

ASEAN HERITAGE TRAIL

PERANAKAN A Colourful Culture





PERANAKAN A Colourful Culture

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All About Craft, Design and Textile

Living Arts Highlights



Peranakan, A Colourful Culture



Peranakan Heritage Trail, the story of a blended Southeast Asian heritage

More than any other cultures in Southeast Asia, the Peranakan heritage fully embodies the essence of the region.

Why is it so? Peranakan is a blend of many various Asian cultures living in the region who managed to create a unique way of life. The word “Peranakan” is derived from the Malay meaning ‘the children of’ or the ‘descendants of’ (Anak means a child in both Malay and Indonesian languages).

More precisely it describes mostly Chinese immigrants from Southern China who settled originally along the Andaman coast of the Malay Peninsula, expanding then to Siam coastal towns. They also sail to the Islands of Sumatra and Java. They generally married to local people. These communities adopted local customs but mixed them with their own Chinese tradition. Peranakan communities were born.

Originally settling in Penang, Melaka, Singapore and the Javanese Coast, Peranakan traders then move to the North looking at the developing of tin in Phuket, Phang-Nga and Songkhla provinces in Southern Siam as well as to Sumatra Island, mostly around Medan, Padang and Sumatra South. By extension, Peranakan designate strongly integrated communities of mixed Chinese with local people. This is why Peranakan communities can also be tracked in the Philippines as well as on Borneo Island or in Sulawesi in Indonesia.

Peranakan people are often referred in Malaysia and Singapore as Straits Chinese why communities call themselves Baba and Nyonya (Baba for men and Nyonya for women) including the ones living in the South of Thailand. In Phuket for example, local Peranakan people call themselves “Phuket Babas”.

ASEAN Peranakan population is estimated to represent eight to nine million people today with some communities also living in the Philippines and on Borneo Island.



CHITTY PERANAKAN

Peranakan not only designate Chinese mixing with locals but also Indians. In the 15th century, traders from Tamil Nadu in South India arrived in the Sultanate of Melaka. They settled and adopted customs and the way of life from Malay and Chinese with influences from Portugal and Britain. They mostly live today in Melaka (there is a small museum dedicated to the Chitty Peranakan community) and in Singapore along Serangoon Road.

A colourful culture

Peranakan people developed a peculiar culture particularly reflected in objects of the daily life, ornaments and fashion with their bright colours. Shades of green, turquoise mix with bright pink or yellow colours mixed with strings of gold.

Ceramics reflect the fascination for bright colours. All shades are available on dish wares such as tea pots, bowls or kamcheng (containers) but special mention is to be given to tiles used on external houses’ facades with their delicate shades and motives inspired by British Art Nouveau.

As does fashion, which mixes elements from Indonesian or Malay cultures such as flower-decorated batik assorted to lace or silk blouses for women often enhanced with embroideries. Traditional wedding tends to disappear due to the very sophisticated –and expensive– costumes and ceremony. However, it is easy these days to find jewels–kerosang (a set of brooches to ornate blouses), earrings, brooches, hairpins and belts. Many shops and young designers recreate these days Peranakan objects while there are still opportunities to find second hand jewels or objects in antique shops.

Peranakan expresses itself also in the cooking with dishes blending traditional Malay, Indonesian and Thai meals with a Chinese touch. In Singapore, Penang, Melaka and Phuket, there are increasingly schools teaching tourists ways to cook fragrant Peranakan dishes while many restaurants are getting specialized in Nyonya cuisine.

Museums or art galleries in Phuket, Phang-Nga, Penang, Melaka, Singapore and Medan show life and traditions of Peranakan communities and are the perfect place to get initiated to this peculiar culture.



