

## THE GARDEN

## OF ORIENT



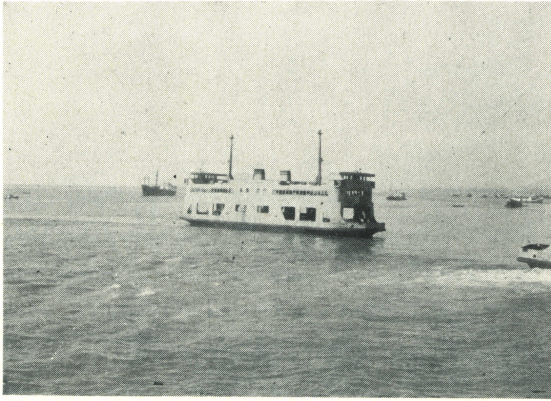
*Rasa Sayang Hotel: The first 'atap' hotel ever built in Malaysia.*

That morning, when I was asked to write an article for the magazine "Hai Sin", I was really taken by surprise. In the first place, I am not a journalist or an author, nor have I had such experience before. Excited and a little apprehensive, I finally decided to take up my pen to introduce the place from where I come and of which I know best. Penang, nicknamed the Garden of the Orient, is a tiny island that does not deserve a place on the world map, and yet it is unique and magnificent enough to lure millions of tourists from all the corners of the world.

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When a tourist arrives in Malaysia, the first thing that puzzles him most is the races in our community. Penang is no exception, for its population is comprised of Malays, Chinese, and Indians, together with minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Ceylon, Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, etc. All these races have their own religions, cultures, traditions, and historical backgrounds; in daily life, each can be easily identified with their costumes and language. Despite the differences, we all share one thing in common: to live together as Malaysians in a spirit of good will and tolerance.





Penang Ferry

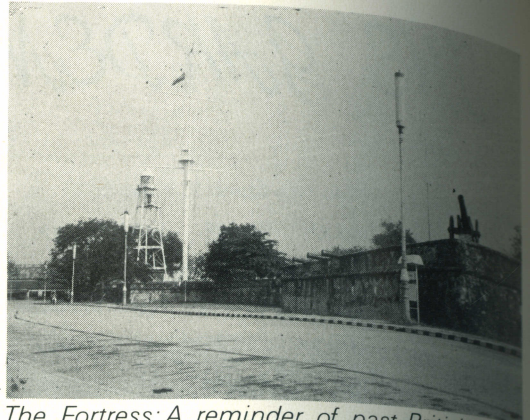
### CITY OF TOMORROW

On this island, there flourishes a type of tree which produces a fruit known as 'Pinang'; it is from this tree that Penang Island gets its name. The 'Pinang' is at present a favourite food among native Malays and Indians. Penang's main city, Georgetown, is in a process of growth and expansion and, of course, is no match for a big city like Taipei. But a recent city reconstruction scheme, sponsored by the state government to replan and rebuild the city with sixty-storey towers surrounded by shopping complexes, gardens, and broad streets, will certainly put this old city up with the times. A new international airport at Bayan Lepas, scheduled to be completed in 1978 to provide a direct landing site for all planes from distant lands, will certainly enhance the prosperity of the island.

Now, it is impossible to tell all about this lovely island in just a matter of a few paragraphs, so I will limit myself to speaking mainly about the remarkable tourist attractions and holiday resorts which surely will interest you most.

### THE FORTRESS

In the year 1857, Captain Francis Light, a British officer well known as 'the Founder of Penang', landed on Penang Island and declared her to be a British colony. Shortly after that, due to the discovery of Penang as an excellent harbour for sheltering, replenishing, and refitting British ships, as well as an important cen-



The Fortress: A reminder of past British rule...

ter for collecting local (Malaysian) products such as pepper, betel nut, camphor, rattan, tin etc., the British decided to built the fortress to defend the harbour against any foreign invaders. Today, the fortress still remains, firm and sturdy though out time, with 7 or 8 canons on top of it overlooking the serene bay proudly. It occupies an area less than the size of a football field surrounded by a wall about 20 feet high on four sides with an open ground in the center for soldiers' man euvres. Beneath this fortress were built several underground apartments to house the soldiers and ammunition. The wall has been tarnished under the relentless, hot sun.

