

Your Ultimate Guide To Exploring The Top Tourist Places In Penang, Malaysia

From vibrant shophouses and scenic hilly trails to tranquil, secluded coasts, uncover the most iconic tourist places in Penang.

BY PUNITA MALHOTRA PUBLISHED: FEB 19, 2025 08:00 AM HKT9 MIN READ



Penang | Image credit: salehi hassan/Flickr

Penang, off Malaysia's northwest coast, may not be as popular as its Southeast Asian peers like Bangkok or Bali, but its allure lies in its authenticity. Once a British colonial outpost, the tropical island is a time warp of 19th-century architecture. At the heart of this unique destination is its legendary food scene. Streets hum with the rhythm of bustling markets, where hawkers serve savoury Hokkien noodles, succulent prawns steamed in rice wine, fiery assam laksa, and indulgent roti canai. There are countless ways to dig into the city's soul, from the inspiring street art of George Town to the lush hilltops of Penang National Park and the Malay kampongs of the countryside. Our guide to Penang's tourist places lets you explore the island's diverse attractions at your own pace.

Planning a trip to this beautiful tropical island? Explore our guide to the **unmissable things to do in Penang**.

Best time to visit Penang



Seaside, Penang | Image credit: Ninjasong/Pexels

The dry season of November to March throws up clear skies and gentle breezes, ideal for exploring Penang's tourist places. This is also the time to join the vibe of lively festivals like Thaipusam and the Chinese New Year. For a more peaceful retreat with fewer crowds and off-peak pricing, consider the monsoon season, when the land is painted in vibrant hues of green. Experience the creative energy of the George Town Festival in July. Penang's changing seasons ensure that your dream getaway comes to life just as you envision it.

Top tourist places in Penang



George Town, Penang | Image credit: Jessica Gale/Unsplash

George Town, the island's capital, has emerged as its star attraction, especially since it earned the **UNESCO World Heritage site** title. Once a fading Chinatown, it has become one of Southeast Asia's most vibrant gastronomic destinations, woven with heritage hotels, innovative galleries, and trendy boutiques. Streets lined with pastel-hued colonial-era shophouses, many dating back to the 18th century, transport visitors to Penang's prominence along the spice trade route.

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The fragrance of incense wafts from ornate temples like **Khoo Kongsi**, where dragons and phoenixes guard the stone-carved entrance. The historic **Clan Jetties**, waterfront villages built on stilts by Chinese immigrant families, evoke nostalgia. Meanwhile, **Chowrasta**, the oldest wet market in the city, brims with aromatic spices, nutmeg, and local delicacies like Curry Mee.

Tourist places exploring the heritage of Penang



Keh Lok Si Temple, Penang | Image credit: Ruslan Zh/Unsplash

On the hills of Air Itam, **Kek Lok Si Temple**, Malaysia's largest Buddhist temple, overlooks the sprawl of Penang. This 19th-century jewel of Chinese, Thai, and Burmese architecture, dressed in reds and gold, boasts a towering Goddess of Mercy statue. The temple is open daily (from 9 am to 6 pm). During the Chinese New Year, thousands of lanterns transform the site into a glittering galaxy.

A short drive away, **Fort Cornwallis** offers a slice of colonial history with sweeping sea views. Built in the 18th Century, the fort is a history lover's delight. Its well-preserved ramparts and cannons and impressive collection of artefacts showcase Penang's military role during British rule.

Timing: 8 am to 8 pm, daily (Fort Cornwallis)

Entry fee: RM 10/HKD 17.75 (Fort Cornwallis)

Looking to relax amidst nature? Try soaking in **Malaysia's hot spring retreats**.

Exploring parks and nature in Penang



Penang Hill | Image credit: Joshua Kettle/Unsplash

Penang National Park, on the northwest coast, is a gem of a sanctuary showcasing the island's ecological diversity. Spanning over 1,200 hectares, this mix of rainforests, mangroves, and coral reefs houses rare species, like the endangered green sea turtle on its secluded beaches.

