



The Ultimate Penang Travel Guide for Singaporeans (2026): Food, Heritage & Weekend Escape

Description

Editorâ??s note: Imagery on this post is being updated to match Little Big Red Dotâ??s editorial standards. Photographs sourced from the originating organisation will replace any temporary placeholders shortly.

If youâ??re looking for a short getaway that delivers big on food, culture, and history â?? all within a two-hour flight from Singapore â?? Penang should be at the very top of your list. Malaysiaâ??s â??Pearl of the Orientâ?? is one of Southeast Asiaâ??s most beloved travel destinations, and itâ??s easy to see why: a UNESCO World Heritage city centre packed with street art and heritage shophouses, hawker food widely regarded as the best in the world, and enough things to see and do to keep you busy for a long weekend without breaking the bank.

With AirAsia and Batik Air running daily flights from Changi, and budget bus tickets available from as little as S\$45, getting to Penang has never been easier. Hereâ??s your complete guide to making the most of a 3-day, 2-night trip.

Getting There: Flights vs Bus

The fastest and most comfortable option is to fly. **AirAsia** and **Batik Air** both operate regular direct flights between Singapore Changi (SIN) and Penang International Airport (PEN), with the journey taking just over an hour. Return fares can start from as low as **S\$58** if you book in advance, though the S\$100â??S\$150 range is more typical. Batik Air offers more legroom and a more full-service experience, while AirAsia is the go-to for budget travellers.

If youâ??re on a tight budget and donâ??t mind the journey, the overnight bus from Singapore to Penang is a surprisingly comfortable option. Operators like **Transtar Travel**, **Supernice Express**, and **Sri Maju** depart from Golden Mile Complex and Lavender, with fares starting from S\$45 one-way. The trip takes 8â??10 hours â?? book an overnight bus and youâ??ll arrive in Penang early in the morning, saving on accommodation costs.

Where to Stay in Penang

For most visitors, **George Town** is the ideal base. Staying in the UNESCO World Heritage Zone puts you within walking distance of the main sights, and the atmosphere of being surrounded by 19th-century shophouses is unbeatable. Here are options across different budgets:

- **Budget (under RM150/night):** Ryokan Muntri Boutique Hostel is a beautifully restored heritage building right in the heart of old George Town. Private rooms are available and the location is superb.
- **Mid-range (RM200-400/night):** Royale Chulan Penang sits near the historic jetties and offers spacious, stylish rooms with a pool and onsite restaurant. Great value for the price.
- **Luxury (RM600+/night):** The **Eastern & Oriental Hotel** is an iconic colonial landmark overlooking the sea. It's one of Asia's grand heritage hotels - a splurge that's absolutely worth it for a special occasion. The newly opened **Soori Penang** (January 2026) is a stunning 15-room boutique property in a restored 19th-century shophouse compound, designed by award-winning architect Soo K. Chan.

For budget-conscious travellers, check out our guide to the [7 Cheapest Travel Destinations from Singapore in 2026](#) for more ideas on stretching your travel dollar.

Day 1: Explore George Town's Heritage & Street Art

Spend your first day getting lost in the lanes of George Town. The city's famous **street art murals** - many by Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic - are scattered across the heritage zone, and hunting them down on foot is one of the most enjoyable ways to explore.

Must-sees include the iconic "Children on a Bicycle" mural on Lebuhr Armenian, the steel wire caricatures dotted around the old town, and the vibrant shophouse facades along Lebuhr Chulia and Lorong Love. Head to **Chew Jetty** in the afternoon - one of the seven clan jetties that jut out over the sea - for a glimpse of a fishing community whose roots stretch back generations.

Round off the evening with a sunset wander along the Esplanade (Padang Kota Lama) and dinner at a local kopitiam. A cold Milo dinosaur and a plate of economy rice will set you back less than RM10.

Day 2: The Great Penang Food Trail

If there's one reason above all others to visit Penang, it's the food. Consistently ranked among Asia's best street food destinations, Penang's hawker centres serve up dishes that have been perfected over generations. Expect to eat very well for very little.



