

How to spend 48 hours in Penang

By Tatler Asia | Dec 12, 2024



The best places to eat, drink and explore in Penang, Malaysia

Penang is a fascinating destination, where east meets west and where history informs the present.

Now is a particularly exciting time to visit, as more up-and-coming creative talents are bringing refreshing new concepts to Penang that are rooted in a deep respect for its history—whether that's in the form of contemporary art, cocktails inspired by local ingredients or in modern interpretations of Malaysian cuisine.

In our guide to Penang, we cover everything from colourful cultural sites to cool cocktail bars, restaurants to enjoy the rich flavours of Nonya

and Peranakan cuisine and of course, Penang's captivating street art.

In November 2024, HK Express launched a new route between Hong Kong and Penang, with daily flights to and from the coveted destination. So really, there's no excuse to not visit this vibrant and dynamic destination. You can book your flights [here](#).

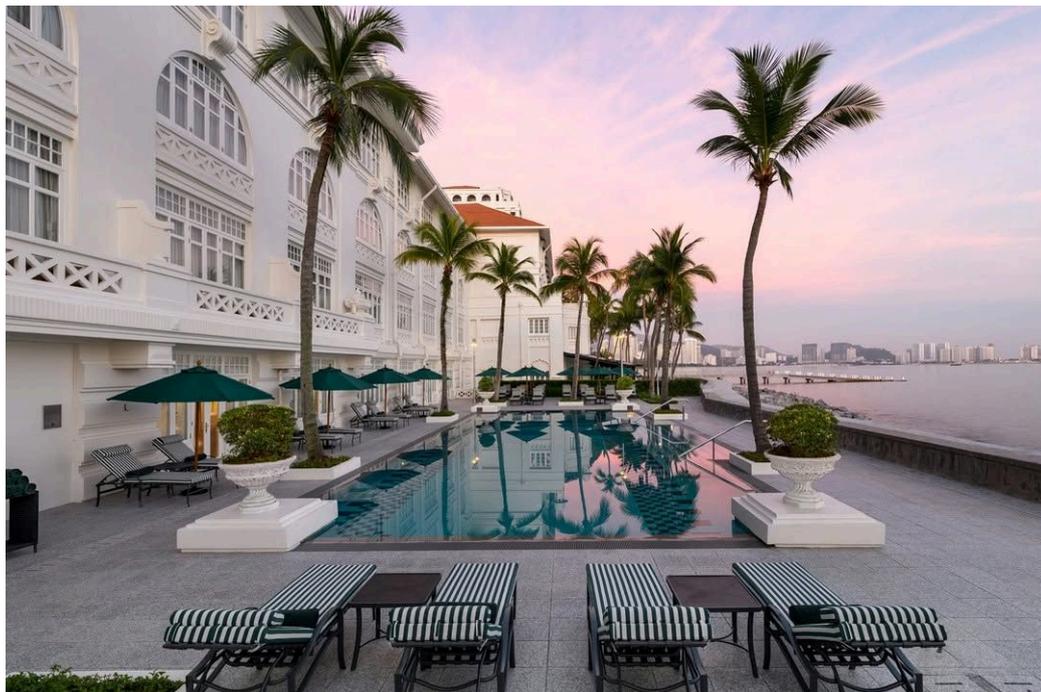
See also: [5 places to eat and drink during a trip to Penang, according to Gen 根's Johnson Wong](#)

Day one: Heritage meets haute cuisine

Check into the Eastern & Oriental Hotel Penang

The Eastern & Oriental Hotel is to Penang what The Strand is to Yangon, what Raffles is to Singapore...you get the drift. This waterfront heritage hotel dates back to 1885, and maintains much of its original charm including its stately facade and a cavernous atrium with a white grand piano.

The Heritage Wing, a restored arm of the original hotel, feels like the set of a period drama with vintage fixtures and antique furniture. The newer Victory Annexe Wing, built in 2013, puts a contemporary spin on Penang's iconic colonial style, with deep timber floors and marble-tiled bathrooms with free-standing tubs.



ABOVE The Eastern & Oriental Hotel in Penang, Malaysia

Aperitif at Cheong Fatt Tze

Kick things off with a pre-dinner drink at the bar in the strikingly blue Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion. The bar and courtyard is situated in a beautifully restored 19th-century dining room with preserved architectural details, including beautiful Art Deco stained glass windows, original tile work and wooden decor that makes you feel like you've stepped back in time.

