ☺ dinner) Genteel restaurant in an elegant seaside mansion with a small garden and nice little alcoves. Dishes like six-spice marinated barbecue chicken, lobster, steaks and Osso Bucco lamb are on the menu but the house speciality is the crab laksa. There's a cocktail bar, and live jazz on Friday and Saturday evenings. Dress code is smart casual.

1885 (☎ 261 8333; 10 Lebu Farquhar; mains from RM45; ☺ dinner) It doesn't get more elegant than a candlelit table at the E&O Hotel's main restaurant. The menu is ever-evolving, but you can always count on excellent Western cuisine such as sea bass with truffle sauce and roast duck. Service is top of the line. Open for dinner only, there's a smart-casual dress code (no T-shirts, shorts or sandals). While this is just about as posh as it gets in Malaysia, convert the price into your home currency and you'll see what phenomenal value this is.

DRINKING

You can get a beer at most Chinese restaurants although not anywhere Malay. Food courts with Chinese vendors have the cheapest drinks prices in town and the bill goes up exponentially once you get to a restaurant or bar. Wine is available mostly by the bottle at finer restaurants, although the selection is poor and the prices exorbitant – the house wines available by the glass have usually been sitting in the fridge for a long while and are mostly of the syrupy sweet variety. One of the nicest areas for a drink is along the pedestrian section of Jln Penang, where a handful of chic bars spread out along the sidewalk and Penang's beautiful people came out in the evening to stroll and mingle. Foodcourt beer starts at RM5.50 but usually costs from RM6 to RM7. At a bar or restaurant expect to pay from RM8 to RM10 and cocktails often start at RM15. Most bars are open from around 5pm to 1am.

Pitt Street Corner (94 Lebu Pitt) The Wild West meets Little India at this saloon-style bar complete with swinging doors. It's a friendly, atmospheric place to sit down with a cold beer on a hot day and watch Indian musicals on the wall-mounted TV.

Soho Free House (50 Jln Penang; ☺ noon-midnight) This place starts rocking out early ('80s music

GAY & LESBIAN PENANG

Penang is second only to KL for its gay and lesbian scene, which doesn't have to stay quite as hushed up as in many of Malaysia's more conservative cities. Popular hang-outs include Batu Ferringhi (p209) and the Midlands Park Centre (p201).

Bagan Lounge (☎ 226 4977; 18 Jln Bagan Jermal) A restaurant, as well as a bar, this cosy, secluded place is popular with hip under-thirties and expats. There's a sultry jazz diva who enhances the décor of cushy couches, giant mirrors, fairy lights and ceiling fans. Not much goes on till the music starts around 10pm. This is also a great place for a romantic dinner.

Beach Blanket Babylon (The Garage, 2 Jln Penang) Another stylish bar run by the owners of Bagan, Sunday night is men's night with half price on standard pours and a discount on beer for anyone male.

Club Momo A short jaunt from Beach Blanket Babylon, bar-hop here on Sunday for the locally dubbed 'Gentlemen Prefer Longs' night. See full review, below.

anyone?) with a mostly Chinese clientele who nosh bangers and mash (RM13.50) and swill pints like good Brits. The main postwork party happens downstairs, while the quieter upstairs area has a few pool tables and window-side tables overlooking Jln Penang. It shows live sports on satellite TV on Saturday.

Coco Island Traveller's Corner (☎ 264 3608; 273 Lebu Chulia) A true traveller hang-out that fronts the Blue Diamond Hotel (p190), you'll find plenty of long-haulers, lonely souls and locals looking for foreign friends in this beer garden. Besides beer and hard liquor there are noodles, rice and steaks on the menu – mains hover around the RM5 mark.

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.

Segafredo Espresso (cfr Lebu Farquhar & Jln Penang; ☺ 10.30am-2.30am) This place is trying to decide if it's a coffeehouse or a bar. OK espresso drinks are available, as well as cocktails (from RM19). It's a franchise, and feels like it with '80s hits showing on the TV screen; the cigarette smoking locals turn up after 10pm.

ENTERTAINMENT

Clubs

Penang's best dancing venues are along stylish upper end of Jln Penang and are set up for drinking as much as, if not more than, for dancing. Karaoke can be found in several hotels along Jln Penang including the Oriental Hotel (p191).

R&B Pub (1st fl, Merchant Hotel, 55 Jln Penang; ☺ 9.30pm-2.45am) Inside the Merchant Hotel, this lively club features live music most nights.

There's also a dart board and pool table, but shorts and sandals are no-nos here.

Rock World (☎ 261 3168; off Lebu Campbell) One of Penang's oldest venues, definitely looking its age. It still gets lively on weekends though, and features local Chinese bands. You can't miss the gargantuan neon spider web hanging over the front.

Glo (☎ 261 1066; The Garage, 2 Jln Penang) A glitzy club with thumping house music and a packed weekly programme. There's cabaret on Friday, game shows on Saturday and dance shows and talent competitions on other days. Ladies get free drinks all night long on Wednesday.

Slippery Senoritas (The Garage, 2 Jln Penang) Come to this see-and-be-seen Latin club for live music, salsa dancing and a Tom Cruise *Cocktail*-esque show, put on by the bar staff, involving flames, fruit and cards among other things. This is a place for dressing to the hilt, so don't show up in your flip flops. It's popular with Western expats, and the adjoining restaurant serves tasty Western and Mexican fare.

Club Momo (☎ 262 3030; The Bungalow, Upper Penang) This place has a Middle Eastern and Mediterranean theme going, complete with a Harem Club with sofas and Moroccan tents. There's a special dance floor and alcoves for VIPs, live music and theme-music nights. On Wednesday women get in free. Alfresco Asian-fusion dining is on a leafy patio.

Cinemas

Golden Screen Cinemas (Gurney Plaza, Gurney Dr) Penang's biggest cinema complex with 12 screens and THX sound is in the Gurney Plaza shopping complex (p201). Tickets generally cost from RM7 to RM10 depending on the time of day and day of the week. Thus, it is RM7

before 6pm and RM10 on Fri night and all day Sat and Sun but only RM8 on week nights.

SHOPPING

Penang is a fun place to shop with plenty of outlets for local crafts and antiques, as well as cameras and electronics at competitive prices (although Kuala Lumpur has a wider range). Bargaining is usually required, except in department stores. Jln Penang is the best shopping street in Georgetown including several outlets selling creative and exotic women's clothing. Along this same road you'll also find **Mydin's Wholesale Emporium** (☎ 262 9915; Jln Penang), part of a nationwide chain that sells everything from toothpaste to watches and DVDs at rock-bottom, no-need-to-bargain prices.

A good souvenir is items of Penang Pewter (below), a rather more affordable version of the better-known Royal Selangor Pewter, though of equal quality.

Antiques

Fine Chinese and European china are what's most readily available around town.

Lean Giap Trading (☎ 262 0520; 443 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.

Oriental Arts & Antiques (☎ 261 2748; 440 Lebu Chulia; ☎ 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.

Arts & Crafts

Penang is brimming with shops selling similar, primarily Chinese, trinkets like calligraphy,

watercolour paintings, good-luck charms and placemats. There are also a few shops along Jln Penang selling batik and some fabulous Indian embroidered silk and cotton clothing. On the last Sunday of every month, the pedestrian section of Jln Penang hosts a **street market** (☎ 10am-6pm) selling Malaysian arts and crafts such as dolls, batik, pottery, T-shirts and painted tiles, as well as items like bottled chutney.

