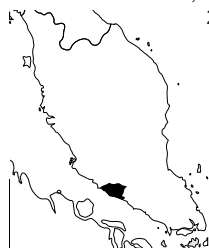


# Melaka



Back when Kuala Lumpur was a malaria-ridden swamp and Penang was yet to become the 'Pearl of the Orient,' Melaka was already one of the greatest trading ports in Southeast Asia. Over time it lost favour to Singapore and became a sleepy backwater compared with its high-rolling cousins, but today it's this lost-in-time feel that makes the place so charming.

It's still said that the soul of the country can be glimpsed through the city's mixed Malay, Chinese, Indian and European heritage and the serene *kampung* (villages) scattered among the state's tropical forests, farmlands and beaches. It's true: this is Malaysia's good side and it's no wonder Melaka has become one of the country's most popular destinations. The variations on traditional cuisine, including the famed Malay-Chinese Nonya food, are reason enough to visit and are a delicious way to experience the region's cultural diversity.

While the coastlines of Pulau Besar and Tanjung Bidara don't compare with the country's other beaches, partially due to the water quality of the Strait of Melaka (one of the world's busiest shipping routes), they do make a relaxing getaway or day trip from the state's capital. Other diversions away from the city are manufactured creations: the wildlife and theme park of Ayer Keroh and the golf course and water park of A'Famosa Resort.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Eating Chinese dim sum for breakfast, Nonya food for lunch and Pakistani tandoori for dinner at Melaka's **fabulous restaurants** (p249)
- Catching glimpses of old-time Melaka while leisurely wandering through historic **Chinatown** (p243)
- Snacking, perusing trinket stands and watching Dr Ho Eng Hui pummel his finger into a coconut at the **Jonker Walk Night Market** (p243)
- Feeling like a happy fool while rocking out to 80s dance hits in a wacky Melaka **trishaw** (p253)
- Imagining the past and all its intricacies at the **Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum** (p243)
- Watching freighters move down the Strait of Melaka while lounging on the white sands of **Tanjung Bidara** (p254)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 06

■ POPULATION: 759,000

■ AREA: 1652 SQ KM

## History

However the history of the city-state of Melaka is told, the story of the state is inseparable from that of the city for which it was named. Before the late 14th century, Melaka was a simple fishing village.

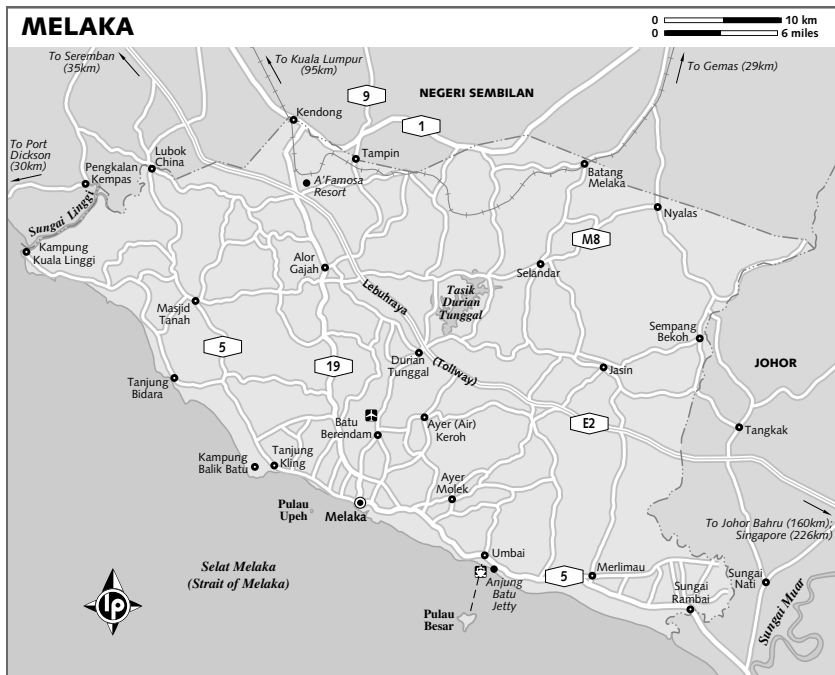
Parameswara, a Hindu prince from Sumatra, was the founder of Melaka (see the boxed text, opposite). Under Parameswara, the city became a favoured port for waiting out monsoons and resupplying trading ships plying the strategic Selat Melaka. Halfway between China and India, and with easy access to the spice islands of Indonesia, Melaka attracted merchants from all over the East.

In 1405 the Chinese Muslim Admiral Cheng Ho, the 'three-jewelled eunuch prince', arrived in Melaka bearing gifts from the Ming emperor and the promise of protection from Siamese enemies. Chinese settlers followed, who mixed with the local Malays to become known as the Baba and Nonya, the Peranakans or Straits Chinese (see the boxed text, p48). The longest-settled Chinese people in Malaysia, they grafted many Malay customs to their own heritage. By the time of

Parameswara's death in 1414, Melaka was a powerful trading state. Its position was consolidated by the state's adoption of Islam in the mid-15th century (see p31).

In 1509 the Portuguese came seeking the wealth of the spice and China trades, but after an initially friendly reception, the Melakans attacked the Portuguese fleet and took a number of prisoners. This prompted an outright assault by the Portuguese, and in 1511 Alfonso de Albuquerque took the city. Under the Portuguese, the fortress of A'Famosa was constructed, and missionaries strove to implant Catholicism. While Portuguese cannons could easily conquer Melaka, they could not force Muslim merchants from Arabia and India to continue trading there, and other ports in the area, such as Islamic Demak on Java, grew to overshadow Melaka.

The period of Portuguese strength in the East was short-lived, as Melaka suffered harrying attacks from the rulers of neighbouring Johor and Negeri Sembilan, as well as from the Islamic power of Aceh in Sumatra. Melaka declined further as Dutch influence in Indonesia grew and Batavia (modern-



### THE PIRATE PRINCE PARAMESWARA

Part legend and part fact, the story of the 14th-century Indonesian Prince Parameswara is the accepted tale of the founding of Melaka. Parameswara was said to be a direct descendent of Alexander the Great, and possessed semi-magical items, some of which were thought to be part of the treasures of Solomon.

After leaving Java and spending time using the island of Temasek (today's Singapore) as a base for his swashbuckling exploits, Parameswara and his faithful band of pirates were forced to flee their new city after an attack by the Siamese. They headed up the Malay Peninsula to the town of Muar in the Johor province, but were soon driven away by a particularly vicious band of monitor lizards. At another short stop, the refugee's freshly built fortress fell into ruins for no apparent reason, making them move on once more.

Not giving up, the group trudged further north and it was here that their luck would change. While hunting at the mouth of the Bertam river, Parameswara saw a white mouse-deer (*pelanduk*) kick one of his hunting dogs in its defence. The prince was so impressed by the valiant and courageous deer that he decided to build a new city on the spot. He asked one of his servants the name of the tree that was shading them and took the name to christen his town Melaka.

Parameswara later married a Muslim princess which consequently opened the doors of the faith to the rest of the peninsula.

day Jakarta) developed as the key European port of the region. Melaka passed into Dutch hands after an eight-month siege in 1641 and the Dutch ruled Melaka for about 150 years. Melaka again became the centre for peninsular trade, but the Dutch directed more energy into their possessions in Indonesia.

