

# Penang's Eastern & Oriental Hotel Celebrates 140 Years Of Stories and Successes

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Examining the hotel's rich history: from its founding by the Armenian Sarkies Brothers to its reception as "The Premier Hotel East of the Suez".



On 10 Farquhar Street, Penang, sits the Eastern & Oriental Hotel, nestled between the rolling Andaman Sea and the lively heritage roads of George Town. Its creamy white walls, contemporary amenities, and colonial charm beckon from the present to a period in the distant past—one of newly established sea routes and travellers that longed for a comfortable place to stay 140 years ago.

During colonial times, Penang was an increasingly exciting destination for adventurous Westerners on their Asian 'Grand Tour'. An Armenian, Tigran Sarkies, naturally met popular demand by establishing the Eastern Hotel in 1884. Soon after, he opened the Oriental Hotel with his brother, Martin, which was officially retitled Eastern & Oriental Hotel in 1889. The Sarkies Brothers' vision for the enterprise and taste for the finer things manifested in traces of Armenian churches in the building's architecture, as well as a unique blend of neoclassical and Asian influences. Charismatic entrepreneurs in their own right, Aviet and Arshak joined their siblings, and the quartet went on to spearhead a bustling hotel empire.

With Arshak's takeover of management in 1894 came the hotel's prime. Magnetic in personality and well-liked amongst staff and guests, his passion for the decadent spurred major renovations that solidified its place as the island's most vibrant cultural hub. A new teak-floored ballroom saw biweekly dances and events, and its walls hosted films and rare motorcar exhibitions for the elite. By 1927, E&O (as it's nicknamed) was known widely as "The Premier Hotel East of Suez".

Its guest list is unsurprisingly star-studded: icons of classic cinema, such as Charlie Chaplin and Douglas Fairbanks, and famous authors, such as William Maugham and Rudyard Kipling, chose to find rejuvenation in the establishment's sea views and luxurious amenities. Echoes of E&O reverberate in Maugham's Malayan tales, and his visit is immortalised in one of four bespoke Heritage Wing Writers Suites named for the visiting authors.

Rebuilt after WWII, the E&O of today maintains its historic integrity in the refurbished echo dome initially installed by Arshak, the manual Waygood Otis lift, and the decommissioned cannons from Fort Cornwallis that line its seafront. More than a regurgitation of colonial aesthetics or nostalgia for a timeless past, its design is a meaningful reclamation. Restored **Peranakan** tiles and commissioned artwork from local artists decorate the hallways, while guest-written poems feature in its Historic Gallery. It boasts donations from E&O loyalists and longtime staff alike—such as handcrafted wedding garments once worn in the ballroom—whose memories are tied fondly with the place.

In 2013, the new Victory Annexe Wing opened its doors to the world with 132 magnificent sea-facing suites, which include 14 Corner Suites that boast 270-degree sea views and unique rainforest showers. Mirroring the E&O of yesteryear, the hotel continues to host the acclaimed and the esteemed, such as King Charles III and Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei. It has further become a staple destination for weddings among the island's upper echelon and celebrities.



*Grand Ballroom.*

“Celebrating 140 years is a joyous moment for us all. It reflects not only the history we have built but also the memories shared by generations of guests who have made the E&O part of their story. As we step into the future, we are dedicated to further preserving our heritage, while embracing new opportunities to serve our guests for many more years to come,” says Alison Fraser, General Manager, E&O Hotel.

## Eastern & Oriental Hotel’s 140th Anniversary Gala Ball

What better way to celebrate than with a black-tie ballroom event that Arshak Sarkies himself would’ve thrown? Dancing and laughter will echo once again as the hotel prepares its 400-seat Grand Ballroom for its 140th Anniversary Gala Ball on 11 October 2025, which costs RM488 nett per person. Enlivening the island with the thrumming energy of galas past, the event features musical performances by the Totally Telemann Quartet, Musica Sinfonietta, and the Big Band of Penang. It promises a night of fine dining, dancing, and a lovely fireworks display—a triumphant revelry in all that has been accomplished and the successes that will follow.

To book seats for the ball, contact 04 222 2151, email [fbcentral.resv@eohotels.com](mailto:fbcentral.resv@eohotels.com), or visit the [website](#).