

Pearl of the ORIENT

For the epic Spring/Summer '13 collections shoot, BAZAAR catwalked into Penang, staying at both the iconic Eastern & Oriental Hotel and the captivating Lone Pine Hotel. By Cai Mei Khoo.

The poolside terrace
at the Victory Annexe



The room was filled with racks of clothes, the sitting area strewn with row upon row of shoes from Dior to Roger Vivier, not forgetting accessories such as that amazing Alexander McQueen beekeeper's hat. Thankfully, we were staying at the Eastern & Oriental Hotel, the guest rooms of which were large enough to occupy the tonne of looks brought in for the collections shoot that ran in our 10th anniversary issue last April. Such a milestone issue deserved only the best, and in Penang, the Eastern & Oriental hotel, or the E&O as it's more fondly known, was the obvious choice.

The grand dame of all hotels in Penang, the E&O has a rich, illustrious past. Established by the Armenien Sarkies brothers, the E&O started life as The Eastern in 1884, catering to the well-heeled

traveller. Due to its popularity, the brothers then added another hotel, The Oriental, a year later on an adjacent piece of land that faced the Andaman Sea. Combined, the hotel was thereafter known as the Eastern & Oriental Hotel and became the largest hotel in Penang, boasting a seafront lawn acknowledged as the world's longest at 842 feet.

Once, renowned writers, playwrights, and famous actors the likes of Rudyard Kipling, Sir Noël Coward, and Mary Pickford arrived in Penang, the Pearl of the Orient, via steamship. Fast forward to 2013 and half the BAZAAR fashion team drove up from KL while the other half flew in from Singapore, large suitcases in tow, all in preparation for the shoot.

Located in George Town, the hotel's cool, quiet interior is a welcome respite from the humid, balmy Penang weather.



We were immediately given cold towels and a welcome drink upon arrival, while waiting to be checked in.

Positioning itself as an all-suite hotel, the rooms are delightfully spacious – our room in the Heritage Wing had a huge walk-in wardrobe – and as well-appointed as you would expect from a hotel of this standard and reputation. The genteel, refined atmosphere is further enhanced by the presence of an army of butlers smartly dressed in white suits, who are on-call 24 hours, should your dress require immediate pressing or if you would like your shoes

shined. Details in the colonial architecture, from dark wood flooring in the rooms right down to the toggle switches make you feel as if you've been transported into a different era. It's this old-world charm and elegance the E&O exudes that places it above the rest.

A new addition to the hotel is the Victory Annexe, its namesake being a grand 40-room addition that was unveiled by Arshak Sarkies in 1923. More flamboyant than his brothers, Martin and Tigran, it was Arshak who added the ballroom in 1903, the very venue that catered to many a glittering extravaganza.

By 1927, the E&O was advertised as 'The Premier Hotel East of the Suez', which boasted more than 100 rooms, 40 of them with adjoining bathrooms offering both hot and cold running water, a luxury at the time. These days, the new Victory Annexe boasts 122 sea-view suites with rain showers, and Victorian details such as claw-foot long baths and pedestal ceramic basins to keep with the original colonial style.

All guests at the Victory Annexe enjoy delightful little extras, such as a Lavazza coffee machine in each room. Alternatively, you could always call someone to prepare a fresh brew; a stay at the Victory Annexe also includes full butler service. Apart from daily breakfast, afternoon tea and evening cocktails at The Planters Lounge are also included in your room rate, tempting you to stay indoors and indulge.

If it's a change of scenery you're after, head downstairs to The Sarkies coffee

house and choose a spot alfresco, overlooking the sea. The Sarkies offers a sumptuous buffet spread, including a mix of local and international cuisine.

But you can't travel to Penang and not savour its Peranakan delights, and it was at the Lone Pine Hotel that we savoured the best Peranakan food this side of the island.

A mere 20-minute drive out of Georgetown transports you to a wildly different setting. Situated on a stretch of white sandy beach on the Batu Ferringhi coastline, Lone Pine Hotel is a charming luxury boutique hotel that offers just 90 rooms, all of which face the sea. A gentle breeze sweeps through the tall glass doors in the lobby, a refreshing welcome to the modern refurbishments that have been making waves since the hotel reopened in 2010.

Established in 1948, the original building was a lovely bungalow owned by Dr. Albert McKern, who ran a medical practice in George Town. He later leased out the building with the intention of

operating the first hotel in Batu Ferringhi. After the renovation, a new block was added, offering facilities such as a gym, a spa, and meeting rooms, which the hotel graciously allowed us to use.

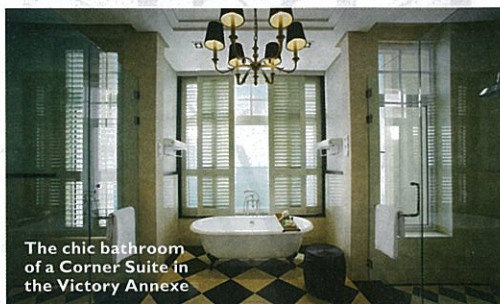
Two restaurants are offered at the Lone Pine Hotel: Matsu, a casual Japanese restaurant, and The Bungalow, the hotel's coffee house. Its chic Batubar plays ambient lounge tunes, great for sunset cocktails. The delicious lunch set at The Bungalow offers authentic Peranakan cuisine served in a tiffin carrier. It was just what the team needed to refuel after shooting under the sweltering sun. With a mostly outdoor setting, The Bungalow is the perfect spot to enjoy the sea breeze, be it at lunch or dinner, under the stars.

While you may be tempted to spend your entire holiday by the picturesque waters, it is highly recommended that you take the time to enjoy the many arts, cultural, and

culinary delights Penang has to offer – and there's no better place to start than these two sides of paradise. ■ *Eastern & Oriental Hotel, 10 Lebuhr Farquhar, Penang. Tel: 04-222 2000. www.eohotels.com. Lone Pine Hotel, 97, Batu Ferringhi, Penang. Tel: 04-886 8686. www.lonepinehotel.com*



A Corner Suite at the Victory Annexe



The chic bathroom of a Corner Suite in the Victory Annexe



The swimming pool at Lone Pine Hotel



The modern interior of Lone Pine Hotel's lobby

ISLAND ART STOPS

PENANG STATE ART GALLERY

Head up to the famed Penang State Art Gallery, which has exhibitions all year round plus exciting art forums and workshops. The collection, though relatively small, is definitely worth the hike.

Dewan Sri Pinang, Lebuh Light, George Town. Tel: 04-261 3144.

THE ART GALLERY PENANG

The Art Gallery Penang is a must-see for the most beautiful traditional artworks. Gallery founder, Dato' Dr. Tan Chee Khuan, is a big collector with a veritable treasure trove of pioneer works.

368-4-8 Bellisa Row, Level 4, Jalan Burma, George Town. Tel: 017-226 6228.

A2 GALLERY

A2 is one of Penang's main contemporary art galleries, putting on between 10 to 15 amazing exhibitions annually. The gallery offers collectors and art lovers a glimpse at works produced on the island and in the northern part of the country. Thought-provoking works of art by founders Alfred Yeoh and Jeff Jansen are also on display.

27 Bangkok Lane, Pulau Tikus. Tel: 04-227 4985.