When the French occupied Holland in 1795, the British (as allies of the Dutch) temporarily assumed administration of the Dutch colonies. As traders, the British administrators were essentially opposed to the Dutch policy of trade monopoly and saw the potential for fierce rivalry in Malaysia between themselves and the Dutch. Accordingly, in 1807 they began demolishing the A'Famosa fortress and forcibly removing Melaka's Dutch population to Penang to prevent Melaka rivalling British Malayan centres if Dutch control was restored. Fortunately, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the far-sighted founder of Singapore, stepped in before these destructive policies went too far, and in 1824 Melaka was permanently ceded to the British in exchange for the Sumatran port of Bencoolen (Bengkulu today).

Melaka, together with Penang and Singapore, formed the Straits settlements, the three British territories that were the centres for later expansion into the peninsula. However, under British rule Melaka was eclipsed by other Straits settlements and then superseded by the rapidly growing commercial importance of Singapore. Apart from a brief upturn in the early 20th century when rubber

was an important crop, Melaka returned again to being a quiet backwater, patiently awaiting its renaissance as a tourist drawcard.

### Climote

The temperature in Melaka ranges from 21°C to 33°C and average humidity exceeds 82%. There is rain throughout the year, with September to November the wettest months.

### Getting There & Away

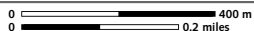
The Lebuhraya (North-South Highway), linking Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur, is the main route through the state. Express buses to KL and Singapore are plentiful and bus connections link with other peninsular destinations. Trains do not stop at Melaka but at Tampin, 38km north of town. Daily boats connect with Dumai in Sumatra. For detailed information on transport, see p252 and p253.

## MELAKA CITY

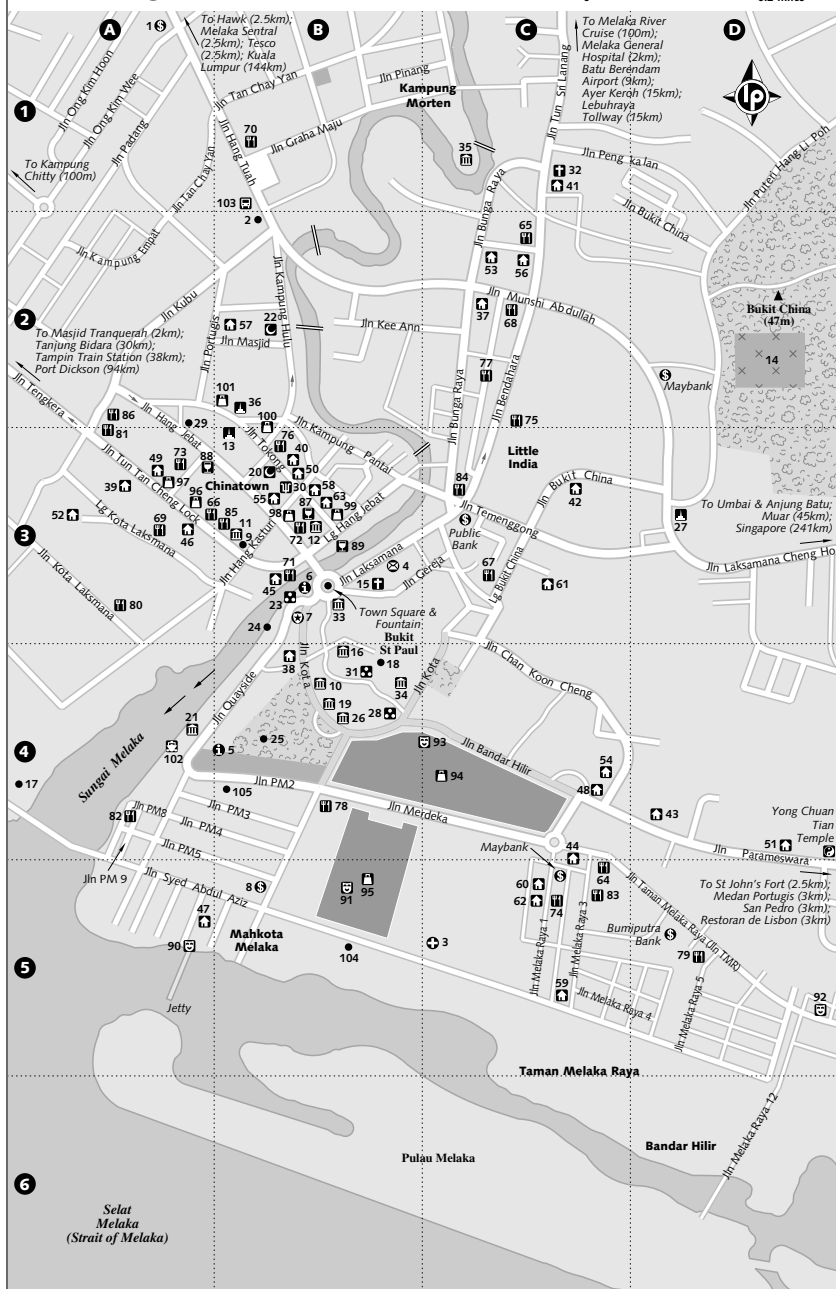
### 06

Melaka's Unesco World Heritage Site status, granted in 2008, sealed the town's claim as one as Malaysia's hottest tourist destinations and the development that has ensued is mind-boggling. Unfortunately, as Elizabeth Cardoso of Badan Warisan (see the boxed text, p99) has put it, development so far has mainly come from 'a perceived need to deliver "products" for tourists rather than work to protect the Outstanding

# MELAKA CITY



MELAKA



Universal Values for which the site has been inscribed, ie the living cultural heritage of the local communities'. There is still plenty of charm in Chinatown, which is best represented by its resident artists, cooks and creative trishaws, but there is also a slew of gaudy, modern signs on shopfronts and so many photo-snapping tourists that the town is verging on becoming a packaged parody of itself.

It's not quite there yet though, and the modern action still blends in with the surrounding Peranakan, Portuguese and Dutch architecture. With the oldest functioning mosque, Catholic church and Buddhist temple in the country, the city today (as it has for centuries) exudes a tolerance that accepts visitors of every creed and always promises to show them a good time.

And have we mentioned the food? If you're eating local dishes, it's unlikely you'll have a bad meal. From the distinct Peranakan dishes to Eurasian Portuguese cooking and Indian banana leaf shops, the citywide restaurant aromas add further colour to the cultural mosaic that makes Melaka such an astonishing destination.

## ORIENTATION

Melaka is a medium-sized town that's easy to navigate and compact enough to explore on foot, bicycle or trishaw.

The colonial areas of Melaka are mainly on the eastern side of the river, focused around Town Sq (which is also known as Dutch Sq) and Christ Church.