Peranakan, A Colourful Culture

Thailand

- Takua Pa
- Krabi
- Songkhla City

- Phang-Nga City
- Trang
- Hat Yai

Malaysia

- George Town (Penang)
- Melaka

- Alor Setar
- Johor Bahru

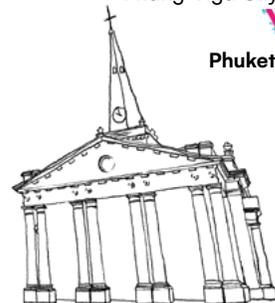
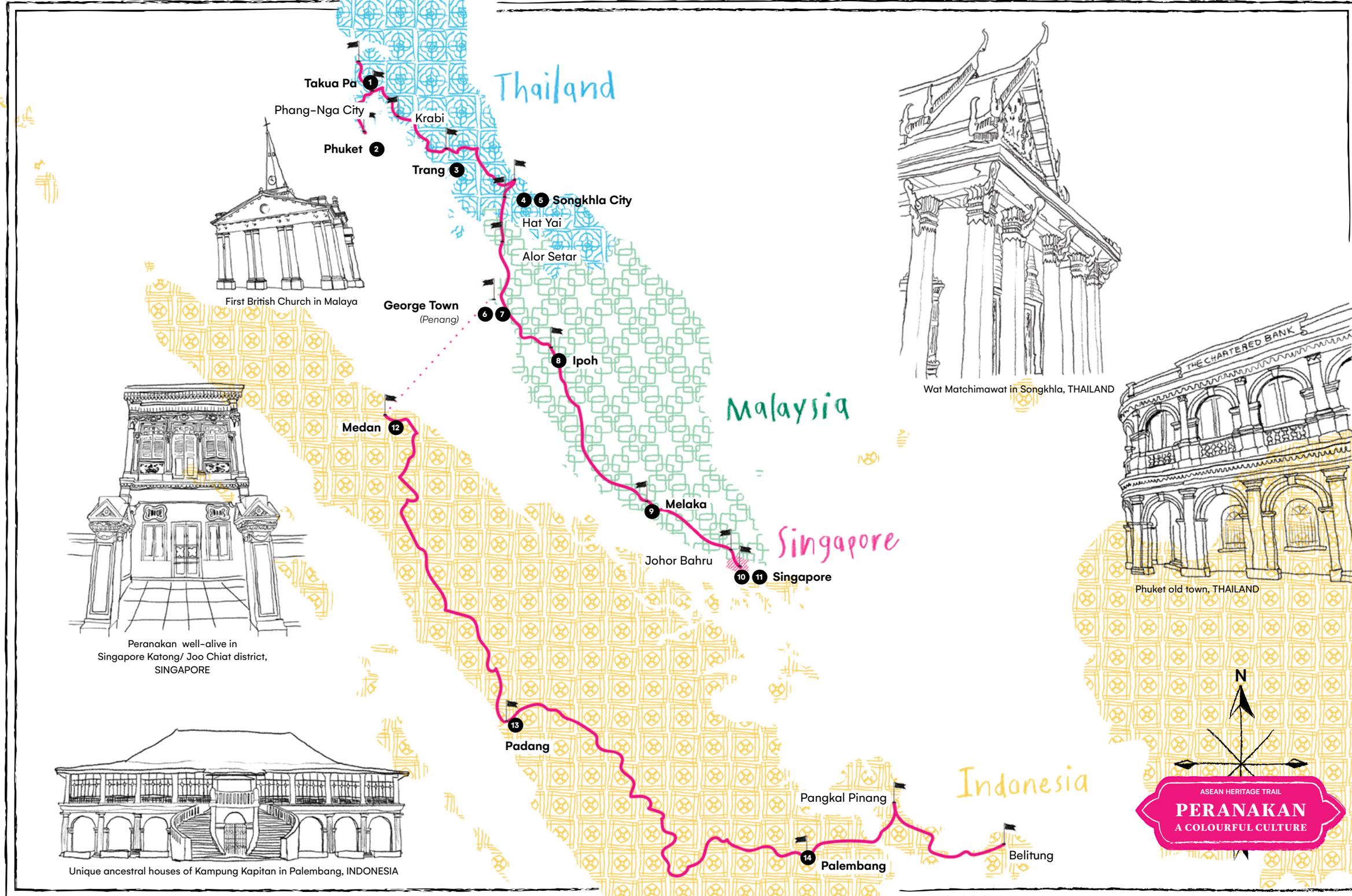
Singapore

- Katong
- Joo Chiat

Indonesia

- Medan
- Pangkal Pinang

- Padang
- Belitung
- Palembang



First British Church in Malaya



Peranakan well-alive in Singapore Katong/ Joo Chiat district, SINGAPORE



Unique ancestral houses of Kampung Kapitan in Palembang, INDONESIA



Wat Matchimawat in Songkhla, THAILAND



Phuket old town, THAILAND



Attractions not to be Missed

Takua Pa
Old town



old town
attractions.

