
Malaysia

George Town Penang

Cultural Cities Profile
East Asia

May 2021

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Special Thanks

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Introducing George Town

George Town, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a progressive city with a rich cultural heritage of over 200 years of history. Many of the cultural and religious festivals have national and regional influence. The city is a regional lead in community-driven urban revitalisation through heritage preservation. It has one of the most significant cultural festivals in the region – The George Town Festival; and a burgeoning street art scene. The city has particular strengths in music, visual arts and performing arts.

George Town is the capital city of Penang. Greater George Town or George Town Conurbation covers Penang Island and Seberang Perai (5 districts in total), as well as the towns of nearby states: Sungai Petani (Kuala Muda District, Kedah), Kulim (Kulim district, Kedah) and Parit Buntar (Kerian District, Perak).¹

“

One word [that] sums up George Town is Eclectic – a description often heard in writeups and talks on the heritage in Penang.

Tan Shih Thoe, managing director of Hin Bus Depot²

Penang Bridge.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd

¹ Homi Kharas, Albert Zeufack & Hamdan Majeed, 2010. Cities, People and the Economy: A Study on Positioning Penang. Khazanah Nasional Berhad and the World Bank. P. 5.

² Interview by Penang Institute



City Vision/Mission/Slogan

Penang government launched the Penang Experience Year 2020 in 2019 with the tagline “The Diversity of Asia” to usher in the excitement of Visit Malaysia Year 2020.³ It has a vision of making Penang a “Cleaner, Greener, Safer, Healthier, and Happier” state.

Since 2010, the government has started a series of environmental initiatives to promote resource efficiency such as implementing free inner-city shuttle, Central Area Transit (CAT BUS) services, No-Plastic-Bag days, a total ban on polystyrene food containers, incentives for greener energy consumption, Waste Segregation at Source policy, and building cycling lanes.⁴



**Cleaner, Greener,
Safer, Healthier,
and Happier**

Penang State Government

Creative Industries and Cultural Services

George Town possesses a rich cultural heritage with over 200 years of history influenced by generation after generation of migration and trade. Many of the cultural and religious festivals are still celebrated to this day such as the Hungry Ghost Festival, Thaipusam, and Nine Emperor God Festival among others.

The city has as well put a lot of emphasis and effort toward the preservation and management of heritage

buildings and is also advocating and encouraging local arts and cultural performances.

With George Town’s designation as one of the Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca in 2008, a state heritage agency, George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) was established to manage, safeguard and promote the city’s heritage.



We hope to portray the importance of art and its generous effects in contributing to society, while developing and retaining Penang’s talent pool to sustain the state’s creative industry and economy.

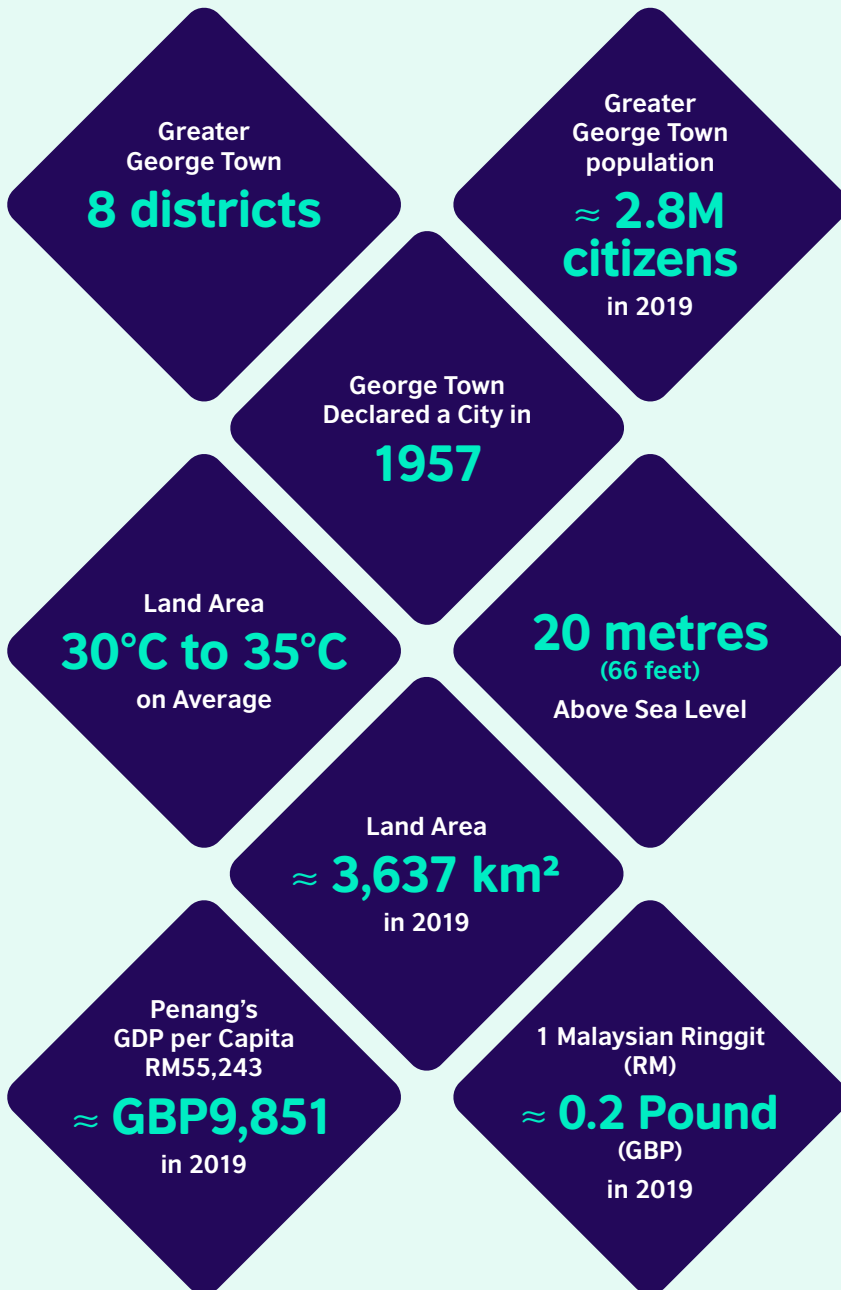
Yeoh Soon Hin, Penang Tourism and Creative Economy Committee Chairman⁵

³ Penang launches Experience Penang Year 2020. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/06/02/penang-launches-experience-penang-year-2020/1758678>

⁴ Speech by Chief Minister of Penang during the Penang Green Agenda Workshop. <http://cm.penang.gov.my/index.php/en/all-stories/2087-penang-green-agenda-workshop>

⁵ <https://www.buletinmutiara.com/tapping-on-creative-industries-to-boost-economy>

George Town in Numbers



After 4 years of development,
Penang Green Agenda (PGA)
was launched in 2021

Penang State Structure Plan 2030
aims to embrace the digital age and Industry 4.0

Non-stop international passenger flights available to
21 destinations
in **7 countries**

20 countries
have established consulates office in Penang

63 different types of traditional trades and occupations
in George Town World Heritage Site

George Town Historic Commercial and Civic Precincts has
51 historic buildings and places

Context

A British trader, Sir Francis Light, founded George Town in 1786. The Popham's 1798 map shows the early settlers formed neighbourhoods or quarters clustered around certain streets or intersections.⁶ It turned into the Municipal Council of Penang Island (MPPP) in 1976 and was granted the City status in 2015.⁷

In Greater George Town, the districts are administered by the local governments under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and the Penang State Government's policies.⁸



[The] multicultural traditions reflect the harmonious coexistence of the different ethnic and social groups, cultures and religions contributing to the vibrancy of George Town today.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow⁹

⁶ George Town World Heritage Site: Special Area Plan, 2016. State Town and Country Planning Department, Penang. P. A2 – 4.

⁷ Penang's a City. <https://www.mypenang.gov.my/all/my-stories/64>

⁸ Other Kedah and Perak districts are also under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and respective state governments' jurisdiction.

⁹ <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2019/05/15/penang-all-set-for-george-town-celebrations>

A Progressive and Ambitious State



The Penang State Structure Plan 2030 is a gazetted planning policy document to provide comprehensive directions within the administrative boundary of Penang State.

It aims to shape Penang into a powerhouse for growth in the northern region, focusing on:

- The function of Penang, in particular George Town, as the centre of economic and administrative activity.
 - The development of new skill-intensive industrial areas.
 - The development of the tourism sector with many international tourist destinations, products and events to attract local and foreign tourists.
- The plan ambitiously aims to 'Upgrade the economy to Raise Household Incomes':
 - To become a high-income state, Penang aims will embrace the digital age and Industry 4.0, and move up the value chain by investing in both talent and technology concurrently.
 - This will involve diversification in tourism, agriculture and manufacturing drivers, incubation of new creative and social enterprises.
 - Penang will also position itself as a robust job market to attract global talents by further strengthening the manufacturing industry and shared services sector, green technology, developing small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and businesses with a social purpose.

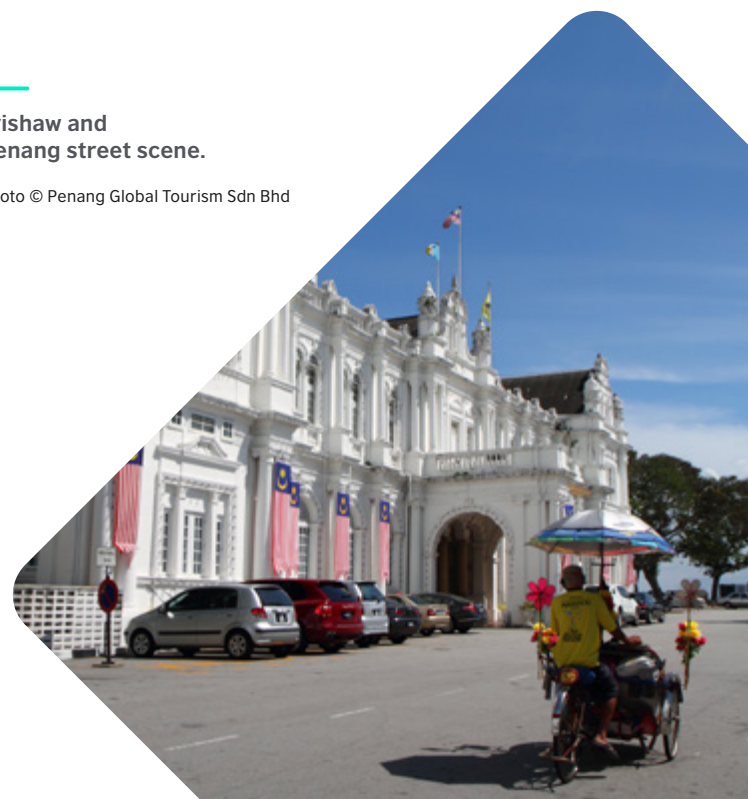
Location/Region

Located in the northeast tip of Penang Island, George Town is the capital city of the state of Penang.

- As a historic port city and a strategic economic location, George Town is easily accessible by air via the Penang International Airport (previously known as the Bayan Lepas International Airport). Situated in the Bayan Lepas area, south-east of Penang Island, the airport is about 14 kilometres away from George Town.¹⁰
- It is one of the busiest airports in Malaysia as it welcomes domestic as well as international flights, with non-stop international passenger flights available to 21 destinations in 7 countries.¹¹

Trishaw and Penang street scene.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd



¹⁰ Penang International Airport, Penang, Malaysia, 2020. <https://www.penangairportonline.com>

¹¹ Flight Connections, 2020. <https://www.flightconnections.com/flights-from-penang-pen>

Ethnic Diversity

The Malay language is the national language, and is the most commonly used one in Malaysia. English is another compulsory language subject in the national education system. Other common languages in Malaysia are Mandarin, Tamil and dialects of different ethnic groups.

In Penang, the Chinese speak Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, and other dialects. The primary dialect is Hokkien.

“

George Town, a multicultural place in Penang, is composed of many groups living together. [It is important in]... cultural heritage... to consider... ways of life [of all the groups and how they] have evolved, and so the values present in George Town cannot be attributed to one ethnic group.

Charis Loke, a teacher and artist from Malaysia¹²

Thaipusam Festival that celebrates by multiracial groups in Penang.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd



¹² <https://www.unesco-ichcap.org/interview-with-charis-loke-about-arts-ed-and-integrating-ich-into-non-formal-education>

Cultural, Arts and Civic Policy

George Town has a designated world heritage zone within the city, of which the outstanding universal values centre on arts and culture.

The city's multicultural quality is embodied in its people, places and practices. It boasts a vibrant local creative scene and has attracted Klang Valley-based arts and culture practitioners who have set up George Town branches or bases.

Under the state government, arts and culture are governed under the Penang State Exco Office for Tourism, Arts, Culture and Heritage. The Penang2030 Guide also prioritises diversifying local arts facilities as one of its overarching strategies.

The state government strongly supports the internationally acclaimed George Town Festival and George Town Heritage Celebration to name a few, drawing both practitioners and visitors.



Empower people to strengthen civic participation.

Penang2030 Unit¹³

The state branch of the National Department of Culture and Arts manages the state-run venues and programmes which includes research, development, documentation and publication.

- It also has a role to enhance arts and cultural activities to support tourism in the state. Under its auspices are facilities like an auditoriums, dance and music studios, art galleries as well as resource and meeting centres.
- The department also runs apprenticeship and capacity-building programmes including one for ghazal music as well as cultural events such as art bazaars.

¹³ Penang2030, 2019.

Policy Leadership – Inclusive Development



Art and culture are supported in Greater George Town with buy-in from not only the administrative but also the legislative arms. Inclusive growth and bottom-up participation are at the core of this decision-making ecosystem.

