

# Historic centres of melaka and penang social and cultural history



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## Introduction

Today if one were to look down from an aerial view over the cities of Melaka (used to be spelt as Malacca) and Penang on the west coast of peninsular Malaysia, one would be able to discern a colourful mosaic of artifacts and people, characteristic of the living cultures of both the historic cities.

Melaka which is about 600 years old from its founding and Penang or “ Pearl of the Orient” which is 215 years after being taken over by the British, have a very strong semblance in their multi-cultural characteristics which developed over the years through the processes of history. For these living cultures, Melaka and Penang deserve to be considered as World Heritage Cities. Melaka is situated 2 degrees north of the equator and very well known in the local legend as a fortunate land for, “ even the pelandok (mouse deer) was full of courage. It went through the age of glory for slightly more than 100 years under the rule of the Malay sultanate, when it became one of the greatest ports in Asia, if not the world. However, it fell into European hands for more than 400 years after that: the Portuguese ruled for 130 years, the Dutch for 160 years and the British for 133 years. In 1948 it became part of the Federation of Malaya and gained her independence with the rest of the peninsula in 1957.

The other proposed heritage city is Penang which became a British possession in 1786 when Francis Light, a British country trader, was able to conclude a treaty with the Sultan of Kedah for the East India Company. Penang became the first leg for the British to set themselves into peninsular Malaysia, and was intended to be a British naval base and a trading centre.

Situated at the northern end of the Straits of Melaka, it could challenge the Dutch in the south. Light was very hopeful of Penang as he had earlier indicated in his letter to his company, Jourdain, Sullivan and De Souza, "... European ships can easily stop there.

There is plenty of wood, water and provisions; there they may be supplied with tin, pepper, beetle-nut, rattans, birds-nests; . and the Macao ships will be glad to stop there, and all other vessels passing through the streights may be as easily supplied as at Malacca [by the Dutch]..."[1] Indeed it soon became a metropolitan city when people from all over the world were allowed to settle in and trade with Penang. In the earlier stage it was ruled by the British as a Presidency from Bengal under the East India Company, and became part of the Straits Settlements since 1826 together with Melaka and Singapore.

As in Melaka, Penang was made part of the Federation of Malaya in 1948 which gained its independence in 1957.

## **The Foundation of Heritage Cities**

Melaka and Penang have left behind historical legacies that deserve to be recognised by the World Heritage Convention. Melaka fits criteria 24(a)(iv) indicating the depth of layers of history in Melaka dating back from the 14th century to the present, and Georgetown in Penang fits in criteria (v) which acknowledges the breadth of typical traditional urban fabric and vital traditional activities that still remains.

However, it is the multi-cultural population of both the cities of Melaka and Penang today, that make them unique. They are the result of hundreds of years of history.

## **Melaka “ The Historical City”**

Today Melaka is officially known as The Historical City (Bandar Bersejarah) because the histories of the Malays are said to have started from here. Founded at the end of the 14th century by Parameswara, a prince from the declining Srivijaya empire in Sumatra, it became one of the largest entrepot in Southeast Asia by the beginning of the 15th century.

Being strategically placed at one of the narrowest spots on the Straits of Melaka and geographically blessed as the area where the northeast and southwest monsoons met, it became a favourite port of call by traders from India, the Middle East, China, the mainland Southeast Asian states and the surrounding Malay archipelago. From the 15th century onwards Europeans also began to ply the Melaka Straits. It provided them with fresh water and the harbour was situated such that it could easily be defended from any attacks.

The deep harbour also served as the door to export goods from the rich hinterland, such as gold from Pahang and tin from neighbouring districts. Melaka had a well administered government and had enjoyed comparatively long periods of peace. Its economic success was based on the roles of international traders. A strong tradition was then set during this period. The famous Melaka Maritime Laws were introduced to ensure the rights of ships' captains and their crew.

There were four different ports, each headed by a harbour master or Syahbandar. The most important was the one in charge of ships from Gujarat, followed by the one in charge of those from other parts of India, Burma and north Sumatra. The third was in charge of ships from islands Southeast Asia, and the last but not least was in charge of ships from China and Indo-China. People from different lands had to stay even if only for a few months while waiting for the respective monsoons to bring them home.

Thus various ethnic groups from the Chinese, Indian, the Malay archipelago, Siamese, Burmese, Indo-Chinese, Arab communities were gathered in this port city germinating the existence of a multi-cultural society that today becomes one of the outstanding features of the general Malaysian population. It was said that at the height of the Melaka period more than 80 different languages were spoken on the streets of Melaka. Melaka trade dealt with spices from the islands of Moluku and Banda, textiles from Gujarat, Coromandel, Malabar and Bengal in India.

These were exchanged for aromatics, corals, pearls, gold, silver and other exotic goods from the East and West, such as Chinese porcelain and silk or perfumes from the Red Sea. About 2 000 ships were reported to anchor at Melaka at any one time. The prosperity of Melaka was enhanced by her relationship with the Ming Dynasty whose patronage was well-sought after by most rulers in island Southeast Asia. Official visits were exchanged annually by both parties, led by the newly installed sultans from Melaka or officials of the Chinese court. Two of the most famous of the latter were Yin Ch'ing and the outward looking Moslem Commander, Cheng Ho.

