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Fall in love with Penang at the timeless Eastern & Oriental Hotel

FEATURED · SINGAPORE & MALAYSIA · TRAVEL | 2 APRIL, 2015



I love a hotel with a good story, especially when visiting a place like Penang, where history and tradition are inextricably woven into the city's fabric. If you're searching for a resort that mirrors the antiquity and intrigue of the city itself, you don't need to look much further than the **Eastern & Oriental Hotel**, with its beautiful grand façade and treasure trove of interesting bits and pieces to discover within its walls.

I had been to Malaysia several times, but not yet to Penang, so I was definitely excited to discover this old-world city with its white sandy beaches, cool street art and architectural feats. The Eastern Oriental Hotel is the perfect home base to uncover everything Penang has to offer, with its luxurious comforts and seaside setting, and proximity to the city centre, attractions and beaches.

Colonial charm and old-world grandeur



The Eastern & Oriental was first established by the Armenian Sarkies brothers – Martin and Tigran The Eastern in 1884, expanding to include The Oriental a year later due to the overwhelming popularity of the resort. By 1927, it was regarded as “The Premier Hotel East of the Suez”, welcoming every shade of traveler from mercenaries to merchants to missionaries, as well as many famous faces of the age including Rudyard Kipling, Douglas Fairbanks, Somerset Maugham and Herman Hemingway (many of these famed guests are framed and proudly displayed in the heritage wing of the hotel). Those days, globetrotters flocked to Penang as an early outpost of the East India Company, and the island was heralded as an exotic and exciting destination. The Eastern & Oriental was by far the largest hotel on the island, offering 80 luxury rooms and suites.



In 1891, a third Sarkies brother – Arshak – joined the business. He added a grand ballroom, which became the hub of the island’s major social celebrations including weddings, banquets, musical cabaret acts, and the annual St. George’s Day Ball. In 1927, the construction of the Victory Annex added another 40 rooms to the majestic property. As the Great Depression set in, the hotel started decline, changing owners several times and suffering from the death of Arshak in 1931.

The E&O closed down to renovate in the early 1990s, and reopened in 2001, returning to its former glory and brilliance. In 2013, a new Victory Annexe (a tribute to the old block of the hotel) was unveiled – a 15-storey building encompassing 122 new sea-facing suites, restaurants, meetings rooms, an infinity pool, spa and retail outlets.

Accommodation

In addition to modern comforts and amenities, the **Victory Annexe** incorporates the same architectural elements and feel of the original hotel, with colonial-style **guestrooms** outfitted with Victorian details such as **claw-footed long baths, pedestal ceramic basins and lazy ceiling fans**. The **Corner Suites** also feature a separate living room, a rainforest shower and dining area with a 180-degree view of the sea.



We stayed in one of the **Studio Suites**, each of which includes a **bedroom**, **bathroom with twin vanity** and **private balcony**. A sea gal at heart, my favourite feature had to be the floor-to-ceiling sea-facing windows, with the thin, billowy curtains letting in the balmy sea breeze – definitely relaxing for an afternoon nap or reading on the private balcony. We also took advantage of the complimentary refreshments and alcoholic beverages from the mini bar – a nice perk offered to all Victory Annexe guests!

Restaurants and Facilities

There's so much to explore within the massive expanse of the hotel-resort, and we spent the first hours of our trip checking out the grounds and enjoying a cocktail by the **Poolside Terrace**, a beautiful pool-lounge on the 6th floor with cushy chairs and an infinity pool, and the Andaman Sea for backdrop.



The 6th floor is also where you'll find **Planter's Lounge**, serving up complimentary breakfast tea/coffee throughout the day, as well as evening cocktails and happy hour refreshments from 6-7. This made for the perfect pre-dinner snack on our second evening – cheese and crackers, fresh fruit, spring rolls and cold cuts, all washed down with a refreshing glass of white wine!

Adjacent to the Victory Annexe, the **Heritage Wing** has been immaculately preserved with original detailings, including antique light switches and an old-fashioned lift with cage-style doors that works.



The Heritage Wing also houses the gift shop, which I would highly recommend visiting if you want to take back a piece of this beautiful building with you. The shop sells decorative pillows, candles, and bathrobes, all emblazoned with the unique E&O logo.