Dinner at Gēn

Gēn's take on Malaysian food makes for a memorable dining experience. Creative dishes such as beef, buah keluak (a fruit native to Southeast Asia) and white corn, and kesom (a herb), oyster and Malaysian kelulut honey highlight local ingredients through skilful techniques and meticulous cooking. The restaurant has an invitingly clean, modern ambience. It's run by chef-owner Johnson Wong, as well as head chef Wong Yau-chin, who use their extensive culinary expertise to spotlight local produce. Paired with impeccable service, the restaurant pushes the envelope for Penang's fine dining scene, allowing guests to discover Malaysian Chinese flavours as they've never done before.

Or dinner at Communal Table by gēn

Fancy something more relaxed? Enjoy Wong's genius in a more casual setting at Communal Table by gēn. The long dining table looks right into the kitchen, so you can watch the skilled chefs prepare modern Malaysian dishes such as prawn toast, winged bean salad with whipped tofu, century egg fried rice and Bidor duck (a style of cooking inspired by a Malaysian region) served two ways. The service, the attention to detail, the complementing beverages and the overall experience are worth coming back to Penang for.

Drinks at Backdoor Bodega

Backdoor Bodega does not shy away from its heritage. Each facet of its operation stands as a tribute to the island it calls home, with a menu that delves into Penang's must-visit spots and the cultural significance of the region's fare. This ethos is evident in its Georgetown Gimlet, a take on the classic with torch ginger flower, kesum leaves and belacan. Every beverage finds inspiration in the cuisine of Penang, delineated in a menu that simultaneously functions as a city guide and history book, from the use of a staple Malaysian botanical in its Ulam Mojito and R.B.S, inspired by the iconic local Ramly Burger, to the Kelapa Hotak, a take on the breakfast staple of kaya butter toast.

Day two: Street food and street art

Coffee at Norm Micro-Roastery

Housed in a retired shipping yard, Norm Micro Roastery is a cafe in an art-deco-style building with rounded corners and sky-high ceilings. Reputed to serve some of the best

cakes in Penang, the spacious cafe benefits from abundant natural light and is designed with an industrial-meets-zen aesthetic. A sculptural garden with grey pebbles and low shrubs is at the heart of the space, with polished cement seating winding through it.

Pinang Peranakan Mansion

This museum and time capsule on Church Street offers a glimpse into the city's colonial heritage, when the Peranakans built their mansions to emulate the stately manors of English aristocracy. A maximalist's dream, it's decked out in ornate—bordering on over-the-top—vintage furniture and Victorian-era furnishings, European artworks, Ming porcelain, and fine china.

Lunch at Sri Weld Food Court

A short walk from Pinang Peranakan Mansion, Sri Weld Food Court serves up some of the best street food in Penang - including char kway teow, claypot chicken rice and the cult favourite Ali Nasi Lemak—this famed halal stall specialises in one of Malaysia's national dishes, nasi lemak: rice cooked in coconut, rice wrapped in banana leaf, topped with fiery sambal and a choice of six toppings including prawns, anchovies and hard-boiled egg.



ABOVE The historical Pinang Peranakan Mansion in Penang, Malaysia

Explore street art in George Town

A visit to Penang would not be complete without exploring the city's plethora of towering murals and thought-provoking street art. Luckily, most of them are within walking distance from each other. For those that aren't, we recommend renting a bike to get around—cycling through the city's colourful scenes and colonial architecture is a beautiful way to spend the day.

Some pieces we love are *Boy on a Motorbike*, *Boy with Pet Dinosaur*, *Brother and Sister on a Swing*, *The Indian Boatman*, *The Real Bruce Lee Would Never Do That*, to name a few. All of which you can conveniently find and map out on Google Maps.



ABOVE Kids on a Bicycle by artist Ernest Zacharevic in Penang, Malaysia

Dinner at Ceki

Wong declares that Ceki is his go-to restaurant in Penang for authentic Nonya cuisine. “Especially for its fish dishes, which I really like,” Wong told Tatler. Ceki’s superb seafood menu includes signature dishes such as assam pedas fish and sambal goreng prawns paired with a herbal sauce.

Night cap at The Nomad

A newcomer to the George Town cocktail scene is Nomad, located along Lebuhraya Kimberley. Its ambience is relaxing and cosy, perfect for sipping your night away with its inventive and smooth cocktails. Gin lovers should try its Botanical Garden cocktail with the aromas of chrysanthemum, orange bitters, and amaro.

Day Three: One last taste

Lunch at Irama Dining Penang

Head over to Irama Dining, a halal restaurant that serves the best of Malaysian cuisine with dishes that include various spicy sambals served with fresh vegetables to dip, chicken grilled in pandan leaves, lamb shank curry and many other flavoursome offerings. Note that they do not serve alcohol, but offer a creative selection of mocktails incorporating tropical fruits and colourful teas. The restaurant is inside an old building, with a verandah overlooking trees and parks.

