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FEATURE

BOUTIQUE BEAUTY



Heritage buildings in Malaysia are seeing an uplift, especially in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Penang and Malacca. SC CHUA highlights the ones to check out when you are in town.

Photos Chinahouse, Eastern & Oriental Hotel, Macalister Mansion, The Majestic Malacca, Seven Terraces, Vintage Eleven, 23 Love Lane

Everyone loves a spot of history. Which is why heritage buildings list high on the agenda when it comes to a holiday itinerary. What more, with the trend looking towards heritage buildings being restored to not only preserve its architectural beauty but to also open its doors for tourists to experience what lies beneath its walls, Melaka and Penang are seeing themselves high on the list of must-visit places in Malaysia.

Eastern & Oriental Hotel ◀

ITS HERITAGE: Its colourful history started in 1884 and 1885, when two hotels – The Eastern and The Oriental – were combined. Established by the Armenian Sarkies brothers Martin and Tigran, the hotel soon became a premier hotel for colonial administrators, planters, and the wealthy local elites. Sadly, the Great Depression set in, and the hotel soon lost its lustre and slipped into a slow decline. It changed hands several times and in 2001, after a major refurbishment by new owners Eastern & Oriental Berhad, this luxurious hotel reopened its doors.

WHAT IT IS NOW: The hotel stands for all things elegant and classy, with its 100 suites that are magnificently furnished, with either the city or the sea view. What makes the hotel stand out is the personalised attentive service each guests receive, much like its old-world charm. The hotel is also home to some of the finest restaurants – 1885, an award-winning restaurant that offers fine food and wine; Sarkies Corner, a colonial-style coffee shop; Farquhar's Bar with its colonial Malaya feel and more. In March this year, a new wing – The Victory Annexe – was opened, which marks the full circle in the hotel's history as it is named after the original Victory Annexe during the days of the Sarkies brothers; the new wing retains many of the same architectural Victorian elements. The Victory Annexe houses a total of 122 sea-view suites.



Courtyard @ Heeren

ITS HERITAGE: Just a few steps away from the popular Jonker Street and located at the formerly known Heeren Street, Courtyard @ Heeren was previously a hotel that was left vacant for many years. This 100-metre long building was originally built in the 18th century.

WHAT IT IS NOW: Today, Courtyard @ Heeren is an award-winning boutique hotel (awarded First Prize by Malaysia Institute of Architect for its exterior category and Second Prize for the interior category, and TripAdvisor.com Awards for Traveller's Choice in 2012 and 2013), taken up by its new owner to restore it with 15 rooms in total. The original parts of the building like the air well, water well, floor tiles and sculptures have all been preserved. Operating since end 2010, each room has been designed to combine both old and new – Peranakan style with modern elements. Enjoy modern facilities and comfort in its different room categories, from its Superior Room to its Executive Suite.

Seven Terraces ▼

ITS HERITAGE: Occupying almost an entire block of one of Penang's finest residential streets, this heritage building is a 19th century Anglo Chinese terrace built in the early 1900s for Penang's wealthy Straits-born Chinese. Surrounding it are also other major heritage icons like the 1810 Goddess of Mercy

Macalister Mansion ▲

ITS HERITAGE: Its name honours Penang's British Governor Colonel Norman Macalister. The restoration of this 100-year-old historic English mansion is the work of Dato' Sean, Datin Karen and Colin Seah of Singapore's renowned Ministry of Design, where the building's heritage aspects and original elements are preserved.

WHAT IT IS NOW: The award-winning boutique hotel, which is the only hotel in Malaysia that makes the cut to be a member of Design Hotels, pays homage to Penang's colonial past and its colourful present. It consists of eight differently designed rooms and five F&B outlets to provide guests with a quirky and sophisticated lifestyle. Room 4, a 49 square metre bedroom and living space complete with the original wrought-iron spiral staircase has a privately commissioned wire sculpture featuring the side profiles of Sir Norman Macalister and his wife by local artist Low Chee Peng, while Room 3 is the largest room with the original wrought-iron balcony for you to sit out on while enjoying the view. Not to be missed are also the dining options like the Dining Room, which offers a selection of modern French cuisine, and The Cellar, stocked with the largest collection of wines in Penang.





Temple. In 2009, the entire row was purchased in a derelict state by Karl Steinberg and Christopher Ong, both winners of the 2007 UNESCO Award of Distinction for heritage conservation.

WHAT IT IS NOW: It took the duo three and a half years rebuilding the row and adapting it into the 18-suite boutique hotel it is now. Walk in and you will be in awe of its surrounding Straits Chinese Peranakan culture of the 18th century and early 19th century, Anglo-Asian style. To keep within the theme, all rooms are fitted with Peranakan antique furniture, original carved consoles and desks, mother-of-pearl blackwood ceremonial chairs and benches, as well as original Baba-Nyonya embroidery on silk. Check out the Grand Apartments, complete with their own tiled entrance hallway with a set of carved gilded Peranakan doors.