Melaka also became the centre of Islam especially after the sultans became converted. Since then this religion became synonymous with the Malays themselves. The religion spread through conversions, marriages, conquests and trade. The Arabic script, being the script of the Quran, was adopted as the official script for the Malay language which had long been the lingua franca of the region. The Melaka Canon or Hukum Kanun Melaka, the first written laws and order of the state and written in this script, became the basis of state laws of other Malay states in the peninsula.

Malay traditions, especially on the religion, language, administration and customs were born in Melaka. Some remnants of the Malay period still exist in an old Malay burial ground In Jalan Masjid Tanah, just outside Trendak Camp. This burial ground was said to date back to the 15th century. An imposing grave that remains was said to belong to one of the legendary Malay warriors, Hang Jebat, Hang Kasturi or Hang Lekiu. Two and a half miles outside Melaka and situated at Kampong Duyong is another artefact connected with another renown Malay legend of the 15th century, the Hang Tuah' well, which is near one of the oldest mosques in Melaka.

Another place with a legend behind it is Bukit China or China Hill. Bukit China was said to be presented to the retinue of the Chinese princess Hong Lim Poh who became one of Sultan Mansur's consorts. At the foot of the hill is a well dug for the Raja, hence the name, the Raja's Well or Perigi Raja. The Chinese called it Sam Po's Well after the name of Admiral Cheng Ho who was also known as Sam Po. They believed the water became purer after the visit of the famous admiral. Because of the water which never dried up, the Dutch walled it up for protection and preservation. 2] IV. Melaka and Portuguese

Legacy (paragraph 29 (iv)) Melaka's glory under the Malay sultans ended in 1511, when the Portuguese captured the the 'fabulous eastern empire', under the command of Alfonso de Albuquerque. The new conquerors had already heard about the wealth of Melaka and how its control could also make Portugal a new power to be reckoned with in Europe. About Melaka a Portuguese had once said, "Whosoever holds Malacca, had his hands on the throat of Venice". [3] The Portuguese then quickly built A Famosa, the fort that surrounded the present St.

Paul's Hill. Hundreds of workmen, slaves and captives were said to have been used to build the fortress made of stones from broken down mosques and tombs of nobles. Within the walls were the Governor's palace, the Bishop's palace, the Government's Council chambers, several churches, two hospitals, a monastery and a prison. The fortress had successfully defended Melaka from enemy attacks until it fell into Dutch hands in 1641. Catholicism was introduced to the locals during the Portuguese rule. A famous French Jesuit St. Francis Xavier "Apostle of the Indies", started St.

Paul's College in Melaka in 1548. On another hill opposite China Hill, the Portuguese also built a chapel dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and the hill was thus named after him, St. John's Hill, or Bukit Senjuang (the corrupted Malay name for the hill). The date of the construction is not known. Celebrations commemorating St. John is carried out here on 23rd June every year with much gaiety and music.

## **Melaka and Dutch Legacy**

In 1641 the Dutch took Melaka from the Portuguese after a five-month siege.

Many of the buildings within the fort were damaged or destroyed and the suburbs were in ruins. The Dutch quickly restored A Famosa which was then renamed Porta de Santiago. On it was engraved the coat of arms of the United East India Company and the date 1670. Between 1760s and 1770s the Dutch built another fort on St. John's Hill. [4] It used to be armed with eight cannons. Under the Dutch, Melaka ceased to be the emporium that it was before, because the new conquerors gave more importance to Batavia (Jakarta) as the capital of the Dutch empire in the East.

But trade at Melaka continued, and here the Dutch spread their Protestant missionary works and established Christ Church on Jalan Gereja in 1753, the oldest Protestant church in Malaysia. It was built of red bricks especially imported from Holland. It had tall slender windows with arched heads, massive walls and heavy wooden ceiling beams. Today devotees still use the original wooden pews during Sunday prayers. Although the Catholics were persecuted by the Dutch, a Catholic St. Peter's Church, was allowed to be built in 1710 on a piece of land given by the government to a Dutch convert.

It is situated at the present Jalan Bendahara in the Bunga Raya district. The church bell dated 1608 was apparently taken from a church which was destroyed by the Dutch during the early period of their rule. This became the oldest Catholic church in Malaysia built on a mixture of oriental and western architecture. St. Paul's College which was founded by St. Francis Xavier during the Portuguese, however, was not spared. The Dutch used it as part of the fort and later as a burial ground for high ranking Dutch personalities.

The former Governor's residence was converted into the red terracotta Stadthuys (Government House) in 1650 and was made the home of the  
<https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>



Dutch Governor and his retinue. It had a beautiful balcony that faced Christ Church. It contained large rooms, one of which had a beautifully carved ceiling. The upper floor was once used as the Court of Justice, and the lower floor partly for the fire service and partly for the main military guard. At the back was an attractive patio that might have led to the Bishop's palace of the Portuguese period. Today it becomes the Melaka Historical Museum.

## **Melaka and British Legacy**

The Dutch ruled Melaka until 1795 when it was handed over to the British during the Napoleonic wars when the Dutch king had to take refuge in England. It was agreed, however, that it would be returned to the Dutch when the wars were over, which was in 1818. It was during this interim period that the fortification in Melaka was destroyed. The Melaka British Resident William Farquhar, under the instruction of the Penang Council, started to effectively level down “.. the whole of the fortifications, arsenals, store houses and public buildings of all denominations in Melaka except Bukit China and St.