Malaysian hawker noodles – dishes like Char Kway Teow, Hokkien Mee and Asam Laksa have made Penang one of Asia’s top street food destinations

Here’s what you absolutely must try:

- **Char Kway Teow:** Flat rice noodles wok-fried with prawns, cockles, Chinese sausage, and bean sprouts. The best versions have a smoky "wok hei" aroma. Arrive before 11am at popular stalls - many sell out by lunchtime.
- **Asam Laksa:** A spicy, sour fish broth with thick white noodles, ranked #7 on CNN's World's 50 Best Foods. The famous stall at Air Itam Market (near Kek Lok Si Temple) is legendary.
- **Penang Hokkien Mee:** A rich prawn-and-pork-bone broth with yellow noodles and bee hoon. Deeply flavourful and intensely satisfying.
- **Cendol:** The ultimate dessert - shaved ice with green rice flour jelly, coconut milk, and Gula Melaka palm sugar. Head to Penang Road Famous Teochew Chendul for the definitive version.

For the most concentrated food experience, head to **Gurney Drive Hawker Centre** in the evening. It's popular with tourists and locals alike, and nearly everything on offer is excellent. The **New Lane (Lorong Baru)** night market is another fantastic option for a more local atmosphere.

Day 3: Penang Hill & Kek Lok Si Temple

Dedicate your final morning to Penang's two most iconic landmarks. Start early at **Kek Lok Si Temple** in Ayer Itam - the largest Buddhist temple in Malaysia. The intricate pagodas, golden statues, and thousands of lanterns draped across the complex are breathtaking, especially in the morning light when crowds are thin. Entry is free, though some areas have a small fee.



Red and yellow lanterns adorning the Kek Lok Si Temple in Ayer Itam – the largest Buddhist temple in Malaysia, built between 1890 and 1930

From Kek Lok Si, it's just a short ride to the **Penang Hill Funicular Station**. The funicular railway takes you up to 833 metres above sea level in under 10 minutes, offering panoramic views over George Town and the Penang Strait. It's particularly beautiful on a clear morning. Book tickets online in advance to avoid the queue (around RM30 return for adults).

Head back down by early afternoon for one last hawker lunch, and pick up some Penang souvenirs – the must-buys are **Tau Sar Pneah** (mung bean pastries) and nutmeg products, which you'll find at shops along Jalan Penang and around the heritage zone.

Budget Breakdown (3D2N, per person)

- Return flights (AirAsia/Batik Air): S\$80 – S\$150
- Accommodation (mid-range, per night): RM200 – RM350 (~S\$60 – S\$105)
- Food (3 days of hawker meals): RM50 – RM100 (~S\$15 – S\$30)
- Attractions (Penang Hill funicular, Kek Lok Si): RM30 – RM50 (~S\$9 – S\$15)
- Transport within Penang (Grab, free CAT bus): RM30 – RM60 (~S\$9 – S\$18)
- **Estimated total: S\$200 – S\$400 per person** (budget to mid-range)

Essential Tips for Singaporeans

- **Currency:** Malaysian Ringgit (MYR). S\$1 buys approximately RM3.45 – 3.50. Change money at licensed money changers in Penang rather than at the airport for better rates.
- **Getting around:** The free **CAT bus** loops around George Town from 6am to midnight daily – great for short hops. Download the Grab app for affordable taxis and private car bookings.
- **No visa required:** Singaporeans can enter Malaysia visa-free for up to 90 days.
- **Best time to visit:** Year-round, but May to September offers drier weather. Avoid Chinese New Year and school holidays if you want fewer crowds.
- **Respect local customs:** Remove shoes before entering temples, dress modestly at religious sites, and use your right hand when giving or receiving items.

If island life is more your speed, Batam and Bintan are excellent alternatives – check out [our Ultimate Batam Weekend Getaway Guide](#) for everything you need to know about getting there and making the most of your trip.

Final Word

Penang offers one of the best value-for-money travel experiences in the region, and it's tailor-made for Singaporeans. Whether you're a first-timer who wants to tick off the heritage trails and hawker classics, or a seasoned visitor looking to dig deeper into the island's culture and food scene, there's always something new to discover. Book your flights early – especially for the Labour Day long weekend – and prepare yourself for some seriously good eating.

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