On the ground floor of the heritage wing sits **Farquhar's Bar**, an old English-style bar named after street on which the hotel stands. This is a relaxing place to grab a tipple or two, with its mahogany w furnishings, cosy armchairs and exclusive club-style atmosphere. When the weather's nice (an almost always is in Penang), you can choose to enjoy your cocktail on the terrace outside, wh surrounds the pool for Heritage Wing guests.



I went straight for the cocktail menu from Farquhar's after settling in, opting for the drink of the month – a refreshing tropical concoction of pineapple and rum. My companion ordered a mojito which was also expertly crafted by the bartender, with prices well within reason for a five-star hotel.

While Penang is renowned for its street food, which can be found everywhere you look for pennies' worth of plate, I would definitely recommend at least having one or two of your meals at E&O (when you're tired of scarfing down char koay teow and hokkien mee at the local hawker stalls). We found the a la carte menu at the hotel's main dining establishment, **Sarkies**, to be very reasonably priced, and had the chance to savour their tasty Hainan Chicken and Nasi Goreng with Chicken Satay:



E&O also operates a fine dining restaurant called 1885, which boasts elegant colonial-style dining is great for special occasions. 1885 serves an elegant afternoon tea service as well that popped up must-try in several travel guides to Penang!

Transportation and City Guide



If you're visiting Penang for three days or more and want to enjoy a stress-free and relaxing stay, we would definitely recommend just spending one day lounging around the hotel, walking along the seafront promenade and indulging in local specialties and drinks at one of the stellar F&B outlets.

When you're ready to step out and explore the vibrant city, here are my top recommended tourist attractions and must-sees in the city:

- Walk around the main city centre in Georgetown (within 5-10 minutes' walking distance from the hotel), making sure to stop at the local hawker stalls and check out the famous street art (along Muntri Street, Lebuh Leith, Armenian Street, Ah Quee Street and more.)
- Visit Kek Lok Si Temple, a magnificent Buddhist temple atop a hill in the town of Air Itam comprising beautifully landscaped gardens, colourful temples, a seven-tiered pagoda and the

giant Laughing Buddha.

- Ride the funicular train and catch the sunset on top of Penang Hill, providing 360-degree view of the city at 821 metres above sea level, as well as a handful of temples, restaurants and show attractions.
- Visit Cheong Fat Tze Mansion, a cool architectural building which was the home of a wealthy Chinese industrialist in the early 1890s.
- Thrill-seekers won't want to miss Escape Adventureland, an outdoor theme park specialising jungle activities such as zip-lining, free-fall platform drops, an inner tube slide and rope swing
- Spend a day at Batu Ferringhi beach (free shuttle bus from Eastern & Oriental), where you can parasailing, horseback riding, jet-skiing and shop for souvenirs at the massive daily night market.
- Visit the Tropical Spice Garden and enjoy local refreshments at their great outdoor restaurant at the end of the trail.

I love everything about Southeast Asian cuisine, from the fresh herbs to the bright, bold flavours incorporating sweet, salty, spicy and sour all in one. With Penang representing such a gastronomic melting pot of Malaysian, Thai, Indian, Vietnamese and Indonesian dishes, I can safely say this is one of the best food cities I've ever been to. It's nearly impossible to eat it all in one trip, but here are some must-try local dishes to add to your list!

- Fried Char Koay Teow
- Mee Goreng
- Fish Ball Koay Teow Soup
- Asam Laksa
- Teochew Cendol
- Loh Mee
- Curry Mee
- Popiah
- Hokkien Mee
- Ice Kacang

With its unique blend of art, culture, history, tropical weather and beaches, and above all, amazing food, I would definitely recommend Penang for a quick weekend getaway from Hong Kong!



*Check out **The Luxe Nomad** to book the **Eastern & Oriental Hotel** or take advantage of other amazing flash sale deals on luxury hotels and private villas, at up to 75% off!*

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Leslie



Leslie



After obtaining her masters in journalism at Columbia University and working a short stint at Condé Nast in NYC, Leslie spent two years editing a parenting magazine in Shanghai and is now bringing that mama-expertise to Sassy Mama. She's a kid at heart, with a love for all things Disney and an insatiable sweet tooth... bring on the cupcakes!

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