Penang Island City Council (MBPP)

The vision of MBPP is to make Penang a harmonious and progressive City by 2020, as well as to maintain its unique culture, heritage and natural beauty. The mission of the city council is to improve and preserve the quality of life of residents of the city through quality and balanced

municipal service and development, conducive and comprehensive environment and facilities as well as efficient governance.

Seberang Perai City Council (MBSP)

The Vision of MBSP is “Seberang Perai Resilient, Inclusive, Green, Competitive and Technology Driven Smart City”. The mission of the city council is to provide urban service, development planning and infrastructure efficiently, and effectively. They aim to be responsive to the needs of the community in Seberang Perai.

Key Policies in Wider Creative Economy

Penang Creative Economy Agenda (PCEA), since 2020

The initiative is a critical initiative steered by the Penang State EXCO for tourism and creative economy in October 2020.¹⁴

- An inclusive direction and policies will be made through the initiative and a working taskforce will soon be set up to study and engage the stakeholders.

Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) Strategic Development Plan 2021 – 2025.

The plan is in line with the Malaysian Government’s Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 that emphasises economic development in order to deliver sustained growth with social inclusion. Its main aim is to transform Malaysia’s north into a globally competitive region by 2025.

- It outlines the strategies, insights and projections that would bring about positive spillover effects for the society. It also acts as the basis for the implementation of projects and programmes in NCER under the 12th Malaysia Plan.
- For the services sector, this plan is going to focus on four sectors including tourism, logistics and connectivity, digital economy and education. It also plans to develop the cultural and creative economy.¹⁵

Below George Town Heritage Celebration organised across the George Town World Heritage Site in July every year.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd

¹⁴ Penang to Implement Agenda for Creative Economy. <https://www.facebook.com/buletinmutiara/posts/3894840733866681>

¹⁵ NCER Strategic Development Plan (2021-2025). <https://www.ncer.com.my/about-ncer/ncer-strategic-development-plan>



Capacity Building and Digital Development

Despite a lack of an overarching education policy at the state and local government level, Penang is proactively delivering cultural education through an initiative that promotes the education of science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM) amongst students.

Government initiatives in digital transformation also have a strong capacity-building focus.

The state government is now positioning the creative industries as an economic generator through the Penang Creative Economy Agenda which will be in line with the Penang2030 vision.



[the state] will be focusing on growing the creative industry and making it a sustainable part of Penang's economy as well as maintaining Penang's unique identity.

Yeoh Soon Hin, Penang Tourism and Creative Economy Committee Chairman¹⁶

NGO Intervention – Education Equity



Founded in 2019, **empowerNCER** – Academic is an initiative that helps students improve their achievements through an all-rounded approach to education, with an emphasis on academic excellence, skills, competencies and personal development.

The project focuses on children from underprivileged households and indigenous communities (*Orang Asli*), who are sitting for the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM) examinations, typically taken during the final year of secondary school.¹⁷

¹⁶ <https://www.buletinmutiara.com/tapping-on-creative-industries-to-boost-economy>

¹⁷ NCER website.

Culture and Digital Enablement – case studies

Penang Smart Delivery Unit (PSDU)

The Penang Smart Delivery Unit was set up within the local government division in 2017 to coordinate “smart state” initiatives in Penang.

- The vision is to develop Penang as a sustainable state through smart governance by 2030 and the objective is to formulate implementation and monitoring mechanisms for smart state development.¹⁸

@CAT Penang

Founded in 2015, @CAT is a platform formed under the Penang State Government via InvestPenang for emerging tech startups and entrepreneurs who are struggling to realise their ideas or build an enduring business.

- They also nurture talents through a variety of training with shared facilities, co-working space and other value-added support.¹⁹

Penang Digital Library

The Penang Digital Libraries are hubs for creativity and innovation, as well as platforms to connect talent. Founded in 2015, the project is a collaborative effort between the Penang State Government, Keysight Technologies, Eastern and Oriental Berhad and TIME. The Library was designed to reengineer how information is curated and consumed in today’s digital world, while encouraging social collaboration. The spaces are open to the general public, and are popular amongst students and remote workers.

- There are three digital libraries in Penang, located in George Town, Bayan Lepas and Butterworth.²⁰

The formation of Digital Penang, 2020-present

Digital Penang aims to leverage technology to create comparative advantages for Penang within the digital economy, to deliver agile solutions and infrastructure, and to promote a digitally-engaged community and data-driven governance.²¹

NCER Technology Innovation Centre (NTIC)

NTIC seeks to accelerate the adoption of Industry 4.0 in the NCER. It focuses on research, product development, and design customisation.

- It is involved in firm capacity-building, talent development, seed funding, consulting services, and the formation of collaborative links between industry players and academia. It also links firms with local and international experts in relevant areas.²²

¹⁸ Penang: Towards A Smart International State. <https://www.penang.gov.my/images/2019/PENANG%20TOWARDS%20A%20SMART%20AND%20INTERNATIONAL%20STATE.pdf>

¹⁹ @CAT Penang. <https://acatpenang.com> Dasar Industri Kreatif Negara. P.7 – 8

²⁰ Penang Digital Library. <https://www.penangdigitallibrary.com/about>

²¹ Digital Penang. https://digitalpenang-my.sharepoint.com/personal/julian_ooi_digitalpenang_my/Documents/Public/Digital%20Penang%20Brochure.pdf, accessed in July 2021.

²² NCER. <https://www.ncer.com.my/strategic-projects-programmes/technology-advancement/ncer-technology-innovation-centre-ntic>



Nurturing and investing in creativity are vital in preserving our cultural expression and identity. Thus, by supporting and encouraging the young generation in the pursuit of the arts, we ensure continuity of the arts for its aesthetic and historical significance.

State Tourism Development, Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee chairman Yeoh Soon Hin²³

Arts and Education – case studies

Penang Education Council (PEC)

PEC runs a wide range of education and literacy initiatives. These include:

- Science and Technology Awareness Programme, 1998-present: What started out as a pilot project by the Penang Education Council (PEC) in 1998 has now grown into a large collaboration with diverse institutions and agencies to develop STEM interest amongst students. The Science and Technology Awareness Programme aims to develop a STEM talent pool by engaging students at early stages through ‘participatory learning’ methods. The Programme organises talks, study trips and camps that seeks to instill awareness of the importance of science, technology and the environment in daily life.²⁴

- Penang International Kids Storytelling Festival, 2005-present is an initiative to promote literacy, creativity, intellectual development, and cultural understanding amongst children and society at large. Children have the opportunity to listen to various stories in various languages, and grasp their historical and cultural settings. It provides ‘wholesome education’ and fun for the entire family, and raises storytelling standards in Malaysia.²⁵

Penang Science Cluster (PSC)

Through various free programmes, Penang Science Cluster (PSC) seeks to increase the uptake of STEM within classrooms. The organisation has launched the Penang Science Cafe, TechMentor programmes, coding workshops and different science competitions targeting school children of all ages.

- PSC also coordinates with multiple industry partners to run their programmes. Its annual science fair, Penang International Science Fair, is held in SPICE Arena every year in November.²⁶

²³ <https://www.buletinmutiara.com/a-spotlight-on-artistic-talents>

²⁴ Penang Education Council. <http://www.penangeducation.org.my/ppst>

²⁵ Penang Education Council. <http://www.penangeducation.org.my/pinks>

²⁶ Penang Science Cluster. <https://www.pscpen.com/programs-for-schools>

Innovation and Creative Entrepreneurship Programme, 2020 – present

This programme is designed by Penang Art District for would-be creative entrepreneurs such as visual artists, performing artists, artisans, music producers, creative hub operators and arts organisations in Penang. It is mainly to provide creative entrepreneurs a learning environment combining academic theory with practical and real-world application.²⁷

The Fort Cornwallis Public Archaeology Programme, 2017 – present

The Programme aims to promote public participation in the conservation of Penang's heritage. School students are encouraged to learn about the history of Fort Cornwallis through hands-on activities.²⁸

Arus Academy

Arus is based in Bukit Mertajam, Penang, with a branch in Kuala Lumpur. It is a social enterprise that seeks to empower the creation of meaningful learning experiences for students.²⁹

Equality and Inclusion in Culture – case studies

Penang Gender Inclusiveness Policy, 2019 – present. Penang State Government.

The Penang Gender Inclusiveness Policy promotes gender-balanced management. It takes gender perspectives into consideration in every decision-making, planning and administration process, at every level of the state government.

- It also aims to increase the commitment and involvement of all relevant parties to prioritise gender perspectives in development programmes and budget allocation.³⁰

Strategic Action Plan Based in Gender Inclusiveness Policy, 2020 – present. MBSP.

The Strategic Action Plan is a policy to ensure inclusive access to programme planning, implementation, and facilities to achieve gender equality. The strategies are:

- Continuous Training and Education for Gender Inclusion
- Disaggregated Sex Data Collection (SDD)
- Ensure gender balance in all State Government Departments and Agencies
- Implementation of Gender Responsive And Participatory Budgeting (GRPB) entirely at the State Government level

Consultation took place during policy formation via strategic partnerships across government agencies, private sector, NGOs and institutions of higher learning.³¹

George Town Festival, an annual art and cultural event in Penang.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd



²⁷ Penang Art District. <https://penangartdistrict.com/innovation-creative-entrepreneurship-program>

²⁸ Think City. <https://thinkcity.com.my>

²⁹ <http://www.arusacademy.org.my>

³⁰ Gender Inclusiveness Policy. <https://pwdc.org.my/gender-inclusiveness-policy>

³¹ Strategic Action Plan Based in Gender Inclusiveness Policy. P. 8 – 9.

Cultural Inclusivity



Penang Women’s Development Corporation (PWDC) has championed inclusivity programmes to enhance gender equality through cultural engagements.

Gender Responsive and Participatory Budgeting, GRPB, 2019 – present: The GRPB is the flagship programme of Penang’s Gender Inclusiveness Policy (GIP), launched in March 2019.

The GRPB is now fully implemented in the Penang State and Local Governments.

- The policy aims to include all stakeholders in budget planning and delivery phases, ensures

that budgets are responsive to the needs of different genders, and that gender-segregated data collection is carried out to support better policymaking. It strengthens the link between economic and social policy outcomes.

PWDC’s Campaigns, 2013 – present: PWDC has launched several campaigns that seek to raise awareness of gender and equality issues among Penangites.

- These include International Women’s Day Penang Goes Orange, Attract and Retain Women in the Workforce Forum at the Labour Day, and Family Day.³²

Eden Handicap Service Centre Berhad, Craft and Souvenir Centre

Eden Handicap Service Centre empowers individuals with disabilities by providing them with craft skills that allow them to be gainfully employed.

- The creations are regularly exhibited at food fairs, exhibitions, corporate companies, road-shows, and factories. The products are a source of income and pride for the craftworkers.³³

Stepping Stone Work Centre

Founded in 2000, Stepping Stone Centre provides a workplace for individuals with special needs. It is a part of Asia Community Service’s Support Centre for Community Living project, and desires to enable “full participation and equal opportunities for people with disabilities” in the community.

- After an initial grant from the International Post Office Volunteers’ Fund, the Centre, based in Balik Pulau, began its operations in February 2000.³⁴

³² PWDC official website.

³³ Eden Handicap Service Centre. <https://www.edenhandicap.org/craft-and-souvenir>

³⁴ Asia Community Service. <https://www.asiacommunityservice.org/index.php?page=SteppingStone>

Environment and Sustainability

Penang state has been dedicated to the development of its environmental framework since 2017 to guide local decision-making, on top of the existing federal policies and relevant participatory governance structure under the National SDG Council.

- After 4 years of development, the Penang Green Agenda (PGA) was launched in 2021. This roadmap is now poised to support the achievement of the Penang2030 vision as well as related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) powered by a green economy.

- 10 key areas have been identified and the PGA is expected to be the benchmark for the development of future policies.

Behind these policy initiatives, Penang Island City Council (MBPP) holds a central role in pushing sustainability agenda with city-wide projects such as LinkBike and brought Malaysia the inaugural Global Climathon Awards at ChangeNOW Summit in Paris in 2020 thanks to a nature-based climate adaption plan co-presented with Think City, a government-funded organisation on urban regeneration.³⁵

Council Leadership



Penang Green Council (PGC) takes a proactive role in shaping the sustainability agenda, including workshops, SDG awareness campaign and awards for best practices.

Virtual Classroom for Environmental Education is Penang Green Council's flagship environmental camps and workshops – recently transformed and brought online after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Its modules are developed based on Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations, and are delivered using game-based learning methods. PGC also runs the Environmental Education Capacity Building Workshop targeted at adult learners.

Sustainable Neighbourhood Development Programme (SNDP), launched in 2021, aims to create community-driven, sustainable neighbourhood framework to enable long term

behavioral change, focusing on waste management.

- With an emphasis on decentralised decision-making, it promotes comprehensive stakeholder involvement and advocacy of shared responsibility. In 2021, the SNDP pilot project will be launched in collaboration with SEA Circular Project at two selected zero waste communities in Penang – Taman Bagan Lalang and Kampung Permatang Nibong at Seberang Perai.

Awards and Incentives acknowledges eco-conscious industry partners and notable figures through its incentive schemes and environmental awards.

- Awardees are those who provide sustainable and innovative environmental solutions in Penang.³⁶

³⁵ <https://thinkcity.com.my/pressroom/penang-wins-global-climathon-awards>

³⁶ Penang Green Council.



Key Policies Initiatives

Penang State Government

The Penang State Government has a vision of making Penang a “Cleaner, Greener, Safer, Healthier, and Happier” state.

