

48 Hours In Penang: Exploring The 'Pearl Of The Orient' In Two Days

Timeless architecture, tantalising street food, and tranquil landscapes are the three main ingredients of this epic 48-hour Penang itinerary.

BY PUNITA MALHOTRA PUBLISHED: FEB 24, 2025 08:00 AM HKT 10 MIN READ



Batu Ferringhi Beach | Image credit: Shahzeb Ihsan/Flickr

Thanks to its strategic location along the Strait of Malacca, Penang has long been a historic crossroads of cultures and traditions. Its moniker, “Pearl of the Orient”, remains as fitting as ever, thanks to an exciting mix of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and colonial influences. Penang’s best-known city, George Town, known for its ensemble of clan houses and colourful Peranakan mansions, lures travellers with diverse aromas, from the scent of freshly prepared Laksa and the incense rising from centuries-old temples. But once you venture beyond the markets and motorbikes, you will find tranquil beaches, lush jungles and forgotten ramparts of a colonial fort. Unique discoveries await at every turn, whether you’re immersed in urban vibrancy or seeking nature’s serene embrace. Here’s an essential 48-hour Penang itinerary that captures the essence of its dynamic cityscape and natural beauty.

Get started with this selection of the most **unmissable things to do in Penang**, where cultures collide and flavours delight.

The best time to visit Penang



George Town promenade | Image credit: FLASHPACKER TRAVELGUIDE/Flickr

From November to March, the dry season brings clear skies and gentle breezes, making it the perfect time to explore Penang's top attractions. It's also when lively festivals like Thaipusam and Chinese New Year fill the island with energy. For a more tranquil experience with fewer crowds and lower prices, consider visiting during the monsoon season, when the landscape is lush and green. And don't miss the George Town Festival in July, where creativity comes alive. Choosing your season to fit your preferences for a perfect Penang itinerary is easy.

For more details, check out our guide to the **best time to visit Malaysia**.

Requirements to visit Penang



Penang | Image credit: Nicolas Lannuzel/Flickr

Many countries, including the United States, EU nations, Australia, and Southeast Asia, can enter Malaysia visa-free for 30-90 days short stays. For those not eligible for visa-free entry, a tourist visa can be obtained through a Malaysian embassy or consulate, or an eVisa may be available for select countries. Ensure your passport is valid for at least six months beyond your planned stay. Before departure, check the latest travel advisories, including health and safety protocols.