<b>INFORMATION</b>		Stadhuis.....	33 B3	Howard's.....	73 A3
Fenix Internet Centre.....	(see 44)	Sultanate Palace.....	34 B4	Ind Ori.....	74 C5
HSBC.....	1 A1	Sultan's Well.....	(see 27)	Indian Hawker Stalls.....	75 C2
Immigration Office.....	2 B2	Villa Sentosa.....	35 C1	Low Yong Mow.....	76 B3
Mahkota Medical Centre.....	3 C5	Xianglin Temple.....	36 B2	Medan Makan Bunga Raya.....	77 C2
MPH Bookstores.....	(see 95)			Nancy's Kitchen.....	(see 73)
Post Office.....	4 B3	<b>SLEEPING</b> 		Newton Food Court.....	78 B4
Tourism Malaysia.....	5 B4	Aldy Hotel - Chinatown.....	37 C2	Ole Sayang.....	79 D5
Tourism Melaka.....	6 B3	Aldy Hotel - Stadhuis.....	38 B4	Pak Putra Restaurant.....	80 A3
Tourist Police.....	7 B3	Baba House.....	39 A3	Poh Piah Lwee.....	81 A3
United Overseas Bank.....	8 B5	Chong Hoe Hotel.....	40 B3	Restoran Amitufoh.....	82 A4
		City Bayview Hotel.....	41 C1	Roti Canai Terbang.....	83 C5
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		Eastern Heritage Guest House.....	42 C3	Selvam.....	84 C3
8 Heeren St.....	9 B3	Emily Traveller's Home.....	43 D4	To Be Korean Café.....	85 B3
Architecture Museum.....	10 B4	Fenix Inn.....	44 C4	Vegan Salad & Herbs House.....	86 A2
Baba-Nyonya Heritage Museum.....	11 B3	Heeren House.....	45 B3		
Cheng Ho Cultural Museum.....	12 B3	Heeren Inn.....	46 A3	<b>DRINKING</b> 	
Cheng Hoon Teng Temple.....	13 B3	Holiday Inn.....	47 A5	Cheng Ho Tea House.....	87 B3
Chinese Cemetery.....	14 D2	Hotel Equatorial.....	48 C4	Geographér Café.....	88 A3
Christ Church.....	15 B3	Hotel Puri.....	49 A3	Voyager Traveller's Lounge.....	89 B3
Democratic Government Museum.....	16 B4	Jalan Jalan Guesthouse.....	50 B3		
Eye on Malaysia, Melaka.....	17 A4	Kancil Guest House.....	51 D4	<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b> 	
Governor's House.....	18 B4	Kota Lodge.....	52 A3	Arena.....	90 A5
History & Ethnography Museum.....	(see 33)	Majestic Malacca.....	53 C2	Golden Screen Cinemas.....	91 B5
Islamic Museum.....	19 B4	Malacca Straits Hotel.....	54 C4	Golden Screen Cinemas.....	(see 94)
Kampung Kling Mosque.....	20 B3	Number 20 Guesthouse.....	55 B3	Pure Bar.....	92 D5
Literature Museum.....	(see 33)	Renaissance Melaka Hotel.....	56 C2	Sound & Light Show.....	93 C4
Maritime Museum.....	21 A4	Ringo's Foyer.....	57 B2		
Masjid Kampung Hulu.....	22 B2	Sama-Sama Guest House.....	58 B3	<b>SHOPPING</b> 	
Melaka Malay Sultanate Water Wheel.....	23 B3	Samudra Inn.....	59 C5	Dataran Pahlawan.....	94 C4
Melaka River Cruise.....	24 B3	Shirah's Guest House.....	60 C5	Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex.....	95 B5
Menara Taming Sari.....	25 B4	Tony's Guesthouse.....	61 C3	Malaqa House.....	96 A3
Muzium Rakyat.....	26 B4	Travellers' Lodge.....	62 C5	Orangutan House.....	97 A3
Naval Museum.....	(see 21)	Voyage Guest House.....	63 B3	Orangutan House.....	98 B3
Poh San Teng Temple.....	27 D3			Orangutan House.....	99 B3
Porta de Santiago.....	28 B4	<b>EATING</b> 		Top Spinning Academy.....	100 B2
Putuo Traditional Chinese Medical Therapy Centre.....	29 A2	Bayonya.....	64 C5	Wan Aik Shoemaker.....	101 B2
Sri Poyayatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple.....	30 B3	Bulldog Café.....	65 C2		
St Paul's Church.....	31 B4	Cafe 1511.....	66 A3	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
St Peter's Church.....	32 C1	Capitol Satay.....	67 C3	Ferries to Indonesia.....	102 A4
		Centrepoint Food Court.....	68 C2	Local Bus Station.....	103 B1
		Donald & Lily's.....	69 A3	Malaysia Airlines.....	104 B5
		Hang Tua Mall.....	70 B1	Tunas Rupert Follow Me Express.....	105 B4
		Harper's Café.....	71 B3		
		Heeren House.....	(see 45)		
		Hoe Kee Chicken Rice.....	72 B3		

Bukit St Paul (St Paul's Hill), the site of the original Portuguese fort of A'Famosa, rises above Town Sq. Located further north is Melaka's tiny Little India, while bustling, scenic Chinatown is to the west.

South of Melaka's old historical quarter are Mahkota Melaka and Taman Melaka Raya, which are two areas built on reclaimed land; bridging Mahkota Melaka to the historic quarter is the Dataran Pahlawan, an enormous new mall and shopping/restaurant complex.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**MPH Bookstores** (☎ 283 3050; G73B, Ground fl, Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex, Jln Merdeka; ☎ 9am-10pm) Has the best selection of English-language titles.

### Emergency

**Melaka Police Hotline** (☎ 285 1999)

### Immigration Offices

**Immigration office** (☎ 282 4958; 2nd fl, Wisma Persekutuan, Jln Hang Tuah)

### Internet Access

Several cafes in Chinatown have a computer for clients and charge around RM3 per hour.

**Fenix Internet Centre** (Fenix Inn, 156 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; per hr RM2.50) Also has fax and full business services.

### Medical Services

**Mahkota Medical Centre** (☎ appointments 281 4426/4427, emergency 281 4068/4071; www.mahkotamedical.com; No 3, Mahkota Melaka, Jln Merdeka)

**Melaka General Hospital** (☎ 282 2344; Jln Pringgit) North of the city centre.

### Money

Moneychangers are scattered throughout Chinatown and near the bus stations. There are more ATMs at the shopping malls.

**HSBC** (Jln Hang Tuah) Has 24-hour ATMs (MasterCard, Visa, Maestro, Cirrus and Plus).

**United Overseas Bank** (Jln PMS) MasterCard, Visa, Maestro, Cirrus and Plus at its 24-hour ATM.

### Post

**Post office** (Jln Laksamana) This is a small post office off Town Sq.

### Tourist Information

**Tourism Malaysia** (☎ 283 6220; ☎ 9am-10pm) At the Menara Taming Sari tower, it has very knowledgeable, helpful staff.

**Tourism Melaka** (☎ 281 4803, 1800-889 483; www.melaka.gov.my; Jln Kota; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm) Diagonally across the square from Christ Church, this place was closed for a remodel when we passed.

**Tourist Police** (☎ 281 4803; Jln Kota; ☎ 8am-11pm)

## SIGHTS

### Historic Town Centre

This area has a ridiculous number of museums clustered along Jln Kota. A few such as the **Islamic Museum** (admission RM2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun), the **Architecture Museum** (admission RM2; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun), which focuses on local housing design, and the **Muzium Rakyat** (People's Museum; adult RM2; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Mon), which covers everything from *gasing uri* (top-spinning) to mutilation for beauty, are worth visiting if you have time on your hands. Most of the others use a bland diorama format where visitors walk through a maze of wordy displays.

### STADTHUYS

Melaka's most unmistakable landmark and favourite trishaw pick-up spot is the **Stadthuys** (Town Square; ☎ 282 6526; adult/child RM5/2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5.30pm Fri), the imposing salmon-pink town hall and governor's residence. It's believed to be the oldest Dutch building in the East, built shortly after Melaka was captured by the Dutch in 1641. The vivid colour theme extends to the other buildings around the Town Square and the old clock tower.

To explore inside the Stadthuys you'll need to visit the extensive **History & Ethnography Museum** (☎ guided tours 10.30am & 2.30pm Sat & Sun), which has a number of historical re-creations as well as displays of Chinese and Malay art, weapons and ceramics. Up the hill is the mildly interesting **Literature Museum**, focusing on Malaysian writers. Admission to the above museums (and the **Governor's House** and the **Democratic Government Museum**) is included in the admission price to Stadthuys.