- Since 2010, the government has started a series of environmental initiatives to promote resource efficiency such as implementing free CAT BUS services, No-Plastic-Bag days, a total ban on polystyrene food containers, incentives for greener energy consumption, Waste Segregation at Source policy, and building cycling lanes.³⁷

Penang Green Agenda 2030 (PGA)

Launched in 2020, the Penang Green Agenda 2030 (PGA) is Penang’s roadmap to achieving the SDGs, and supports the implementation of vision Penang2030.

- There are 10 working groups in PGA, including: Land Use and Planning; Green Economy; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Agriculture; Marine and Coastal Management; Sustainable Mobility and Connectivity; Green Buildings and Townships; Water and Sanitation; Governance and Institutions; Biodiversity and Natural Ecosystems.³⁸

Sustainable Tourism Strategy Document

Implemented since 2017, the Sustainable Tourism Strategy as outlined by UNESCO is aimed at providing a long – term direction to the World Heritage Sites in Melaka and George Town respectively.

- The two cities are significant historical sites along the Straits of Malacca whose tourism industries are expected to grow in coming years. The Strategy aims to prepare both cities for sustainable management of their tourism industries.
- The Strategy further hopes to increase stakeholder involvement from local communities, and to better protect buildings within the heritage zones.³⁹

³⁷ Speech by Chief Minister of Penang during the Penang Green. Agenda Workshop. <http://cm.penang.gov.my/index.php/en/all-stories/2087-penang-green-agenda-workshop>

³⁸ Penang Green Agenda. <http://www.pgc.com.my/2020/think-tank-policy/penang-green-agenda>

³⁹ Sustainable Tourism Strategy Document. P. 9.

⁴⁰ Entopia. <https://www.entopia.com/nature-learning-programmes>

⁴¹ Sungai Perai Agrotourism. https://www.sgperaiagrotourism.org/?page_id=292

⁴² The Armenian Park Improvement Project. <https://thinkcity.com.my/project/the-armenian-park-improvement-project>

Culture and Environment – case studies

Entopia Nature Learning

Entopia Learning is an educational programme created by Entopia, one of the largest butterfly gardens in Malaysia, with approximately 15,000 free-flying butterflies from 60 different species.

- The eco-tourism site offers various modules to suit local and international communities of all ages. These are often used by schools, corporates and other organisations, and can be tailored to have the content delivered in multiple languages.⁴⁰

Perai River Community Empowerment Programme

The Perai River Community Empowerment Programme aims to improve the livelihoods of the fisheries community through generating additional income and increasing participation through Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM).

- It helps fishermen modernise their business and promote them online, with the hope of enabling them with the capacity to reach national and global markets in the future. The project also aims to increase fishermen’s participation in IRBM which is currently being promoted and implemented by leading stakeholders, such as the Department of Irrigation and Drainage, MBSP and Think City.⁴¹

Armenian Park Improvement Project, 2015 – present

The Lebu Armenian Park is one of the few green spaces in the George Town World Heritage Site. The park and its surrounding spaces saw recent improvements. The first phase began with community engagement followed by the relocation of the flea market sited there to a more suitable locale at Lorong Kulit, Dato’ Keramat. The park was redesigned by Aga Khan Trust for Culture in partnership with Think City and the Chief Minister of Penang in 2015. Upgrades to the area included soft landscaping, lighting, and building spaces to sit and relax under the comfort of the trees. The basketball court was retained but re-orientated to serve as a multipurpose event space.⁴²

Opposite The Habitat Penang Hill is one of the ecotourism hotspots in the State.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd

LinkBike, 2016 – present

LinkBike is a bike sharing system operated by Fast Rent Bike in collaboration with Penang Island City Council (MBPP) to serve short distance transits, reduce the use of motor vehicles, traffic congestion and environmental pollution. Twenty-five strategic locations have been set up in George Town, Queensbay and Straits Quay for convenient access to the bikes. The concept is similar to Santander Cycles in the United Kingdom. Riders can pick up a bike from any station and return it to another. In the future, the bikes will serve as last-mile transport, connecting travellers from LRT stations to their destinations.⁴³

The Habitat Rainforest Explorer Programme, 2016 – present

Created by The Habitat, an eco-tourism site, the Rainforest Explorer Programme is specially designed to complement the teaching and learning of STEM subjects. It introduces students to the forest environment and topics in ecology. The modules are customised for students aged 4 to 17.⁴⁴

North Seafront Project, 2016 – 2022

The RM30-million north seafront project is expected to be completed in 2022. The Light Street project, the restoration of the Queen Victoria Memorial Clock Tower, the upgrading of the State Assembly Building and Dewan Sri Pinang besides the landscape and restoration works at the Fountain Garden were completed in 2020.


- The RM8 million restoration and upgrading works at the 140-year-old Penang Town Hall at the Esplanade in George Town are estimated to be completed by the end of 2021.⁴⁵ The other two components of the north seafront project — the repair and restoration of the sea wall and the restoration of Fort Cornwallis — will take longer to complete. The sea wall repair works is expected to complete by August 2021 and the restoration works on Fort Cornwallis that included restoring the original moat around it are expected to complete by 2022.⁴⁶

East Seafront Project, 2020 – 2022

The Eastern Seafront Development project costing more than RM1 billion was planned to take off early 2020, beginning with the Promenade Walk above the sea along the waterfront. It would start from the Swettenham Pier in Esplanade up to the abandoned Tanjung City Marina. Other projects include the expansion of the Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal (SPCT) and the upgrading of the ground transport area (GTA), including port warehouses, a yacht club and the Tanjung City Marina.⁴⁷

Gurney Wharf Project, 2021 – present

The Gurney Wharf project is a seafront public park located on part of the 131.09 acres of reclaimed land off Gurney Drive that was handed over to the state government. It includes a wetland, food and beverage outlets, retail outlets and a water taxi pier along the site.⁴⁸



KOMTAR, the tallest building in Penang and the evening street view of George Town.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd

⁴³ LinkBike. <https://www.linkbike.my>

⁴⁴ The Habitat. <https://thehabitat.my/education.php>

⁴⁵ RM8mil Town Hall upgrade under way. <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2020/07/04/rm8mil-town-hall-upgrade-under-way>

⁴⁶ RM30m north seafront project to be completed by 2022, says Penang exco. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/09/26/rm30m-north-seafront-project-to-be-completed-by-2022-says-penang-exco/1794456>

⁴⁷ Change on the horizon for Penang's seafront. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2019/12/28/change-on-the-horizon-for-penangs-seafront>

⁴⁸ Out of the 131 acres, only 40 acres is for public facilities. The project on Gurney Wharf which was supposed to start in 2020 was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/09/22/penang-says-gurney-wharf-project-to-start-next-year/1905544>

Urban Planning and Regeneration

When George Town was jointly awarded World Heritage Site status, it marked a cultural renaissance for the island city. The state government and **George Town World Heritage Inc. (GTWHI)** set up in 2008 subsequently play pivotal roles in enabling new expressions of culture to flourish, some of which like public arts and street arts, would go on to immortalise George Town with the Facebook and subsequently Instagram crowd.

- Due to its core being a UNESCO World Heritage Zone governed by a Special Area Plan as well as the National Heritage Act, conservation management is key to George Town's urban planning and regeneration.

In addition, the **George Town Conservation and Development Corporation (GTDC)** was established to align conservation with development in the George Town World Heritage Zone as a milestone partnership

between Penang State Government's Chief Minister's Incorporated, Think City and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. Central to its bottom-up approach, the corporation works closely in consultation with stakeholders and local community organisations.

- Under this partnership, efforts to develop new waterfront cores in the Penang Bay areas are underway to create a more seamless city connection between George Town and Butterworth. According to the Penang Chief Minister, this will also "support, catalyse and develop heritage-related activities that will help strengthen a new economy based on culture".⁴⁹ The state government is asking innovators to rethink the future and apply this to the waterfronts of the island and mainland in a manner that builds social, economic and environmental resilience, through the Penang Bay International Ideas Competition 2020. The winners would be announced in early 2021.⁵⁰

Towering Ambition



KOMTAR is the tallest building in Penang and has been a focus of creative programming since its genesis.

Completed in 1986, the 65-storey tower (now 68 floors after a renovation in 2016) overlooks the city of George Town.

- This was only one fifth of the then-government's plan to enliven the sleepy town into a modernised hub for Penangites.
- Despite a decade spent in executing the first two phases and the millions ringgit invested, the mega plan fell through and the land that was cleared out for this project was left empty – only to be taken up by Shangri-La Hotel (1980s, currently rebranded as Jen Hotel) Prangin Mall (2001) and 1st Avenue Mall (2010) in the pipeline.

As a part of the revitalisation of KOMTAR, the site

also hosts a variety of other culture-adjacent activities.

- With a total investment of RM200 million, The Top, the newly created leisure attraction with a curved glass bottomed skywalk, the highest open-air dining in the region and the largest dinosaur theme park in Malaysia, won the Malaysian Construction Industry Excellence Award (MCIEA) 2017 which was adjudicated by the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB).
- **Sia Boey Rejuvenation Project** (2018 – 2019) aimed to create Sia Boey Urban Archaeological Park. This involved creating a Prangin Bypass, Archaeological Study of Site A (old Prangin Canal Basin) and Site B (Police Barracks) by Universiti Sains Malaysia.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Global interest in Penang Bay. <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2020/12/10/global-interest-in-penang-bay>

⁵⁰ Penang Bay International Ideas Competition. <https://penangbaycompetition.com.my>

⁵¹ Penang Chief Ministry official website.

Key Projects in Connectivity and Transportation

Seberang Perai (MBSP) Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022. Seberang Perai City Council.

The strategic plan focuses on safe environment, quality facilities and infrastructure, healthy lifestyle, green development and clean environment, the adoption of new technologies, a competitive urban economy, strengthening culture and heritage, resilient city, community involvement, inclusive and equitable urban development.⁵²

Penang Transport Master Plan (PTMP)

The masterplan is an ambitious redesign of Penang's transportation system. It seeks not only to provide new transportation methods such as an elevated light rail transit (LRT) and water taxi services, but also to improve existing systems such as the bus network, taxi/ e-hailing and ferry. It targets to achieve a public-private modal share of 40:60 by 2030. Despite the federal government pulling project funds, the Penang state government has decided to continue with this mega project.⁵³

Northern Corridor Highway (NCH)

The NCH was designed to improve connectivity between cities in the northern region, especially those in Kedah to reduce traffic congestion on the PLUS Expressway and to catalyse inter-state developments.⁵⁴

Culture and the Urban Landscape – case studies

Mirrors George Town, 2012 – present

Mirrors George Town is Ernest Zacharevic's first constructive public art project in collaboration with the George Town Festival in 2012.⁵⁵

Marking George Town, 2013 – present

Tang Mun Kian has created 52 sculptures reflecting the unique character of George Town's streets. These steel rod caricatures explain the history of George Town through amusing dialogues and stories.⁵⁶

Chowrasta Market Renovation Project, 2013 – 2017

Chowrasta market had benefited from a RM13.5 million massive renovation project that started in 2013 and ended in 2017. It was a single-storey building in 1890 but was replaced with a three-storey building in the 1960s.

- The market sells almost everything, from fresh livestock on the first floor, to clothing, shoes and second-hand books on the upper floor.
- The project was conducted by LLA Architect, in collaboration with Arts-ED in their delivery of consultative exercises. During the process, the team received input and feedback from vendors regarding the design criterion. As a result, two rounds of consultative exercises were conducted between all the vendors in the market, the architects and local municipal council. The consultative exercises involved interactive social surveys, focus group discussion and collaborative design.

Penang Bridge.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd

⁵² Seberang Perai (MBSP) Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022. P. 6 – 7.

⁵³ Mega projects in Penang to go ahead. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2020/06/20/mega-projects-in-penang-to-go-ahead>

⁵⁴ Northern Corridor Highway (NCH). <https://www.ncer.com.my/strategic-projects-programmes/strategic-infrastructure/northern-corridor-highway-nch>

⁵⁵ Ernest Zacharevic. <http://www.ernestzacharevic.com/outdoor#/georgetown2012>

⁵⁶ Sculpture At Work. <https://www.sculptureatwork.com/our-work/markings-george-town>



- The renovation project has maintained the original character of the building built in the 1960s, and made improvements to cater to the needs of the times. One hundred and seventy traders have filled up the shoplots in the three-storey building and there are 120 parking spaces with special lots for women customers and families. Chowrasta market is the first market to be accorded the silver Green Building Index rating for its environmentally-friendly design.⁵⁷

New Butterworth Project, 2016 – present

Locally known as Bagan, Butterworth was once a busy port transporting goods from a narrow hinterland annexed to the British by the Kedah Sultan during

British rule, and remained as part of the Penang state ever since.⁵⁸

- Following a successful partnership with Think City in 2014 and 2015, the Seberang Perai authority continues to work with the organisation to improve Pekan Lama, Sungai Perai, Penang Sentral and Butterworth Waterfront.⁵⁹

Campbell Street Market Renovation Project, 2018 – present

The Campbell Street market is under a RM8 million renovation project which started in 2018. The construction work is expected to take at least two and a half years because the market continues to operate during construction.⁶⁰

Mapping the Community of Practitioners



Leading collective **Arts-ED** uses data to facilitate cultural appraisal for future conservation and development.