Penang itinerary day 1: George Town streets to Batu Ferringhi

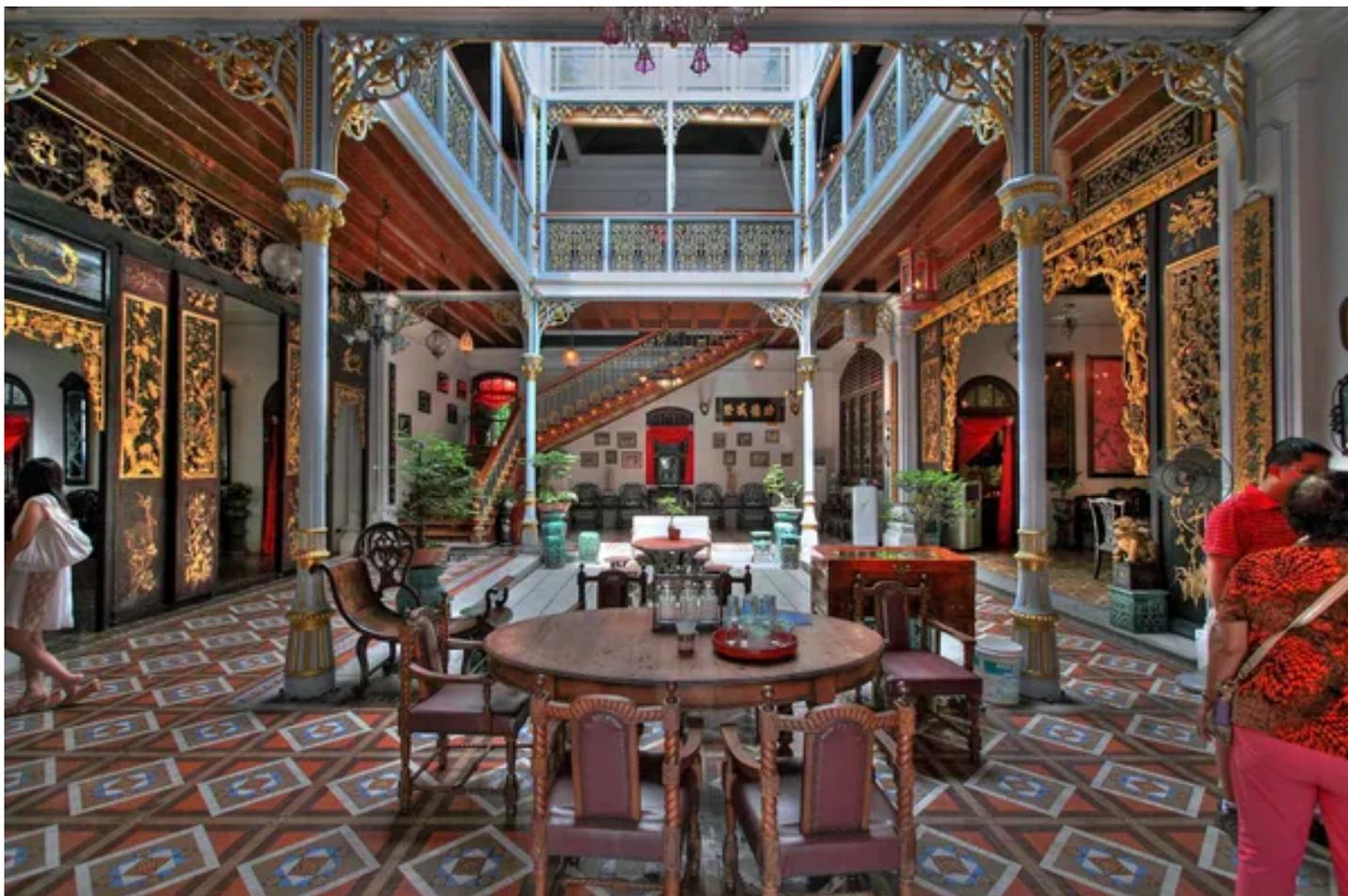


Wall art, George Town | Image credit: S. Ken/Flickr

Start your journey in George Town, the capital city of Penang. Meandering through the cobbled streets of this **UNESCO World Heritage Site in Malaysia** and admiring the colonial-era architecture is one of the best ways to experience the island's rich history. Pay a visit to the Pinang Peranakan Mansion to discover the unique fusion of Chinese and Malay traditions known as Peranakan culture. The mansion, filled with beautiful antiques, costumes, and ceramics, offers an immersive peek into the grandeur and craftsmanship of the Peranakan community. Next, head to Penang's Street Art to hunt down whimsical murals and interactive art installations. Some of the best-recognised ones are "Children on a Bicycle" by Ernest Zacharevic and "Boy on a Bike".