1 Takua Pa old town

Phang-Nga, THAILAND

is considered a living museum of Peranakan culture in Thailand. The city became prosperous thanks to tin discovery and the move of many Chinese from Penang resettling there. The old town of Takua Pa is lined with traditional buildings offering the typical Sino-Malay architecture blended with European and Thai details.

2 Phuket old town

Phuket, THAILAND

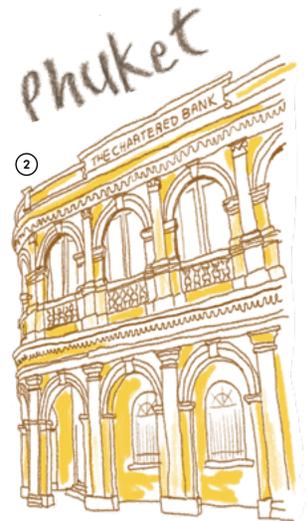
has certainly the largest collection of Peranakan houses in all of Thailand and the city recently has done a lot to restore, to repaint and to give a new breath of life to old houses. Not only they look now colourful and are great photo motives that many accommodate now design shops, trendy eateries and cafes as well as hotels. Visit in particularly Soi Romanee/corner of Thalang Road which offers a perfect photo shot with its multi-coloured houses and Krabi Road for its magnificent villas (Phra Pitak Chinpracha Mansion, today Blue Elephant Restaurant or the Chinpracha Mansion.)

3 Trang old town

Trang, THAILAND

is now an open air museum for street art with old houses filled with paintings. The most amazing are located along Ratchadamnoen Street in Thap Thiang sub-district. And have a coffee at Tubtieng Old Town Cafe & Bistro with some more murals.

Trang



4 Wat Matchimawat

Songkhla, THAILAND

Located in the middle of Songkhla old town with its Peranakan style shop houses, the temple is one of the oldest in the South, dating back to the 17th century and showing a blend of Chinese, European and Southern Thai styles. The Ayutthaya-style ordination hall exhibits extraordinary murals depicting the life of Buddha.

5 Colonial atmosphere of Nakhon Nai Road in Songkhla

Songkhla, THAILAND

The street has the highest number of Peranakan style buildings, including the newly established museum of Ban Nakorn Nai, showing the life of a prominent Songkhla Chinese–Thai personality.



Wat Matchimawat

Tycoon dreams
in George Town



Songkhla



George Town

atmosphere of city

6 George Town city view

Penang, MALAYSIA

Where to embrace best George Town historical city with its hundreds of Peranakan style shop houses crowned by red roofs? The Rainbow Skywalk on the top of the Komtar Tower offers on the 68th floor at 248 meters gives you a 360° vision of town. If you feel scared to walk outdoors, there is a glassed observatory on the 65th floor!

7 Tycoon dreams in George Town

Penang, MALAYSIA

Nicknamed the “Millionaire’s Row”. Gurney Drive, a large boulevard nestled along Penang Coast, northwest of the E&O Hotel, was the prestige address of the rich and powerful during British times. Take a bike and admire a dozens of stately mansions looking like castles such as the Homestead –today the Wawasan Open University– or the Woodville Mansion. End up at Bangkok Lane with its colonial shop houses next to Penang unique Thai-style temple.

8 Ipoh 'Taj Mahal' has trains

Ipoh, MALAYSIA

Called the Taj Mahal by locals, the building carrying this name is actually the grand train station of Ipoh. Tin made Ipoh prosperous in the early years of the 20th century, translating into a range of superb colonial buildings designed in Edwardian Baroque style. That includes the City Hall, the St. Michael Institution and of course the Rail Station. Opened in 1917, the station is crowned by a huge dome which gave the building its nickname.

9 Mixing Portugal, Holland and Peranakan in Melaka

Melaka, MALAYSIA

Melaka old town is a UNESCO world heritage and was an important Sultanate and the first international trading place in Malaya back to the 15th century. St. Paul Hill concentrates all these cultures with the late-Renaissance Dutch Stadhuis (City Hall) and the classical Christ Church facing the British Queen Victoria fountain. Few meters away is Santiago Gate, the remains of Asia oldest Portuguese fortress and the ruin of St. Paul church. Across the river, former Jonker and Heeren streets are lined up with Peranakan houses and Chinese temples.