Just inland, **Penang Hill (Bukit Bendera)** rises to over 800 metres, offering panoramic views of George Town's colonial buildings from the observation deck. The hill provides various activities, from the spectacular sunrise to the Habitat Nature Reserve. The 30-minute **Penang Hill funicular ride** itself is a highlight. To avoid the busiest hours, ride early or later in the day.

Finding leisure and beaches in Penang



Penang National Park | Image credit: Syed Abdul Khaliq, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Batu Ferringhi Beach is Penang's hub of adventure and relaxation, buzzing with activity from thrilling water sports and seaside restaurants serving fresh seafood alongside a bustling night market. In contrast, **Monkey Beach**, tucked away within **Penang National Park**, offers a serene retreat, accessible by a gentle boat ride or a 45-minute jungle hike.

It's a favoured escape for those seeking tranquillity away from the island's more touristy areas. Nearby, **Turtle Beach**, also within Penang National Park, stands out for its turtle conservation efforts, while the untouched **Long Sand Beach** is perfect for a morning of quiet reflection.

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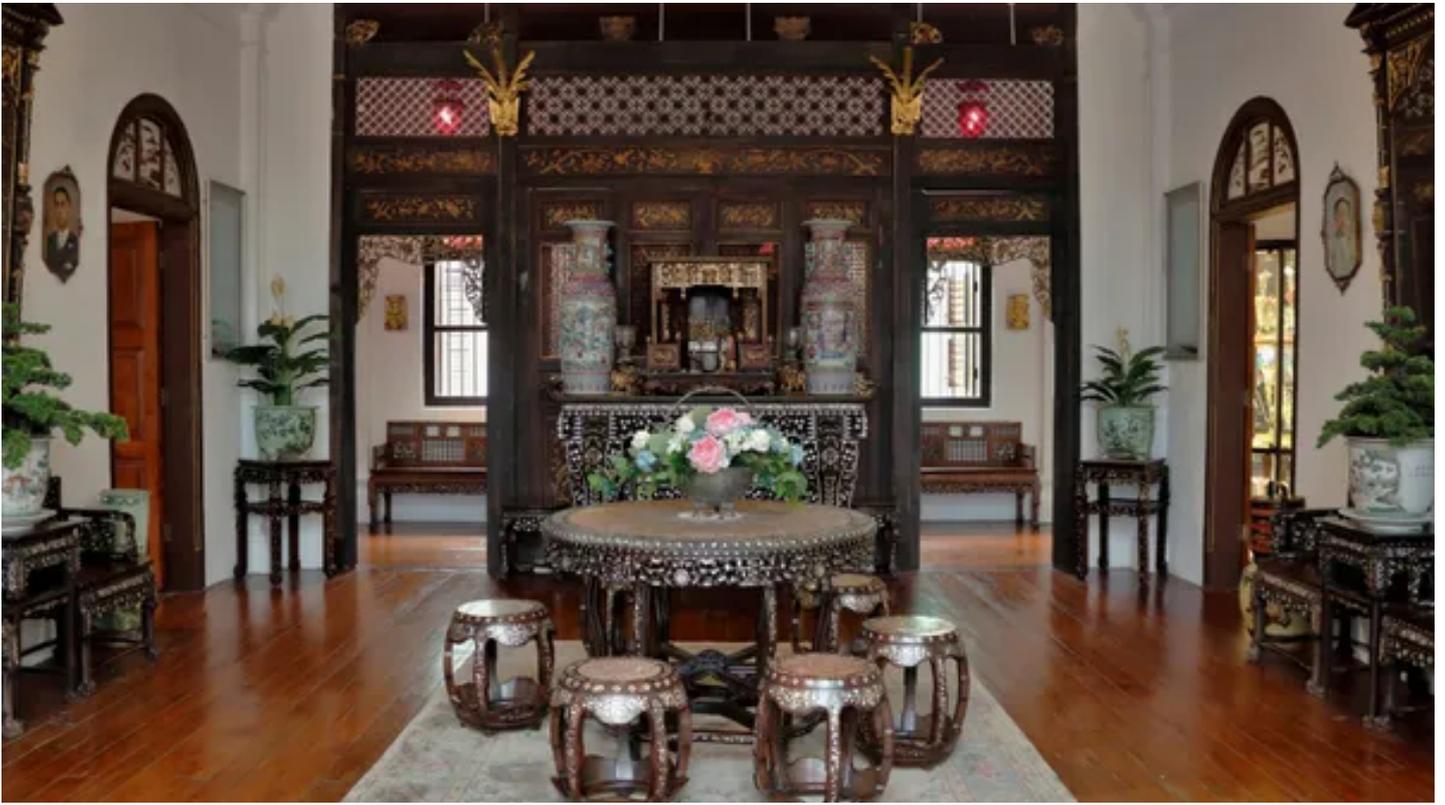
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Museums and culture