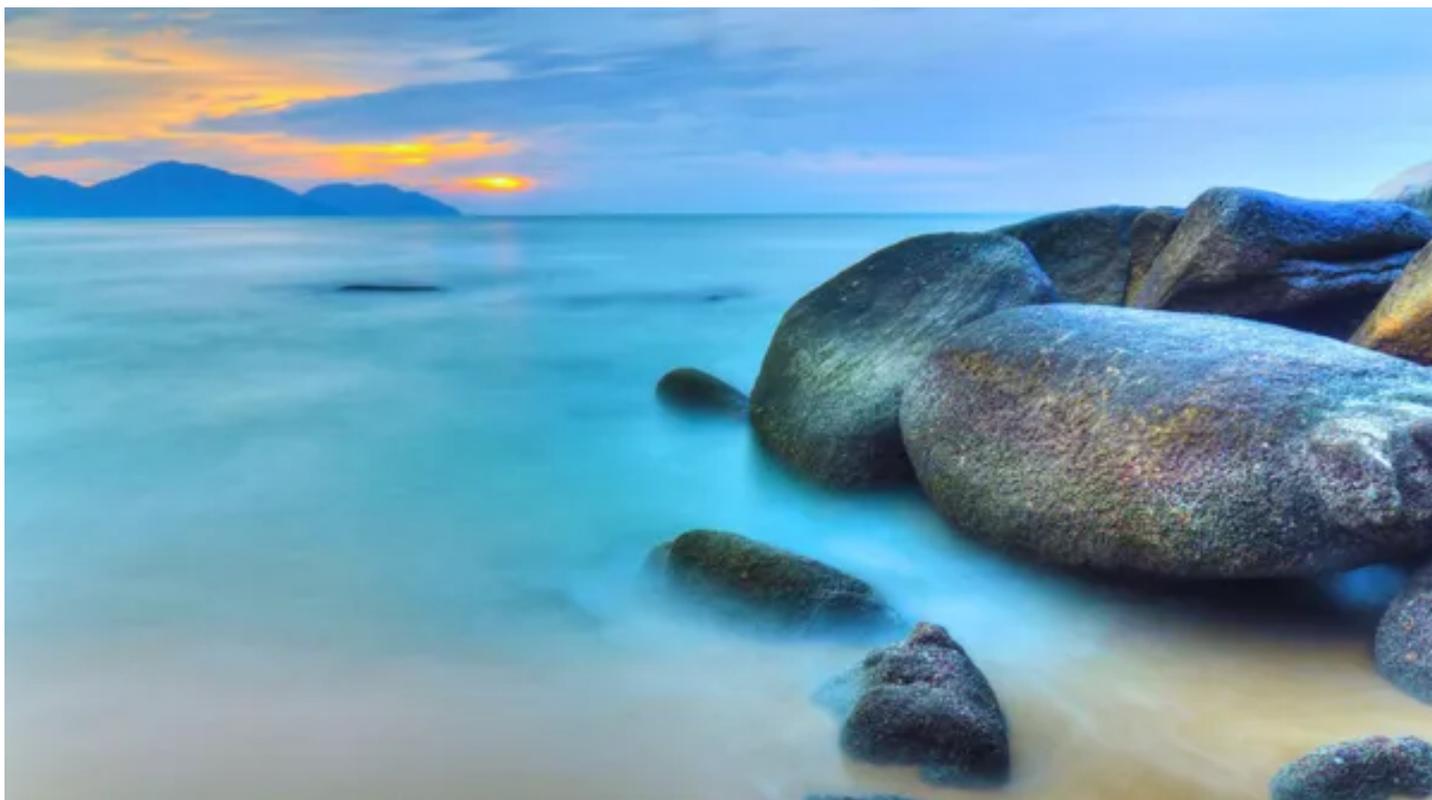
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Penang Peranakan Mansion | Image credit: -Damian-/Flickr

The pace changes at Chowrasta Market, one of Penang's oldest and most famous markets, browsing through an assortment of local produce, sampling authentic Penang white coffee and picking up some local pickles or dried seafood to take home. Later, at the nearby waterfront, spend some time at the Clan Jetties, traditional wooden houses on stilts built by Chinese immigrant families. The narrow wooden walkways have several small shops selling handmade crafts and souvenirs.



As the day winds down, head to Batu Ferringhi Beach to relax on the golden sands or try water sports like parasailing for the thrill of adventure. Try the stalls at Batu Ferringhi Night Market for handmade handicrafts and souvenirs. How about Char Kway Teow (stir-fried noodles) or Nasi Kandar (rice with various curries) at one of the beachfront restaurants? The combination of freshly whipped-up local dishes and stunning coast views makes for the perfect end to day 1 of your Penang itinerary.

Explore more with our selection of the most **brehtaking beaches and islands in Malaysia**.