John's Hill. ”[5] Penang which at this time was beginning to expand as a trading centre did not want Melaka to rival it when the Dutch returned after the Napoleonic wars. Thus the famous local writer, Abdullah Abdul Kadir Munsyi, noted sadly in his journal, “ The Fort was the pride of Melaka, and after its destruction the place lost its glory like a woman bereaved of her husband, the lustre gone from her face... The old order is destroyed, a new world is created, and all around us is changed. ” [6] The only part that remained of A Famosa and Porta de Santiago was the gate which now still stands.

Further destruction was stopped by the agent of the East India Company, Thomas Stamford Raffles, who happened to be visiting Melaka at this time. His report on Melaka to the East India Company that, "...Its name carries more weight to a Malay ear than any new settlement could,"[7] and indeed, "...with the assistance of Malacca, the whole of the Malay rajahs in the Straits and to the Eastward might be rendered not only subservient but if necessary tributary",[8] was almost prophetic in relation to later expansion of British influence in the Malay States.

A significant landmark that the British left in Melaka before the Dutch took it back was the establishment of Anglo Chinese College in 1818. It was the brain-child of Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China, who had failed to make any headway in that imperial country, but used Melaka "for the diffusion of Christianity" and also for "the reciprocal cultivation of Chinese and European culture." [9] Most of the students were children from Melaka-born Chinese, as well as Indian and Malay.

The college which stood on a piece of land given to the London Missionary Society was just outside the Trankerah gate. Although the contribution of the college in education was unquestionable, in 1843 the London Missionary Society sold it for private purposes because it decided to move its activities to Hong Kong. In the same decade, however, a twin-towered Gothic Church dedicated to St. Francis Xavier by the French Father P. Fabre, was built on part of the Portuguese ruins to continue with the Christian missionary works.

### **The Melaka People – The Living Heritage**

Although the population of Melaka had been multi cultural since the Sultanate period, new communal groups that emerged as the result of <https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>

cultural and socialmetamorphosismake them unique. They were the Peranakan Chinese or Baba, the Chitty and the Portuguese Peranakan. The Baba community practised a culture which is a syncretism of Chinese and Malay culture. It was not the result of inter-marriages for they segregated strictly among themselves. [10] They spoke Baba Malay, and the women wore Malay costume and jewellery. The majority were Buddhists but some became Christians.

They dominated the Tranquerah district and Jalan Tan Cheng Lock. Today they lean more towards the Chinese culture. The Chitty were the Melaka born Indians who might have immigrated in the 16th century as traders and inter-married with the local women. They spoke Malay but remained staunch Hindu. They built Hindu temples and shrines. [11] The last group is the descendents of Portuguese settlers who came during the Portuguese rule. They had inter-married with local women but remained staunch Catholics. They spoke an archaic and highly localised Portuguese called Cristao.

In 1933 an 11-hectare land was allotted for this community at Ujong Pasir where the people could preserve their traditions and customs which they continue to celebrate, such as the Natal or Christmas, singing the carols and dancing the branyo. [12] Festa de San Pedro a celebration honouring St. Peter, the patron of the fishermen, most of whose members are from this community, is held on 29th June every year. On this day their boats are well decorated and are blessed by the local priests. Easter is always celebrated at St. Peter's Church on Jalan Bendahara.

Here, too, the Palm Sunday and Good Friday are celebrated by a life-sized statue of Christ being borne in a procession around the church. As in other

<https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>

parts of Malaysia, the Malays are synonymous with Islam and identified with their mosques. Although Islam already existed in Melaka in the 14th century, one of the oldest mosques that still remains is the Tranquerah Mosque which might have been built in the early 1820s. It is in the grounds of this mosque that Sultan Hussein, who signed the cession of Singapore to the British in 1819, was buried.

The mosque which is strongly influenced by Achehnese style of the period, has pyramid roofs and Islamic designs and motifs. Another mosque that denotes Melaka's rich cultural heritage is the Kampung Keling Mosque at Jalan Tukang Emas. Also built in Sumatran style, it has pyramid roof and pagoda-like minaret, white glazed Portuguese tiles and Victorian chandelier. One of the significant landmarks of the Chinese community in Melaka is the Cheng Hoon Teng temple (the Abode of the Green Merciful Clouds), which could be the oldest Chinese temple in Malaysia.

Situated in Temple Street in the heart of Melaka, was founded by Li Wei King or Li Kup at the beginning of the Dutch period. He was a Chinese refugee who escaped from the Manchus and was the first Kapitan China in Melaka. The temple has undergone renovations and expansion by different Chinese community leaders at different times. Today it also houses Kwan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, and several other deities. The building is based on intricate Chinese architecture, whose roof ridges and eaves are decorated with exquisite Chinese mythical figures, animals, birds and flowers of coloured glass or porcelain. 13] The Indians, most of whom are Hindus, are also identified by the house of worship. Their oldest temple is Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi which was built in the late 18th century. The temple which

stands at Jalan Tukang Emas, have deities which are invoked by devotees for their aids before starting new businesses, occupying a new house, performing marriages or funerals.