Bee Chin Heong (☎ 261 9346; 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 Lebu Armenia; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat) This small gallery showcases the exquisite fused-glass creations of Penang artist Wong Keng Fuan. Colourful bowls and quirky sculptures are for sale.

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, selling all the different varieties. It also sells woodcarvings, jewellery, porcelain, crystal and batik.

Penang Pewter (The Garage, Jln Penang; ☎ 11am-10pm) It's a small shop but has a large array of Penang Pewter direct from the factory.

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 its current range, and pewter-making workshops can be arranged here, costing RM50 for about one hour. Book at least two days in advance.

Siddhi Gifts & Crafts (☎ 264 1005; 34 Lebu Penang) Indian woodcarvings, incense sticks and pewter souvenirs are sold at this little shop.

Shopping Centres

There are dozens of malls in Georgetown but most hover in locations away from the colonial centre.

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 cafés.

Komtar (Jln Penang) Penang's oldest mall is housed in a 64-storey landmark tower. There are hundreds of shops in a place with the feel of an ageing bazaar. Here you'll find everything from clothes, shoes and electronics to everyday goods. The Penang Tourist Guide Association has a desk on the 3rd floor, there's a Tesco Hypermarket, and you can take an elevator ride (RM5) from the ground floor to the 58th floor where there's a tourist viewing-area with amazing views over the island.

Prangin Mall (Jln Penang) Adjoining Komtar, the biggest mall in Penang houses a huge number of shops and restaurants, including smarter chain stores such as Parkson Grand which has a wide range of clothes, cosmetics, household goods and such. There's also a cinema showing the odd Western blockbuster.

Gurney Plaza (Gurney Dr) The most chic mall, with international chain stores like The Body Shop and Esprit. Mac users will find an Apple store here, and there's a massive music store, bookstore and several electronics outlets. The state's biggest cineplex, Golden Screen Cinemas (p199) is here, as well as a mini theme park, fitness centre and a health spa. Shop all day, then dine at the colourful hawker centre (p194) in the evening.

Midlands Park Centre (☎ 226 8588; Jln Burma) This is like a scaled down version of Prangin Mall, with an attached hotel and a rooftop water park (see p188).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

See the Getting There & Away (p172) and Getting Around (p174) sections for information on transport to and from Georgetown.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Penang's Bayan Lepas International Airport (☎ 643 4411) is 18km south of Georgetown. There's a coupon system for taxis from the airport. The fare to Georgetown is RM30.

Taxis take about 45 minutes from the centre of town, while the bus takes at least an hour. Buses U307 and U401 run to and from the airport (RM3) every half hour between 6am and 11pm daily and stop at Komtar and Weld Quay.

Bus

Buses around Penang are run by the government-owned Rapid Penang and the entire system was entirely revamped in July 2007. Bus routes are divided into Utama (U), or Trunk routes that leave Georgetown to destinations around the island, and Tempatan (T), or local routes that do shorter circuits. All U routes originate at Weld Quay and most also stop at Komtar. Most buses have stops along Lebu Chulia. For a full list and a map of the routes go to www.wikipedia.org/wiki/rapidpenang.

Fares around town start at RM1 and only the farthest flung destinations, like Teluk Bahang, will cost RM3. Some handy routes are set out in the Useful Penang Bus routes table, p174.

Taxi

Penang's taxis all have meters, which drivers flatly refuse to use, so negotiate the fare before you set off. Typical fares around town cost around RM5 to RM15. For rates around the island see p175.

Trishaw

Bicycle rickshaws are an ideal way to negotiate Georgetown's backstreets and cost around RM30 per hour – as with taxis, it's important to agree on the fare before departure. You won't have any trouble finding one – more often than not, the drivers will hail you! From the ferry terminal, a trishaw to the hotel area around Lebu Chulia costs from RM10 to RM15 (or you can walk there in about 15 minutes).

THE REST OF THE ISLAND

It's not all Georgetown you know. When exploring the rest of the island, you'll find the same cultural mix but in smaller, easier to

PENANG PEWTER

Something you'll see in many shops, particularly along Jln Penang, is Penang Pewter. Malaysia was once one of the world's largest tin producers and today Royal Selangor, which was founded in 1885, is one of the most renowned pewter companies in the world. With Royal Selangor's haughty reputation comes a hefty price tag for its pewter. Penang Pewter, as Malaysia's second-name Pewter company, can be a real bargain compared to the picture frames, goblets, vases and the like produced by its upscale compatriots. The company's newest claim to fame is its gold-plated pewterware, which it happily adds to its 600 or so available items.

If you're not fussed about great quality or brand names, even cheaper pewter items, many of which you can get custom engraved, are available in small shops around Komtar shopping complex. Pewter was once made with lead, but today's varieties are not and are comprised primarily of tin with a hint of copper. The soft metal is easily handcrafted with intricate designs.

swallow doses and with a lackadaisical, paradisiacal backdrop. You can make a circuit of the island by car, motorcycle, or if you're really fit, bicycle, but it's not possible to circle the whole island by bus. If travelling by motorcycle or car, plan to spend a minimum of five hours, including plenty of sightseeing and refreshment stops. If you're on a bicycle allow all day or maybe even stop in Teluk Bahang for the night to rehydrate and rest the thighs.

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 Bayan Lepas and the airport is congested and built up, but it gets much quieter further around on the island's western side.

PENANG HILL

📍 04

Rising 821m above Georgetown, the top of Penang Hill 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 top is 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** was completed (one-way/return RM3/4; runs every 30 minutes from 6.30am to 9.30pm Sunday to Friday, till 11.30pm Saturday). 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 horrendously long, with waits of up to 30 minutes but on weekdays queues are minimal.

A number of roads and **walking trails** traverse the hill. From the trail near the upper funicular station you can walk the 5.5km to the Botanical Gardens (Moon Gate) in about three hours. The easier 5.1km tarred jeep track from the top also leads to the gardens, just beyond the Moon Gate. There are a couple of numbered pitstops, with views, along the trails, and you might be lucky enough to find someone stationed there to serve you a cup of tea.

Penang's longest forest trail, the Penang Hill Forest Challenge (p206) runs from the upper funicular station to Teluk Bahang 6.6km away. This is a challenging trail taking the jeep track from the top to station 1 (Western Hill), a forest trail to station 10, then continuing on a forest track towards Teluk Bahang. Trees along the trail are marked with white paint and reflectors at 10m intervals. Expect a minimum of four hours to hike this trail if you are fit, and it's recommended by the Penang Forestry Department that hikers go in groups of at least four people, inform someone of where they are going before setting out, and that each person carries at least 2L of water.

The 11-room **Bellevue Hotel** (☎ 829 9500; penbell@streamyx.com; s & d RM132, f RM154) is the only place to stay on Penang Hill, but while the garden offers some splendid views over Georgetown, the hotel is a little frayed at the edges and overpriced. It has a restaurant and a small **aviary garden** (adult/child RM4/2; ☎ 9am-6pm) featuring exotic birds. You can get a drink or snack in the hotel restaurant to take in the view but be warned that this might be one of your more expensive food purchases in Malaysia.

Getting There & Away

From Weld Quay, Komtar or Lebu Chulia, you can catch one of the frequent bus U204.

The energetic can take one of the walking trails (see above) to/from the Botanical Gardens or from Teluk Bahang.

