

Eastern & Oriental Hotel Penang Proudly Celebrates Its Rich And Glamorous Heritage



English afternoon tea at the new Palm Court of the Eastern & Oriental Hotel in Penang recall the multi-faceted elements of George Town, a city which developed as a confluence of East and West two centuries ago. Here, plenty of throwback elements from palm fronds and period furniture to dainty porcelain and idyllic ceiling fans offer a sense of time travel to days of long ago. One could quite easily sink into a reverie, lulled by its customised playlist of jazz and bossa nova accompanied by delicious sips of Taittinger champagne, with treats ranging from crabmeat sandwiches and truffle-scented egg on a poppy seed bun, to raisin scones and red velvet. This deliberate level of detailing is what is most interesting in the recent nine-month renovation of the hotel's Heritage Wing, established since 1885 by the Armenian Sarkies brothers and advertised in 1927 as "The Premier Hotel East of the Suez". Its long line of famous guests have included Noel Coward, Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, Charlie Chaplin, Dr Sun Yat Sen, Orson Welles, William Holden and Rita Hayworth. In 2013, the hotel welcomed its adjacent Victory Annexe with an additional 132 sea-facing suites and boasting Malaysia's only Panpuri spa which has attained great popularity on the island for its range of luxurious treatments.

Since opening last December, its original Heritage Wing, which has been expanded and remodelled throughout the hotel's illustrious history, now offers a reinvention of its spaces harking back at its storied legacy of history, people and the cultural milieu, reimagined for the present age. The renovation saw the addition of its new F&B offerings, while its suites attained a brighter sheen with increased natural light introduced into the rooms, as well as softer colours with new wallpaper.

Its grandiose façade remains, as does its khaki-clad doormen and pith-helmeted bellhops. Inside, its reception foyer has been refreshed, with historical relics such as its 1920s Waygood-Otis elevator – the first ever to be installed in then Malaya – mingled with fresh appointments. Just by this century-old elevator you find the hotel's art colonnade, a new introduction to the Heritage Wing which hosts continual exhibitions by artists and photographers.

Without contest, the 100-key all-suite Heritage Wing is an easy reference for a grande dame hotel. Its accompanying 24-hour butler services runs the gamut of laundry, posting letters, unpacking/packing of luggage and drawing hot-water baths. A noteworthy update in its twin-vanity bathrooms, as well as all around the property, is its purposeful reduction of plastic use, with wooden combs and toothbrushes replacing formerly plastic ones. For those who fancy a nightcap, in-suite decanters with a choice of complimentary vodka, gin and whisky are replenished daily as you wind down in the spacious comfort of your suites where average room sizes range start at 57 square metres all the way to the capacious 522-square metre E&O suite.

In the same building, The Cornwallis lounge becomes the exclusive domain of guests of the Heritage Wing, with a private pool for perfect afternoons. Evenings bring canapes and cocktails for Heritage Wing guests to savour sunset vistas on a largely unchanged horizon since [Penang's](#) colonial days. If anything, the cannon on its manicured grounds evoke another dimension of history, as do newspaper articles along the Heritage Wing's corridors which carry news of pre-independent Malaya and olden-day advertisements.

At the hotel's new Java Tree restaurant – named after the oldest tree on the property which predates the hotel's founding – guests will enjoy an eclectic menu which comprises both classic European and Malaccan-inflected Peranakan cuisine. This cosy nook will invariably become a sought-after dining room for its warm woody ambience of chandeliers, and sprawling wall mural of its namesake backgrounded by a landscape of olden-day Penang, not to mention consummate service from its members of staff.

Next door, one finds the relocated Farquhar Bar which serves bar snacks, cocktails and pours from an impressive back bar, with occasional guest bartender appearances. In one of the most delightful turns of this renovation, the hotel's iconic Grand Ballroom – the de facto venue for the island's grandest parties and weddings with its 400-seat capacity – has been given a brilliant coat of paint which reveals all the original Art Deco touches of its original construction, with vivid splashes of colour and gilt bringing intricate belle epoque-motifs to life.

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