## **The Living Cultures of the City of Penang (Georgetown)**

A local writer in 1986 wrote a piece of poetry which describes the people of Penang, thus:

Notes On My Native Land  
To this corner of the world came  
People from China and India  
From Indonesia and Europe  
Some of the people Adopted local ways  
They spoke Malay Dressed Malay  
But still kept their customs  
Others stuck to their ways  
While firmly planting A foot on Malaysian soil  
The alchemy worked  
And today we have a nation  
That is a kaleidoscope  
Of many things and many people  
We all belong to this fabric  
Having each lent a stitch  
To make up a whole  
Now we invite the world  
To see this tapestry.

David Lazarus, 1986. This poetry which is printed on a board in the vestibule of the Penang Museum is the first thing that one sees as soon as one enters the main building indicating the main theme of the museum display. This also sums up what the people of Penang are. Penang began to attract traders from all over the world. As it was accorded the status of a free port it grew steadily and within a few years its trade and population increased. True to Light's prediction, it was able to outgrow the position of Melaka.

And as in Melaka, people from all over the world, from India, China, the Middle East, Europe, island and mainland Southeast Asia, and the Malay archipelago thronged the city. The core area of Georgetown nominated to be placed as a Heritage City covers 108. 97 ha. (269. 27 ac). Here Penang's

history and its character are displayed by the historic buildings as well as by the real daily routines of its people. It has outstanding universal values that fit in with the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention relating to historic urban areas as stated in paragraphs 27(ii) and 29(iv).

Paragraph 27(ii) is, “ historic towns which are still inhabited and which, by their very nature, have developed and will continue to develop under the influence of socio-economic and cultural change, a situation that renders the assessment of the authenticity more difficult and any conservation policy more problematic. ” Under 29(iv) it states “ Sectors, areas, or isolated units which, even in the residual state in which they have survived, provide coherent evidence of the character of a historic town which has disappeared.

In such cases surviving areas and buildings should bear sufficient testimony to the former whole.

## **The Penangites**

The living cultures of the people in Penang today bear testimony of the living cultures of the past generations. In 1998 the Penang Town and Country Planning Department Director, Mohamed Jamil Ahmad strongly acknowledged the living cultures of Penang as having, “... multicultural influences. It is a unique melting pot of Indian, British, Armenian, Chinese, Malay, Acehnese, Thai, Burmese and Arab. It is an old trading port that contains one of the largest ensemble of multicultural buildings and landmarks in the world. ”[14] These zones consist of early suburban residential townhouses, known for their eclectic architecture, commercial centres, the waterfront, religious and clan houses.

<https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>

More than 100 years earlier an avid British traveler and writer, Isabella Bird, had given an almost identical description of Penang “ As one lands on Pinang one is impressed even before reaching the shore by the blaze of colour in the costumes of the crowds which throng the jetty. About the people she said, “ The sight of the Asiatics who have crowded into Georgetown is a wonderful one, Chinese, Burmese, Javanese, Arabs, Malays, Sikhs, Madrassesees, Klings, Chuliahs, and Parsees, and still they come in junks and steamers and strange Arabian craft, and all get a living, depend slavishly on no one, never lapse into pauperism, retain their own dress, customs and religion, and are orderly. [15]This description does not seem to defer from the observation of Sir George Leith, the Lieutenant Governor of Penang in the early 1800’s, who succinctly described the situation, “ There is not, probably, any part of the world, where, in so small a space, so many different people are assembled together, or so a great a variety of languages spoken. ”[16]

## **The Relics**

Perhaps the easiest way to appreciate Penang’s wealth of cultures and historical sites is by following its historical trail.

As soon as Francis Light occupied Penang in 1786, he built a fort at Tanjung Penaga that faces the sea front of the Esplanade. It took him 5 years to complete it and named it Fort Cornwallis after the Governor of the East India Company. Originally the fort was made of gabions (cylindrical baskets filled with earth) then with nibong trunks supported by bulwarks and mounted with canons, the most famous is the Seri Rambai. Next to it Light, who was later appointed by the East India Company as the Superintendent of the island, built a low bungalow and a kitchen meant for his use.

<https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>

All these were later combined to form the fort which underwent several constructions. Impressive renovations were done in early 1800s especially by the chief engineer and surveyor, Captain Thomas Robertson, under the auspices of Governor Norman Macalister. In 1820 granite was heaped on the seaward side to prevent erosion, but today it has a frontal road, Jalan Tun Syed Sheh Barakbah. In the early period the expansion of Penang seemed to have emanated from here.

### **West Meets East (the Living Tradition)**

At the back of the Fort is Light Street, the first street in Penang named after Francis Light.

Several other streets were opened to accommodate Penang's expansion, especially for the British officials and traders who were here. As indicated by the names of streets close by, the Christians began to set up churches. Bishop Street was named after the French priest, Arnold Garnault, who first set up the Assumption Church in 1787. He was then the Bishop of Bangkok. This church was built on Farquhar Street (named after one of the Lieutenant Governors of Penang) which is on the western end of Light Street. It was in Bishop Street that Francis Light then built a large house for the Bishop, hence the name.