Peranakan
well-alive in
Singapore Katong
/ Joo Chiat district



10 Peranakan well-alive in Singapore Katong/Joo Chiat district, the heart of the Peranakan community.

Katong/Joo Chiat, SINGAPORE

the heart of the Peranakan community. Jewels of architecture with stucco-decorated two-storey shophouses and terrace houses looking like lace can be admired along Koon Seng Road and Joo Chiat Road among others. Some are filled with restaurants and coffee shops selling local delicacies including the famous Katong Laksa.

11 Only for the wealthy and famous.

Newton & Orchard, SINGAPORE

Emerald Hill used to be a farming estate until being transformed into an exclusive neighbourhood of terraced houses. Some of the wealthiest members of Singapore Peranakan community used to live there from the 1920s to the 1950s. The beautifully restored houses are a welcome walking alternative to the shopping malls of Singapore famed Orchard Road.

12 Medan last Peranakan mansion.

Medan, INDONESIA

Located along what used to be Medan most elegant street, the Tjong A Fie Mansion is a two-story building surrounded by a garden built in 1900. Tjong A Fie was a wealthy merchant owning much of Medan plantations. The house has now been turned into a unique museum of Peranakan life managed by Tjong A Fie's descendants.



Emerald Hill
Only for the wealthy
and famous.

13 Along Batang Arau River in Padang.

Padang, INDONESIA

The river is where Padang old town stands with its historical harbour with trade starting there already in the 16th century. The old town suffered particularly during the earthquake of 2009 and reconstruction has been slow. The dilapidated houses in the area certainly add to the charm of the area...

14 Unique ancestral houses of Kampung Kapitan in Palembang.

Palembang, INDONESIA

The area is the only place in the South Sumatra capital where 15 traditional 300-year old houses survived, mixing influences of Chinese, Malay and Dutch cultures. Houses have typical pyramid-shaped roofs, delicate carvings and verandahs sustained by European style columns.



Unique
ancestral houses
of Kampung Kapitan
in Palembang.



Museums and Cultural Attractions

To understand the history of Peranakan communities and their environment between 1880 and 1940, many museums offer a historical but lively perspective.



Museums and Cultural Attractions

Gastronomy Delights

All About Craft, Design and Textile

Living Arts Highlights

THAILAND

Peranakannit Museum was inaugurated two years ago by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn in the former Standard Chartered Bank building, the first foreign banking institution in Phuket. The museum tells about the development of Phuket old town displaying historical furniture, paintings, Peranakan fashion from Phuket as well as focusing on Phuket special cuisine.

Phuket Thai Hua Museum is located in the oldest Chinese school on the island. Since 2010, it is a museum dedicated to Phuket Chinese community with 13 rooms showing among others the trade, the culture, tin mining, relations to Mainland China, education and architecture. A must-see!

Chinpracha House & Museum, Phuket. The house which is still inhabited by the owner gives a glimpse into the lifestyle of a local Phuket Peranakan family with many objects of daily life and furniture.

The Research Center for Andaman Arts, Cultures and Traditions, Phang-Nga City is the most comprehensive museum about Southern Andaman people in Thailand. Among the five permanent exhibitions, one hall recreates a typical Peranakan street a century ago.

Songkhla National Museum. One of Thailand most beautiful national museums, it is located in the former residence of Songkhla Governor built at the end of the 19th century. The house is a magnificent Chinese-style mansion built around an open courtyard. It displays Southern antiques and crafts.

Phraya Ratsadanupradit Mahison Phakdi Museum, Trang Province. Kantang used to be the port area of Trang with the city having some Peranakan houses. The mansion used to be the residence of Trang former Governor. Phraya Ratsadanupradit actually came from Penang and many of the objects and pictures are related to Penang.



MALAYSIA

Penang State Museum. Located in a former school, the museum is a fascinating walk through Penang history with thousands of objects evoking the life of the various communities living in George Town.

