

On Penang island, it's all about art, eats & old streets

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more likely than not to be wowed by some selfie-inspired street art slowly fading away in the tropical sun.

On this multiethnic island, it is perhaps no surprise that some of the most popular were produced by an outsider, Lithuanian Ernest Zacharevic, who was inspired enough by George Town to put down roots.

"It was very fresh for me — to see all these walls and textures and inspirations that I get there," he said. "There's just something charming about it. It's a place which is hard to forget."

Other pieces to look out for are the more than four dozen cartoonish steel-rod sculptures by Malaysian artists detailing local history, including one memorializing Penang-born shoemaker Jimmy Choo, and a mural of a larger-than-life Indian boatman by Russian artist Julia Volchkova.

Feeling inspired? Rozana Mohamed runs classes teaching the traditional art of *batik* painting from her studio on Lebuah Aceh. Sessions start from as little as 35 ringgit (\$8.40) for one hour, materials included.

Eat on the street

Even by the standards of Southeast Asia — a region that spawned pad thai and Vietnamese banh mi sandwiches — the street food of Penang stands out. Part of what makes it so good is the mishmash of cultures that have left their mark on the island.

Start the day with Indian roti canai, a flaky flatbread served with curry. Or try a true Malaysian favorite: nasi lemak — a mound of coconut-infused rice plus peanuts, crispy anchovies, sweet chili sauce, and a hard-boiled egg, served with



or without meat. It's an odd combination — often wrapped in a grab-and-go banana leaf parcel — that works amazingly well.

Wash it down like the locals do with a strong iced coffee sweetened with condensed milk.

FAMILIAR & EXOTIC. Skewered pieces of chicken (top photo) are roasted in a traditional Indian tandoor oven on a George Town roadside on the island of Penang, Malaysia. In the bottom photo, people walk past the Ren i Tang, a former Chinese medicine hall converted into a boutique hotel, in George Town. Penang is the rare tropical island where hitting the town beats lazing on the beach. Fortune-seekers from China, Europe, and India have been drawn to the Malaysian island for more than two centuries, creating along with local Malays an eclectic mix that can feel both seductively familiar and exotic at the same time. (AP Photos/Adam Schreck)

From there it's on to a parade of China-inspired stir-fried noodle dishes. Char kway teow — made with flat rice noodles, sausage, shrimp, cockles, and eggs — is a must-try staple that's easy to find.

Mee goreng, another fried noodle dish, is sweeter and can have a subtle Indian curry kick, while the famous laksa noodle soup is all about the sour and spice.

None of the dishes costs much more than 6 ringgit (\$1.45). One you'll struggle to find? The similarly named panang curry, which is more associated with neighboring Thailand.

If you go

Getting there: Bridges and ferries link Penang to the mainland. Or catch a short direct flight from the capital, Kuala Lumpur, or nearby hubs like Singapore or Bangkok.

Accommodations: Some of the best hotels and inns are housed in renovated old buildings, such as the Blue Mansion built by 19th-century magnate Cheong Fatt Tze. Another one to check out is Ren i Tang, a converted Chinese medicine hall in Little India where an ingenious pulley spares guests from hoisting bags up the narrow stairs.



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