KEK LOK SI TEMPLE

The largest Buddhist temple in Malaysia stands on a hilltop at Air Itam, near Penang Hill. Founded by an immigrant Chinese Buddhist, construction started in 1890, took more than 20 years to complete and was

largely funded by donations from Penang's Baba-Nonya (Straits Chinese) elite. The temple is still being added to.

To reach the entrance, walk through a maze of souvenir stalls, past a tightly packed turtle pond and murky fish ponds, until you reach **Ban Po Thar** (Ten Thousand Buddhas Pagoda; admission RM2) a seven-tier, 30m-high tower. 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; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun), while a **cable-car** (one-way/return RM4/2) whisks you to the highest level, presided over by an awesome 120ft-high bronze **statue of Kuan Yin**, goddess of mercy. Sixteen highly decorated bronze columns (still under construction) 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 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 station, or you can hop on bus U204 to Air Itam. Tell the driver you want to get off near the temple.

BOTANICAL GARDENS

Don't join the throngs of Penang visitors that miss the 30-hectare **Botanical Gardens** (☎ 227 0328; www.jkb.penang.gov.my; Waterfall Rd; admission free; ☎ 5am-8pm). The area has been called a 'green lung' for the busy city and it has become a place to safe keep the unique flora and some fauna of the island. Also known as the Waterfall Gardens, after the stream that cascades through from Penang Hill, they've also been dubbed the Monkey Gardens for the many long-tailed macaques that scamper around. Don't be tempted to feed them: monkeys do bite, and there's a RM500 fine if you're caught. Walking with food or a plastic bag that looks like it contains food might also make you prone to attacks, and we're not kidding. You'll also see dusky leaf monkeys, black giant squirrels and a myriad of giant bugs and velvety butterflies, which are all considerably more docile.

Once a granite quarry, the gardens were founded in 1884 by Charles Curtis, a tireless

British plant lover who collected the first specimens and became the first curator. At first the gardens were primarily used for the commercial cultivation of spices including cloves, pepper and nutmeg. Today Penangites love their garden and you'll find groups practising Tai Chi, jogging, picnicking and even line-dancing throughout the week. Weekends see more families in the gardens, and evenings belong to the lovebirds. The best time to visit is during the Penang International Floral Festival (see p171) around late May or early June.

Within the grounds are an orchid house, palm house, bromeliad house, cactus garden and numerous tropical trees, all labelled in English. The most famous tree in the gardens is the cannonball tree, which produces large pink flowers that eventually give off stinking fruits about the size and shape of a human head. Continuing the human body-part theme is the Palm of Buddha tree that gives off fruits resembling human hands. On weekdays only, you can get all your kooky horticultural questions answered at the **Plant Information Kiosk** (☎ 8am-4.30pm).

To get here, take bus U102. There's also a path that leads to/from the top of Penang Hill (see opposite).

MUZIUM & GALERI TUANKU FAUZIAH

Six kilometres south of Georgetown, on the sprawling campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia, is the **Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah** (☎ 657 7888; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun-Thu, 10am-12.15pm & 2.45-5pm Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), previously known as the USM Museum & Art Gallery. It holds a collection of traditional Malaysian and Indonesian musical instruments – including several full *gamelan* (traditional) orchestras, aboriginal and Baba-Nonya pieces, and fascinating contemporary Malaysian art and photography. The university campus is on an old spice plantation with a few colonial buildings.

Take bus U302 or U704. If you take the U704, be sure to get off at the university stop before the bus turns onto the Penang Bridge and carries you away to the mainland.

BUKIT JAMBUL ORCHID & HIBISCUS GARDEN & REPTILE HOUSE

Heading inland from the University is the 2 hectare, descriptively named **Bukit Jambul Orchid & Hibiscus Garden & Reptile House** (☎ 644 8863; admission adult/child RM4/1; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm).

The flower gardens which include a cactus garden, a waterfall, a Japanese pond, tea house and plenty of tropical flowers beyond orchids and hibiscus are pleasant to visit. Be warned that there is a mini-zoo which includes two caged Bengal tigers. There is also a collection of flightless birds, two turtle species and some giant Amazonian apaima fish. If you're around in September you'll get to see the blooms of the world's largest tiger orchid, which grows to 7.6cm.

The reptile house has about 50 tanks filled with snakes and skinks plus a pair of saltwater crocodiles. The snake show is on weekends and holidays at 11.30am and 3.30pm.

PULAU JEREJAK

Lying 1.5 nautical miles off Penang's south-east coast, thickly forested Pulau Jerejak is an island that until recently served as a dumping ground for Penang's unwanted residents. Sir Francis Light actually arrived on Pulau Jerejak before setting foot on Penang and the island was at that time already called Jerejak by local fishermen. There was talk of building Fort Cornwallis on the site but a malaria outbreak, which was probably due to land clearing on Penang, quickly made Georgetown look like a better option.

At the end of the 19th century Pulau Jerejak served as a leper colony and, later, as a quarantine area for contagious diseases until WWII when there were rumours it was used as a German submarine base. After the war Penang had a severe tuberculosis outbreak and the sufferers were once again sent to Jerejak. If that wasn't enough, the island became a penal colony and then a rehabilitation centre for the country's worst criminals and drug offenders.

Today ecotourism has brightened things up and the island is now private property, occupied by the **Jerejak Resort & Spa** (☎ 658 7111; www.jerejakresort.com; 1-night packages per person from RM148; 📍 🚗) which is located on the site of the old leper colony. Packages available through the website, which usually include transport, breakfast and a massage, make staying here good value.

The new chalets are beautifully furnished and the Asian-chic spa offers massage, body scrubs and steam baths. The less luxurious 'adventure village' complex has simple doubles (RM150) and dorms (four/six beds RM230/330), though you will need to book

the whole dorm room. Camping, including tent rental, is RM80 for two people or RM100 for four people.

The resort has its own jetty, and day trippers are welcome. Boats leave roughly every two hours (adult/child RM25/16). There are several activities on the island including jungle trekking (one hour, RM20); wall climbing (RM10); mountain biking (RM15) and a suspension bridge trail (RM15). No buses run past the jetty; a taxi from Georgetown will cost around RM40.

SNAKE TEMPLE

Three kilometres before the airport, you'll see Penang's **Snake Temple** (Temple of the Azure Cloud; 📍 9am-6pm) on the western side of the road. The temple is dedicated to Chor Soo Kong, a Buddhist priest and healer, and was built in 1850 by a grateful patient. The several resident, venomous Wagler's pit vipers and green tree snakes are said to be slightly doped by the incense smoke drifting around the temple during the day, but at night slither down to eat the offerings. 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 a photo of you holding a snake. While interesting, it's not really worth coming all the way out here unless you're doing a tour of the island or going to other nearby sights as well.

Bus U302 runs every 30 minutes from Weld Quay and Komtar and passes the temple.

SOUTHERN FISHING VILLAGES Batu Maung

About 3km after the snake temple, at the end of the Bayan Lepas Expressway, you reach the turnoff to the Chinese fishing village of Batu Maung. Once home to a biodiverse mangrove swamp, encroaching development from the Bayan Lepas Industrial Zone has resulted in extensive clearing. Development here is expected to skyrocket with the building of the new bridge linking Penang to the mainland (see boxed text, p171). It's Penang's deep-sea fishing port so there are plenty of dilapidated, brightly painted boats along the coast.