Only in 1860 was the Assumption Church built on the present basilica layout. In 1817 an Anglican church, the St. George Church, was then built at the junction of Pitt Street (named after the then Prime Minister of Britain) and Farquhar Street by the East India Company chaplain, Rev. Robert Sparke Hutchings. Pitt Street runs from north to south at right angle with Light Street and parallel with Farquhar Street. This church which was completed a <https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>



year later, was based on classical colonial style with a Greek style porch. Its dignified facade and graceful columns “ speak to the eye of the artist. [17] Just as the Christian missionaries were keen to spread their religion through the churches, they were also bent to educate the varied local population with western education. The English schools that they set up slowly attracted local families, especially the established ones, such as the Straits Chinese, better known as the Babas or Peranakan. [18] The children were sent to such schools, spoke very good English, some became government officers and other professionals. They showed strong tendencies to adopt the Malaysian homeland.

One of the first missionaries responsible for introducing English schools, was the same Rev. Robert Sparke Hutchings. He had initiated the building for the Penang Free School which was to educate boys from all creed or class. The school which started temporarily at Love Lane was moved to a permanent building on a piece of land adjoining St. George’s Church at Church Square at Farquhar Street. It was built by Captain R. Smith of the Royal Engineers and was opened in 1821. It was based on a classic Renaissance architecture which has symmetrical arches, debased columns, pilasters and twin decorative domes on the roof.

This school was responsible for producing some of the most prominent local personalities. [19] During the war it was bombed and only half of the original building remains. It has been renovated and now houses the Penang State Museum. Some 30 years later, in 1852, a convent was set up at Light Street by Rev. Mother St. Mathilde. It was the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus School, popularly known as the Convent Light Street. [20] The main building

which was acquired from the Government House has corniced reception rooms and broad arcades that faced the sea.

It served as a boarding house, an orphanage and a school. Both boy and girl orphans were taken in, until the boys reached 11 years when they left to join the nearby St. Xavier's Free School as full boarders. [21] Slowly the school began to add an elegant Gothic chapel with stained glass windows specially commissioned from France. Then new wings for classrooms were added as the demand to educate girls increased. Today it still serves as one of the most progressive schools for girls in the state. In 1852, too, another boys' school was set up at Bishop Street, just across the Light Street Convent.

The St. Xavier's Free School, today known as the St. Xavier Institution (SXI), was founded by the Paris Foreign Mission Society Superior Father V. M. Beurel. It was their first mission school in the Far East. Although its main aim was initially to provide education for the poor, children from established local families were also sent there. In 1889 the Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Cecil Clementi, introduced a Queen's Scholarship to the best students who excelled at the Senior Cambridge School Certificate examination. Fourteen of these awards were won by students from this school. [22] The recipients were sent to the best universities in the United Kingdom to further their studies. Many became successful professionals and leaders. Today the SXI remains as one of the most prominent schools in the country. Obviously English education was becoming more popular. Some 30 years later after the SXI was opened, another girl school was established. It was initiated by Mrs. Biggs, the wife of another chaplain, Rev. L. Courtier

Biggs. This was the St. George's Girls School which was situated on the northern beach at Farquhar Street and was officiated in 1885.

It was a double-storey bungalow based on Malay-colonial style surrounded by airy verandahs and stables on the side. [23] Classes were conducted on the ground floor while the second floor was occupied by the principal and some boarders. In 1920 the school was moved to another bigger premise at Northam Road (today's Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah) as the number of girls receiving education here increased. The original bungalow was maintained as a boarding house. Today it houses the State Welfare Office.

## **Entrenching the Traditions**

Christianity and western education were not the only culture introduced in Penang.

The Chinese population which had begun to grow had their own practices. A large number of them was at first brought in by Francis Light as masons and bricklayers. They settled around the site that was then named China Street which is parallel to Church Street. Besides masons and bricklayers, other Chinese traders and merchants also began to settle near here, for example in Pitt Street. In 1800 a large group of the Hokkien and Cantonese communities who settled here built a temple of their own, called the Kwan Yin Temple (The Goddess of Mercy Temple).

It was also sponsored by Chinese from Melaka and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. [24] Its massive roof was guarded by two guardian dragons while the front was guarded by two lion figures. Inside was a 40- foot square hall which housed the Kwan Yin, the Patroness of Virgins associated with rites of

fertility, peace and good fortune. Even today it is invoked daily but especially celebrated on the 19th day of the 2nd, 6th and 9th months of the Chinese lunar calendar. Devotees offer food, flowers, oil and burn incense or joss sticks to seek consolation for various illnesses.