So far, it has conducted consultative exercises, including:

- **Jeti Lama Market:** Arts-ED and Think City carried out a cultural mapping exercise of Pasar Jeti Lama, Butterworth, to provide data about the social, economic and environmental aspects of the market and identifies aspects that justify improvement works; identifies threats and opportunities for the revitalisation of the market site; suggests necessary improvements to civil works, spatial layout, waste management and accessibility.
- **Pulau Tikus Market:** Arts-ED was tasked by Pulau Tikus assemblyman service centre, to engage the Pulau Tikus Market users to prepare a comprehensive guideline for redeveloping the market and its adjacent areas.
- **Value Your Shophouse Style (Architectural Style in George Town)** is a document that provides detailed information about the different parts and features that should be included in traditional shop houses with Southern Chinese Eclectic style as well as recommendations on how to protect the heritage values of these properties. It also features a very brief description of the different types and styles of shop houses of past eras.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Chowrasta: Penang oldest market a crowd puller. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/04/480905/chowrasta-penang-oldest-market-crowd-puller>

⁵⁸ Jeti Lama Heritage Enclave. <https://www.mypenang.gov.my/culture-heritage/my-stories/123>

⁵⁹ Building a Better Butterworth. <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/community/2016/01/09/building-a-better-butterworth-council-extends-partnership-with-think-city-to-restore-historic-areas>

⁶⁰ New look for heritage market. <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2018/05/21/new-look-for-heritage-market>

⁶¹ Arts-ED official website.

Ecosystem and Infrastructure

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Penang inspires artists thanks to its multicultural community, heritage, architecture and faith, all elements that the city is trying to preserve.

Hoo Fan Chon, artist and curator⁶²

George Town's ethnic cultural landmarks have continued to be an essential part of its cultural ecosystem. These legacy architecture – alongside the communities that continue to live and breathe traditional practices – not only serves as the venue but also inspiration for cultural events.

These events have become tourism attractions, where the provision of costumes, performances and paraphernalia is also what contributes to the unique character of the city.

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Performances such as the Kavadi Attam, Hakka Pixiu Dance, Shimokita Ondo, Awang Batil, gamelan, lion dance and dikir barat will take centre stage to showcase George Town's cultural diversity... the celebration will be an occasion that brings together people from near and far and acknowledges the importance of conserving the intangible cultural heritage of George Town.

Dr Ang Ming Chee, general manager,
George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI)⁶³

The Penang State Government has also launched a defining initiative called the Penang Art District – to provide a hub for contemporary arts and culture.

- Although the construction of its centre has been pushed back to 2023, the initiative will continue to incubate and catalyse Penang’s creative industry.
- It is also expected to be a hub and network that connects the state’s dispersed arts scene.

Cultural Ambition in the Making



Penang Art District (PAD), founded in 2017, was formed to achieve the Penang State Government’s vision to create a contemporary arts and cultural hub in the future to catalyse the economic growth of Penang’s creative industries.

Currently, it has no physical space but runs its events by working together with other creative hubs in George Town.

Spotlight, 2018 – present, is a competition that is open to all Malaysian citizens and permanent residents of Malaysia. It is organised by Penang Art District, and allows young artists to display their artwork in the exhibition.

- Only one winner will receive the RM5,000 cash award and a solo exhibition.
- Five will receive the Jury’s Choice Award and RM1,000 cash each. The top 20 submissions will be selected for a group exhibition.

Upskilling and reskilling initiatives such as **the Innovative and Creative Entrepreneur Programme** organised by PAD trains ‘creative entrepreneurs’ to map and match their skillsets to business opportunities.⁶⁴

Thaipusam Festival.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd



⁶² <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/story-art-collective.html>

⁶³ <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2019/05/18/penang-all-set-for-george-town-celebrations>

⁶⁴ PAD website.



As steward and guardian of the city, my government, through the means of the Penang2030 initiative, will make our most fervent attempt to position Penang as the centre for culture. We hope that by doing so, an economy and society based on culture and creativity will be cultivated and nurtured.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow⁶⁵

Cultural Funding and Partnership

At the federal level, cultural funding is being funneled through the Cultural Economy Development Agency (CENDANA) – which has been allocated RM15million in the 2021 budget to invigorate the arts and culture sectors.

The state has also launched under InvestPenang, @CAT (accelerator for creative, analytics and technology) to boost early-stage tech entrepreneurs, with mention of those in the creative animation and Internet-of-Things (IoT) sectors.

The State government also funds culture for tourism promotion purposes through the organisation of a variety of state level cultural festivals. In the latest state budget, allocation continues to be provided for the George Town Festival as well as the George Town Heritage celebrations.

Penang Art District provides regular information update on national, state and foundation grants such as the Yayasan Hasanah Grants, Yayasan Sime Darby (YSD) Sponsorships, to name a few.⁶⁶

Funding

Penang Heritage Trust: Living Heritage Treasures of Penang Awards, 2004 – present

The Penang Living Heritage Treasures Award was initiated in 2004 to acknowledge and appreciate Penangites who embody or possess high level skills, practices and techniques that are essential for the production of certain cultural aspects and preservation of Penang cultural heritage.

- This initiative enables the awarded recipients' knowledge, skills, practices and techniques to be documented, preserved and transmitted for future generations. A certificate and plaque will be awarded at the annual ceremony and there will be a cash award of RM2,000 on an annual basis in order to assist the recipients. This cash award is given out for the remainder of the recipient's lifetime.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ <https://www.buletinmutiara.com/forum-addresses-the-past-present-and-future-of-heritage-conservation>

⁶⁶ <https://penangartdistrict.com/applying-for-art-grants-in-malaysia>

⁶⁷ Penang Heritage Trust. <https://pht.org.my/living-heritage-treasures-awards>

George Town Grants Programme (GTGP), 2009 – present

In Penang, these grants were used for many different projects such as carrying out repair work at the Kapitan Keling Mosque in 2010 to preserve this Islamic national monument,⁶⁸ undertaking a restoration project at the Cheah Kongsu's Hokkien clan house in 2015 to revitalise the clan and many more.

Penang i4.0 Seed Fund, 2018 – present

The seed funding is initiated by the Penang State Government through InvestPenang, to provide funding for early-stage technology startups. It offers funding up to RM250,000 and assists startups with commercialisation.⁶⁹

George Town Heritage Habitat Seed Fund, 2018 – present

The George Town Heritage Habitat Seed Fund (RM3 million) is an initiative by the State Government of Penang in collaboration with George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) to preserve the heritage shophouses of the George Town World Heritage Site.⁷⁰ Launched in 2018, the programme focused on heritage buildings in the World Heritage Site. Participating building owners, who were hosting long-term tenants, were given funds to repair and restore their heritage buildings in exchange for long-term tenancy at subsidised rent.⁷¹

Penang Green Council (PGC) Awards and Incentives

PGC acknowledges eco-conscious industry partners and notable figures through its incentive schemes and environmental awards. Awardees are those who provide sustainable and innovative environmental solutions in Penang. The incentives and awards include Penang Green Journalism Award, Sustainability Seed Grant, Penang Green Event Incentive, Food Waste Challenge Incentive, Penang Rainwater Harvesting System Incentive, Penang Green School Award and Penang Green Kindy Incentive.⁷²

Cultural Partnership – case studies

Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) – George Town Conservation and Development Corporation Sdn Bhd (GTCD)

Penang State Government, Think City and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) signed a Management Collaboration Agreement in 2015 that expands the scope of an existing partnership for the protection, development and enhancement of Penang's historic George Town. This latest agreement extended the partnership for another three years. The agreement follows a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed in November 2013, under which AKTC was to provide technical assistance to George Town.

- The first phase of the collaboration was aimed at the development of a Strategic Master Plan and identification of significant conservation and development projects within and around the designated heritage area. It included recommendations for the policies and actions to be pursued with regard to land use, conservation and development, traffic, infrastructure, and institutional management.
- Under the second phase of the collaboration, the three partners were expected to contribute significantly to the regeneration of George Town, particularly through the establishment of a project implementation vehicle (George Town Conservation and Development Corporation Sdn Bhd, GTCD), and the training of young professionals in the conservation and sustainable development of the city heritage.
- Aga Khan Trust for Culture is recognised as one of the foremost organisations involved in matters of architecture, conservation and urban planning. Its Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, which will be the main collaborating partner under the agreement, promotes planning, conservation and urban revitalisation in historic cities. It also undertakes the restoration and rehabilitation of historic structures and public spaces in ways that can spur social, economic and cultural development.⁷³

⁶⁸ Think City Sdn Bhd, 2017. Rejuvenating the City Together. P.65 – 71

⁶⁹ @CAT Penang. <https://acatpenang.com/i4seedfund>

⁷⁰ Habitat seed fund to safeguard cultural heritage in George Town Unesco World Heritage Site. <https://www.bulet-inmutiara.com/habitat-seed-fund-to-safeguard-cultural-heritage-in-george-town-unesco-world-heritage-site>

⁷¹ George Town World Heritage Incorporated. <https://gtwhi.com.my/our-work/george-town-heritage-habitat-seed-fund>

⁷² Penang Green Council. <http://www.pgc.com.my/2020/awards-incentives-ai>

⁷³ Regeneration of Penang's George Town World Heritage Site. <https://www.akdn.org/press-release/regeneration-penangs-george-town-world-heritage-site>

- In 2018, The Penang government renewed its collaboration with Think City and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture for another three years to complete key public realm improvement projects in the heritage zone. They also agreed to expand the role of its special purpose vehicle, GTDC to include large-scale master planning especially George Town's Northern and Eastern Seafrost.⁷⁴

World Urban Forum 10, Abu Dhabi, 8 to 11 February 2020

In line with the global conference's theme - 'Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation', Think City presented their work in urban regeneration and conservation programmes in Penang, KL and JB. The interior of the exhibition booth also features a multimedia installation outlining the company's four main areas of urban innovation: Placemaking, Resilience, Analytics and Conservation.⁷⁵

The Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APF-7), 15 – 17 October 2019

The APF-7 was held in Penang in order to accelerate the implementation of initiatives to create a sustainable future for cities throughout Asia and the Pacific. The Forum is the largest regional gathering of stakeholders, coming from all levels of governance and civil society. It was chaired by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Co-chaired by Urbanice Malaysia and UN-Habitat.⁷⁶

Asia-Pacific Heritage 20/20 Forum, 14 October 2019

The Asia-Pacific Heritage 20/20 Forum was held in George Town, Penang on 14 October, alongside the 2019 ceremony of the Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage. The event was presenting an opportunity to chart the course and future for the next two decades on the role and contribution of cultural heritage more broadly to sustainable development, within the broad framework defined by the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, along with key partner institutions and thought leaders in the field.⁷⁷

National Networks and Groups

The Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER), 2007 – present

The northern region of Malaysia was identified under the ninth Malaysia Plan for the promotion of balanced and equitable economic development.⁷⁸

Regional Networks and Groups

The Regional Network of Local Authorities for the management of Human Settlements (CITYNET)

CityNet is the largest association of urban stakeholders committed to sustainable development in the Asia Pacific region. Through capacity building, city-to-city cooperation and tangible projects, it also helps members to respond to Climate Change Disaster, the Sustainable Development Goals and rising Infrastructure demands. Penang and Seberang Perai are both their members.⁷⁹

The United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC)

UCLG ASPAC is one of the Regional Sections of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), formed of the International Union of Local Authorities, United Towns Organization (ITO) and World Association of the Major Metropolises (METROPOLIS). It was established in Taipei in 2004 and is the key knowledge management hub on local government issues in APAC. The Malaysia Association of Local Authorities (MALA) is a member of UCLG ASPAC.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Penang extends Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Think City collab. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/12/21/penang-extends-aga-khan-trust-for-culture-think-city-collab/1705099>

⁷⁵ World Urban Forum 10. <https://thinkcity.com.my/wuf10>

⁷⁶ The Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum. <https://www.apuf7.org>, accessed in July 2021.

⁷⁷ Asia-Pacific Heritage 20/20 Forum returns to Penang on Oct 14. <https://www.buletinmutiara.com/asia-pacific-heritage-20-20-forum-returns-to-penang-on-oct-14>

⁷⁸ NCER. <https://www.ncer.com.my>

⁷⁹ CityNet. <https://citynet-ap.org/network/280-2>

⁸⁰ The United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific. <https://uclg-aspac.org/en>

International Networks and Groups

UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat works with partners in over 90 countries to build inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and communities and to reduce inequality, discrimination and poverty. Presently, UN-Habitat, led by the Urban Planning and Design Branch, is working on several projects in Malaysia which include public space, green transport and heritage initiatives in Melaka; and the City Prosperity Initiative in Penang.⁸¹

Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI)

ICLEI is a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments that seeks to promote sustainable urban development, and is active in 100+ countries. Members exchange knowledge, form partnerships and build capacity to create systemic change for urban sustainability. Penang Island and Seberang Perai City Council are both their members.⁸²

World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization (WeGO)

WeGO is committed to the development of smart and sustainable cities. It is a collective of governments, smart tech solution providers and national/regional institutions. In Malaysia, only Penang Island and Seberang Prai City Councils are their members.⁸³

Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC)

Founded in 1993, OWHC is a knowledge bank for issues related to the urban management of World Heritage properties and connects more than 300 cities that have properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Both Penang and Melaka are their members.⁸⁴

Tourism Promotion Organization for Asia Pacific Cities (TPO)

The organisation is an inter-city network to develop the tourism industry and economies of Asian Pacific cities as a whole. There are 10 cities from Malaysia as the member cities of TPO. George Town is one of them.⁸⁵

International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)

ICCA is a global leader in the international meetings industry, and specialises in the international association meetings sector, offering unrivalled data, education, communication channels, and business development and networking opportunities. It comprises over 1,100 member companies and organisations in almost 100 countries and territories worldwide. It represents top destinations for meetings, and experienced event suppliers. As of 2020, there are 3 members from Penang including Setia SPICE Convention Centre, Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau and Hotel Equatorial Penang.⁸⁶ However, Hotel Equatorial Penang had confirmed its closure on 27 January 2021.⁸⁷

Chinese New Year Celebration, takes place in George Town every year.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd

⁸¹ UN Habitat. <https://unhabitat.org/malaysia>

⁸² Local Governments for Sustainability. <https://www.iclei.org/en/Home.html>

⁸³ World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization. <http://we-gov.org>

⁸⁴ Organization of World Heritage Cities. <https://www.ovpm.org>

⁸⁵ Tourism Promotion Organization for Asia Pacific Cities. <http://aptpo.org/eng>

⁸⁶ ICCA. <https://www.iccaworld.org>

⁸⁷ Hotel Equatorial. <https://www.equatorial.com/news-announcements>





Dynamic Historic Living City.