This fortress has always reminded us of British rule during the past colonial days. With the progress of the city, the fortress does not stand idly alone any more. A long broad street bordering the beach was built in front of the fortress and a vast playground immediately constructed behind it. Not far away from the fortress, there stand three old but huge buildings left behind by the British Administrator, which are now utilized as government offices. Just recently, the city council added one more, Dewan Sir Pinang serves as a cultural center. Explanade is a place favored by both the young and old especially in the evening. Perhaps, that is the place where one can afford a rest and a peace of mind, while enjoying the cool sea breeze and the scenery of sunset.



## PENANG HILL

Penang Hill, another tourist attraction, is over 2700 feet above sea level. One can reach the top by two means: one is by a 3 hours' hike, which is the favourite way of school children during vacation. The other is by funicular railway. This railway track was built on the hill. Slope during the British colonial days extends from the foot straight up to the top. The carriages are not propelled by a strong locomotive but instead ascend or descend by strong wire cables.

Four carriages are involved and their routes are reciprocal, 2 up and 2 down at the same time. Each carriage can only take 25 passengers at a time.

*Penang Hill Station: Penang is one of the three places in the world to offer a ride on the funicular.*



*Funicular Railway: A carriage on the railway track moving up the hill slope.*

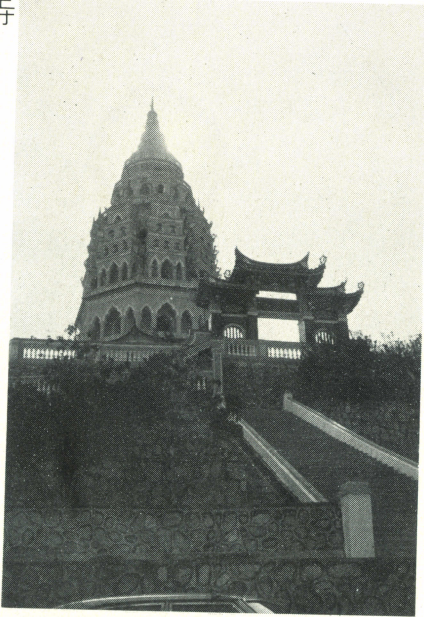
To be sure, having a ride on this tiny carriage is something more than a thrill to the newcomer. Initially, you will surely have a feeling of uncertainty toward this strange and novel railway system. But all that is lost as you are hoisted higher and higher up the slope, gliding through the tropical forests with the panoramic scene of the city of Georgetown falling before your eyes. At the hill top, you will find a restaurant, a childrens' playground, and gardens filled with brightly coloured flowers such as roses, hibiscuses, orchids...etc. which blossom at all seasons. Here again, unexpectedly, tourists will come across 2 canons left behind by the British. Up to now, I still can't think of any reason why they were placed there in the first place.



海杏

KET LOK SI

極樂寺



*The Pagoda:.....largest in S.E. Asia.*

This Buddhist monastery is located in a small market town known as Ayer Itam, just on the outskirts of the city of Georgetown. A twenty minutes' ride by bus from Georgetown will bring you right up to where it is. To reach the interior of Ket Lok Si you must walk a distance up stoney stairs. On both sides of the stairs, there stand countless stores selling fruits, foods, toys, jewelry, medicine and some other local products.

Once inside all the buildings seen here are similar to that of the ancient Chinese temples in decoration as well as architecture. There are numerous buildings, each of which houses a Buddha statue and a big bowl in front for placing joss sticks. Among these, perhaps the one which houses the Four Giants ( 四大金剛 ) will attract the most attention. These Four Giants are huge statues, each over 15 feet tall, and are dressed in ancient Chinese warrior costumes. According to Chinese legend, they are supposed to be the legitimate lawmen under the Lord Buddha, who preserve justice, law and order in the human world.

Further up, there are 3 round ponds, built especially to house tortoises and fish. To Buddhists, these creatures outlive man in years and they convey a message of everlasting existence

in the world of Buddhism. To these creatures, Chinese New Year means a season of food. During this interval, thousands of Chinese worshippers swarm to the monastery, throwing vegetables to these creatures as a token of charity. Just behind these ponds, higher up on the wall, there are six bold Chinese Characters: (南無阿彌陀佛) -- an appreciation slogan to Buddha the Lord.

The visit to Ket Lok Si reaches a climax when he stands before the magnificent Pagoda, the largest in South East Asia. Built before the Second World War in commemoration of Buddha, this Pagoda is fifteen storeys high. To reach the top, one has to walk up flights of stairs. Within each storey, the walls are painted white, with Buddha statues at the four corners. On the way up, it is a common sight to see the verses and teachings of Buddha carved on the walls. Tired and perspiring, you reach the top only to have a sense of relief and comfort, as if you had entered a paradise. Now, it is time to have a bird's eye view of the entire monastery and the market town beneath.