Pinang Peranakan Mansion | Image credit: Stefan K/Unsplash

Penang House of Music offers a deep dive into the island's evolving soundscape. The museum chronicles Penang's musical journey through interactive exhibits, live performances, and immersive workshops, from classical compositions to contemporary beats. The experience offers a rich auditory narrative, bringing the island's cultural history to life.

Meanwhile, **the Pinang Peranakan Mansion** is a meticulously restored mansion with over 1,000 pieces of antiques and collectables. It reflects the opulent world of the Baba-Nyonya, a prominent community of acculturated Chinese who adopted the lifestyle of the local Malays and, later, the colonial British. Their cultural influences are still evident in Penang today.

Timing: 9:30 am to 5 pm on all days (Pinang Peranakan Mansion)

Entry fee: RM 25/HKD 44.40 (Pinang Peranakan Mansion)

Excited about museums? Visit the **Penang War Museum in Malaysia** for a haunting experience.

Top places to eat in Penang



Street food shop in Penang | Image credit: Kelvin Zyteng/Unsplash

Penang is a haven for food enthusiasts, with street food taking centre stage. From Chinese to Malay, Indian, and Peranakan, the island's food scene reflects the unique blend of traditions that have shaped its identity. Lorong Selamat's Char Kway Teow is a local favourite for street food like smoky stir-fried noodles, prawns, eggs, and bean sprouts. The Penang Laksa at Air Itam stall delivers a tangy, spicy broth with fresh fish. For a more refined dining experience, Kebaya Dining Room fuses Peranakan and Asian flavours in visually stunning dishes, while Ocean Green Restaurant serves fresh seafood with breathtaking ocean views.

For the best chill vibe, bookmark these **six hidden bars in Penang**.

Top hotels in Penang



Eastern & Oriental Hotel | Image credit: EO Hotels

Penang is home to a diverse range of exceptional hotels, each catering to different tastes and preferences. The Eastern & Oriental Hotel, located in the heart of George Town, is the epitome of timeless elegance. It exudes colonial grandeur, classic architecture, and sweeping sea views. The hotel has 232 opulent suites, a fitness centre, an infinity pool, and three restaurants.

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For those seeking a fusion of history and modern luxury, The Prestige Hotel is another excellent pick for a refined stay in a beautifully restored heritage building with contemporary amenities. The hotel features 162 rooms, an all-day dining restaurant, an arcade with various retail outlets, versatile event spaces, and a rooftop infinity pool.

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Read our story on the **top hotels in Penang for a luxe stay** amidst Malaysia's rich heritage.

Tips to remember while visiting tourist places in Penang



Local market, Penang | Image credit: Kelvin Zyteng/Unsplash

Carry cash when exploring the tourist places in Penang, especially for local markets and street food stalls, as some vendors may not accept cards.

Explore George Town on the free CAT bus. For convenience in remote areas, rent a scooter or use Grab, the popular ride-hailing app.

Pack comfortable shoes for walking George Town's historic streets and exploring the island's scenic trails.

Remember to wear sunscreen and a hat to protect yourself from the sun, especially at the **beaches** or on Penang Hill.

Visit on weekdays for a more relaxed experience.

(Feature image credit: Vitalina/Pexels)

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