

# Oriental Hideaways

Check-into Penang's elegant heritage hives or design-centric boutique properties that celebrate the vibrant energy of Malaysia's 'Pearl of the Orient'.



## E&O Hotel

"The brown-green ocean lapped against the wall and in the reddish sand, big dignified trees stood in the evening," wrote Hermann Hesse of the view in 1911, perhaps from the very spot I now stand along the sea wall of Eastern & Oriental Hotel, Penang, popularly known as The E&O.

Over a century has passed, but the glorious expanse of the Andaman is much the same – although more blue-green than brown-green – as described by the German poet, novelist and Nobel laureate in his reflections of Penang. And, despite the passage of time, at least one of his "big dignified trees" – a majestic Java Olive said to predate the hotel – is still firmly rooted on the lawn overlooking the sea.

Once lauded as 'The Premier Hotel East of the Suez', the historic property has hosted heads of state, Hollywood legends like Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford and

Douglas Fairbanks, and literary giants including Sir Noël Coward, Rudyard Kipling and Somerset Maugham – who have suites named in their honour.

The hotel has been in a class of its own since the illustrious Sarkies' brothers – visionary Armenian hoteliers – first threw open its doors in 1885. The E&O was THE luxury abode of choice for travellers to the Far East in pre-WWII years, and the first in this part of the world to boast extravagance such as hot and cold running water, double vanities and English-style long baths.

The property's hallowed Heritage Wing – newly opened after an extensive refurbishment – is set to reclaim the glory and glamour of its heydays. All 100 rooms, ranging from the 57sqm Superior Suite to the cavernous 522sqm E&O Suite replete with His and Hers bathrooms, now showcase a softer colour palette and maximise natural light. My favourite – the seaview Deluxe

Suite – opens onto a living area furnished with a writing desk, framed botanic prints and a Regency-style sofa bookended by teal ceramic lamps.

Louvred French doors and arched windows lead to a pretty jewel box bedroom, which features a generous four poster bed, crystal chandelier, armoire and dove grey walls. The nostalgic charm is echoed in the black and white-tiled bathroom, which, true to E&O tradition, spotlights twin vanities and an ample marble bath. New additions include a luxurious rainforest shower and Pañpuri organic bath amenities.



During renovations, care was taken to maintain the historic integrity of the building with many original features such as the lobby's stunning Echo Dome (be warned – even whispers carry under the dome!) retained. Among these is the original bedside Butler Call switch. The switch is connected to an old school switchboard of 100 bulbs in the hotel's operations room; when a



guest calls for the butler, the bulb connected to his or her suite lights up, alerting the staff on duty!

The butler – whose duties include unpacking and packing luggage and ensuring the complimentary decanters of gin, vodka and whisky are refilled daily – offers a personalised touch and that extra bit of pampering, which Heritage Wing and Corner Suite (located in the hotel's adjoining Victory Annexe) guests enjoy. Other indulgences include complimentary cocktails and canapes at The Cornwallis, which overlooks the saltwater swimming pool and Andaman Sea. The private venue is also open only to Heritage Wing and Corner Suite guests.

Returning guests will find that the property's F&B venues have been completely revamped, but for the better.

Palm Court – an airy all-day dining venue with French doors that open to the seafront promenade – serves Asian favourites inspired by multicultural George Town and a sumptuous afternoon tea with champagne! Meanwhile, Java Tree, which celebrates the iconic tree with a gorgeous feature wall mural, plates up Peranakan (Straits Chinese) and classic European fare, and is highly recommended for guests seeking a more intimate experience. Menu highlights here include house-made gravlax marinated in dill mustard dressing, blackened top hats (jicama, carrot, cuttlefish and salmon roe in delicate pastry cups) and salted cod fillet – fish gently poached in milk and served with a poached egg, mashed potatoes and wilted baby spinach.



**Parkroyal Penang Resort**



This four-star resort near Ferringhi Beach houses 309 premium suites, all equipped with complimentary Wi-Fi, LED TVs, minibars and coffee makers. Relax at the hotel's outdoor pool, feast at its two restaurants, unwind at the classy lounge bar or rejuvenate at the in-house spa.

📍 Batu Ferringhi Beach, Penang 11100

*Must Try!*



Red Snapper – Farquhar Bar's take on the classic Bloody Mary – is a blend of gin, red wine, sherry, tomato juice, worcestershire sauce, jalapeno sauce, wasabi, coriander, celery and rosemary, guaranteed to blow your socks off!



For a nightcap or two, waltz over to Farquhar's Bar where deep green walls, dark wood, and the owners' collection of old photographs evoke the romance of another era. Here, bartender Zhe puts a spin on classic cocktails such as Clover Club and Aged Negroni by blending boutique liquors with unique ingredients.

Enjoying my tippie of choice on the verandah, I imagine Hesse nursing a whisky-stengah (half measures of whisky and soda water) as he gazed out to sea. The old junks – the sails of which he referred to as "dragons' wings leaning towards the stars" – are long gone but The E&O remains a dignified icon many a weary traveller will be privileged to call home away from home.

📍 10 Lebuhr Farquhar, 10200 Penang