Ever since its existence, Ket Lok Si has served much more than just as an abode for Buddhist monks and nuns. It is the place where the disillusioned and the deserted come forward, kneeling before the Lord to seek for enlightenment and spiritual relief; businessmen, who have embarked on a new enterprise, pray to Lord for His help to see them through; young couples pray for their everlasting happiness; parents dragging their children to the front of the Lord, pray earnestly so that happiness and comfort will befall their families. In the eyes of Buddhists, any favor will be fulfilled sooner or later, if one is sincere to the Lord.

Buddhism is at present adhered to by a majority of Malaysian Chinese. Apart from Ket Lok Si, there are still several other monasteries built for such religious practices, like the Penang Buddhist Association Center, Siam Watt, Burma Watt...etc. Perhaps, among these, Siam Watt is the most outstanding.





*Wat Chayamankalaram Temple: A joint venture of Thailand and Malayan Buddhist Association.*

Here, at Siam Watt, a Buddha statue 108 feet long has been cast lying casually on a high platform. On the wall surrounding this platform are pictures relating to visitors how the original Buddha gave up his luxurious life in his palace and went out to seek an answer to man's sorrows and sufferings, and how finally this search led him to receive enlightenment under the Potay tree. In addition to having the third largest Reclining Buddha in the world, the temple is lined with thousands of golden Buddha plaques, while the ashes of dead devotees are placed in niches beneath the 108-foot long Buddha. Like the building itself and its decorations, the setting is in the best Thai tradition.

## SNAKE TEMPLE

There exists only one such temple in this world, and it is right here on Penang Island. Located in the countryside at Bayan Lepas, Snake Temple is supposed to be a dwelling place for the 'God of the Snake'. Visitors will often be astonished, if not terrified, to find snakes everywhere in the temple especially in front of the God statue. Snakes are also seen coiling up on the table, or resting on the branches of tiny trees



*Snake resting: on tree branches....* placed in a vase. It is strange, indeed, to learn that these snakes are 'pacified' and will never cause any harm unless deliberately irritated. According to Chinese belief, once a year at the birthday of the God of the Snake, all the snakes in the nearby jungles will automatically come out of their hiding places and come forward to visit their Lord right here in this temple. Then they will 'celebrate' for a whole day before they leave. Today, the God's birthday is still celebrated with a great festival but no more snake pilgrims come. And whether the jungle snakes did gather here in the past is still something of a mystery. Behind this temple, there is a big iron case in which a huge python lives. All these holy snakes will live forever, just like the spirit of their God.

## BEACHES

If Penang ever achieves its present status in the eye of foreign tourists, it will be its beautiful natural beaches that make the largest contributions. Being situated near the equator, Penang Island is always hot. Daily weather is warm, with temperatures between 25° to 30°C, and sun-shine is common. This fine weather, coupled with long stretches of fine, sandy beaches, and





*Golden Beach in Batu Ferringgi: Isn't it look so inviting and lovely.....?*  
the serene blue sea, makes its natural beauty second to none.

Just recently, lured by its attractive beaches and sunshine, hippies from the West have swarmed to this Island. Here they dwell along the beaches, earning their living by means of prostitution and some other crooked ways. Worst still, they are all drug addicts and often swim and sunbathe naked along the beaches. But, the State government soon took unprecedented action to expel them on 24 hours' notice and denied them all future entry. Batu Ferringgi, Tanjung Bunga, Muka Head, Gurney Drive, and Batu Man are some of the well-known holiday resorts, where visitors as well as local inhabitants have great fun in swimming, sun-bathing, water skiing and picnicking.

In order to gain more foreign exchange, the Penang State Government has launched a full sea-led programme to promote tourism. Under this project, the City Council has paid great attention to the Penang holiday resort. Apart from beautifying the lovely beaches, foreign investors are encouraged to build luxurious up-to-date hotels along Batu Ferringgi Beaches. Today, a former swampy forested area has now been transformed into a holiday recreation park with hotels, golf-fields, gardens, and swimming pools. Some of the magnificent and luxurious hotels are Rasa Sayang, Casuarina, Palm Beach, Merlin Club, Golden Band..... etc. Among these, one that needs some introduction is the Rasa Sayang Hotel

whose unique architecture marks a new page in Malaysian history. Unlike other hotels, the Rasa Sayang is not well-known for its height but for its external appearance which is a replica of a Malaysian atap house. It is here that one has the chance of seeing the Malaysian Bumiputra traditional house.