The renovated seaside temple here, **Sam Poh Temple**, has a shrine dedicated to the legendary Admiral Cheng Ho (see p144) who was also known as Sam Poh. The temple sanctifies a huge 'footprint' on the rock that's reputed to belong to the famous navigator. Devotees pray

before his statue here and drop coins into the water-filled footprint.

Perched on top of the steep Bukit Batu Maung is the **Penang War Museum** (☎ 626 5142; Bukit Batu Maung; adult/child RM25/12.50; 📍 9am-7pm). 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.

Also in town is the **Penang Aquarium** (admission adult/child RM5/2; 📍 10am-5pm, closed Wed) which houses 25 tanks filled with colourful fish and some not-so colourful stonefish; there is a tactile tank with a young green turtle, and visitors can also feed koi. Next door to the aquarium is the World Fish Centre, a research institute funded by Unesco.

Batu Maung is a fishing port so of course there are plenty of opportunities to sample fresh fish. **The Beginning of the World** (from RM5; 📍 breakfast & lunch) and **Best View Seafood** (from RM5; 📍 breakfast & lunch) are recommended. Batu Maung bus U307 leaves every half hour from Weld Quay and Komtar.

Sungai Batu

This is a beach village utterly off the beaten track and unaccustomed to foreigners, be on your best behaviour and cover up if you're going to visit. While the beach isn't as stunning as some others, the surroundings of delightful *kampung* houses, flowers and picket fences make this one of the more scenic spots on the island. On the way to the beach you pass a small green lake created by sand mining that's now filled with lotus flowers.

You need a car to get to Sungai Batu. To get there coming from Batu Maung, turn left at the mosque on the left-hand side on the way to Teluk Kumbar. From here follow Jln Sungai Batu and you'll be able to find your way from there. The road here can get muddy after a rain.

Teluk Kumbar

Penangites come here with one thing in mind: seafood. While some housing estates have sprung up recently – which is probably linked to plans for the new bridge in nearby Batu Maung (see p171) – the village is still a

calm and beautiful stretch of sugary sands. Stop at one of the Malay food stalls for some *mee udang* (spicy noodles with prawns) or at the well-known Chinese restaurant **Good Friend Seafood** (from RM3; 📍 lunch & dinner) which is known for its seafood and its meat satay.

Detour from Teluk Kumbar to **Gertak Sanggul**, which has gorgeous beaches, brightly painted fishing boats swaying in the sea and stalls on the shore selling fresh goodies. As enticing as it may look, don't swim here; pollution from the area's many pig farms make it a very bad idea. From the shore you can glimpse **Pulau Kendi** which is the most distant island in the state of Penang.

BALIK PULAU

Balik Pulau is the main town on the island circuit, with a population of 120,000. There are a number of restaurants, food stalls and a daily market here, but no accommodation. It's a good place for lunch and the local speciality, laksa *balik pulau*, is a must. It's a tasty rice-noodle concoction with a thick fish-broth, mint leaves, pineapple slivers, onions and fresh chillies, best sampled at the **Balik Pulau Market**.

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 hill orchards of clove and nutmeg trees which fruit during the month of July and between November and January. From late May to July, this is the place to come for durians.

A new town centre, expected to be completed in August 2007, will house the island's biggest wet and dry market as well as a huge new food court.

Balik Pulau is the terminus of bus U401 from Georgetown.

SUNGAI PINANG TO PANTAI ACHEH

After Balik Pulau you pass through an area of Malay *kampung* and clove, nutmeg, rubber, even durian, plantations. Sungai Pinang, a busy Chinese village built along a stagnant river (it's a different tributary from the Sungai Pinang in the boxed text on p189), is worth a peek. Further on is the turnoff to Pantai Aceh, another small, isolated fishing village.

About 2km further north along the road to Teluk Bahang is the hillside 10-hectare **Tropical Fruit Farm** (☎ 227 6223; 📍 9am-6pm), which

cultivates over 250 types of tropical and subtropical fruit trees, native and hybrid. Its two-hour tours (adult/child RM25/17) are very educational, and include fruit tastings and a glass of fresh juice. The farm endeavours to use only organic fertilisers, some of which it produces itself; although not completely chemical-free, it's a good start. On Saturday and Sunday there's a **barbecue lunch** (adult/child RM35/28; ☎ noon-3pm), which includes salads made with garden veggies, all-you-can-drink fresh fruit juice and, of course, plenty of tropical garden fruit for dessert. If you get lunch, the farm's tour costs RM10. Most visitors come on organised trips but it's no problem showing up on your own. The hourly T501 bus runs between Balik Pulau and Teluk Bahang four times a day, passing Sungai Pinang and the fruit farm.

TITI KERAWANG

After the turnoff 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 to protect the precious fruit when they fall.

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

TELUK BAHANG & AROUND

The village of Teluk Bahang marks the western end of the island's northern beach strip. It's a sleepy fishing village with very little going on and locals have dubbed the area 'the end of the world'. While it is in fact the end of the paved road and human civilisation, it's only the beginning for hikers, who will revel in the numerous forest trails of Teluk Bahang Forest Reserve and Penang National Park. Those coming from the mainland or Borneo will be very pleased to know that Penang's forests are the only ones in Malaysia that are leech-free; no such luck with the mosquitoes though. For those not wanting to dirty their boots, even without the bloodsuckers, there's a handful of manmade flora- and fauna-based sights near the village.

Visitors are encouraged to dress conservatively in and around this rural village and use discretion with wearing swimming costumes

on beaches near the town – if everyone on the beach is fully clothed, it's best to do the same. When in the park, it's usually OK to get into your togs for a swim. If you do go in the water, watch out for jellyfish.

If you're on a tour, you might visit the **Pinang Cultural Centre** (☎ 885 1175) which 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. Just outside Teluk Bahang is the **Craft Batik** factory and shop, a somewhat touristy and overpriced outlet for sarongs and the like.

To get here from Georgetown, use the northern coastal road passing through Tanjung Tokong, Tanjung Bungah and Batu Ferringhi.