### PORTA DE SANTIAGO (A'FAMOSA)

A quick photo stop but a must for anyone visiting Melaka, **Porta de Santiago** was built by the Portuguese as a fortress in 1511. The Dutch were busy destroying the majority of the fort when Sir Stamford Raffles came by in 1810 and saved what remains today. Look for the 'VOC' inscription of the Dutch East India Company on the arch.

In 2006 work on the Menara Taming Sari revolving tower (p245) uncovered another part of the famous wall. The revolving tower was relocated further inland, and the remains of the fortress walls were reconstructed and are now home to the 13m-high **Melaka Malay Sultanate Water Wheel** replica. The original wheel would have been used to channel the river waters for the large number of traders swarming Melaka during the 15th and 16th centuries.

#### ST PAUL'S CHURCH

St Paul's Church is a breezy sanctuary reached after a steep flight of stairs. Originally built by a Portuguese captain in 1521, the church offers views over Melaka from the summit of Bukit St Paul. Inside the decaying stone interior are intricately engraved tombstones of the Dutch nobility that are buried here. The church was regularly visited by St Francis Xavier, and following his death in China the saint's body was temporarily interred here for nine months before being transferred to Goa, where it remains today. Visitors can look into his ancient tomb (surrounded by a wire fence) in the centre of the church and a marble statue of the saint gazes wistfully over the city.

When the Dutch completed their own Christ Church in 1590 at the base of the hill, St Paul fell into disuse. Under the British a lighthouse was built and the church eventually ended up as a storehouse for gunpowder. The church has been in ruins for more than 150 years.

#### SULTANATE PALACE

Housing a cultural museum, this wooden replica of a Melaka sultan's **palace** (Jln Kota; admission RM2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Wed-Mon) is based on descriptions, from the *Malay Annals*, of the original 15th-century palace, built entirely without nails.

#### MARITIME MUSEUM & NAVAL MUSEUM

Housed in a huge re-creation of the *Flora de la Mar*, a Portuguese ship that sank off the coast of Melaka, the **Maritime Museum** (admission RM2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) merits a visit. Clamber up for a detailed examination of Melaka's history via faded and dated props. The museum continues in the building next door with more absorbing exhibits featuring local vessels plus an assortment of nautical devices.

## Chinatown

Chinatown is the heart of Melaka and is by far the most interesting area to wander around. Stroll along **Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock**, formerly called Heeren St, which was the preferred address for wealthy Baba (Straits-born Chinese) traders who were most active during the short-lived rubber boom of the early 20th century. The centre street of Chinatown is **Jln Hang Jebat**, formerly known as Jonker St (or Junk St Melaka), that was once famed for its antique shops but is now more of a collection of clothing and crafts outlets and restaurants. On Friday and Saturday nights, the street is transformed into the **Jonker Walk Night Market**, a lively market of food and trinket stalls. Finally, the northern section of **Jln Tokong** (also known as Harmony St) has a handful of authentic Chinese shops selling red and gold lanterns, paper money and funerary preparations.

The following sights are listed in geographical order and could be used as a walking tour: start going northwest on Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock, follow the map to head southeast down Jln Tokong, then finish by heading northwest again up Jln Hang Jebat.

#### 8 HEREEN STREET

Run by the Heritage Trust of Malaysia, this 18th-century Dutch period residential **house** (admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm Tue-Sat) was restored as a model conservation project. The friendly host will show you around and describe what era each style of the building came from (some as far back as the Portuguese occupation) and what life would have been like inside its walls over the centuries. The project was partially chronicled by Lim Huck Chin and Fernando Jorge in their beautifully designed coffee-table book *Voices from the Street*, which is for sale at the house along with other titles on historical Melaka. You can also pick up an *Endangered Trades: A Walking Tour of Malacca's Living Heritage* (RM5) booklet and map for an excellent self-guided tour of the city centre.

#### BABA-NONYA HERITAGE MUSEUM

Touring this traditional Peranakan townhouse takes you back to a time when women hid behind elaborate partitions when guests dropped by, and every social situation had its specific location within the house. The captivating **museum** (☎ 283 1273; 48-50 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; adult/child RM8/4, incl tour if enough people; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Wed-Mon) is arranged

## COCONUT KUNG FU

While enjoying the Friday and Saturday night Jonker Walk Night Market, don't miss the performance by kung fu master **Dr Ho Eng Hui** (📞 around 6.30-9pm Fri & Sat) at the southern end of Jln Hang Jebat. He eats fire and throws knives, but the real reason to stick around is to see him pummel his finger into a coconut. If you're not familiar with the strength of a coconut's husk, think back to Tom Hanks in the film *Castaway*. Remember how he spends hours hurling a coconut on the rocks trying to break the damn thing open? Now a soft human finger just shouldn't be able to pierce through a coconut's husk – but this guy really seems to do it and has been entertaining folks by doing so for over 35 years. Dr Ho Eng Hui is in fact a doctor, and the purpose of his performance is to sell a 'miracle oil' (RM10) that cures aches and pains.

to look like a typical 19th-century Baba-Nonya residence. Furniture consists of Chinese hardwoods fashioned in a mixture of Chinese, Victorian and Dutch designs with mother-of-pearl inlay. The highlight is the tour guides who tell tales of the past with a distinctly Peranakan sense of humour.

## CHENG HOON TENG TEMPLE

Malaysia's oldest traditional Chinese temple (dating from 1646) remains a central place of worship for the Buddhist community in Melaka. Notable for its carved woodwork, **Cheng Hoon Teng Temple** (Qing Yun Ting, Green Clouds Temple; 25 Jln Tokong; 📞 7am-7pm) is dedicated to Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy. All building materials for the temple were imported from China, along with the artisans involved in its construction. A robed effigy of Guanyin can be found within the main temple hall, itself an explosion of black, gold and red. Across the street from the main temple is a traditional opera theatre.

Opposite is the more recently constructed **Xianglin** (Fragrant Forest Temple), which endeavours to follow the layout of a traditional Chinese Buddhist temple.

## MASJID KAMPUNG HULU

The oldest functioning **mosque** (Jln Kampung Hulu) in Malaysia, it was commissioned by the Dutch in 1728. The Portuguese had destroyed all non-Christian establishments during their occupation, but the Dutch had different colonisation tactics and decided to help the locals rebuild their places of worship instead. The resulting mosque is made up of predominantly Javanese architecture with a multitiered roof; at the time of construction, domes and minarets had not yet come into fashion.

## KAMPUNG KLING MOSQUE

This hoary **mosque** (Jln Tokong) has a multitiered *meru* roof (a stacked form similar to that seen in Balinese Hindu architecture), which owes its inspiration to Hindu temples, and a Moorish watchtower minaret typical of early mosques in Sumatra.

## SRI POYYATHA VINAYAGAR MOORTHY TEMPLE

One of the first Hindu temples built in the country, this **temple** (Jln Tokong) was built in 1781 on the plot donated by the religiously tolerant Dutch and dedicated to the Hindu deity Vinayagar.

## CHENG HO CULTURAL MUSEUM

A lengthy paean to Ming Admiral Cheng Ho (Zhenghe), this extensive **museum** (📞 283 1135; 51 Lg Hang Jebat; adult/child RM20/10; 📞 9am-6pm Mon-Thu & 9am-7pm Fri-Sun) charts the tremendous voyages of the intrepid eunuch Muslim Chinese seafarer. As a favourite servant of the Chinese emperor's fourth son, Prince Zhu Di, Cheng Ho later became an army officer and ultimately the admiral of China's 'Treasure Fleet', a convoy that solidified China's control over most of Asia during the 15th century. It's a great stop for history buffs, although there's too much information here for anyone expecting a casual visit. The ticket price includes a 15-minute film presentation on Cheng Ho.