Penang itinerary day 2: More of nature and heritage



Penang National Park | Image credit: Adam Jones/Flickr

On **day 2 of your Penang itinerary**, get close to the lap of nature at Penang National Park. A trek through the Mangrove Forest Trail goes through dense mangrove swamps, where sightings of monkeys and exotic birds are common. Those up for a more significant challenge can take the Pantai Kerachut Trail to the serene Pantai Kerachut Beach. If you are lucky, you may spot the Green Sea Turtles that nest on the beach. Wildlife enthusiasts will enjoy learning about efforts to protect this endangered species at The Turtle Conservation Centre. You can also take a boat ride to Monkey Beach, a secluded spot for a relaxing swim. Explore more geological wonders with this guide to the **national parks in Malaysia**.



Penang Hill Railway | Image credit: railasia/Flickr

After exploring the park, make your way to Penang Hill. The hill provides stunning panoramic island views, refreshing from the tropical heat. Take the scenic Penang Hill funicular railway to the top, a scenic ride that takes you through lush landscapes and dense forests before reaching the summit. At the top, enjoy the cool, misty air, visit the David Brown Restaurant & Tea Terraces, and soak up the panoramic views.

BOOK YOUR STAY AT MACALISTER MANSION VIA AGODA

BOOK YOUR STAY AT MACALISTER MANSION VIA MARRIOTT



Kek Lok Si Temple | Image credit: Alexey Demidov/Pexels

Don't miss a visit to Kek Lok Si Temple, one of Southeast Asia's largest **Buddhist temples**, located on the lower slopes of Penang Hill. The temple complex blends Chinese, Thai, and Burmese architectural styles. Its beautiful prayer halls, shrines, and a towering Goddess of Mercy (Kuan Yin) statue overlook the island.



Fort Cornwallis | Image credit: neepster/Flickr

In the evening, return to George Town to explore Fort Cornwallis, a colonial-era landmark built by the British East India Company in the late 18th century. The sunset over the horizon from its weathered ramparts marks a picture-perfect end to your Penang itinerary.

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Morning scenes at Penang Road | Image credit: Sheba_Also/Flickr

Commuting around Penang is a breeze with a range of affordable options for every traveller. The Penang Rapid Bus network covers major attractions like George Town, Batu Ferringhi, and Penang Hill. Need a quick ride? Taxis and ride-hailing apps like Grab have you covered. For a more immersive experience, hop on a bicycle or e-scooter to explore the island at your own pace.

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Best restaurants to try

Penang's culinary scene is a paradise for food lovers, with street food taking centre stage. Expect a fabulous mix of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Peranakan influences. For street food, don't miss the smoky stir-fry of noodles, prawns, eggs, and bean sprouts at Lorong Selamat's **Char Kway Teow**. Try the Penang Laksa from the Air Itam stall for a refreshing tang, offering a spicy, fish-based broth. For a more upscale experience, the Kebaya Dining Room serves beautifully presented Peranakan-inspired dishes, while Ocean Green Restaurant combines fresh seafood with stunning ocean views.

Best hotels in Penang



Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion | Image credit: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Penang offers a wide range of hotels catering to diverse tastes. For a classic, luxurious experience, stay at the Eastern & Oriental Hotel in George Town, where colonial charm meets sea views. For a blend of history and modern luxury, Macalister Mansion offers a chic stay in a restored heritage building complete with contemporary amenities. Book the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion to spend a few days like royalty. With spaces like the oriental garden, pool, open courtyards, and private jacuzzis, this 'Blue Mansion' makes you feel like royalty.

BOOK YOUR STAY AT CHEONG FATT TZE MANSION VIA AGODA

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Things to keep in mind for your Penang itinerary



Street art in George Town | Image credit: .Dwayne./Flickr

As you plan your Penang itinerary, pack light, breathable clothing and rain gear, especially if you're visiting during the monsoon season.

Be mindful of local customs and dress modestly when visiting religious sites.

Carry Malaysian Ringgit for small purchases, as credit cards may not be accepted everywhere.

Use local transport options like buses or Grab rides to get around and set aside time to visit must-see spots like Penang Hill and the National Park.

And, of course, dive into the local street food scene for an authentic culinary journey.