Sights

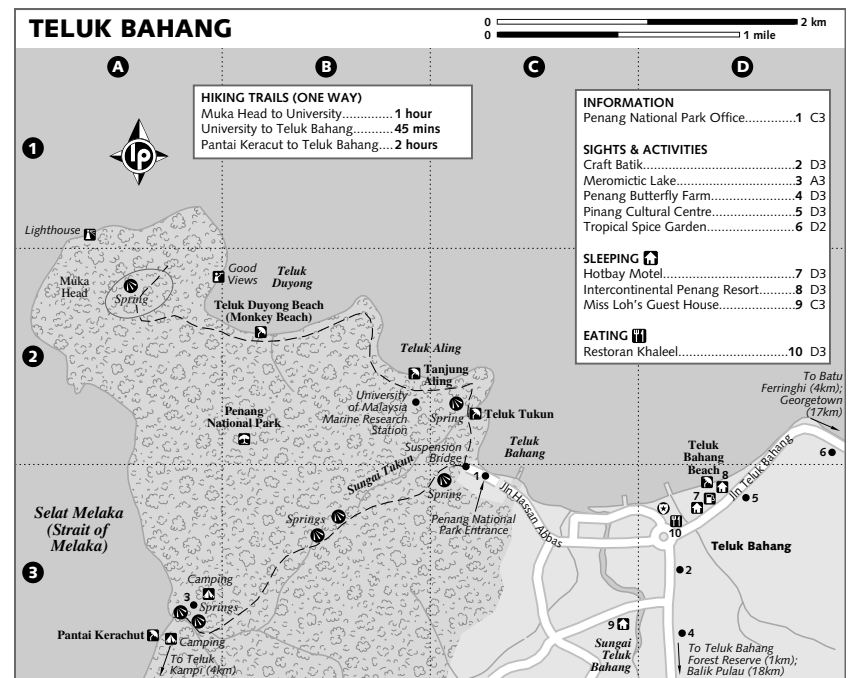
TELUK BAHANG FOREST RESERVE

The 873-hectare **Teluk Bahang Forest Reserve** (☎ Ranger's Office 885 1280; admission free) contains a buzzing chunk of Penang's virgin rainforests. Guides are rarely available, so pick up a hiking leaflet, available at the ranger's office at the park entrance or at the **Forestry Department** (Map p176; ☎ 262 5272; 20th fl, Komtar, Jln Penang) in Georgetown; the leaflets have trail maps and some information on plant identification. Also ask at either of these offices about **camping** in the reserve.

To get to the park entrance from Batu Ferringhi, get off the bus U101 at the Teluk Bahang roundabout, turn left and walk 15 minutes. The park entrance will be on your left just past the Penang Butterfly Farm.

Trails

There are only five mapped trails in the park, the most well known being the **Penang Hill Forest Challenge**, the longest trail in Penang that leads all the way to the top of 821m Penang Hill. This walk is obviously less strenuous in the downhill direction and is covered in the Penang Hill section (p202); from the Teluk Bahang end, expect the trek to take at least eight hours. One of the better walks is the easy 800m **Monkey-Cup Forest Trail** where you can search for carnivorous 'monkey-cups', more commonly known as pitcher plants. The 'flower' of this strangely beautiful plant is actually a modified leaf that traps insects then digests them with secreted liquids. The plant is not poisonous and is reportedly used



as rice-cooking containers in Sarawak, as well as having innumerable medicinal qualities. Intermediate trails are the 1.2km **Simpoh Gajah Trail** that passes through virgin jungle, the 2.9km **Charcoal Kiln Trail** which has some gnarly uphill bits through lovely forest to an old 1950s charcoal kiln; and the much more difficult 4.2km **Ridge Top Trail** that branches off from the Charcoal Kiln Trail to reach a ridge 400m above sea level. This last trail has some fantastic views over Telok Bahang, as well as pitcher plants to look out for along the way – if you don't have too much blinding sweat stinging your eyes.

Forestry Museum

It's best to visit the **Forestry Museum** (☎ 885 2388; admission RM1; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun, 9am-noon & 2.45-5pm Fri) before you take off on a hike so you'll know what to look for on the trail. While of most interest to plant and insect nerds (and we love 'em!), the museum does offer plenty of information to anyone who's willing to spend the time browsing. The most dramatic features are an 11m-high tree trunk and some insect and butterfly displays.

PENANG BUTTERFLY FARM

A little nearer the coast is the **Penang Butterfly Farm** (☎ 885 1253; 830 Jln Teluk Bahang; adult/child RM15/7.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun) with several thousand live butterflies, representing over 150 species. You can also see some fascinating beetles, lizards and spiders.

PENANG NATIONAL PARK

At just 2300ha, **Penang National Park** is the smallest in Malaysia; it's also one of the newest, attaining national park status in 2003. It has some interesting and challenging trails through the jungle, as well as some of Penang's finest and quietest beaches.

The small **Penang National Park office** (☎ 881 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 and can help organise guides (full day RM100), although they may be hard to find on weekdays. There are toilet facilities and **camping grounds** at Teluk Bahang Beach (close to the town and amenities), Pantai Kerachut (about a two-hour walk from the park entrance) and Teluk Tukun (20 minutes from

the park entrance); check at the park office for availability of camp sites.

The park entrance, located at the park office, is at the end of the road after passing through Teluk Bahang town.

Trails

From Teluk Bahang follow the trail to the suspension bridge. Here you have the choice of turning right towards Teluk Tukun and Muka Head or left to Pantai Kerachut. The easiest walk is to the right and it's a 20-minute stroll to **Teluk Tukun** beach where Sungai Tukun flows into the ocean. There are some little pools to swim in here. Following this trail along the coast about 25 minutes more brings you to the private **University of Malaysia Marine Research Station**, where there is a supply jetty, as well as **Tanjung Aling**, a nice beach to stop at for a rest. From here it's another 45 minutes or so down the beach to **Teluk Duyung**, also called Monkey Beach, after the numerous primates who scamper about here on the beach, on **Muka Head**, the isolated rocky promontory at the extreme northwestern corner of the island. On the peak of the head, another 15 minutes along, is an off-limits 1883 **lighthouse** and an Achenese-style **graveyard**. The views of the surrounding islands from up here are worth the sweaty uphill jaunt.

A longer and more difficult trail heads left from the suspension bridge, towards **Pantai Kerachut**, a beautiful white-sand beach which is a popular spot for picnics and is a green turtle nesting-ground. Count on about two hours to walk to the beach on the well-used trail. On your way is the unusual **meromictic lake**, a rare natural feature composed of two separate layers of unmixed freshwater on top and seawater below, supporting a unique mini-ecosystem. From Pantai Kerachut beach you can walk about two hours onward to further-flung and isolated **Teluk Kampi**, which is the longest beach in the park; look for **trenches** along the coast that are remnants of the Japanese occupation in WWII.

TROPICAL SPICE GARDEN

Along the road from Teluk Bahang to Batu Ferringhi is the **Tropical Spice Garden** (☎ 881 1797; www.tropicalspicegarden.com; Jln Teluk Bahang; admission adult/child RM13/5, adult/child incl tour RM20/5; ☎ 9am-6pm), a tranquil botanical garden planted with more than 500 species of flora, with an emphasis on spices. Ferns, bamboo, ginger and

heliconias are among the lush vegetation and you might spot a giant monitor lizard or two. Walk up to the small café to sample fruit juices mixed with garden spices and enjoy the panoramic view through the trees from the terrace. Tours are by appointment only. To get here by bus, take any Teluk Bahang bus and let the driver know that you want to get off here. There's a beautiful roadside white-sand beach just across the road from the gardens.

Sleeping

Teluk Bahang is only 4km from Batu Ferringhi so if the few options here don't suit you, there are plenty more over there.

Miss Loh's Guest House (☎ 885 1227; 159 Jln Teluk Bahang; dm/s/d from RM8/15/30; ☎) This peaceful, ramshackle place is set in a large garden away from the seafront, with several cats and dogs wandering about. The accommodation is about as basic as you can get, but travellers keep returning, and some stay for months on end. Rates are negotiable for longer stays, but Miss Loh won't accept telephone reservations.

Hotbay Motel (☎ 016 4559062; Jln Teluk Bahang; r RM75-85; ☎) In the main shopping area east of the roundabout, Hotbay offers fair motel-style rooms, with a communal TV lounge at the front. Rooms with five and seven beds are also available (RM150/210).

Previously called the Penang Mutiara Beach Resort, the **Intercontinental Penang Resort** (www.intercontinental.com) was closed for remodelling at the time of writing but was expected to open around July 2008. It's a huge resort on a good stretch of white beach.