## Around the City Centre

### VILLA SENTOSA

While not an official museum, the 1920s Malay *kampung* house **Villa Sentosa** (Peaceful Villa; 📞 282 3988; www.travel.to/villasentosa; admission by donation; 📞 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat-Thu, 2.45-5pm Fri), on the Melaka River in Kampung Morten, is well worth a visit. A member of the family will show you around the house. There's a varied



collection of objects, including Ming dynasty ceramics and a 100-year-old copy of the *Quran*, but most of all it's an opportunity to wander through a genuine *kampung* house.

### ST PETER'S CHURCH

The oldest functioning Catholic church in Malaysia, **St Peter's Church** (Jln Bendahara) was built in 1710 by descendants of early Portuguese settlers. On Good Friday the church comes alive when the Melakans flock here, many of them making it the occasion for a trip home from far-flung parts of the country.

### BUKIT CHINA

Besides being the largest **Chinese cemetery** outside of China, Bukit China is also Melaka's best jogging track. Over 12,500 graves, including approximately 20 Muslim tombs, cover the 25 grassy hectares.

In the middle of the 15th century the sultan of Melaka imported the Ming emperor's daughter from China as his bride to seal relations between the two countries. She brought with her a vast retinue, including 500 handmaidens, and the area has been Chinese ever since, the two adjoining hills becoming the burial ground for Chinese traders. At the foot of Bukit China, **Poh San Teng Temple** was built in 1795 and contains images of the Taoist entity Dabo Gong and Guanyin. To the right of the temple is the **Sultan's Well**, a 15th-century well built by Sultan Mansor Shah. It was an important source of water for Melaka and a prime target for opposition forces seeking to take the city.

### KAMPUNG CHITTY

Melaka also has a small community of Chitty, or Straits-born Indians, who are the offspring of Indian traders and Malay women. Having arrived in the 1400s, the Chitties are regarded to be older than the Chinese-Malay Peranakan community. Their area of town, known as Kampung Chitty, lies west of Jln Gajah Berang, about a kilometre northwest of Chinatown; look for the archway with elephant sculptures beside the Mutamariman Temple. It's a pretty district in which to wander and see traditional Malay-style houses.

### LITTLE INDIA

Across the river from Chinatown is Melaka's surprisingly plain Little India. This busy area along Jln Bendahara and Jln Temenggong is a

worthwhile place for soaking in some Indian influence and grabbing an excellent banana leaf meal. During **Deepavali**, a section of Jalan Temenggong closes to traffic to make way for Indian cultural performances and street-side food vendors.

### MEDAN PORTUGIS

Roughly 4km east of the city centre on the coast is the **Medan Portugis** (Portuguese Square). The small *kampung* centred on the square is the heart of Melaka's Eurasian community, who are descended from marriages between the colonial Portuguese and Malays 400 years ago. Many of them speak Kristang, a Creole language that mixes Malay with archaic Portuguese. The square, styled after a typical Portuguese *mercado*, wasn't completed until the late 1980s.

The *kampung* is unexceptional and the square is often empty, except on Saturday evenings when cultural events are staged. But the sea breeze is lovely while enjoying a relaxing meal at the many restaurants in and around the square (see p251). Town bus 17 from the local bus station or Panorama Melaka buses will get you here; see Getting Around p253.

## ACTIVITIES

For cycling tours to rubber and oil palm plantations out of town, see p246.

### Getting High

No we're not suggesting you do anything illegal – Melaka has two very modern activities that give you a bird's-eye view of the city. You have two choices:

**Eye on Malaysia, Melaka** (child/adult RM10/20;

🕒 10am–11pm Mon–Thu, 10am–midnight Fri & Sat) This giant gondola-style Ferris wheel spins very slowly for about 20 minutes. At the time of writing the Malaysia International Space Adventure interactive museum (which will include a 4D theatre) was under construction at the site, and a sound and light show on a water screen (that will be highlighted by a fireworks show and water-ski performance) was in the planning stages.

**Menara Taming Sari** (child/adult RM10/20; 🕒 10am–10pm) This controversial 80m revolving tower is considered an eyesore by many. Waits can be long and it's all a bit tourist tacky, but is a good way to get your bearings and enjoy great views.

### Massage & Reflexology

It seems that reflexology centres have opened up on every corner in Melaka over the last few

years. The original, and still one of the best, is **Putuo Traditional Chinese Medical Therapy Centre** (☎ 286 1052; 134 Jln Hang Jebat; 1hr reflexology/qi massage RM38/65; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, 10-midnight Fri-Sun), which offers straightforward, excellent-value services. If you have specific ailments – anything from migraines to water retention – the owner will create a special treatment for you. There are also ear candles, fire cupping, body scrubs and more. The centre's ambience is no-frills Chinese institutional.

## TOURS

You can take a DIY city bus tour with **Panorama Melaka** – see *Getting Around*, p253.

### Boat Trips

**Melaka River Cruise** (☎ 286 5468; per person RM10) has daily 40-minute riverboat trips (minimum eight people) along the Melaka River from two locations: the 'Spice Garden' on the corner of Jln Tun Mutahii and Jln Tun Sri Lanang in the north of town, and the quay near the Maritime Museum (p243). Cruises don't go out to sea but rather 9km upriver past *Kampung Morten* and old *godowns* (river warehouses).

### Bike Tours

To explore the fascinating landscape around Melaka, join **Alias** for his three-hour **Eco Bike Tour** (☎ 019-652 5029; www.melakaonbike.com; per person RM80) through 20km of oil palm and rubber tree plantations and delightful *kampung* communities surrounding town. Pick-up is from the Travellers' Lodge (p248). Alias changes the tour around local events or festivals in the area. The tour can leave at either 8am or 3pm any day of the week as long as there are at least two people.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Melaka celebrates all the major Malaysian holidays, including Chinese New Year and *Thaipusam* (see p470).

**Easter** Good Friday and Easter Sunday processions are held outside St Peter's Church in March/April.

**Festa San Pedro** In late June, this festival honours the patron saint of the Portuguese fishing community. Celebrations take place at St Peter's Church and normally include a procession from the *Porta de Santiago* to *Medan Portugis* and carnival festivities.

**Festa San Juan** (Festival of St John) This festival is celebrated by Melaka's Eurasian community in late June by the lighting of candles in the Portuguese Settlement.

**Dragon Boat Festival** This June/July Chinese festival, marked by a dragon-boat race in the Strait of Melaka, commemorates the death, by drowning, of 3rd-century BC Chinese poet and statesman Qu Yuan.

**Festa Santa Cruz** In mid-September, this festival finishes with a candlelight procession of Melakan and Singaporean Catholics to *Malim chapel*.

## SLEEPING

So many new places are opening up in Melaka that this section is particularly vulnerable to change. The good news is that quality is improving, but the bad news is that there's simply not enough tourism to keep all these places open. Rooms have private showers and dorms have shared bathrooms, unless otherwise stated.

### Chinatown

If you have the option of staying in Chinatown, do it. This is what Melaka is all about.

**Voyage Guest House** (☎ 281 5216; Jln Tukang Besi; dm RM12) Head here for clean, industrial-sized dorm rooms and common areas decorated with a *nouveau-heritage* Chinatown jazz lounge look. It's run by *Voyager Traveller's Lounge* (p251).

**Sama-Sama Guest House** (☎ 305 1980; 26 Jln Tukang Besi; dm RM12, d RM20-40) This place has a great hippy-ish vibe, with a courtyard overflowing with potted plants, mini-ponds and wind chimes. Rooms are intimately linked by creaky wood floors and the breezes that run through the wide walkways. The whole place, including the shared toilets and showers, is kept sparkling clean, but when anyone walks down the hall (usually barefooted) it sounds like they are stomping in combat boots. Not for light sleepers but a fun and quirky place to meet other travellers.