In contrast with the Christian churches, this temple was decorated with ancient Chinese artwork and architecture. The Indians who also came in large numbers to Penang in 1780s, were first imported as labourers, shipbuilders, and deckhands who worked at the waterfront. Soon they were joined by traders, merchants and chettiers. The Hindu followers which had numbered about 1, 000 at this time, felt that they had to build a temple for their daily worship. In 1801, a piece of land was granted by the government to one, Bette Lingam Chetty, to build the Arulmigu Mahamariamman. 25] This temple had undergone several renovations and expansion, the major one was made in 1933. It is a temple which was built in accordance with the Saiva agamas with an ante chamber (Artha Mandapam), a hall (mahamandapam), circumambient (pragaram), dome (vimanam), surrounding walls, and entrance tower (Rajagopuram). This is situated at Queen Street, which is on the east of and parallel to Pitt Street. It is from this temple, that the celebration of the Thaipusam starts every year. This is a celebration when good overcomes evil, when goodness symbolised by the goddess Mariamman, is brought out from the temple on a chariot that proceeds through Queen Street, Church Street and King Street to the Esplanade near Fort Cornwallis, where a priest shoots an arrow into the air to symbolise the killing of the demon. The chariot then returns to Queen Street through Penang Street and Market Street. Thousands of devotees follow the

procession and give her offerings. [26] Every year the procession becomes bigger and longer as this day is declared a public holiday in Penang, and the number of devotees has also increased. To the south of Queen Street is Chulia Street.

Majority of the people who lived here were Indian Muslims from the Coromandel Coast in India. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Chulias were the second most dominant population in Penang, after the Malays. In 1820 there were 9, 000, and this number increased to 11, 000 in 1830. Although many of them were merchants and owners of property, there were others who were hack carriage runners and gharry drivers as well as boatmen and coolies. During her Penang visit in 1880s, Isabella Bird was impressed by Chulia Street which she said was entirely composed of Chulia and Kling bazaars. Each side walk is a rude arcade, entered by passing through heavy curtains, when you find yourself in a narrow, crowded passage, with deep or shallow recesses on one side, in which the handsome, brightly-dressed Klings sit on the floor, surrounded by their bright-hued goods; and over one's head and all down the narrow, thronged passage, noisy with business, are hung Malay bandanas, red turban cloths, red sarongs in silk and cotton, and white and gold sprinkled muslin, the whole length of the very long bazaar, blazing with colour, and picturesque beyond description with beautiful costume. [27] Today, 200 years later, the scene changes little. Amidst the sound of Indian music, the scents of perfumes mixed with the smell of curry and spices whiff through Chulia Street. Interspersed between the stores that sell colourful sarees, and other

clothings, as well as carpets from India, Pakistan, the Middle East and China, there are also stores of famed Indian jewelers and money-changers.

There are also the famous nasi kandar stores where one can buy rice topped with more than a dozen gourmet of one's choice, to be eaten with ais bandung (iced water with syrup and milk), or teh tarik (milked tea that is poured from a mug to another at a space of about three to four feet). The British had correctly nicknamed this area as " Little Madras". [28] But Chulia Street does not merely house economic activities of the Indian community alone. Several mosques were also built here. They were Masjid Bahudi Bohra and Masjid Jamek Alimshah.

Some Chinese associations, such as the United Association of Cantonese Districts, also built their imposing headquarters here. So, too, were the Nam Hooi Kam Association, the Teowchoo Merchant Association, and the Teowchoo kongsi. Not far from Chulia Street, and at Pitt Street, is where the Temple of the Goddess of Mercy stands. Now this street is renamed Jalan Mesjid kapitan Kling where the Kapitan Kling Mosque stands. It was built following an Anglo-Indian architecture, with domes and turrets. The interior aisles are formed by series of horseshoe arches, crowned with King Edward's plumes.

The five-time daily call for prayer by the muazzin from the minarets of this mosque further enlivens the living scenery of this part of the city of Penang. The mosque was built in 1801 by Kader Mydin Marican who was appointed by the Lieutenant Governor as Kapitan Kling or head of the Indian community. [29] As the head of his people, he was assigned the duties to regulate civil and religious ceremonies. Inter-marriages between Indians and

<https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>

Malays were frequent, and the generations produced a community that spoke Malay and followed the Malay culture. They were popularly known as the Jawi Pekan or Jawi Peranakan.

Today they have become so absorbed into the Malay culture that they are no longer called Jawi Pekan or Jawi Peranakan but are called Malays, although the Indian physical features of having sharp nose and tanned skin still remain strong. The Kapitan Kling Mosque had undergone several renovations and extensions, but retained its main structures of onion shaped domes and pitched roof. Major Islamic functions are conducted here, such as the celebration of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, the first of Muharram (the Islamic New Year), and the 10th day of Muharram (commemoration of the death of Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad).

Parallel to and on the west of Chulia Street are Armenian Street and Acheh Street or Acheen Street as it is more popularly known to the locals. At the beginning of the 19th century, the area between these two latter streets were dominated by traders of Arab and Achenese descent. It was the focal point of the first Muslim urban parish and the earliest centre of Achenese spice traders and Malay entrepreneurs in Penang. The leader, Tengku Syed Hussein Al-Aidid who was married to a member of the Achenese royal family, built the first Malay mosque, Masjid Melayu or Masjid Jame' on Acheen Street.

This was distinct from the Kapitan Kling Mosque on Pitt Street. Its minaret was octagonal, which followed the 16th century Moghul architecture common in old mosques in Acheh. It was also influenced by some western style especially in the wooden transoms, the stucco work and the round brick

<https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>

columns in the outer aisles. [30] Next to the mosque he built his tomb which was covered with timber and Islamic calligraphy. The gravestones were intricately carved in Achehnese style. Surrounding the mosque were Malay urban homes of half timber, half brick and terracotta tiles.