Eating

With all those fishing boats in the harbour, fresh and tasty seafood is guaranteed. A group of busy hawkers stalls congregate at the final bus stop after the roundabout. Sadly, Teluk Bahang's famous End of the World Restaurant was destroyed in the 26 December 2004 tsunami.

Restoran Khaleel (Jln Teluk Bahang; mains from RM4; ☎ 24hr) is a good-value little food court next to the Hotbay Motel. The usual Malay specialities such as *nasi goreng* (fried rice) and fish-head curry are available.

The main shopping area along the road heading east to Batu Ferringhi also has a few coffee shops where you'll find cheaper Chinese dishes and seafood, as well as a couple of good

South Indian places which sell *murtabak* and *dosa* (savoury Indian pancakes).

Getting There & Away

Bus U101 runs from Georgetown every half-hour all the way along the north coast of the island as far as the roundabout in Teluk Bahang.

BATU FERRINGHI

The road from Teluk Bahang that winds along the coast to Batu Ferringhi is a picturesque stretch of small coves and more beaches. The quaintness abruptly stops at Batu Ferringhi (Foreigner's Rock), a concrete-clad resort strip. Stretching along the main drag of Jln Batu Ferringhi, the road is lined with big hotels, Malay restaurants and tourist shops flogging neon kiddie floats and cheesy postcards. While many resorts line the beach, the most gentle and ambient area in town is the jumble of cheap backpacker places and beachfront cafés that form a small community along the western portion of the sugary white beach.

Batu Ferringhi takes its name from a small rocky island just off the eastern end of the

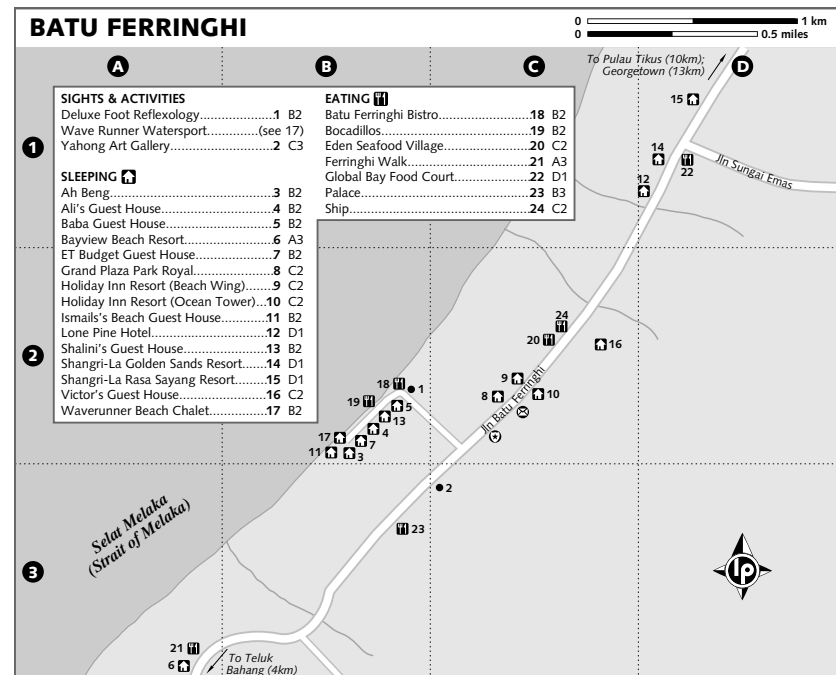
beach. Once, this island served as a landmark for passing sailors who would stop here to fill up on water from a nearby river. Local Malay called the sailors *ferringi*, which comes from an Indian term meaning Europeans. Eventually the village took on the name for itself and the rocky mound is now known as Lover's Isle.

The sand of Batu Ferringhi is fine for sunbathing, but doesn't compare to Malaysia's best; the water isn't as clear as you might expect, and often swimming means battling jellyfish. The beach itself can be dirty, especially on weekends when hordes of day trippers visit. Still, it's the best easy-access beach stop on the island.

There's a good night market and the **Yahong Art Gallery** (☎ 881 1251; 58-D Jln Batu Ferringhi) sells a vast range of Asian antiques and art, including jewellery, pewter, batik paintings, woodcarvings, and, less appealingly, ivory.

Activities

There are a few companies offering watersport activities on the beach. **Wave Runner Watersport** (☎ 881 4753) operates from the Waverunner



Beach Chalet (opposite). Among the activities on offer are jet-skiing (30 minutes, RM100), water-skiing (15 minutes, RM60) and parasailing (15 minutes, RM50). You can also book a deep-sea fishing trip (three hours, RM250). All hotels and guesthouses will be more than happy to set you up with their affiliated tour companies as well.

After that you might need a relaxing massage. Try the beachfront **Deluxe Foot Reflexology** (☎ 017 429 0722) which offers a 45-minute foot massage for RM40.

Sleeping

Batu Ferringhi, along with Teluk Bahang, was once a favourite stopover on the budget traveller's trail, and although there's still a clutch of backpacker hostels near the beach, these days the place is dominated by huge luxury developments. There are very few midrange options out here but the budget places are good value, big discounts are often available at the resorts outside the high season (roughly December to February). Staying out here is a completely different, more relaxing, experience from the city digs of Georgetown.

BUDGET

All the following places provide laundry services.

ET Budget Guest House (☎ 881 1553; etguesthouse2006@yahoo.com; 47 Batu Ferringhi; r RM25-60; 🏠) In a bright and open double-storey Chinese home with polished wood floors, this friendly, snooty place is the best bargain on the beach. Most rooms in the charming old-time building have a common bathroom and mosquito nets. The pricier air-con rooms come with TV and shower.

Ah Beng (☎ 881 1036; 54C Batu Ferringhi; r RM25-70; 🏠) This place has a motel-style layout with basic rooms, the pricier ones with air con, attached bath, mini-fridge and TV. It lacks the ambience of some of the places in older buildings, but the staff are enthusiastic and helpful.

our pick **Baba Guest House** (☎ 881 1686; babaguesthouse2000@yahoo.com; 52 Batu Ferringhi; r RM35-60; 🏠) Grandma's cooking up something tasty in the kitchen, sister is doing the laundry and grandpa is snoozing in a chair in the back garden. This is a wonderfully ramshackle, brightly blue-painted house that shows of the heart and soul of its resident (and very active) Chinese family. Rooms are large and spotless, most have shared bathrooms and

the dearer air-con rooms come with a fridge and shower. Grab your book, put up your feet on the colonial wood terrace and relax the day away. The beach is only about five steps away. When you're ready, the family can help arrange onward transport.

Shalini's Guest House (☎ 881 1859; ahlooi@pc.jaring.my; 56 Batu Ferringhi; r RM35-60; 🏠) This old, two-storey wooden house on the beach has an Indian family atmosphere; although not every one in the family is outwardly friendly, they do warm up eventually. Rooms are basic but neat and some have balconies. The priciest ones have private bathrooms.

Victor's Guest House (☎ 881 1005; 399 Jln Batu Ferringhi; r RM35-60; 🏠) Down a dusty lane, off the main road and away from the beach, Victor's is a friendly Indian guesthouse with large and clean – but frayed – rooms upstairs and down. The bare brick walls are a bit cheerless, but it's OK value and in a quiet, very secure, location with chickens pecking about outside. Only the air-con rooms have attached bathrooms, and are much more spacious than those without air-con.