**Jalan Jalan Guesthouse** (☎ 283 3937; www.jalanguuesthouse.com; 8 Jln Tukang Emas; dm/s/d RM12/23/34; ☎ ☎) This lovely hostel is in a restored old shophouse painted periwinkle blue. Fan-cooled rooms with one shared bathroom are spread out over a tranquil garden inner courtyard. Like some other older places though, noise from your neighbours might keep you awake at night. Internet and wi-fi are free and there's bike rental available.

**Ringo's Foyer** (☎ 016-354 2223; www.ringosfoyer.com; 46A Jln Portugis; dm/s/d/tr RM12/25/30/40; ☎ ☎) Just far enough out of central Chinatown to be quiet, but close enough to be convenient,

Ringo's is plain and clean, has friendly staff and a relaxing rooftop chill-out area.

**Chong Hoe Hotel** (☎ 282 6102; 26 Jln Tukang Emas; r with shared bathroom RM25, r with bathroom RM45-75; 📶) Chong Ho has stayed true to its no-frills functional personality and now, after all the years of staying exactly the same, it has an unpretentious charm that's lacking elsewhere. Air-con rooms with bathrooms are some of the cheapest in town and (except when the Kampung Kling Mosque starts blaring) it's a quiet and blissfully unexciting place to catch some Zs.

**Kota Lodge** (☎ 281 6512; Jln Kota Laksmana; hotelkl8@streamyx.com; d from RM70; 📶) Heritage not your thing? The brand-new Kota Lodge offers freshly painted characterless rooms, all with good beds, air-con and hot showers. It's stumbling distance from central Chinatown – just follow the signs on Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock.

**Baba House** (☎ 281 1216; www.thebabahouse.com.my; 125-127 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; s/d ind breakfast from RM59/75; 📶 📺) This elegant Baba building has beautiful tile work, carved panels and a cool, interior courtyard, but rooms, many windowless, aren't nearly as glitzy as the lobby and are dark and worn.

**Heeren Inn** (☎ 288 3600; heerenin@streamyx.com; 23 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; d RM78-145; 📶 📺) Housed in an attractive building, the motel-like windowless rooms here lack the ancient flair of the common areas. Rooms bordering the light-filled central courtyard are the brightest of the bunch.

**our pick Number 20 Guesthouse** (☎ /fax 281 9761; www.selesalifestyle.com; 20 Jln Hang Jebat; d RM95; 📶 📺 📶) A 1673 Dutch mansion meets urban-Zen chic with dark-wood beam construction, high ceilings, a touch of Chinese art, low opium beds, modern lighting and a common area with elongated windows that look over Jln Hang Jebat. Unfortunately, not all rooms have windows, but you can always get a little air on the rooftop garden. To conform with Melaka city's preservation standards, the guesthouse wasn't allowed to build en suite baths, so all rooms here have shared bathrooms. Breakfast is included and it's gay friendly.

**Aldy Hotel – Stadhuys** (☎ 283 3232; www.aldyhotel.com.my; 27 Jln Kota; d RM118-280, tr/f incl breakfast RM220/260; 📶 📺) This boutique-style hotel opposite the foot of Bukit St Paul is a great choice for families. Worn grey carpet and decades-old decor darken the halls, but things perk up again in the rooms that are newly

remodelled, modern and equipped with satellite TV. The on-site bistro is a great stop for Western favourites and fresh fruit juices.

**Heeren House** (☎ 281 4241; www.melaka.net/heerenhouse; 1 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; s/d from RM119/129, f RM259; 📶) The airy, clean and lovely rooms (six in all) in this former warehouse largely overlook the river, with polished floorboards, traditional furniture (some with four-poster beds) and clean showers. This is one of the more unpretentiously restored places in town – it's beautiful in its simplicity. A window-lit cafe (p250) is in the foyer – perfect for trying the daily baked goods over the morning paper.

**Hotel Puri** (☎ 282 5588; www.hotelpuri.com; 118 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; d/f from RM120/310; 📶 📺 📶) One of Chinatown's gems, Hotel Puri is an elegant creation in a superb old renovated Peranakan manor house. Its elaborate lobby, decked out with beautiful old cane and in-laid furniture, opens to a gorgeous courtyard garden. Standard rooms have butter-yellow walls, crisp sheets, satellite TV and shuttered windows. There's an on-site spa and breakfast is included.

## Jalan Taman Melaka Raya & Around

This area is close to some of Melaka's better bars and nightlife, plus it's only a short walk to the historic centre and Chinatown.

**Samudra Inn** (☎ 282 7441; samudrainn@hotmail.com; 348B Jln Melaka Raya 3; dm/d from RM12/30; 📶) This charmingly homey place is for lovers of peace and quiet. Caged birds chirp softly in the courtyard area, but other than that you won't hear a peep out of anyone. There are kitchen facilities if you want to cook and ex-teacher owners take extra steps to make sure their guests are comfortable, such as taking lone visitors out to dinner.

**Shirah's Guest House** (☎ 286 1041; shirahgh@tm.ent.my; 207-209, 2nd fl, Jln Melaka Raya 1; fan dm/d RM12/30, air-con d RM45; 📶 📺) Brightly painted walls and a gentle Malay welcome make this place sit somewhere between a backpackers and a homestay. Some rooms have balconies and all have high ceilings.

**our pick Emily Travellers Home** (☎ 012-301 8524; 71 Jln Parameswara; dm/s RM16/24, d RM32-48) Enter the humble entrance off the busy road and it feels like you've stepped into another dimension filled with plants, koi ponds, a bunny hopping around (named Mr Playboy) and happy, mingling people. Every room in the heritage building and its annexes is different, from funky

cottages with semi-outdoor 'jungle showers' to simple wooden rooms in the house – the dorm rooms have only two beds apiece. The whole place is decorated with recycled or found objects, including a very cool coffee table that transforms into a barbecue. Rates include breakfast and all-day tea or coffee.

**Travellers' Lodge** (☎ 226 5709; 214B Jln Melaka Raya 1; d with fan from RM30; 📶) This is one of the more social and deservedly popular backpacker places in town. The kick-up-your-feet common area has an elevated platform TV lounge with cushions and mats strewn about – perfect for lounging. Rooms are all clean, have windows and tiled floors and the sheltered roof terrace is a boon, dotted with flowers and plants.

**Kancil Guesthouse** (☎ 281 4044; www.machinta.com.sg/kancil; 177 Jln Parameswara; r RM40-50; 📶) About a 10-minute hoof from Chinatown, this guesthouse is in an elegant, immaculately kept, open and airy heritage home that offers spacious and comfortable rooms (all with fan). You'll want to wander the house, which is lovely and deep, with a gorgeous garden out back. The owners are pleasant and helpful. Bus 17 goes past here.

**Fenix Inn** (☎ 281 5511; www.fenixinn.com; 156 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; d RM128-168; 📶 📺) Efficiency is the name and business is the game at this crisp hotel. Rooms are small and characterless, but most have a window. A particularly good crop of terminals for internet access make this a good choice for anyone who has to work on the road.

**Malacca Straits Hotel** (☎ 286 1888; www.malaccastraitshotel.com.my; 27 Jln Chan Koon Cheng; r/ste RM168/298; 📶 ☎ 📺) Smack up against the Hotel Equatorial, this hotel calls itself a 'batik boutique' hotel, and it's not a bad description. Ask to see a room or two here before you decide; all are spacious but only about half have hardwood floors and a handful are furnished with some especially nice teak furniture.