George Town World Heritage Site: Special Area Plan

Heritage Assets and Activation

Penang boasts many long-established community organisations that actively campaign for its arts, culture and heritage; and also regularly run activities and programmes.

With George Town's designation as one of the Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca in 2008, a state heritage agency, George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), was established to manage, safeguard and promote the city's heritage.

- There are over 5,000 heritage buildings within the designated zone, not to mention those within the buffer zone and beyond.

The challenge is to ensure the preservation of these heritage assets, while addressing the needs of a growing, modern society and stimulating the economy.

The 2021 state budget has provided for the "George Town in the New Normal" project by GTWHI in order to help the local community to regenerate, and Penang's cultural heritage sector to transition in the face of the new normal.

UNESCO Title

World Heritage: Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca, 2008 – present

Category: Cultural

Melaka and George Town, historic cities of the Straits of Malacca have developed over 500 years of trading and cultural exchanges between East and West in the Straits of Malacca.

- The influences of Asia and Europe have endowed the towns with a specific multicultural heritage that is both tangible and intangible.
- With its government buildings, churches, squares and fortifications, Melaka demonstrates the early stages of this history originating in the 15th-century Malay sultanate, and the Portuguese and Dutch periods beginning in the early 16th century. Featuring residential and commercial buildings, George Town represents the British era from the end of the 18th century.
- The two towns constitute a unique architectural and cultural townscape without parallel anywhere else in East and Southeast Asia.⁸⁸

George Town World Heritage cluster and KOMTAR Tower.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd



⁸⁸ Melaka and George Town, Historic Cities of the Straits of Malacca. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1223>

Oral History



The conservation works by the George Town World Heritage Inc. also has a focus on intergenerational history preservation.

The Oral History Documentation Project (2013 – 2018) has built a pool of consistent local human resources, including a collection of oral histories based on the memories of Chulia Street during the post-war period of 1945 – 1970.⁸⁹



Chulia Street is a living heritage which is still active and very much alive. In addition, there are many cultural activities which are held at this street as there are lots of mosques, temple shrines and Chinese associations located here.

Kuah Li Feng, arts curator⁹⁰

Heritage Assets

Directory of Traditional Trades and Occupations in George Town World Heritage Site 2012 – by trades. 2012. George Town World Heritage Incorporated.

This directory provides detailed information of 63 different types of traditional trades and occupations in George Town World Heritage Site such as antiques, craft and souvenirs; fine art graphic production; recycling; tailoring; woodwork and woodcarving and many more.

- The information in the directory is compiled according to the quantity, street name, house number, company name, company name in Chinese (if applicable), year founded and short description for each of the traditional trade and occupation.

German Heritage Trail, 2012 – present. German Embassy & Penang Heritage Trust

Penang Heritage Trust (PHT) with sponsorship from the German Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, developed the trail with the aim to promote German heritage in Penang. The heritage trail showcases the importance of Penang's ties with Germany. It highlights more than 10 sites in George Town with a number of signboards.⁹¹

Muslim Heritage in George Town, 2013 – present. George Town World Heritage Incorporated.

The Muslim Heritage in George Town is showcased through its different buildings, activities and associations in the city. Muslim diaspora in Southeast Asia settled in the port cities in the Straits of Melaka, such as Penang, Melaka, Singapore, Aceh and East

⁸⁹ George Town World Heritage Inc website – Oral History.

⁹⁰ The Star.

⁹¹ Germans etched in our history. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/community/2012/10/13/germans-etched-in-our-history>

Sumatra. They were mostly traders and entrepreneurs. Existing heritage buildings are held as public and communal assets under the management of the Penang Islamic Council (MAIPP).

George Town World Heritage Site: Special Area Plan, 2016 (to be updated in 2021). State Town and Country Planning Department, Penang.

The Special Area Plan is a statutory plan with legal backing under the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172). The George Town World Heritage Site Special Area Plan was put in place to ensure the guidelines and recommendations of the Conservation Management Plan are implemented under Malaysian law.⁹² It has a lifespan of six years, during which there is a sizeable number of programmes expected to be carried out. The programmes include building up a resource centre, assisting the understanding of conservation work through workshops, offering awards for good conservation practices, strengthening the management of the World Heritage Site, and safeguarding the intangible heritage, to name a few.

- The Penang state government called for input from the public as it puts together a replacement Special Area Plan (SAP) for the George Town UNESCO world heritage site in November 2020. PLANMalaysia Penang (Town and Country Planning Department) has appointed a consultant to prepare the draft replacement SAP. The draft is expected to be done by April 2021.⁹³

Seberang Perai Heritage Trail, 2019 – present. MBSP

This heritage trail marks out important landmarks in Seberang Perai, and can be found on MBSP's website.⁹⁴

French Heritage Trail, 2020 – present. France Embassy & Think City

The French Heritage Trail in Penang helps visitors discover the many sites of French memory in Penang. It displays the individual stories of French citizens who contributed to the collective history of Penang since the end of the 18th century.⁹⁵

George Town Historic Commercial and Civic Precincts

George Town's historic commercial and civic precincts were developed under the administration of the British East India Company (1786 – 1858) and British Crown rule, which operated till just after the Japanese Occupation during World War II (1941 – 1945). These precincts contain 51 different historic buildings and places such as the Queen Victoria Memorial Clock Tower at Beach Street and Light Street junction, Islamic Council Building at the corner of Beach & Downing Streets and the Immigration Building at the corner of Beach Street and Light Street.

George Town Northam Road Protestant Cemetery

The old Protestant Cemetery is located next to the Roman Catholic Cemetery within the George Town World Heritage Site. Established in 1786, it was situated at that time on partially swampy ground beyond the precincts of George Town. Although the old Protestant Cemetery was partially destroyed during World War II, it still represents a rare example of an original burial ground during the East India Company era and a significant heritage of the early settlement of George Town.

The Clan Jetties of George Town

The Clan Jetties of George Town are located along Weld Quay in water villages made of wooden houses on stilts built above the sea and connected by planked walkways. The jetties were initially used by Chinese clans for the loading and unloading of goods and as anchorage of their boats. Simple sheds, which were built to provide shelter, were subsequently converted into communal houses for residence in the late 19th century. While some of the clans' houses were demolished in 2006 (Peng Aun and Koay) others from the Ong, Lim, Chew, Tan, Lee and Yeoh clans can still be seen to this day. Clan Jetties have been included in the Core Area of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town, and are preserved as a part of George Town's cultural heritage legacy.

Tropical Spice Garden Cooking School

A popular cultural experience amongst travelers, the cooking classes offered by the Tropical Spice Garden is a memorable way to understand Malaysia's culinary heritage. The classes are conducted within the Garden itself, and allows participants a chance to cook and taste local favourites such as Nasi Lemak, Assam Laksa, and Beef Rendang.⁹⁶

⁹² George Town World Heritage Site: Special Area Plan. P. A1 – 2.

⁹³ Penang seeks public input for special area plan review of George Town world heritage site. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/11/03/penang-seeks-public-input-for-special-area-plan-review-of-george-town-world/1918854>

⁹⁴ Please refer to the MBSP Heritage Trail brochure.

⁹⁵ French Heritage Trail in Penang. <https://my.ambafrance.org/French-Heritage-Trail-in-Penang>

⁹⁶ Tropical Spice Garden. <https://www.tsgcookingschool.com>

Sample of ‘Movers and Shakers’ in the Cultural and Creative Sector of George Town

Penang has a vibrant creative and cultural scene. In addition to being a leading voice in community-based heritage preservation and urban regeneration practices, George Town also has an influential literature and publishing sector.⁹⁷ From books, magazines, journals to zines, the industry has seen dynamic developments across genres and language/ethnic groups.

- There are at least two community magazines in George Town – *Penang City Eye* and *Penang Monthly*.

The publications focus on the development of the community, where art and culture are their key pillars.

In Penang, apart from individual artists and cultural workers, there are plenty of groups and organizations playing essential roles in promoting creative ideas. Educational institutions such as the Universiti Sains Malaysia are an integral unit that not only cultivating cultural researchers, but also enriched Penang’s publishing practice and knowledge production.



For me, the strongest attribute of George Town is the people. From artists and craft makers to entrepreneurs and rickshaw drivers to historians and thinkers, George Town is what it is because of the people who take pride in being a part of this little island city we call home. I always like to think of us as individual jigsaw pieces that, when put together and work together, form a picture of Penang as an eclectic hub of the arts, culture and creativity.

Joe Sidek, Chairman of Penang Arts Council⁹⁸

⁹⁷ <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/library/a-study-of-publishing-practices-in-malaysia-kl-penang-and-ipoh>

⁹⁸ <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2019/05/15/penang-all-set-for-george-town-celebrations>

Table 1 Selected George Town stakeholders⁹⁹

Media/Film/Digital	Arts	Crossover – Culture/Arts/Lifestyle
Anna Tan, author	Aida Reza, dancer	Dato' Dr. Wazir Jahan Karim, scholar
Gareth Richards, editor and bookseller	Azmi Hussin, artist	George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), since 2010
Khoo Salma, writer and publisher of Areca Books	Charis Loke, illustrator	Hasnul J Saidon, scholar and artist
Penang City Eye, since 2014	Hoo Fan Chon, artist	Janet Pillai, researcher, practitioner and activist, Arts-ED
Penang Monthly, Penang Institute, since 2009	Khoo Cheang Jin, artist	Joe Sidek, Chairman of Penang Arts Council
	Rebecca Duckett-Wilkinson, artist	Kuah Li Feng, arts curator
	Bettina Chua Abdullah and Gareth Richard, founder of Hikayat	Lee Khai, chairman of Penang State Art Gallery
		Narelle Murtie, owner of China House
		Prof. Ar. Laurence Loh, architect
		Penang Heritage Trust, since 1986
		Tan Shih Thoe, managing director of Hin Bus
		Tan Sooi Beng, scholar
		Think City, since 2009



There are world-class talents here [in Penang], though many fly under the radar... There is still plenty of room for writers and artists to get connected, to produce and to promote what they do.

Gareth Richards of Hikayat¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ For the purpose of this report, cultural influencers are defined as the media or cultural sector go to people comprising key opinion leaders who are networked into the public, private and cultural scene. They or their organisations, where possible, have a substantial following (>50,000 followers) especially on social media and/or digital channels and are seen as credible experts in their field and can influence change, innovating culture and arts practices through their programmes. In order to provide a sampling of the movers and shakers, they have been categorised into 3 key sectors comprising media, film and digitals, the arts, and those within a crossover of culture, arts and lifestyle.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.silverkris.com/penang-arts>

Media/Film/Digital

Anna Tan, author

Anna Tan is the author of two fantasy books, *Coexist* and *Dongeng*, and has short stories included in anthologies by Fixi Novo, BWP Publishing, Bause Books, Wordworks, Gerakbudaya, and Uncommon Universes Press. She is also the editor of *NutMag*, an annual zine published for and by MYWriters Penang.

- She is the current president of the Malaysian Writers Society (MYWriters) and oversees the group in her hometown of Penang.

Gareth Richards, editor and bookseller

Gareth Richards is a researcher, writer, editor, bookseller and activist who has long been associated with the arts scene. He co-founded the Gerakbudaya Bookshop, established *Impress Creative & Editorial*, and *Hikayat*, an arts space cum bookstore.

- Gareth is the co-author/editor of *Asia–Europe Interregionalism: Critical Perspectives*, and wrote the texts for two books of photography, *Portraits of Penang: Little India* and *Panicrama*.

Khoo Salma, writer and publisher of Areca Books

Khoo Salma is a writer, publisher and heritage advocate. She is currently deputy president of Penang Heritage Trust, custodian of the Sun Yat Sen Museum in Penang and co-founder of Little Penang Street Market. She is an Asian Public Intellectual (API) Fellow of the Nippon Foundation.

- She founded Areca Books in 2005. Areca Books promotes the writing of urban histories, and publishes pioneering works on social history, biographies, cultural heritage, architecture, the environment and visual arts. The books appeal to general readers as well as academic researchers of Southeast Asia.

Penang City Eye, 2014 – present

The periodical magazine is published in Mandarin to cater to Penang's mandarin-speaking community, and is distributed free of charge.

Penang Monthly, Penang Institute, 2009 – present

Penang Monthly is a publication of Penang Institute. It covers topics such as the wellbeing of Penangites, national and regional politics, economy, culture and society. The publication recently initiated a book prize in 2018 to encourage development of Penang's literary scene.

Arts

Aida Redza, dancer

Aida Redza is the founding member of staff of the dance programme at Akademi Seni Kebangsaan (National Arts Academy) and has worked in various national and international projects as dancer, choreographer, and teacher.

- She established Shakti Dances, Penang Modern Dance Ensemble and TradeWinds Arts Exchange. She is passionate about creating training opportunities for young dancers and fostering international art exchanges.

Azmi Hussin, artist

Hussin is famous for his unique portrait caricature sketches and coffee painting. He has an entry in the Malaysia Book of Records for most caricatures drawn within 24 hours, and has published comic books, inspired by legendary Malaysian comic artist, Datuk Lat.

Charis Loke, illustrator

Charis Loke is well-known for illustrating books, maps, and more. In Arts-ED Penang, she designed arts and heritage education projects for youth, from ergonomics and waste management explorations at a wet market to a tabletop game about urban architecture and walking.