Ali's Guest House (☎ 881 1316; www.alisferringhi.guesthouse.enetmyne.com; 53 Batu Ferringhi; tent RM10, r RM50-140, 🏠) With a courtyard overflowing with tree ferns and a wooden terrace that just nails that colonial feeling, this place has by far the most appealing and eclectic décor in the budget range. The simple rooms aren't as interesting as the common areas but most have air-con, attached bathrooms and TVs, and the room price includes breakfast. Room sizes range from singles to family rooms sleeping four people. The downstairs, bamboo-and-cushion-clad common area has a good library, DVD area and wi-fi. An unusual option here is a beachside tent rental, which includes a sleeping bag and bathroom use. The helpful management can arrange transport and all activities. An associated bar-restaurant is just across the road from the guesthouse and right on the beach.

MIDRANGE

Ismail's Beach Guest House (☎ 881 2569; Batu Ferringhi; r RM70-80; 🏠) Back behind the Wave-runner Beach Chalet and right on the beach, this place was under construction when we passed but several rooms were already completed. It's a clean, modern concrete complex with little in the way of creative décor but it has plenty of new-place perks like crisp sheets

and little dust. All rooms have air-con, attached bath and TV.

Waverunner Beach Chalet (☎ 019 472 7789; 54 Batu Ferringhi; r RM80; 🏠) Right on the sand, this is a brick chalet block with just five rooms, so it's often full. Rooms are clean, with tiled floors, two double beds, TVs, kettles and private showers; but the air signs of wear and tear. There are a few food stalls on the doorstep. Wave Runner Watersport (p209) operates from here.

TOP END

Lone Pine Hotel (☎ 881 1511; www.lonepinehotel.com; 97 Jln Batu Ferringhi; r from RM275; 🏠 🏠) Batu Ferringhi's original hotel, established in 1948 still feels like a 1950s holiday camp (remember *Dirty Dancing*?). In contrast to the nearby megaresorts, it's a relatively small, low-rise hotel, with only 50 rooms; even though it does retain old world ambience, it's been completely renovated. Rooms are enormous but have an institutional feel, mostly due to the greying, speckled tiles. Bathrooms are a step up from a standard public restroom. A big draw are the balconies or terraces with seaviews and the shady, pine-forested lawn just off the excellent stretch of beach. There's a pool but it's L-shaped, so not much good for anything besides lazy laps.

Holiday Inn Resort (☎ 881 1601; www.penang.holiday-inn.com; 72 Jln Batu Ferringhi; r from RM420; 🏠 🏠) Big, family-friendly resort with accommodation blocks on either side of the main road; rooms in the sea-facing Beach Wing are more expensive (from RM530). There's a wide range of rooms to choose from, including themed 'kidsuites', which come with TV, video and playstation. There's also a well-equipped kids' club, tennis courts and a gym.

Bayview Beach Resort (☎ 881 2123; www.bayviewbeach.com; Batu Ferringhi; r/st from RM475/770; 🏠 🏠) At the southern, and quieter, end of the beach, this is a gigantic place set in lovely palm-filled gardens. The hotel is built like a shopping mall, with the many levels of rooms encircling a skylit courtyard. A glass elevator jets you up and down through the middle. Rooms are fraying and staff are less friendly than at some of the other resorts but everything you could wish for is here, including a watersports centre, gym, squash courts, shops and bars – there's a bar in the middle of the large swimming pool too.

Shangri-La Golden Sands Resort (☎ 886 1191; www.shangri-la.com; r RM490-575; 🏠 🏠) In the same Shangri-La family as the high-class Rasa

Sayang (below) this hotel is more like the group's big-haired, cheesy-grinned little sister. If you could just imagine Julie the Loveboat cruise director leading you through the orderly array of blue, rubber woven lawn chairs, sprawling cement walkways and mushroom-like thatched hut shaded areas to the rat-tan lobby, you could have a lot of fun here. Rooms move into the modern age and are spacious with marble bathrooms. Staff are a little brusque but get the job done.

Grand Plaza Park Royal (☎ 881 1133; www.penang.parkroyalhotels.com; Batu Ferringhi; s/d/ste from RM520/550/1200; 🏠 🏠 🏠) With 324 rooms this place isn't the biggest resort here, but it's comfy, modern and a great choice. The lobby lounge, with its squashy sofas and piano bar, leads out onto a clean and attractive stretch of beach and a sparkling swimming pool. Rooms are large and have some nice touches, such as interesting shell art in the bathrooms. Sea views are preferable of course, but cost more. Nonguests can use the gardens and pools for RM25 per day, including lunch.

our pick **Shangri-La Rasa Sayang Resort** (☎ 881 1966; www.shangri-la.com; Jln Batu Ferringhi; r from RM600; 🏠 🏠 🏠) Outclassing every other resort on the island, this vast and luxurious establishment feels like something out of a South Sea dream. The newly renovated complex is unpretentiously chic and liveable. Rooms are large and decorated with fine hardwood furniture, and cloud-like white duvets float on the beds; all have balconies and many have sea views. The exclusive Rasa wing takes high-end to another elevation with its decadent suites – while the rest of the resort welcomes children, this area is adults-only. And did we mention the gardens? Palms, plumeria and bird of paradise create a lush enclave for the winding, partially shaded naturalistic swimming pool. A thin stretch of beach borders the gardens. As you'd expect, the hotel's Chi Spa is the most posh on Penang Island and is housed in 11 serene villas surrounded by lush plants. There's a yoga studio with regular yoga and meditation classes as well as a spa shop where you can shop for bath goodies to bring home. There are also tennis courts, a putting green and several restaurants. The service is the perfect balance of professionalism and easygoing friendliness.

Eating & Drinking

Batu Ferringhi Bistro (Batu Ferringhi; mains from RM6; 🕒 6pm-4am) This is a basic beach bar with a

small menu of Chinese and Western dishes. There are tables on the sand and it's a pleasant place to relax with an evening beer.

Bocadillos (Batu Ferringhi; mains RM8; ☺ breakfast & lunch daily, till sunset Sat & Sun) Amongst the little local-style cafés around the budget guesthouses is this gem of a place serving some of the best Western breakfasts and snacks in Penang. It's a Mediterranean menu with pizzas, burgers and fresh-baked pita sandwiches stuffed with creative salads. Enjoy a fresh fruit juice and homemade baked goods while gazing across the beach out to sea.

Palace (☎ 881 1313; 78 Jln Batu Ferringhi; mains from RM12; ☺ 2-11pm) Very gaudily decorated Indian restaurant specialising in tandoori dishes, though it also serves Italian and Arabic cuisine.

Ship (☎ 881 2142; 69B Jln Batu Ferringhi; mains from RM15; ☺ noon-midnight) You can't miss this one; it's a full-size replica of a wooden sailing ship, specialising in hefty steaks and seafood. Escargot and oysters are also on the somewhat overpriced menu. It's quite smart inside, but rather dark.

Ferringhi Walk (☎ 881 3325; 16 Jln Batu Ferringhi; mains from RM16; ☺ 4-11pm) At the southern end of the beach, this place has an outside seating area and a varied menu featuring lots of Chinese dishes, seafood and grills.

Eden Seafood Village (☎ 881 1236; 69A Jln Batu Ferringhi; mains from RM20; ☺ 3.30-10.30pm) Huge barn-like place serving seafood plucked from aquariums at the entrance. Oysters, crab, lobster and countless kinds of fish are available. There's a free dance show every evening at 8.30pm.