Pinang Peranakan Mansion is inside a grand home of a rich Baba built over 130 years ago. The house offers a glimpse of Peranakan opulent lifestyle with over 1,000 pieces of antiques and collectibles on display. The house used to serve as the residence and office of Kapitan Cina Chung Keng Kwee.

First Galleria, Taiping. Former Taiping Town Board Office with its historical architecture welcomes the First Galleria, a museum dedicated to the city's history. Why First? Because Taiping has been during British times the city of many "firsts", Taiping had the first prison in Malaya, the first railway, hospital, golf course, European Club, public park, swimming pool, clock tower, central market, post office or girls school among others...

Baba & Nyonya Heritage Museum, Melaka. The museum combines three terrace lots that were acquired by the Chan family in 1861. Four generations lived in the house before being turned into the museum in 1985 which is still run by the same family. The house offers an extraordinary look at one of Melaka's wealthiest family expressed through unique furniture and art pieces.

Gastronomy Delights



Peranakan
Museum
Singapore

Maimoon Palace
Medan,
Indonesia



SINGAPORE

Peranakan Museum has the most comprehensive collection of Peranakan objects in Southeast Asia. Located in a former Chinese school, the museum is closed for renovation until mid-2021. However, a permanent exhibition of the Peranakan Museum is visible at Changi airport in Terminal 4 as well as in rotating exhibitions in Singapore libraries.

National Museum of Singapore. The institution is located in the impressive structure, the oldest cultural institution in Singapore as it was opened in 1887 as the Raffles Library and Museum building. The museum offers a comprehensive vision into Singapore history and its communities through different walking trails as well as in thematic galleries.

INDONESIA

Maimoon Palace in Medan has little to do with the Peranakan but is influenced by the arts and crafts of that time. Formerly the residence of Deli Sultan, the 1888-built palace has an eclectic architecture blending neo-Moorish elements with Dutch Art Nouveau as well as Chinese and Persian decorative motives. It remains one of the most spectacular palaces in Indonesia.

Museum Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II Palembang. The collection is not an amazing interest but the typical structure is a good example of Dutch-influenced Palembang architecture with items showing the history of the city. The building used to be Palembang Sultan's Palace.



Nasi lemak

Peranakan or Nyonya cuisine takes its inspiration from traditional cooking originating from Southern China, India, Java, Sumatra, the former Malaya and Siam. The fusion of all these cuisines created dishes rich in flavours and colours. Bases of Peranakan food include curries, tamarind, fermented soybean, chili paste, coconut milk as well as galangal, ginger, candlenut, kaffir lime and pandan leaves. Chicken, pork, beef and fishes are often simmered in gravies mixing spicy pastes with coconut milk.

There are however variations from one region to another. Peranakan food in Phuket and Penang integrate more Thai flavours, particularly a distinctive sourness such as in Laksa Penang, a curry soup with tamarind, Southern Malaysia and Singapore use more coconut milk such as in Laksa Singapore or Laksa Melaka.

An iconic dish originated from Minangkabau cuisine in West Sumatra is the Rendang dish, generally served with a nasi lemak (coconut fragrant rice). Rendang is beef or chicken cooked and simmered for a couple of hours with spices and coconut. Nyonya ladies prepare also pork rendang...

Rendang has been declared a national iconic dish by CNN a couple of years ago and in recent years, Rendang festivals have been hosted in West Sumatra but are spreading now all across Indonesia.



Thong Muan

ICONIC DISHES TO TRY ALONG THE PERANAKAN TRAIL



Katong Laksa
in Singapore

Nyonya Pie Tee (Kueh Pai Tee) is a typical Peranakan appetizer found along the Andaman Sea. A Hat-shaped crispy shell is filled with savoury yam bean, dried and fresh shrimps, omelette, shallots, shredded carrots, fresh red chilli and topped with a home-made chili sauce.

Phuket Moo Hong is a typical Peranakan dish from the island. It is made of pork fatty cuts braised in a dip made of brown sugar, soy sauce, garlic and black pepper. Potatoes are often served with the dish...

Phuket Hokkien Mee As the name tells, the dish is originated from China and is a wheat-and-egg noodles accompanied with shrimps, squids, slice of porks, vegetable and eventually a boiled egg. Noodles are covered by a hearty mild-flavoured broth.

