

Choreographer and director Akram Khan collaborates with legendary sculptor Anish Kapoor to recreate his masterpiece, *Kaash*

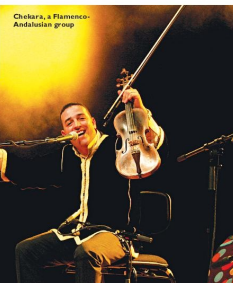
A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO BEACH STREET...

... at the corner of Armenian Street. An explosion of peoplerazzi excitedly pointed their iPhones at a life-like mural depicting perfectly ordinary Penang life—this was my introduction to the George Town Festival in 2012. ‘Little Children On A Bicycle’ by Ernest Zacharevic was that year’s festival icon. The snapshots went viral, and a star was birthed.
By Shireen Zainudin-Lowe.

BY GEORGE! This is the alchemy at work at the George Town Festival. Proudly homegrown, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Overlay a strata of internationally lauded artists and dust everything with the passion of the populace. It’s a magical concoction to sip, stir, or submerge in. So, roll up year seven to the now globally acclaimed George Town Festival. Here’s a checklist you might want to tick off all of this month—there’s culture, heritage, and a welcoming community.



Chobara is a beautiful collaboration between contemporary dance and Andalusian flamenco



Chobara, a flamenco-Andalusian group



World-renowned jugglers of Gandini juggles greens. Smiling

WHERE TO STAY

With an explosion of boutique hotels and guesthouses over the years in George Town, Penang, these top the list.

23 LOVE LANE

Just like living in your Nanyang grandmother’s home—your grandmother with fabulous taste in art, of course—with the friendliest front desk staff in George Town and the best afternoon tea, served daily.

SEVEN TERRACES

Lacquered wood and genuine antiques from award-winning hosteler Chris Ong’s private collection are seen here. The architectural genius who knocked through seven shophouses and created this magnificent courtyard provides a cool, elegant respite from the bustle on its doorstep.

JAWI

Newly opened and the latest in Chris Ong’s stable of hotels, a tinkling fountain greets you in the courtyard. As you sink further into intricate latticework and sultan Indian friery, this delightful hotel weaves opulence and intimacy together.

CLOVE HALL RESIDENCE

Situated slightly beyond the heritage zone, the private, black-and-white colonial house is set within delicate green gardens. This is the best place if you’re bringing kids. Even better, book up the whole hotel and take up all six suites with family and friends.

MACALISTER MANSION

Although Macalister is quietly contemporary within its grandiose colonial walls, glass-walled bedrooms, an impressive library, and a fine dining restaurant await you.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF GEORGE TOWN FESTIVAL AND VISUALS



Mirrored by Pearl, a collaborative project by choreographer and dancer Aida Reda

WHAT TO SEE The festival programme encompasses installations and performances in art, design, photography, film, music, dance, and drama. For those lucky enough to take up a month-long residence—yes, I’ve met several who do this every year!—there’s something of interest everyday. For the rest, here’s an exclusive selection.

1 STRANDBEEST

These majestic multi-legged sculptures are the most stunning interplay of artistry and technology. The ethereal beasts by Dutch artist Theo Jansen are powered by gusts of wind as they “march” across the installation space and into our imaginations.

2 PEARL OF THE EASTERN & ORIENTAL

Another production from the hugely gifted Singaporean husband-and-wife team of Lim Yu Beng and Tan Kheng Hua, this site-specific drama brings tales at the E&O Hotel. This is the second offering in the 2 Houses series, paying homage to Penang (Yu Beng’s father’s place of birth).

3 MOVED BY PADI

“What one cultivates, one consumes.” The growing of a rice field on Macalister Street began months ago as multi-arts collaborators set the organic staging for Malaysian dance-choreographer Aida Reda and her Japanese partner Mas Arata.

4 SMASHED

A glorious reinterpretation of theatrical juggling, traversing lost love, and afternoon tea by the world-renowned Gandini Jugglers.

5 KAASH

Presenting Kaash at George Town Festival 2016 as its South East Asian debut, award-winning dancer, choreographer, and director Akram Khan teams up with celebrated sculptor Anish Kapoor and composer Nisan Sawhney to revive his first full-length masterpiece. The New York Times called this blend of contemporary and classical Indian dance as “an exquisitely beautiful shifting tapestry of tightly woven motion, light and dark.”

Stranbeest by Theo Jansen brings plastic tubes to life through the force of wind



LAST TIP Half the richness of experiencing the George Town Festival is traipsing the *kaki lima*, getting lost, and discovering the cornucopia of creative charm for yourself. Hidden installations, mysterious cafés, pop up ateliers, and vintage retailers are just waiting to reveal themselves. One just needs to go forth and explore. ■ From July 29 to August 28 at Dewan Sri Pinang, MBPP Town Hall, Esplanade, and around George Town. www.georgetownfestival.com