Some of these homes also served as offices of the Qadi, Jeddah Ticket Agency for Muslim pilgrimage to Mekah and rest houses for the pilgrims. Consonant with the need to spread Islam, the community leaders also set up madrasah Al Quran (Quranic school) on the same street to teach the religion to local children. Armenian Street was also known for the pepper trading among the Arab-Achenese and Chinese. Their relationship was not limited to only trading but also to other social and political activities. It was believed that many of them were also members of the Red Flag or Hai San Secret Society, that were based at the Masjid Melayu.

One of their leaders was Syed Mohamed Alatas who built the Alatas Mansion at a junction between Acheen Street and Armenian Street. This mid-nineteenth century building of Indo-Malay style was surrounded by a brick wall and two gates that were accessible from both the streets. Its porch was paved with terracota tiles and the gable roof was decorated with Islamic motifs. Today the building which had undergone some renovations is used as the office for the Penang Heritage Centre. Alatas also had another building which became a landmark for pepper traders in Penang.

This was his four-storey spice godown and office popularly called Rumah Tinggi (tall house) by the local people because it was the highest building at that time. This building which was also known as Kuan Lau or Small-Tower junction by the Chinese, stands on Beach Street which runs on the east of <https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>



and at right angle with Armenian Street and Acheen Street. Acheen Street and Armenian Street were typical examples of a multi-cultural section of Georgetown where people of various communities lived side by side and intermarriages were not uncommon.

One of Alatas' wives was one of the daughters of a very wealthy Hokkien pepper trader in Penang and Sumatra. He was Khoo Tiang Poh who had presented his " Khoo Poh Villa" at the corner of Acheen Street and Carnavon Street to his Muslim son-in-law. Today it houses the Li Teik Seah School. Khoo Tiang Poh also had a bungalow on Acheen Street which later became the premises of Bangkok Hotel. [31] The Cheah kongsi which was founded in the 1820s also had their kongsi house on Armenian Street. The piece of land which was donated by its founder, Cheah Eam, added a temple building of Malay, Chinese, European and Straits' Chinese styles in 1873.

This two-storey temple has an upper porch enclosed by wrought iron grills decorated with wood carvings. The lower porch which was renovated in 1930s was guarded by two lion heads. The wide courtyard in the front provides an airy atmosphere for people who come to perform ancestral worship, and other functions. Also on Armenian Street was built the Tua Pek Kong Temple which was dedicated to the God of Prosperity. It was founded by Khoo Teng Pang in 1844 and was also used as a base for the Tua Pek Kong triad or the Khian Tek Society. It was an important headquarters for the Straits Chinese.

After 1890 when secret societies were banned by the government, this triad became a Hokkien kongsi consisting of several clans, such as the Khoo, Cheah, Lim, Tan and Yeoh, which built clan houses close by. Starting from <https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>

that year and since then annually, they organised a ch'ng panh (decorated stage) procession accompanied by the very colourful chingay featuring towering triangular flags. This procession which took place on the 14th day of the Chinese New Year, carried the Tua Pek Kong and the more than 200-year old incense urn from the Armenian Street temple to the Son Pearl Temple in Tanjong Tokong.

There were also other clan houses on Armenian Street such as, the Moh Hun Association or the Teowchoo Social club, the Yap kongsi headed by Yeap Chor Ee, and a house which used to be the base for Dr. Sun Yat Sen whenever he was in Penang to plan his political strategies in China. Situated between Armenian and Acheh Streets, at Cannon Square, is the elegant Khoo Kongsi temple. The piece of land where it stands was bought in 1851. The Khoo clan started building the temple in 1894 and completed it in 1902. 32] Other sub-lineages of the Khoo clan built separate temples, such as the grand Boon San Tong Khoo Kongsi at Victoria Street, and the Khoo Si Toon Keng Tong which occupies a shoplots at Beach Street. The main Khoo Kongsi at Cannon Square which was surrounded by over 20 clan dwellings, is very impressive for its intricate architecture. The “ double imperial” roof decorations were constructed from shards cut out from colourful ceramic bowls, and the ancestral hall was decorated with woods carved by specialist artisans. Religious and family functions used to be held here for it had a meeting room, a large reception hall and kitchen.

Today it holds only three gatherings annually. They are to celebrate the Cheng Beng (Chinese All Souls' Day) or the Hungry Ghosts, when the descendants come to the clan temple to worship their ancestors; a reunion

ceremony during the Tang Chi (Winter Solstice); and an awards ceremony usually held to honour Khoos who have graduated from a tertiary education or who have gained public recognition.

## **The Former Whole**

The expansion of Georgetown seemed to grow naturally. The waterfront which was the busiest commercially, was constructed with wharves, godowns and offices.

Weld Quay was the main street that greeted ships, tongkang, boats and ferries that carried passengers from the mainland. Colonial style two-storey brick buildings with arches dominated this area. They housed European companies, such as the Messrs. Behn, Meyer & Co. , German shipping agents, general importers and tin refiners. Parallel to Weld Quay, and on the inner side of the city, is Beach Street which was an extension of the port area. The western part was mainly occupied by Asian (Chinese, Malay and Indian) forwarding agents, traders, market sellers, metalsmiths, cargo handlers and shipyard workers.