Trang Moo Yang. A favourite in Trang especially at breakfast where people choose among dozens of flavoured dim sum served with Trang famous pork, simmered during the night in Chinese herbs, spices and honey giving the meat a sweet and crispy consistency.

Songkhla snacks and desserts can be tasted along Nang Ngam road with locally made “Thong Muan” (crackers), “Tao Huay” (bean curd with a ginger broth) and famous Chinese-style biscuits.

Penang Laksa. A sourer and fiery version of the Laksa soup due to Thai influences with the addition of tamarind, lemongrass and daun kesum (laksa leaf) as well as kalamasi.

Kapitan Chicken Penang is a savoury rather mild curry prepared with a coconut milk and flavoured with kaffir limes.

Katong Laksa in Singapore. Any visit to Joo Chiat/Katong district has to include the famous fragrant curry soup in a local restaurant and home-made biscuits from Kim Choo Kueh Chang.

Fish head curry Singapore represents the multi-cultural identity of the town at best. The fish head is cooked with a spicy, tangy curry filled with lady's fingers and tomatoes.

Rendang, Padang

The iconic Indonesian dish is originated from West Sumatra and is a slowly cooked beef or chicken in a gravy made of coconut milk, galangal, tamarind, onions, garlic, coriander, chili and lemongrass among others...

Kemplang and Pempek, Palembang. They are impossible to be missed. They are in town shops with their walls covered by kemplang, a cracker (krupuk) made of fish. Kemplang can be as big as a meter and has curious shapes. Pempek is another iconic South Sumatra snack. It is a salted cake done with a dough of fish and tapioca, egg, noodle, palm sugar, vinegar and tamarind and dried shrimp powder.



Nyonya Pie Tee
(Kueh Pai Tee)

All About Craft, Design and Textile

Peranakan culture translated in many art fields, from fashion and jewellery to chinaware/ceramics or furniture. Some shops and towns offer the opportunity to acquire Peranakan related objects...



Penang shop for hand-made Nyonya beaded shoes and kebaya

Batik Traditional Nyonya style batik and lace shirts are coming back in fashion. While batik Nyonya style are mostly produced in Indonesia — particularly from Java Island, embroidered or lace shirts can be found in Phuket, Penang or Singapore. Nyonya batiks and Baba shirts show generally regular motives of flowers and birds. In Phuket, Thalang Road has a range of souvenirs as well as textile shops. Go to the Peranakan Phuket Boutique inside of the Garden at Phuket Peranakan Museum.

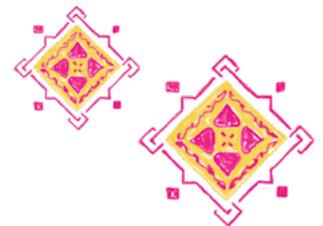
Peranakan antiques can be found in major cities along the trail. In Singapore, East Coast Road has a couple of shops, particularly at the beautifully restored Rumah Bebe House: heirlooms, baju kebaya (blouse dress), jewels as well as furniture are among the treasures to be found there.

Looking for **the colourful glazed tiles decorating the facades of Peranakan houses?** Original antique and reproductions are on sale at Peranakan Tiles Gallery, 168 Telok Ayer Street in Singapore.

Penang shop for hand-made Nyonya beaded shoes and kebaya can be found at Penang Nyonya Culture at Jen Hotel and in Armenian Street in George Town. They are all made by young fashion Baba designer Kenny Loh.

Batak wood sculptures are well known and can be seen in many museums around the world. Medan antique shops are along Kesawan Street (the heart of the colonial town) and at Crispo Antiques in KH. Zainul Arifin Street.

Palembang Faqih Jalaluddin Street near the historical Grand Mosque is where craftsmen are producing traditional furniture with its very ornate carvings representing flowers and plants, mixing Malay and Chinese motives. Dozens of showrooms line along the street with craftsmen putting the finishing touch of dark red and gold painting, Palembang traditional colours.



ENJOYING WEEKEND

WALKING STREETS IN SOUTH THAILAND

Walking streets are becoming fashionable in Thailand with local food and craft markets popping up in all towns around the Kingdom each weekend at sunset. The Best in South Thailand are the one in Phuket old town around Thalang Road, Songkhla old town but also Trang Rail Station market (locally called Chan Cha La Night Market). They are all perfect places to mingle with locals!