There are some basic foodstalls on the beachfront near the budget guesthouses, where you can enjoy some fresh fish, while **Global Bay Food Court** (cnr Jln Batu Ferringhi & Jln Sungai Emas) is a good place for inexpensive Western and Chinese meals.

Getting There & Away

Buses U101 and U105 run from Weld Quay and from Komtar, in Georgetown, and take around 30 minutes to reach Batu Ferringhi.

TANJUNG TOKONG

Once a small fishing village, this area has experienced rapid development since the 1980s, mostly of the highrise variety. The town is known for its temple, **Tua Pek Kong** which is dedicated to the Taoist god of prosperity.

While the temple looks rather ordinary, it hosts an annual ritual, Chneah Hoay, on the 14th night of the Chinese New Year that draws folks in from around the island. During the ceremony, the year's fortune is divined from flames that are fanned inside a special, ceremonial urn.

Facing the temple is a sitting area that was funded by the famous Tiger Balm guy, Aw Boon Haw. The nearby open-air seafood restaurant is renowned throughout Penang and the town is also known for its chicken rice.

TANJUNG BUNGGAH & PULAU TIKUS

Heading back into Georgetown from Batu Ferringhi, you'll pass **Tanjung Bungah** (Cape of Flowers), the first real beach town close to the city – but it's not good for swimming. Inexplicably, big hotels and apartment blocks are cropping up everywhere, but 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 Park Centre (p188) and Island Plaza. Georgetown has encroached enough that this area could nearly be considered a neighbourhood, rather than a separate town. A taxi from Georgetown's Lebu Chulia to Midlands costs RM15.

Pulau Tikus is also the beginning of scenic Gurney Dr with its great sea views and hawk food (see p194); see p201 for Gurney Plaza. 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 the homes have now been demolished and abandoned, taken over by squatters, fronted by office space or even converted into fast-food outlets. Keep moving in this direction and you'll have made it back to central Georgetown.

SEBERANG PERAI

Living in the shadow of the tourist megalith of Penang Island, Seberang Perai has become the forgotten half of the state. While it doesn't hold much to entice visitors, Butterworth has one or two interesting places to visit if you're passing through, and the friendly island of Pulau Aman is the perfect place to go for an immersion into the Malay side of life. The province

was previously called Wellesley Province named for Richard Wellesley, the governor-general of Bengal from 1797–1805.

BUTTERWORTH

You probably won't spend much time in the industrial town of Butterworth, which lacks the historic points of interest and charm found on Penang Island. The main reason most travellers come here is to pass through and cross the channel to visit Penang. The town has a large ferry port and an air force base.

The only major point of interest is the **Penang Bird Park** (Taman Burung Pinang; ☎ 399 1899; Jln Todak; adult/child RM15/7.50; ☺ 9am-7.30pm), 7km east of the ferry terminal across the river. This landscaped park has more than 300 species of birds, mostly from Southeast Asia, including parrots, hornbills and hawks. There's a walk-in aviary, lily pond, a playground and a large collection of orchids, hibiscus and palms. To get there, take one of the frequent buses from Butterworth bus station to Seberang Jaya (RM1).

Right next to the Penang Bird Park is **Arulmigu Karumariamman Temple**, a South Indian Hindu temple with the largest and tallest (22m) *rajagopuram* (main temple tower) in Malaysia. The entrance to the *rajagopuram* is also the largest in the country at nearly 6.5m. The temple was completed in 1997.

If you're a Chinese-temple freak, it's worth checking out **Rumah Berhala Tow Boo Kong** (Nine Emperor Gods Temple) which began its existence as a shed on a rented piece of land in 1971. The temple blossomed little by little and was completed in its final form in the year 2000. It's exceedingly ornate for a modern edifice, with a dramatic roof swarming with curving pagodas and golden dragons. It's home to a Taoist group who worship the Nine Emperor Gods, the nine sons of the Queen of Heaven, who are the patron deities of, among other things, prosperity and health. Their festival, called none other than the **Nine Emperor Gods Festival**, is held on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month each year when the Nine Emperor Gods are believed to descend to Earth from the stars. For nine days devotees show off their religious fervour and the temple becomes a hive of followers. Vegetarian food and snacks are prepared and sold at stalls during this time. The temple is north of the Jln Raja Uda and the Butterworth-Kulim Expressway. Look out for the temple on the right side of the road after the Butterworth Outer Ring Rd intersection.

Sleeping & Eating

There's little to detain you in Butterworth for the night, but there are several hotels if you do wish to stay.

Ambassadors Hotel (☎ 332 7788; 4425 Jln Bagan Luar; r from RM45; ☺) 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. There's a gym and sauna, and breakfast is included in the price.

Sunway Hotel (☎ 370 7788; www.sh.com.my; 11 Lebuh Tenggara Dua, Seberang Jaya; s/d RM180/200; ☺) 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 though one of the better places is **Sri Ananda Bahwan Restaurant** (☎ 323 6228; 2982 Jln Bagar Luar; mains from RM3; ☺ 6.30am-midnight), a popular Indian place which serves vegetarian/nonvegetarian set lunches for RM3.50/5. It has a particularly good selection of colourful, handmade Indian sweets, which you can have boxed to take away.

Getting There & Away

Most of the land transport (buses, trains, taxis) between Penang and other places in peninsular Malaysia and Thailand leaves from Butterworth, not far from the train station and next to the terminal for ferries going to or from Georgetown. See the Getting There & Away (p172) and Getting Around (p174) sections for information on transport services to/from Butterworth.

PULAU AMAN

For anyone really wanting to get off the beaten track, head to the tiny fishing island of **Pulau Aman** (Peace Island; population 300), southeast of Penang Island, and 4.5km off the coast of Bukit Tambun in Seberang Perai. The whole island can be covered on foot in about an hour; trees are labelled with scientific and local names, making the walk a bit educational

as well. The oldest known *sukun* (breadfruit tree) in Malaysia can be found in the village, and is said to have been planted in 1891; it's marked with a basic cement sign. Other elegant *sukun* are found all over the island. There is one small **beach** at the north, but don't even consider exposing your knees or shoulders, let alone your midriff, to sunbathe here. Several paths lead through the village and a cement path goes partway around the island. At the end of the cement path on the waterside is **Telaga Emas Well** (Golden Well) that was purportedly dug in 1879 and is now covered with a modern shelter to protect it from decay; the well is also special because it never runs dry. Don't forget mosquito repellent if you walk around the island.

Off the north coast of Pulau Aman is **Pulau Gedung**, a deserted island that was once the

tramping ground for the region's numerous pirates (see p21). Everything of interest on the forested island revolves around pirates: there's **Gua Lanun** (Pirate's Cave, where the sailors stashed their loot) and **Batu Perompak** (Pirate Rock) which is also the tomb of local pirate captain Panglima Garang. You'll have to bargain with a local Pulau Aman fisherman for transport to the island or you can pre-arrange the voyage by contacting the **Seberang Perai Fishermen Association** (☎ 397 9796).

To get to Pulau Aman take the ferry (one-way adult/child RM4/2), filled with fishermen and their families, that leaves the Bukit Tambun pier (departures 10am, 1pm, 4pm and 7pm; 30 minutes) for the fishing village on the northeast side of the island. The return trips to Bukit Tambun are at 8am, 12pm, 3pm and 6pm.