**Holiday Inn** (☎ 255 9000; Jln Sayed Abdul Aziz; www.melaka.holidayinn.com; r from RM225; 📶 📺) Boldly facing historic Melaka like a gleaming white middle finger, this brand-new Holiday Inn is absurdly tall and doesn't have a single heritage quality about it. Rooms are comfy and carpeted yet bland. Ask for a top-storey room for fantastic views over the Strait of Melaka.

**Hotel Equatorial** (☎ 282 8333; www.equatorial.com; Jln Parameswara; d RM430-500; 📶 📺) The Hotel Equatorial can't be beaten for its location

near the historic centre. While it's a bit frayed around the edges, good discounts online can cut prices nearly in half, making this elegant choice excellent value. It's worth upgrading to a deluxe room, which have either balconies or heaps of extra space. Special packages are available through the hotel, which include tours and specials such as cookery courses. Room prices include a RM88 meal credit at any of the hotel's four restaurants.

## Little India to Bukit China

This is one of the busiest and traffic-clogged areas of Melaka, but it's convenient if you're visiting on business and is relatively close to all the sights.

**Eastern Heritage Guest House** (☎ 283 3026; 8 Jln Bukit China; dm/s/d RM10/28/30) With one foot in Chinatown and the other in Little India, this superb though deteriorating 1918 building, with Peranakan tiling and impressive carved panelling, has lots of open spaces with plenty of natural light. There's a dipping pool, sun-roof area, a downstairs common room and breakfast is thrown in. The upstairs dorm is airless and bland, but double and single rooms are brightened up by original murals on the walls.

**Tony's Guesthouse** (☎ 688 0119; 24 Lg Banda Kaba; r RM24-28; ☎) This is a scatterbrained, old-school hippy backpacker's place that looks like an appealingly untidy artist's living room. The host couldn't be friendlier and it's a great place to meet other budget road warriors over tea.

**Aldy Hotel – Chinatown** (☎ 281 3636; www.aldyhotel.com; 148 Jln Bunga Raya; r incl breakfast RM150-260; 📶 📺 ☎) While the name says it's in Chinatown, this second location of the Aldy boutique hotel (opened in 2008) is actually outside the main Chinatown heritage centre on the busy thoroughfare of Jln Bunga Raya. The 16 rooms, housed in a 1966 building, are comfortable and verging on trendy.

**City Bayview Hotel** (☎ 283 9888; www.bayviewintl.com; Jln Bendahara; r RM398; 📶 📺) This hotel with a modern edge has a smallish pool, dance club and breakfast included in the room price. The views over the old town from some rooms are quite spectacular. This is a favourite with families, and kids will enjoy the rather weird computerised speaking lift.

**Renaissance Melaka Hotel** (☎ 284 8888; infomkz@po.jaring.my; Jln Bendahara; d RM470; 📶 📺) The Renaissance offers five-star service and old-school luxury. Large windows in the rooms

### DON'T LEAVE MELAKA WITHOUT TRYING...

- laksa – a regional version distinguished by its coconut milk and lemongrass flavours
- popiah – an uber-spring roll stuffed with shredded carrots, prawns, chilli, garlic, palm sugar and much, much more
- cendol – a shaved-ice monstrosity with jellies, syrup and coconut milk
- Nonya pineapple tarts – buttery pastries with a chewy pineapple jam filling
- chicken rice ball – Hokkien-style chicken and balled-up rice dumplings
- Assam fish heads – spicy tamarind fish-head stew.
- satay celup – like fondue but better; you dunk tofu, prawns and more into bubbling soup and cook it to your liking
- devil curry – a fiery Eurasian chicken curry

take advantage of views that sweep over Melaka in all directions, while the spacious rooms, equipped with comfy beds, are modern and chic while incorporating classic Chinese touches. Build up a sweat in the squash courts or at a yoga class then sink a drink in the pub (with regular live music).

**Majestic Malacca** (☎ 289 8000; [www.majesticmalacca.com](http://www.majesticmalacca.com); 188 Jln Bunga Raya; r/ste US\$250/650; 📶 📺 📶 📶) This elegant new hotel is an interesting mix: the lobby is in a 1920s colonial-style mansion while the bulk of the hotel is in a modern high-rise built behind. Rooms continue with this old and new theme with hardwood floors, sheer ivory-coloured drapes and heritage-style wood furnishings (including claw-footed bathtubs) – yet all are very modern in their sublime level of comfort. Of course, the place is stacked with amenities including an outdoor swimming pool, a gym, spa and a library.

### EATING

Melaka's food mirrors the city's eclectic, multi-cultural DNA. Peranakan cuisine (Nonya; prepared here with a salty Indonesian influence) is the most famous type of cooking here, but

there's also Portuguese Eurasian food, Indian, Chinese, Indonesian and more.

### Chinatown

On Friday and Saturday nights, Jln Hang Jebat turns into the not-to-be-missed Jonker Walk Night Market.

**Poh Piah Lwee** (Jln Kubu; ☎ 9am-5pm) An authentic and lively hole in the wall with one specialist cook preparing delicious Hokkien-style *popiah* (RM2), another making near-perfect *rojak* (RM3) while the third whips up a fantastic laksa (RM3).

**Low Yong Mow** (☎ 282 1235; Jln Tokong; dim sum RM1-6; ☎ 5am-noon, closed Tue) Famous Malaysia-wide for its large and delectably well-stuffed *pao* (steamed pork buns), this place is Chinatown's biggest breakfast treat. With high ceilings, plenty of fans running and a view of Masjid Kampung Kling, the atmosphere oozes all the charms of Chinatown. Take your pick from the endless variety of dumplings, sticky rice dishes and mysterious treats that are wheeled to your table.

**Donald & Lily's** (☎ 284 8907; Jln Kota Laksmana; snacks RM3; ☎ 9.30am-4pm, closed Tue) Back behind the Heeren Inn, with the staircase entrance hidden by a few hawker stalls selling *cendol*, this is Melaka locals' favourite stop for the regional laksa (RM3) and Nonya *cendol* (RM1.20).

**our pick Pak Putra Restaurant** (56 Jln Kota Laksmana; tandoori from RM5; ☎ dinner, closed every other Mon) This fabulous Pakistani place cooks up a variety of meats and seafood in clay tandoori ovens perched on the sidewalk. Apart from the tandoori try the raw prawns (cooked with onion, yoghurt and coriander, RM10) or mutton rogan josh (in onion gravy with spices and chilli oil, RM8). Side dishes of veg are around RM5 and a mango lassi costs RM4.

**Cafe 1511** (☎ 286 0151; [www.cafe1511.com](http://www.cafe1511.com); 52 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; meals RM8; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue; 📶) Next to the Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum is this high-ceilinged Peranakan cafe, with original tiles along the wall, lovely carved screens, a mishmash of decorative objects from Southeast Asia and a Nonya menu. At the time of writing this place was also planning a guesthouse.

**Vegan Salad & Herbs House** (☎ 282 9466; 22 Jln Kubu; meals RM10; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Fri-Wed) Around the corner from the Buddhist Guanyin Temple in Chinatown, this health-conscious spot offers a range of uncooked, crisp vegetables, brown rice set lunches and wholemeal bread buns.

**Nancy's Kitchen** (15 Jln Hang Lekir; meals RM10; ☎ 11am-5.30pm, closed Tue) In a town already known for its graciousness, this home-cooking Nonya restaurant is our favourite for friendly service. The server is as chatty as they come, full of suggestions of what to order and will have you making conversation with the other handful of customers in no time. Try the house speciality: chicken candlenut (RM10).