The buildings were normally smaller. Only Gedung Aceh was four-storey high. The eastern side of the street was more dominated by European companies, and banks, such as the Standard Chartered Bank and the Algemene Bank Nederland (ABN Bank). An adjacent block of buildings that was built later housed the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. Adjacent to these latter buildings were the Government offices, first of the East India Company, and later of the Straits Settlements. They were called the “ Government’s Quadrangle” built on King Edward Place. The ground floor used to house the Post Office.

<https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>

Now it houses the State Religious Department on one side, which still retains the original building, and the Penang Malay Chamber of Commerce on the other, which underwent a complete renovation because it was bombed during the Japanese occupation. King Edward Place ends with the Victoria Memorial Clock Tower. This tower now stands on a small round-about that opens to Beach Street on its west, Light Street on its north, Jalan Tun Syed Sheh Barakbah on its east and the eastern end of Weld Quay on its south. The Tower was built by a prominent Chinese business man, Cheah Chen Eok, to commemorate the Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897.

Although the Clock Tower is small compared to the buildings at Beach Street, it remains prominent because of its strategic position. It will be one of the first monuments that can be seen by ferry passengers to the island.

## **Conclusion**

The cities of Melaka and Georgetown are both very rich in their cultural heritage. The people are the living proof of a unique multicultural population, the consequence of centuries of history, that are shown from the living cultures and abodes, the architecture, the languages, and daily routines.

They are thoroughly mixed yet not completely blended, much like the rojak, a popular local mixed fruit salad in sweet, slightly hot thick sauce, where the taste of the different fruits is still maintained, but on the whole becomes different because of the unique condiment that binds all in it. The people of both Melaka and Penang, though dominated by Malays, Indians, Chinese as distinct communities, yet there are also the unique historical offshoots of these communities that do not exist anywhere else (except perhaps in Singapore). They are the Peranakan Chinese, Indian, Portuguese and Arab.  
<https://assignbuster.com/historic-centres-of-melaka-and-penang-social-and-cultural-history/>

The most beautiful result of the historical phenomenon is that they all live together, side by side, doing their own things, maintaining their own religions and customs and also enjoying everybody's cuisine.

## **Bibliography**

1. Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, 1969. *The Hikayat Abdullah*. Annotated and translated by A. H. Hill. Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press.
2. Bird, Isabella, 1883 (first published in 1883). *The Golden Chersonese*. Introduction by Robin Hanbury Tenison. London, Century Publishing.
3. Choong Kwee Kim, "In Good Hands" *The Star*, 5. 2. 2001
4. Clammer, John R. , 1979. *The Ambiguity of Identity: Ethnicity Maintenance and Change Among the Straits Chinese Community of Malaysia and Singapore*. ISEAS. Occasional Paper No. 54.
5. Clodd, Harold Park, 1948. *Malaya's First British Pioneer: The Life of Francis Light*. London, Luzac.
6. Fujimoto, Helen, 1988. *The South Indian Community and the Evolution of the Jawi Peranakan in Penang up to 1948*. Tokyo, ILCAA, Tokyo Gaokokugo Daigaku.
7. Harrison, Brian, 1985. *Holding the Fort: Melaka Under Two Flags, 1795-1845*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. Monograph No. 14.
8. *Waiting For China: The Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca, 1818-1843, and Early Nineteenth Century Missions*. Hong Kong.
9. Karathigesu, R. , "Mariamman's Temple" *Pulau Pinang*, Vol. 2, No. 6, pp. 42-44.
10. Khoo Su Nin, "The Red Belted School" *Pulau Pinang*, Vol. 2, No. 3. , 1990, pp. 10-11.

8. “ The Acheen Street Community: A Melting Pot of the Malay World”  
Pulau Pinang, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 22.
9. “ The Chariot Procession” Pulau Pinang, Vol. 2, No. 6, pp. 46-48.
10. Leith, George, 1804. A Short Account of the Settlement, Produce  
and Commerce of the Prince of Wales Island in the Straits of Malacca.  
London, J. Booth.
11. Malacca, 1986. The Times Travel Library, Singapore.
12. Meerah, N. , “ Old Tamil Place Names” Pulau Pinang, Vol. 1, No.  
5, 1989. Pp. 13-15.
13. New Straits Times, 4. 8. 1998. Ong Seng Huat, “ Temple On the  
Knoll” Pulau Pinang, Jan-Feb. 1989, pp. 24-29.
14. “ The Khoo Clan” Pulau Pinang, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1990, pp. 4-16.
15. Pintado, Manuel Joachim, 1980. A Stroll Through Anciet Malacca  
And A Glimpse At Her Historical Sites. Melaka, Loh Printing Press.
16. Rabeendran, R. , “ Ethno-Racial Marginality in West Malaysia:  
The Case of Peranakan Hindu Malacca or Malacca Chitty Community”
17. University of Malaya, n. d. Scott-Ross, Marcus, 1971. A Short  
History of Malacca. Singapore, Chopmen Enterprise. Tan Leh Sah, “  
Convent Light Stree” Pulau Pinang, Vol. 1, No. 6, 1989, pp. 24-26.
18. The Star, 24. 6. 1984; 8. 9. 1987. Wurtzburg, C. E. , 1984. Raffles  
of the Eastern Isles, Singapore, Oxford University Press.