Living Arts Highlights



Manora (or Nora) dance

Manora (or Nora) dance A typical dance from the south of Thailand which refer to the ancestral spirit. It is a colourful dance with dancers wearing spectacular costumes often involving very athletic performance. There are close to 400 Nora troops in the Kingdom, the majority being located in the south. Manora dance is for example taught at Phatthalung College of Dramatic Arts — an hour away from Trang- with students travelling around to perform at special events. The Thai government is looking at registering Manora as a UNESCO intangible world heritage. Every year, the festival Nora Rong Kru happens at Tha Kae district in Phatthalung. Tha Kae is believed to be the original source of Nora with the worshipping of the Kru Mo Nora (spirits of former masters).

Phuket Old Town Festival is a relatively recent festivity and takes place generally in February. Special lighting illuminate Phuket's Old Town while parades, Chinese dragon dancing, rickshaw rides, Phuket Baba and Nyonya cuisine demonstrations are performed among others.

Penang Hungry Ghost Festival takes place on the fifteenth night in the seventh lunar month of the Chinese calendar, Buddhists are trying to keep ancestors' spirits happy. Special dishes, joysticks burning and performances of Chinese Operas or concerts happen all across George Town...

George Town Festival is taking place every summer in July and last between two and three weeks. The event is celebrating local arts, culture and heritage linked to the status of George Town as a UNESCO World Heritage. The program includes exhibitions and performances of dance, music and theatre.

Shadow Puppet Theatre (Nang Talung in Thai, Wayang Kulit in Malaysia/ Indonesia) is popular in Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia with performances being hosted at festivals and some restaurants, particularly in Songkhla old town, Hat Yai and Penang.

Melaka River Street Art What used to be named graffiti has now been turned into the trendier term of 'street art'. It is so popular that every city has now its piece of art. Phuket, Trang, Songkhla, George Town, Melaka or Singapore have turned part of their walls to artists. One of the most spectacular is street art along the Melaka River with hundreds of portraits and painting turning the small houses along the river into a giant art gallery.

Melaka San Pedro Festival takes place every June 29th and is the celebration of the Malacca Portuguese. The statue of San Pedro is bathed in the sea followed by traditional dances and folk songs featured by Kristang people, who are mixed Portuguese, Malay and Chinese.

Singapore Night Festival It takes place during two weekends in August with artists transforming through lighting major heritage structures in town with Bras Basah Bugis road transformed into an open air art exhibition.

Tari Lilin or Tari Piring are traditional dances executed by Minangkabau people in West Sumatra. Dancers perform carrying candles in the first dance and plates in the second one. Generally most festivals will have these dances being executed.



Information

Going along the Peranakan Trail is easier than ever as connectivity has been improving over the years.

Visa

The four countries generally provide free visa on arrivals to most countries around the world. Visa regulation should however be checked before departure at local embassies or consulates.

Flying

From both Bangkok Don Mueang and Suvarnabhumi airports, there are direct flights to Hat Yai, Krabi, Phuket, Penang and Singapore while Don Mueang Airport is also linked to Medan and Trang. Melaka is easily accessible via Kuala Lumpur and Singapore international airports. Phuket is also linked to Penang and Singapore while Hat Yai has a daily flight to Singapore. Padang and Palembang are best to be reached via Kuala Lumpur or Singapore.

Other Transportation

There are also regular ferries linking Penang to Medan as well as train services between Singapore and Hat Yai via Ipoh and Butterworth (Penang Mainland).

THAILAND ANDAMAN COAST

www.tourismthailand.org

TAT has regional information offices in Krabi, Phang-Nga, Phuket, Songkhla and Trang.

www.phukettourist.com
www.songkhla-city.go.th
www.museumthailand.com

INDONESIA

www.indonesia.travel/gb/en/destinations
www.medantourism.com
www.southsumatratourism.com

SINGAPORE

www.visitsingapore.com

MALAYSIA

Malaysia.travel
www.tourismmelaka.com
www.mypenang.gov.my

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PERANAKAN

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Tourism Authority of Thailand
1600 New Phetchaburi Road, Makkasan,
Ratchathewi, Bangkok 10400, THAILAND
Tel. +66 2250 5500
Call Center 1672