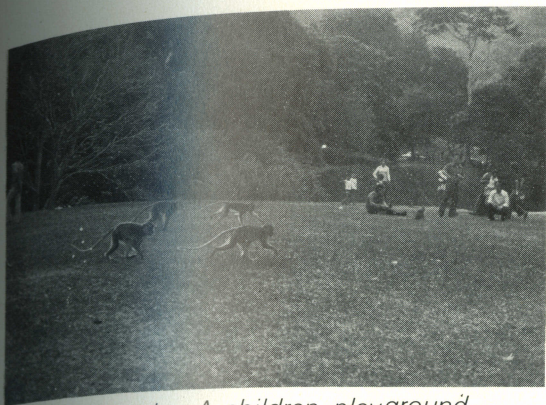
At night, when there are plenty of free hours, it is a common practice for people take a walk along Gurney Drive. All along the beach, a long stretch of road has already been constructed, with bright street lights all along the way. A broad side walk with chairs at regular intervals facilitates any passers-by. On the other side of the street, there are numerous restaurants serving a variety of Chinese foods and drinks.

Here the sea remains calm, with its lethargic rhythm, of waves splashing gently onto the shore: the cool sea breeze makes one feel relaxed and lively; the bright full moon, accompanied by countless glittering stars, shines brightly over the silvery sea as if to share a moment of comfort and peace with those beneath. Clusters of people sit and chat endlessly with all their daily drudgery gone. Everything seems at rest except for the movement of trees in the direction of the sea breeze. The distant darkness appears so mysterious and silence prevails, but occasionally a pop song tells in advance the arrival of the ice-cream hawker. I believe here is a scene that can never be narrated by words alone.



*Gurney Drive: A place to eat, rest and chat around.*





*Botanical garden: A children playground during daytime and a 'love' park at night.*

Penang is an island full of gardens. When one is bored with the city life, he can pay a visit to any of the gardens, such as the Botanical Garden, the Youth Park or the Bukit Dumbar Garden. The Youth Park is a typical playground for children and youths. Right in its center, a tiny circular area has been constructed for roller-skating. Somewhere by the side of a small stream, there is some sort of a scout camp where youths find great pleasure in physical training, such as crossing a river on a single rope or climbing up ladders to a tiny house on the top of a tall tree.

The Botanical Garden, located near the Youth Park, is one which attracts a great many visitors at all times. Flowers, shrubs, and tropical forests can be seen everywhere in this garden. Surrounded by hills on all sides except the sole entrance, numerous waterfalls of varying sizes are found on the hill slope. The cold clear water from these waterfalls meets on the foothill to form a single narrow stream cutting right through the garden. Here, a winding road had been built to provide a route by which vehicles can travel around the entire garden. A narrow hill path can lead visitors up to a pond where lotuses flourish. Further in the interior, a variety of animals are exhibited. A pair of hairy and brown-coloured 'orang hutan' swing with agility and joy in a big iron cage. They were given as gifts by Indonesia to the people of Penang. In a compound surrounded by a wire fence, a pair of tro-

-pical deer and a number of mouse deer roam leisurely on the green grass. Monkeys are everywhere in the garden, dodging after tourists for peanuts and bananas. Three pairs of Kangaroos presented by the Government of South Australia frolic around with the monkeys, conveying the everlasting friendship of the people of our sister city, Adelaide.

In the morning, people prefer to come here for a walk or to practise the Chinese art of self-defence. The refreshing atmosphere, free from the pollution of the outside world, is certainly good for the health. During the evening, the joyful voice of children breaks the silence, as they go chasing one another on the hilly grassland. Boys and girls seen in pairs keep themselves away from the crowd, under the shield or by the river side. Late at night, the Garden returns to absolute silence, but that doesn't necessarily mean it is free of visitors. Cars queue all the way along the road, right up to the interior, and couples may spend a good time through the night.

Well, that is all I can cover at my very best about my native homeland. It may be brief, but I am sure it gives a clear impression of what Penang Island is like. There are still other interesting locations on the island, including the Lord Nariamman Temple, the oldest Hindu Temple; the Kapitan Kling Mosque, built in the early 1800's; the Tengku Abdul Rahman Aquarium, one of the best aquariums in South East Asia; the Goddess of Mercy Temple, the busiest temple on the island (built in 1800), the well-known Ayer Itam Dam and Bukit Dumbar Dam. In fact, much more could be written and there would hardly be an end at all. If one day you have the chance, do not hesitate to set foot on this lovely island!!

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