- She is also the comics and illustrations editor at *New Naratif*, working with authors to tell visual stories supporting the movement for democracy and freedom of information.

Hoo Fan Chon, artist

Born in 1982, Hoo currently resides in Penang and is the co-founder of Run Amok Gallery. He has exhibited locally and internationally, and has participated in several international art projects and workshops such as the Japan Foundation Asia Center Curators' Workshop, No Man's Land Residency Project – Nusantara Archive in Taiwan, and Makassar Biennale.

Khoo Cheang Jin, artist

Khoo Cheang Jin graduated from the School of Architecture, UNSW, Australia. He is President of the Penang Water Colour Society and co-founder of Urban Sketchers Penang. He has previously held 11 solo exhibitions in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.



The future of Penang arts is shining bright.

Daiichi's gallery manager, Vincent Tai¹⁰¹

Rebecca Duckett-Wilkinson, artist

A Malaysian artist and painter who works mainly with paint and paper, Rebecca is a weaver and textile print designer by training. She uses her work to highlight issues that affect women and children, and the relationship between mankind and nature.

- She alternates between Penang and Piemonte, Italy while working.

Bettina Chua Abdullah and Gareth Richard, founder of Hikayat

Established in 2018, Hikayat is a creative hub founded by Bettina Chua Abdullah and Gareth Richard. It hosted a rich array of events: screenings through its film club Kaki Kino, Open Mic Open Mind poetry evenings; special events for World Refugee Day with Médecins Sans Frontières; and much more.¹⁰²

- An award-winning CNBC Asia anchor, Bettina Chua Abdullah founded the Fay Khoo Award for Food+Drink Writing to provide a platform for new and talented voices in food writing, and edited its bestselling anthology *Telltale Food* (2019). She is the author of the texts for *Over Penang* (2019), an innovative book of dronescape photography.
- Gareth Richards is a writer, editor and bookseller: the founding director of Impress Creative and Editorial and owner of Gerakbudaya Bookshop Penang. He has written extensively on photography, film, dance, literature and music, and is a member of the juries for the Penang Book Prize and Epigram Fiction Prize.

Crossover – Culture/Arts/Lifestyle

Dato' Dr. Wazir Jahan Karim, scholar

Dato' Dr. Wazir Jahan Karim is an international scholar in the Social Sciences who has made outstanding contributions to both academic and applied research in the fields of minorities, gender, globalisation, conservation and heritage.

- She is a pioneer of Gender Studies in Malaysia, led a movement for the revival of Jawi Peranakan culture, and founded several NGOs to facilitate cohesive networks.

George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), 2010 – present

George Town World Heritage Incorporated is a state heritage agency established by the Penang State Government in 2010 to spearhead efforts in safeguarding the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site. Their main tasks are managing, safeguarding and promoting George Town as a sustainable heritage city.

- They work on cultural heritage promotion in schools, youth participation in programmes, disaster risk management, regeneration of residency within George Town, paper and object conservation, and first aid for cultural heritage in emergencies. Besides that, they promote cultural heritage education and boost capacity building by conducting workshops, conferences, exhibitions and heritage celebrations, and at the same time encourage public participation in World Heritage Site conservation efforts. They are also managing an online archive called "Vision of Penang".

¹⁰¹ <https://www.silverkris.com/penang-arts>

¹⁰² <https://www.facebook.com/hikayatpenang>

Hasnul J Saidon, scholar and artist

Hasnul is an Assoc. Professor of media arts at Universiti Sains Malaysia. He has contributed to the local art & academic scenes under various capacities such as a programme head, deputy dean, museum director, board member, chief jury, curator, external examiner and curriculum advisor.

- His current research is on tradition through the language of quantum physics & new media. His current works are H3RO, gemaBELAS, DidikJiwaHalus, ROH, KITA & RumahTokCu.

Janet Pillai, researcher, practitioner and activist, Arts-ED

Janet Pillai is a researcher, practitioner and activist in the field of arts and culture education, specialising in creative pedagogy, cultural research and community-outreach.

- She chairs Arts-ED, a non-profit organisation which works in community area revitalisation projects in partnership or consultation with professionals, local agencies and community. She also contributes as an expert resource person with the education training units of UNESCO Bangkok and APCEIU (Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding Under The Auspices of UNESCO), Korea and has authored numerous articles.

Joe Sidek, Chairman of Penang Arts Council

Joe Sidek is best-known as one of Malaysia's advocates for the arts. In 2010, he was appointed director for the George Town Festival (GTF) which he has tremendously helped grow since then. In 2014, he brought and showcased the inaugural Tropfest South East Asia, the world's largest short film festival to Southeast Asia, in Penang. He also directed the Butterworth Fringe Festival from 2015 to 2017, and the 2-year-old Rainforest Fringe Festival in Kuching in 2018.

- The Creative Brands Penang is an online store that brings together Penang's creativity, crafts, culture and heritage by Joe Sidek Production. There are currently 30 artists, artisans and brands under it.

Kuah Li Feng, arts curator

Kuah Li Feng is an artist-facilitator, cultural worker, project manager, coordinator or administrator. She was leading the oral history project for George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) in George Town from 2012 to 2016 and was a curator for George Town Heritage Celebration from 2016 to 2017.

Lee Khai, chairman of Penang State Art Gallery

Lee Khai is a litigator with more than 25 years of experience. He is also a board member of the Penang State Museum and the chairman of the Penang State Art Gallery.

Narelle Murtie, owner of China House

An Australian who hails from Junee, New South Wales, Murtie has created a name for herself in the hospitality industry, having established resort complex Bon Ton and Temple Tree in Langkawi. One of the most famous establishments in Penang, China House is yet another one of her creations that houses multiple eateries and event spaces for exhibitions as well as mic and music performances.

Prof. Ar. Laurence Loh, architect

Laurence Loh has dedicated the last 26 years protecting, conserving, managing and sustaining the cultural heritage of Malaysia. He was appointed by UNESCO to act as the on-site Assessor for the World Heritage Listing of both Macau as well as Kaiping in China. Some of his notable restoration projects include the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Stadium Merdeka, Suffolk House, and the Cheng Hoon Teng.

He is presently a director of Think City Sdn Bhd, and also teaches at the University of Hong Kong and at the ICOMOS International Centre for the Study of Preservation Restoration of Cultural Property in Rome.

Penang Heritage Trust, 1986 – present

The Penang Heritage Trust (PHT), established in 1986, is a membership-based non-government organisation. It is wholly dependent on membership subscriptions, donations, and grants to continue its work in promoting the conservation of Penang's tangible and intangible heritage, and working to save the State's many historical buildings, and its shared community and cultural practices and values.

- In addition, PHT organises cultural, educational, and public awareness programmes for its members and the public. It also strives to work with like-minded organisations, both local and international.

Tan Shih Thoe, managing director of Hin Bus Depot

Tan Shih Thoe is an art lover. He was appointed by the three families who own Hin Bus Depot to take charge and manage the whole place.

Tan Sooi Beng, scholar

Tan Sooi Beng is a professor in the School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia and is one of the leading authorities on the performing arts in Southeast Asia.

Think City, 2009 – present

Think City is an impact-focused organisation dedicated to making cities more liveable, resilient and sustainable. It is a special purpose vehicle of Khazanah Nasional Berhad, the Malaysian Federal Government's strategic investment arm. Established in 2009 Think City pioneered a small grants programme in the George Town World Heritage Site to catalyse urban regeneration.

- In 2014, Think City's mandate was expanded to Butterworth, then Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru. In 2018, management was tasked by its shareholder to pivot towards a more financially independent model focused on the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and Decade of Action. The 40-plus strong team is now assembled around four communities of practice (Placemaking, Resilience, Analytics and Conservation), six flagship programmes and the Think City Institute.

- Over the past 10 years they have generated an economic output of RM900 million (approximately USD225 million), with a co-investment ratio of 1:3 (approximately RM300 million/USD 75 million co-invested), over 300 grants disbursed, 13 grants received, and more than 700 projects on record.

Prof. Ar. Laurence Loh, architect

Laurence Loh has dedicated the last 26 years protecting, conserving, managing and sustaining the cultural heritage of Malaysia. He was appointed by UNESCO to act as the on-site Assessor for the World Heritage Listing of both Macau as well as Kaiping in China. Some of his notable restoration projects include the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Stadium Merdeka, Suffolk House, and the Cheng Hoon Teng.

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Food is what Penang is known for and is a form of valuable intangible heritage.

Hamdan Abdul Majeed, Managing Director of Think City Sdn Bhd¹⁰³

George Town Heritage Celebration.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd



¹⁰³ <https://focusmalaysia.my/property/rejuvenating-public-spaces-with-placemaking>

Events, Festivals and Creative Marketplaces (selected)

George Town and Penang in general, celebrates many traditional cultural and/or religious festivals in a grand style with public parades, processions and attendant rituals.

In addition to these are now festivals commemorating its World Heritage Site status – state supported ones like the George Town Festival, George Town Literary Festival and other festivals such as the Butterworth Fringe Festival and Penang Jazz Festival.

Regeneration projects since the early 2000s have also transformed derelict spaces into buzzing arts hubs and marketplaces as in the example of the Hin Bus Depot.

Hungry Ghost Festival

Organisers and supporters: Persatuan Teong Guan Pulau Pinang (Penang Hungry Ghost Festival Association) and community groups of each street.

The Hungry Ghost Festival is one of the biggest and festive Buddhist festivals in Penang. It is held every year during the hungry ghost month that begins on the fifteenth night in the seventh lunar month of the Chinese calendar.¹⁰⁴

Nine Emperor Gods Festival

Organisers and supporters: Hong Kong Street Tow Boh Keong Temple and other related temples in Penang.

Observed mainly in the Southeast Asia region, the Nine Emperor Gods Festival is celebrated in Penang for nine days during the ninth lunar month of the Chinese calendar.¹⁰⁵

Penang Bon Odori Festival

Organisers and supporters: Consulate-General of Japan in Penang, Penang State Tourism Development Office and five other Japanese-related organisations.

Penang Bon Odori Festival has now become one of the biggest Bon Odori celebrations outside of Japan, attracting tens of thousands of visitors every year.¹⁰⁶

Penang Chinese New Year (CNY) Celebration

Organisers and supporters: Penang Chinese Clan Council, Penang Cultural Inheritors Society, Penang State Government.

Held every year in George Town, the event is curated to mainly introduce the history of Chinese migrants in Penang by setting up stalls, exhibitions, performances and interactive activities in the streets.¹⁰⁷

Thaipusam

Organisers and supporters: Penang Hindu Endowment Board (PHEB).

Penang Thaipusam is a three-day Hindu celebration that sees devotees clad in yellow and saffron, bearing milk pots on their heads or kavadis with body and facial piercings, seeking blessings, fulfilling vows and offering thanks to Lord Murugan.¹⁰⁸

Penang Jazz Festival, 2004 – 2017

Organisers and supporters: Paul Augustin and team.

During its 14-year run, the independent festival was one of the most anticipated music festivals in the region and attracted many local and foreign artists, as well as jazz enthusiasts.¹⁰⁹ It had been cancelled since 2018.¹¹⁰

George Town Festival (GTF), 2008 – present

Organisers and supporters: George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI), TLM Event, Penang State Government, Penang State EXCO for Tourism and Creative Economy (PETACE), City Council of Penang Island (MBPP), and Penang Global Tourism (PGT).

GTF is an annual festival held in the George Town World Heritage Site in honour of the city's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Since then, the festival has become a global event featuring various art events on visual art, theatre, music, dance, film, photography and more.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ myPenang. <https://mypenang.gov.my/all/my-stories/46>

¹⁰⁵ myPenang. <https://mypenang.gov.my/culture-heritage/my-stories/41>

¹⁰⁶ Penang Bon Odori Festival. https://www.penang.my.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_en/00_000311.html

¹⁰⁷ Penang CNY Celebration. <https://www.pgcny.my>

¹⁰⁸ myPenang. <https://mypenang.gov.my/all/my-stories/129>

¹⁰⁹ Penang Jazz. <http://www.penangjazz.com/wp/history-2>

¹¹⁰ Penang Island Jazz Festival 2018 cancelled. <https://www.nst.com.my/lifestyle/groove/2018/09/414426/showbiz-penang-island-jazz-festival-2018-cancelled>

¹¹¹ George Town Festival. <https://georgetownfestival.com/2021>

George Town Heritage Celebration (GTHC), 2008 – present

Organisers and supporters: George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI).

GTHC is an annual celebration organised by GTWHI to commemorate the city's inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It highlights interactive and educational workshops and performances which take place in the streets of the heritage enclave.¹¹²

George Town Literary Festival (GTLF), 2011 – present

Organisers and supporters: Penang Convention and Exhibition Bureau (PCEB), Penang State Government and Penang Global Tourism (PGT).

The George Town Literary Festival is an international literary festival celebrating world literature, translations and literary arts.¹¹³

Butterworth Fringe Festival, 2015 – present

Organisers and supporters: Think City, Penang State Government and Seberang Perai City Council (MBSP)

The fringe festival takes place in Butterworth and supports the arts, culture and heritage of mainland Penang. In its 2019 event, there were about 100 performers and 50 programmes held over 2 days.¹¹⁴

Penang Anime Matsuri, 2015 – present

Organisers and supporters: Sozo.

The two-day event celebrates anime by featuring anime characters, cosplayers, stage activities and collectibles.¹¹⁵

Penang Hot Air Balloon Festival, 2015 – present

Organiser and supporters: AKA Balloon Sdn Bhd.

Penang Hot Air Balloon Fiesta will give visitors an opportunity to participate in various activities. The 2-day event is open to all ages at Padang Polo (Polo Ground) with balloon set-up and free-flying balloon shows.¹¹⁶

Penang International Food Festival, PIFF, 2016 – present

Organisers and supporters: TLM Event Sdn Bhd.