ChinaHouse ▲

ITS HERITAGE: Located in George Town's warehouse district, ChinaHouse is refurbished from a traditional 16,000 square-foot compound of three heritage buildings that are linked by an open-air courtyard. Many of its architecture details are worked in its restoration, with exposed beams, cement floors, and weathered timber existing alongside contemporary furnishings and splashy textures.

WHAT IT IS NOW: Converted into a creative arts platform as well as a lifestyle and dining emporium, ChinaHouse is fast becoming the talk of town with its 14 different shops, restaurants, cafes, galleries and theatre. First up is the Kopi C Espresso Café & Bar, a favourite breakfast and coffee joint. Then, there is the BTB & Restaurant serving up a mix of Asian and Middle Eastern cuisines amidst old-school furnishing. Other restaurants and cafes include Vine & Single, Beach St. Bakery, the private dining space 14 Chairs and many more. For art lovers in Penang, ChinaHouse is the place to be. Its galleries host exhibitions, workshops, performances, and even an artist's dorm for visiting artists to meet and chat.

Suffolk House

ITS HERITAGE: Malaysia's only surviving Georgian mansion and one of the finest in Asia, Suffolk House is home to a rich history that spans over 200 years. Known as the first 'Great House of Penang', it is a stunning example of an Anglo-Indian garden house owned by Captain Francis Light, the founder of British settlement of Penang. It is said that the house was the scene of many important social and official events, like the founding of Singapore by Sir Stamford Raffles. In the 1960s, it became dilapidated and eventually abandoned in 1974. In 2000, major restoration work began, which was completely in 2007.

WHAT IT IS NOW: In July 2009, a lease was granted to Badan Warisan by the State Government of Penang to operate Suffolk House as a culture and arts centre. Visitors can explore the building and its themed heritage garden, as well as enjoy a meal in the restaurant. It is also the perfect setting for events with its lofty Georgian reception rooms, broad verandas and verdant gardens. Self-guided tours are available daily from 10am to 6pm for RM10 (free for children under six), while guided tours are available at RM15.

23 Love Lane ▼

ITS HERITAGE: Located within the inner city of George Town, 23 Love Lane is a unique heritage property set within its own walled garden. It combined four heritage buildings – an Anglo Indian bungalow, a Straits eclectic-style building, a 1920s Jack Roof Annex, and an Indian shophouse.

WHAT IT IS NOW: The buildings were restored extensively by the owner to become the charming boutique heritage hotel it is today. You will love the fact that 23 Love Lane has been furnished with the owner's own private collection of antique and vintage furniture like lacquered cupboards and Peranakan style furnishing. The private garden is a plus for guests to enjoy and take in all that nature has to offer.



The Majestic Malacca ►

ITS HERITAGE: Dating back to the 1920s, The Majestic Malacca was once a private mansion built for a prominent Chinese tycoon who acquired the land from St. Peter's Church. Located along the river bank of the Malacca River, the mansion was later converted into a hotel in 1955 and was given the name it has today. It ceased operation in 2000 and was reopened once more in 2008 after undergoing restoration.

WHAT IT IS NOW: A gem from the YTL Group, The Majestic Malacca houses the mansion as well as an adjacent new wing with 52 rooms, two suites and a Spa Village. Original fixtures were restored so that the building retains its former glory – settlement windows painted in soft pastel shades, intricate Straits Chinese porcelain tiles, dark teakwood fittings and more. Combined with modern conveniences, the hotel makes for a memorable stay. For history buffs, make sure to sign up for the fascinating historical walks offered at the hotel, led daily by its very own resident historian. And of course, a spa indulgence at Spa Village is not to be missed.

Vintage Eleven ►

ITS HERITAGE: Strategically situated in the middle of Jonker Street, this heritage building is a typical 19th century Baba-Nyonya tenement complete with its spiral-shaped staircase and antique wooden doors and windows.

WHAT IT IS NOW: A personal project by a group of friends who share the passion for travel and heritage, this building was restored to a luxurious boutique hotel where guests are allowed to use the entire premise when they check in. Restoration work took six months but the result is a living hall, indoor pool with Jacuzzi and massage jets, man-made backyard, one master bedroom, one family suite, a Peranakan kitchenette, lounge, modern facilities – perfect for a family getaway. Check out the 13-foot wall art depicting Jalan Tokong from the river side of Jonker Street, a work of art done by one of Vintage Eleven's directors that took 75 hours to complete and is made from recycled and vintage materials.



Listings

ChinaHouse

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Courtyard @ Heeren

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Eastern & Oriental Hotel

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Macalister Mansion

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