The annual event spans 22 days, and allows visitors the chance to taste Penang's local cuisine.¹¹⁷

Penang International Container Art Festival, 2020 – present

Organisers and supporters: Can Can Public Art PLT.

Penang International Container Art Festival (PICAF) is an international street/ urban art festival, celebrating the vibrant street art scene in Penang.¹¹⁸

Hin Pop-up Market.

Photo © Penang Institute



¹¹² George Town Heritage Celebrations. <http://gtwhi.com.my/george-town-heritage-celebrations>

¹¹³ George Town Literary Festival. <https://www.georgetownlitfest.com>

¹¹⁴ Creative Hubs. https://creativehubs.my/creative_hub/butterworth-fringe-festival

¹¹⁵ myPenang. <https://mypenang.gov.my/events/all-events/414>

¹¹⁶ Penang Hot Air Balloon Fiesta 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/PenangHAB>

¹¹⁷ myPenang. <https://mypenang.gov.my/events/all-events/408>

¹¹⁸ myPenang. <https://mypenang.gov.my/events/all-events/422>



The [Penang International Container Art] festival demonstrates that Penang is a place prepared to try new things and our willingness to think out of the box has elevated Penang’s thriving art scene to new heights.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow¹¹⁹

From, For, By the Community



George Town has led national discourse and practices with bottom-up community-driven projects. Creative hub **Hin Bus Depot** has been at the forefront of preserving social fabric with active cultural engagement programmes.

In 2014, Hin Bus Depot took its first transformative steps toward becoming the vibrant community art space that it is today. Vacant lots have been restored and converted into new spaces for local small businesses and artists to use as studios.

- The campus had served as a bus depot since 1947 at Brick Kiln Road (now known as Jalan Gurdwara) until it came into the possession of a company owned by three families in 2001.
- Hin Market is run every Sunday in Hin Bus, is a platform for entrepreneurs, small business owners, craftsmen, artisans, musicians, performers, and makers of all kinds to showcase their products, crafts, and talents.

Accessibility: Wheelchair Friendly¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2020/01/28/art-scene-scales-new-heights>

¹²⁰ Hin Bus Depot website.

Creative and Cultural Platforms and Networks (selected)

Penang has always been home to influential arts movements and birthed many of the country's arts and culture icons.

- Throughout the years, the knowledge and experience are passed down from legacy art organisations and cultural societies, such as the Penang Art Society, Penang Philharmonic Orchestra, Penang Players Music and Drama Society, Ombak-Ombak ARTStudio, Penang Heritage Trust, to name a few.

- George Town also houses art groups formed more recently to tackle current issues, such as Penang Theatre Arts Solidarity (PENTAS).

In addition to stable state government support, the art scene has benefited from a strong sense of solidarity and the spirit of mutual help, which become vital to the survival and prosperity of independent art spaces and creative practitioners (both before and during the pandemic).



Penang is a centre from which to travel and communicate with the rest of the world, as well as a lifestyle that allows a great mix of old and new, culture and of course, nature and the iconic Penang Hills.

Rebecca Duckett-Wilkinson, artist and founder of Owen Rebecca Designs¹²¹

Table 2 Sample of creative and cultural influencers¹²² and platforms

Media/Film/Digital	Arts	Crossover/Lifestyle
Image farm, 2001	Can Can Public Art PLT, 2018	Betterthanblouse, 2018
Kenray communications, 1987	Fuan Wong Glass, 1985	Habib Jewels, 1958
Lemonsky Studio, 2006	KaKi Creation, 2010	Johnsson Pipes, 2009
The Rondo Production, 2019	Shop Howard, n.d.	Kenny Loh Couture, 2017
W3RK Digital Creative Agency, 2004	Urban Sketchers Penang, 2010	MY Parang, 2013
		ZNGART, 2018

For more information on creative hubs in George Town and the Penang area, see British Council Creative Hub Malaysia: <https://creativehubs.my>

¹²¹ <https://empirics.asia/rebecca-duckett-wilkinson-founder-owen-rebecca-designs>

¹²² These influencers are defined as those who are building up creative enterprises, creating jobs and supporting the development cultural economy.

Media/Film/Digital

Image Farm, 2001 – present

Image Farm is a video production company that has served multinational corporations (MNCs), government agencies, SMEs, SMLs and new start-ups, both internationally and locally.

- They are also specialised in making documentaries and won the prizes of best director, best history documentary, best overall documentary silver and special jury awards in FINAS (National Film Development Corporation Malaysia) Documentary Awards 2011.

Kenray Communications, 1987 – present

The well-known advertising agency has helped various companies from different industries establish their brands amongst the public.

Lemon Sky Studio, 2006 – present

The art outsourcing studio has 300 creative talents that create visual art solutions for clients and partners. It has designed some of the most popular games and animated series in the market.

- Its list of clients includes Blizzard Entertainment, Naughty Dog, 2K Games, Capcom, Bandai Namco, EA, Disney and Nickelodeon. Games, Bandai Namco, Capcom, Microsoft Studios, EA, Disney and Nickelodeon.

The Rondo Production, 2019 – present

The social enterprise offers in-house music production, project management, artist management, and musical instrument maintenance services.

It has worked with more than 70 local and international artists. The production house also produces educational videos and music courses, available at Rondo Explore.

W3RK Digital Creative Agency, 2004 – present

The agency offers services that focus on branding/rebranding through creative, communicative and digital strategies.

- Their clients include small to medium businesses, multinational corporations, government agencies and many others such as Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Wawasan Open University, Honda, Agilent Technologies and Keysight Technologies among others.

Arts

Can Can Public Art PLT, 2018 – present

The company is founded by Tan Chor Whye. It aims to connect people within communities through art, and encourages them to rethink new possibilities and potential for their living spaces.

Fuan Wong Glass, 1985 – present

Fuan Wong is a self-taught glass artist. He runs a studio in Armenian Street and established Art & Garden in Balik Pulau, a garden combining nature and arts.

KaKi Creation, 2010 – present

Ch'ng Kiah Kiean was born in 1974 in George Town, Penang. He joined the global network of Urban Sketchers in 2009 and co-founded Urban Sketchers Penang in 2010. He runs his own studio/gallery, KaKi Creation, based in Tanjung Tokong, Penang.

Shop Howard

Shop Howard is the commercial brand name for Howard Tan, a photographer, artist, product designer and collector. It is located on Pitt Street, George Town.

Urban Sketchers Penang, 2010 – present

The group is part of the global Urban Sketchers chapters, and began as Penang Sketchers in 2010. Its artists draw inspiration from their immediate surroundings, including living areas, and travel destinations.

Penang International Food Festival.

Photo © Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd



Crossover/Lifestyle

Betterthanblouse, 2018 – present

Betterthanblouses or BTB is a local brand that creates handmade fashion pieces with bold prints. It is located in Carnavon Street, George Town and participates in pop-up markets in Penang and Singapore.

Habib Jewels, 1958 – present

Habib Jewels is a jewelry company with an in-house design capability, specialised workshop and a distribution network of stores throughout Malaysia. Their first store in Penang was located on Pitt Street.

Johnsson Pipes, 2009 – present

Johnsson Pipes was created in partnership with Kraftangan Malaysia in 2009. Since then, the brand's achievements include winning the prestigious Malaysian Good Design Products by MOSTI in 2012 and 2013.

MY Parang, 2013 – present

MY Parang is a brand producing and selling traditional knives, parangs. Based in Balik Pulau, MY Parang exports parangs to countries such as Thailand and Canada. The parangs are also retailed by equipment shops including Ray Mears in the United Kingdom, which boosted their international reputation and sales.

ZNG ART, 2018 – present

ZNG Art was established by Zahidah Noor Ghazalli, a Penang born henna artist. Henna is widely used in Indian culture. In the early days of her career, Zahidah provided bridal henna and event henna services. Since joining Hin Market at Hin Bus Depot in 2017, she has decided to pursue a career in art.



Hin Bus Depot.

Photo © Penang Institute

Creative Infrastructure, Hubs and Assets (selected)

Penang especially George Town has been historically known for its cultural vibrancy due to the diverse diaspora from China, Indonesia, India and Europe and the inter-marriage between these ethnicities giving birth to new cultures. As a community, Penangites have always been very proud and protective of their culture and the celebration of it has become mainstream. One of the key results of this, is much of their cultural offerings have kept its authenticity.

Penang continues to champion successful public-private partnerships and has created a 'best practice' to future proof the state.

- After George Town became a world cultural heritage in 2008, cultural tourism and related infrastructure has stably attracted government funding. For example, George Town Festival (GTF) has become a highly regarded art activity in the region.

- In its ambition to be a digital innovation hub, the state government has launched a Penang Young Digital Talent platform run by the Penang Youth Development Corporation. This platform aims to develop 1,000 new talents in the next 2 years. It is also establishing MakersLabs in schools statewide. Under @CAT, a co-working space has been set up for the community and run by the community itself, supported by partners.

In 2012, the murals of multidisciplinary Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic brought massive attention to not only street arts in Penang and across the nation but also quickly increased awareness around the potential of art to draw crowds.

- Its success has also led to the rise of grassroots art spaces like Hin Bus Depot, Jetty 35, Sinkeh, etc., which nurture independent artists and creative talents.



In the past, when people thought about Penang, they would think about beaches, Komtar, and the long bridge; but today, Penang has changed a lot. A main attraction is the George Town World Heritage site, and while a number of new hotels are opening, there are also many heritage buildings being repurposed for accommodation.

Khoo Salma Nasution, writer and publisher of Areca Books¹²³

For more information on creative hubs in George Town and the Penang area, see British Council Creative Hub Malaysia: <https://creativehubs.my>

¹²³ <https://tourmab.com/2018/04/15/when-local-heritage-becomes-world-heritage>

Esplanade, 1786 – present

The Esplanade is a large open space in the heritage zone in the city. Shifting away from its original purpose of providing unobstructed view of the fort's surroundings, it was later converted into a military parade ground and over time as a recreation ground for Penangites and a popular venue for events.¹²⁴

Acheen Street Mosque, 1808 – present

The Acheen Mosque in George Town, Penang, also known as Masjid Melayu Lebu Acheh (Malay Mosque) was founded by Tengku Syed Hussain Al-Aidid in 1808. The mosque is surrounded by rows of shophouses, a cemetery including the mausoleum of Syed Hussain and his family, mid-19th Century town houses and an octagonal minaret.

- The complex is historically and architecturally important as it reflects the earliest Muslim urban community in Penang comprising of the Malays, Indian Muslims, Arabs and the Achehnese.
- It was also a hub of various activities for pilgrim brokers, ticketing agencies, bazaar traders, hotel, shops and printing presses. Today, the Mosque as well as the surrounding properties are administered by the Penang State Religious Council and now remains a centre for Malays and Muslims in Penang.¹²⁵

Sek Tek Tong Cheah Kongs, 1810 – present

Seh Tek Tong Cheah Kongs (Cheah Si Hock Haw Kong Kongs) was formed in 1810 by the Cheah clansmen of Sek Tong Village, Hai Teng Kuan, District of Sam Tor, Cheang Chew Prefecture, and Fukien Province who have settled down overseas and together with their descendants in Penang, they later constructed the present magnificent clan ancestral temple.

- There is a Cheah Kongs Interpretative Centre launched in 2016 to showcase the history of Penang and its clan houses.¹²⁶

Sri Mahamariamman Temple, 1833

The Arulmigu Sri Mahamariamman Temple situated in George Town Penang is the oldest Hindu temple in Malaysia, and features sculptures of gods and goddesses over its main entrance and façade. It is located in Lebu Queen, George Town. It is also known as the Mariamman Temple or Queen Street Indian Temple. It is the centre of the Indian community in George Town where many cultural events take place.¹²⁷

Leong San Tong Khoo Kongs, 1835 – present

Leong San Tong Khoo Kongs, or Khoo Kongs for short, is one of the most distinctive Chinese clan associations in Malaysia. It is well-known worldwide for its extensive lineage that can be traced back 650 years, as well as its closely-knit congregation of buildings and a magnificent clan house.

- Its temple and interpretative centre are both tourist hotspots in Penang. Many cultural and art events such as the Heritage Celebration or George Town Festival are organised in the clan house due to its significance.¹²⁸

Kapitan Keling Mosque, 1880s – present

The Kapitan Keling Mosque (Masjid Kapitan Keling) is a mosque built in the 19th century by Indian Muslim traders in George Town, Penang. It is situated on the corner of Buckingham Street (Lebu Buckingham) and Pitt Street (Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling).

- Being a prominent Islamic historic centre, it is part of the World Heritage Site of George Town and lies at the centre of the city's Tamil Muslim neighbourhood, the *chulias*.
- It is the first permanent Muslim institution to have been established in the area, dating from the early 1800s. Cauder Mohuddeen Merican is known as the founder of the mosque and leader of the Chulias. In 1801 Sir George Leith, who was then Lieutenant Governor of Penang, appointed a prominent Indian Muslim leader, Cauder Mohudeen, as Captain of the South Indian "*Keling*" community. He granted a piece of land to build a mosque on the south side of Chulia Street. It is now the centre of the Indian Muslim community.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Langdon, M., n.d. A Guide to George Town's Historic Commercial and Civic Precincts. Penang: George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) P. 39 – 40

¹²⁵ Acheen Street. <http://www.hbp.usm.my/townplg/heritage/acheen.html>, accessed in July 2021.

¹²⁶ Cheah Kongs. <http://cheahkongs.org>

¹²⁷ Sri Mahamariamman Temple. <https://www.mmadventure.com/explore/penang-island/sri-maha-mariamman-temple>

¹²⁸ Leong San Tong Khoo Kongs. <https://www.khooKongs.com.my>

¹²⁹ Kapitan Keling Mosque. <https://itc.gov.my/listings/masjid-kapitan-keling>

Penang State Museum and State Art Gallery, 1965 – present

Penang State Museum & Art Gallery was officially established in 1965 to collect, study, preserve and showcase the state's cultural heritage and national history by promoting educational exhibits on history, heritage and culture.

- Artists in Penang have continued to be involved in planning annual retrospective exhibition since 2006.¹³⁰

Dewan Sri Penang, 1972 – present

Accessibility: Wheelchair friendly

Dewan Sri Pinang serves as a venue for concerts, orchestra plays, seminars and other programmes in Penang. It is also the main location for the George Town Festival, government and other state events. The hall also houses the Penang State Art Gallery on the third floor.¹³¹

Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah (MGTF), 1982 – present

Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah (MGTF) is located within Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). It is the only museum and gallery in the region that merge sciences and arts under one roof. MGTF USM also possesses a substantial collection of Malaysian modern art, various cultural artifacts and science artefacts from the Islamic world.¹³²

KOMTAR Auditoriums, 1986 – present

Accessibility: Lift

KOMTAR, the tallest building in Penang, is specially designed to accommodate conferences, lectures, conventions, seminars, meeting presentations and other medium scale events.¹³³

The Art Gallery, 1989 – present

Accessibility: Lift

Although The Art Gallery initially started off by selling Chinese ink brush paintings from China, the gallery quickly made a name in the Malaysian art community to become a prominent art gallery holding between 12 to 15 exhibitions a year by local well-known artists.¹³⁴

SPICE Arena, 2000 – present

The SPICE Arena is an indoor arena located in the township of Bayan Baru in Penang. It serves as Penang's main indoor sports centre as well as the preferred venue within the city-state for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE). It consists of a convention & exhibition centre as well as an aquatic centre.¹³⁵

Galeri Seni Mutiara, 2005 – present

Before establishing Galeri Seni Mutiara, Mr Koay, who is also an experienced painter, held over 20 solo exhibitions globally. He also served as the Secretary of the Penang State Art Gallery. Today Galeri Seni Mutiara is committed to promoting good art in Penang.¹³⁶

a2 Gallery, 2007 – present

a2 Gallery was conceptualised and opened by two individual artists, Alfred and Jeff in 2007. The Gallery is located in Bangkok Lane, Penang, Malaysia. The set mission is to encourage art lovers to see art as interpreted by artists coming from different backgrounds.¹³⁷

Penang Performing Art Centre, 2011 – present

Accessibility: Lift; Wheelchair Friendly

Founded by the Actors Studio Sdn Bhd and Eastern & Oriental Berhad, the Performing Arts Centre of Penang (penangpac), a non-profit organisation, is the Northern region's first performing art centre and second in Malaysia after the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (klpac).¹³⁸

¹³⁰ Penang Museum. <https://www.penangmuseum.gov.my/museum>

¹³¹ Sistem Tempahan Berpusat. <https://etempahan.penang.gov.my/index.php?cur=utama>

¹³² Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah. <http://mgtf.usm.my/index.php/en/about/now-at-the-mgtf-2>

¹³³ Sistem Tempahan Berpusat. <https://etempahan.penang.gov.my/index.php?cur=utama>

¹³⁴ The Art Gallery. <https://www.theartgallerypg.com>

¹³⁵ Setia Spice Arena. <https://spsetia.com/en-us/venues/setia-spice/facilities/arena>

¹³⁶ Galeri Seni Mutiara. <https://galerisenimutiara.com>

¹³⁷ A2 Art Gallery. <https://www.a2artgallery.com>

¹³⁸ PenangPAC. <http://www.theactorsstudio.com.my/penangpac>

Narrow Marrow Cafe, 2014 – present

The cafe was started in 2014 by Alvin and Jamie as a social hub for their creative friends in town. It is now known for its Tiramisus, Cheese Cakes, Coffee and Toddy. Since 2020, Narrow Marrow has moved to a wider space. It also hosts or organises creative and social events in the community.¹³⁹

Macallum Connoisseurs, 2015 – present

Macallum Connoisseurs Coffee Company infuses modern coffee culture with Penang's local heritage. The venue is a roastery, cafe, restaurant and academy, covers a space of 8,000 square feet, and is often used as an exhibition and event space.¹⁴⁰

Penang House of Music, 2016 – present

Accessibility: Lift; Wheelchair Friendly

Penang House of Music is a place that showcases Penang's glorious musical heritage and culture diversity through careful curated exhibitions and interactive features. There is also a resource centre where visitors can discover an ever-growing vinyl collection, newspaper clipping, previously unreleased recording, audio and video interviews and so on.¹⁴¹

Bangunan UAB, 2016 – present

Accessibility: Wheelchair Friendly

The Bangunan UAB (UAB Building) on China Street is a recently renovated heritage building. It houses Think City's offices, and was recently turned into an innovation hub by the organisation through collaborations with international and local companies bringing cutting edge design and technologies.¹⁴²

Jetty 35, 2018 – present

Founded in 2018, 35@Jetty is a heritage focused venue with 12,000 square feet of space for arts and cultural events. It is located down a secluded alleyway off Weld Quay within the UNESCO world heritage site. The space has been divided into five separate halls which are each available for rent to hold cultural events.¹⁴³

Networks and Collectives

Gerakbudaya Bookshops Penang, 2014 – present

The two Gerakbudaya bookshops offer book lovers a place to meet and talk, and an opportunity for writers and readers to interact. The first bookshop possesses a wide selection of literary fiction, poetry, translations and hard-to-find titles from smaller and independent publishers, whereas the second bookshop offers non-fiction titles.¹⁴⁴

Rakan BM (Friends of Bukit Mertajam), 2016 – present

Rakan BM (Friends of BM) is a community initiative that collects stories, and the history of Bukit Mertajam. Though an online platform, it hosts events, community gatherings and sharing sessions.¹⁴⁵

Daiichi Art Space, 2016 – present

A branch of Daiichi Modern Art Gallery, the Art Space forms one of the largest private art galleries in North Malaysia with art works from Southeast Asia and China.¹⁴⁶

Studio Pentas, 2018 – present

Studio Pentas was initiated by Aida Redza and Margaret Fuilee in 2018. The studio acts as a space of convergence where communities can come together to interact and collaborate on performances; and it is also available for rental for events.¹⁴⁷

Ruang Kongsy, 2018 – present

Ruang Kongsy was founded by a group of journalists, activists, artists and cultural practitioners. It is a collective space for the cultivation of a socially, artistically and culturally conscious community in Penang. Since its inception in 2018, it has developed a community library containing over 1,500 books; a space for community social activities; and an exhibition space for local artists.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁹ Narrow Marrow. <https://www.facebook.com/NARROWMALLOW>

¹⁴⁰ Macallum Connoisseurs. <https://macallumcoffee.com/index.php>

¹⁴¹ Penang House of Music. <https://www.penanghouseofmusic.com>

¹⁴² Penang Institute verified the information with Think City via a call on 29 January 2021, 3.15 pm.

¹⁴³ Creative Hubs. https://creativehubs.my/creative_hub/35jetty

¹⁴⁴ Gerak Budaya. <https://gerakbudayapenang.com>

¹⁴⁵ Rakan BM. <https://www.facebook.com/RakanBukitMertajam>

¹⁴⁶ Daiichi Art Space. <https://www.facebook.com/daiichiartspace>

¹⁴⁷ Creative Hubs. https://creativehubs.my/creative_hub/studio-pentas

¹⁴⁸ Ruang Kongsy. https://creativehubs.my/creative_hub/ruang-kongsy

Open Studios Penang, 2019 – present

This is a non-profit annual art event for artists to exchange ideas, and to promote public exposure for artists. In 2019, it brought 90 Malaysian and international artists together, and hosted events in 30 venues across Penang.¹⁴⁹

Hikayat

Established in 2018, Hikayat is a creative hub founded by Bettina Chua Abdullah and Gareth Richard. It hosted a rich array of events: screenings through its film club Kaki Kino, Open Mic Open Mind poetry evenings; special events for World Refugee Day with Médecins Sans Frontières; and much more.¹⁵⁰

Arts-ED

Founded in 2000, Arts-ED is a non-profit organisation based in Penang, Malaysia. The organisation specialises in innovative community-based arts and culture education for young people and adult communities. The organisation has developed strong local inter-agency networks and collaborative partnerships.¹⁵¹

Arus Academy

Arus is based in Bukit Mertajam, Penang, with a branch in Kuala Lumpur. It is a social enterprise that seeks to empower the creation of meaningful learning experiences for students.¹⁵²

Other Key Cultural Infrastructure Assets

Penang National Park

The Penang National Park hugs the coastline of Penang's northwest corner. It is located in Teluk Bahang. It boasts many beautiful beaches and crystal-clear waters.¹⁵³

Fort Cornwallis

The brickwork structure was completed to its current state in 1804-05 under Lieutenant Governor Robert Townsend Farquhar. None of the cannons were ever fired in defence, but were regularly fired for salutes. Today it is perhaps the most iconic and important structure which links George Town's World Heritage Site back to the first days of settlement by the British East India Company (EIC).¹⁵⁴

The Han Jiang Ancestral Temple of the Penang Teochew Association, 1870 – present

The Han Jiang Ancestral Hall received the Award of Merit at the 2006 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards. It was restored to its former glory through the commendable effort of the Teochew community of Penang.¹⁵⁵

Penang Botanic Gardens

Established by the British in 1884, the lush greenery and tranquil setting of the Botanic Garden make it a popular park and tourist attraction. It is considered Penang's unique natural heritage, with its large repository of flora which is unique to the country and to the region.¹⁵⁶

Kek Lok Si Temple

Completed in 1891, the Chinese temple is situated on the island of Penang, and is known as one of the largest temple complexes in Southeast Asia. It has a seven-storey pagoda and a 30.2-metre bronze statue of Kuan Yin, a female goddess.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁹ Open Studios Penang. <https://openstudiospenang.com>

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/hikayatpenang>

¹⁵¹ <https://www.arts-ed.my>

¹⁵² <http://www.arusacademy.org.my>

¹⁵³ <https://www.wildlife.gov.my/index.php/en/public/2016-05-10-02-34-43/peta>

¹⁵⁴ Langdon, M., n.d. A Guide to George Town's Historic Commercial and Civic Precincts. Penang: George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) P. 37 – 39.

¹⁵⁵ 2006 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards. P. 2

¹⁵⁶ <http://botanicalgardens.penang.gov.my/index.php/en/pengenalan/sejarah>

¹⁵⁷ Kek Lok Si Temple. <https://kekloksitemple.com>

Chinese Recreation Club Penang

The Chinese Recreation Club Penang (CRC Penang) is a social club in Penang. It was established in 1892 at Lake Villa along Peel Avenue by a group of Chinese football enthusiasts. It caters to the sports and recreation needs of the community.¹⁵⁸

The Queen Victoria Memorial Clock Tower

The Queen Victoria Memorial Clock Tower was built in 1900 to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and commissioned by local merchant, Cheah Chean Eok. The clock tower was opened to the public in July 1902, but unfortunately suffered damages during World War II. It was restored and maintained throughout the years. The latest renovation was completed last year by MBPP.¹⁵⁹

Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion

Built in 1904, the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, also known as the Blue Mansion, is the late nineteenth-century architectural legacy of business tycoon Cheong Fatt Tze. The mansion is one of three remaining stately Chinese-style dwellings of its kind outside of China, and is the only one in Southeast Asia. It also won UNESCO 'Most Excellent' Heritage Conservation Award in 2000.¹⁶⁰ It has become a popular set location for movies such as *Indochine* and *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Penang City Stadium

Opened in 1957, the City Stadium is situated at Lorong Kulit and can accommodate approximately 25,000 spectators. It can be used for athletic meets, soccer matches, field events, stage shows and other ceremonies.¹⁶¹

Penang Youth Park

The Youth Park was opened by the 3rd Governor of Penang in 1972. Since then, the park has continued to grow and currently possesses gyms (both indoors and outdoors), a world-class stage, art murals, swimming pools, baseball court, and more.¹⁶²

Gua Kepah Archaeological Site

The archaeotourism site is one of Penang's prized historical sites. It is believed to be the only one with clear evidence of shell middens in Malaysia. Guar Kepah is also famed for the over 5,700-year-old "Penang Woman" skeleton that was discovered in 2017.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Chinese Recreation Club. <http://crc.com.my/milestones>

¹⁵⁹ RM30m north seafront project to be completed by 2022, says Penang exco. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/09/26/rm30m-north-seafront-project-to-be-completed-by-2022-says-penang-exco/1794456>

¹⁶⁰ Asia Conserved. P. 70-76. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000155754/PDF/155754eng.pdf.multi>

¹⁶¹ Penang City Stadium. http://etempahan.mbpp.gov.my/pls/ebkpublic/EBK_FACILITY.viewLocationInfo?pn_alocId=3

¹⁶² Penang's Youth Park: Malaysia's First Adventure Playground. <https://penangmonthly.com/article/9436/penangs-youth-park-malysias-first-adventure-playground>

¹⁶³ NCER Malaysia. <https://www.ncer.com.my/strategic-projects-programmes/tourism/archaeotourism-link>

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As cities work to reinvent themselves to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19, they need to find new ways to build back better, greener and fairer. One formidable resource for resilience is culture. Penang’s diversity and culture of innovation remains the basis for its strength. The urban regeneration process that started some two decades ago will need revisiting but I am sure with the right leadership, community partnership and focus on innovation, Penang can achieve its 2030 Vision to localise the Sustainable Development Goals.

Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Tempatico.