**Hoee Kee Chicken Rice** (☎ 283 34751; 4 Jln Hang Jebat; meals RM11; ☎ 8.30am-3pm, closed last Wed of every month) Serving the local speciality of chicken rice ball and Assam fish head (fish heads in a spicy tamarind gravy), you'll need to arrive outside of peak time or expect to wait for a table. The restaurant's setting, with wood floors and ceiling fans, seems to further bring out the exotic flavours.

**Heeren House** (☎ 281 4241; 1 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; meals around RM12; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) In the hotel of the same name (p247), make this a slot for healthy Western breakfasts, a light meal of quiches and salads (from RM12) and yummy brownies (RM4). You can browse the integrated shop for a wonderful selection of up-market batik and other crafts from all around Southeast Asia, while you wait for your food to arrive.

**To Be Korean Café** (☎ 016-635 6501; 58 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; meals around RM25; ☎ 11am-5.30pm Sun-Thu, 11am-10pm Fri & Sat) Traditional Korean pork barbecue (RM23) as well as pages of other specialities (some vegetarian) can be enjoyed here while your feet get the dead skin nibbled off them by little fish – the tables are placed over a pond so can dine with your feet in or out of the water. There's also a selection of 'Korean healthy teas' (from RM3.50) that purport to cure a plethora of ailments.

**Harper's Café** (2 & 4 Lg Hang Jebat; meals RM40; ☎ lunch & dinner) Perched elegantly over the Sungai Melaka, breezy Harper's serves excellent (though small) Malay-European fusion dishes in a rather stark decor. It's worth visiting for the food, though the service can be slow.

**Howard's** (☎ 286 8727; 5 Jln Hang Lekir; meals RM40; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) A finely crafted ambience of creaseless linen, elegant furniture, black-and-white chequered tile floor, flavoursome international cuisine (lobster bisque, roast rack of lamb) and nonintrusive service, Howard's is a thoroughly unhurried and intimate experience and a top romantic dining choice. Topped off with an impres-

sive wine list, this is definitely Chinatown's swankiest choice.

## Jalan Melaka Raya & Around

Serving Chinese food in the main hall and Halal at the back, **Newton Food Court** (Jln Merdeka), just west of the Mahkota Parade shopping complex, is Melaka's newest and most attractive hawker centre. It's under an immense thatched roof and is bordered by palms.

The new jetty over the river in front of the Holiday Inn has a number of semi-up-market restaurants serving *satay celup* and Western food.

**Restoran Amitufoh** (☎ 292 6426; 2-20 Jln PM9, Plaza Mahkota, Bandar Hilir; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This Buddhist vegetarian restaurant – the gift of a Chinese philanthropist – provides food on the house. You should make a contribution, but otherwise there are few conditions: you must wash your own plates and cutlery, and taking food away is not permitted.

**Roti Canai Terbang** (Jln Melaka Raya 3; roti canai 70 sen-RM3; ☎ breakfast) Get excellent *roti canai* (flaky pancakes) either plain or stuffed with your choice of onion, egg, cheese or all three. This is a huge *roti canai* establishment and it packs in the locals.

**Ind Ori** (☎ 282 4777; 236 Jln Melaka Raya 1; dishes RM1-15; ☎ 8am-midnight) Mmm, Indonesian Padang food: fresh and heated in a point and ask buffet. It's just like the real thing but without the flies and dubious sanitation issues. House specialities include avocado juice with chocolate sauce (RM4.50) and *sekotang* (sweet cream and peanut dumplings with green beans and hot ginger; RM5.80).

**Ole Sayang** (☎ 283 1966; 198 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; meals RM13; ☎ 10am-10pm, closed Wed) Come here for ambient Nonya atmosphere, decorated with old wooden furniture and dim lighting.

**Bayonya** (☎ 292 2192; 164 Jln Taman Melaka Raya; meals RM15; ☎ 10am-10pm, closed Tue) This authentic eatery is a locals' favourite for its excellent and inexpensive home-cooked Peranakan cuisine. One of the must-tries here is the durian *cendol* (RM5).

## Little India to Bukit China

Follow the sounds of a chopping meat cleaver to **Medan Makan Bunga Raya** (Hungry Lane; btwn Jln Bendahara & Jln Bunga Raya), where you can feast on Indian-style curry-pork rice in the evenings or try the local speciality of *gula melaka* (palm sugar) during the day. The

**Centrepont food court** (Jln Munshi Abdullah) is the place to seek out Indian and Malay treats for lunch. Further north **Hang Tuah Mall** (Jln Hang Tuah), a pedestrian walk, swarms with open-air food stalls every evening.

**our pick Capitol Satay** (☎ 283 5508; 41 Lg Bukit China; meals RM8; ☎ from 6pm) Famous for its satay *celup* (a Melaka adaptation of satay steamboat), this place is usually packed to the gills and is one of the cheapest outfits in town. Stainless-steel tables have bubbling vats of soup in the middle where you dunk skewers of okra stuffed with tofu, sausages, chicken, prawns and bok choy.

**Selvam** (☎ 281 9223; 3 Jln Temenggong; meals RM8; ☎ from 6pm) This is a classic banana leaf restaurant always busy with its loyal band of local patrons ordering tasty and cheap curries, roti and Tandoori chicken sets (RM5.50). Even devout carnivores will second guess their food preferences after trying the Friday-afternoon vegetarian special with 10 varieties of veg for only RM6.

**Bulldog Café** (☎ 292 1920; 145 Jln Bendahara; meals RM10; ☎ from 6pm) Features Nonya, Chinese, Thai and Western dishes. For cheap snacks, sample the Nonya *popiah* (RM2) or the *pai tee* (RM3), crispy cone-shaped morsels of rice flour stuffed with vegetables.

## Medan Portugis

There's really not much reason to head out to this nondescript neighbourhood other than to eat. On Friday and Saturday evenings, head to **Restoran de Lisbon** (Medan Portugis; meals RM30; ☎ dinner Fri & Sat), where you can sample Malay-Portuguese dishes at outdoor tables. Try the delicious local specialities of chilli crabs (RM20) or the distinctly Eurasian devil curry (RM10). Any other time of the week, Medan Portugis has food stalls serving similar dishes to those found at restaurants at seaside tables.

## DRINKING

Unlike much of Malaysia, Melaka is studied with watering holes. The Friday- and Saturday-night Jonker Walk Night Market in Chinatown closes down Jln Heng Lekir to traffic and the handful of bars along the lane become a mini street party with tables oozing beyond the sidewalks and live music.

**Geographér Café** (☎ 281 6813; www.geographer.com.my; 83 Jln Hang Jebat; large Tiger beer RM17.20; ☎ 10am-

1am Wed-Sun; ☎) This ventilated, breezy bar with outside seating and late hours, in a pre-war corner shophouse, is a godsend. A tasty choice of local and Western dishes (meals around RM8) and laid-back, but professional, service round it all off.

**Voyager Traveller's Lounge** (☎ 281 5216; 40 Lg Hang Jebat; ☎) Ease back into a wicker chair and order a cold beer (and/or an all-day Western-style breakfast) from the glowing bar built out of recycled bottles. Yaks, the super-helpful young owner, can arrange activities throughout Melaka, and on certain nights there's live music.

**Cheng Ho Tea House** (Jln Tokong; ☎ 10am-5pm) In an exquisite setting that resembles a Chinese temple garden courtyard, relax here over a pot of fine Chinese tea (from RM15).

## ENTERTAINMENT

More entertainment opportunities will be available by 2010 at the site of the Eye on Malaysia, Melaka (see p245).

**Sound & Light Show** (adult/child RM10/2; ☎ shows 8.30-9.15pm) Held outside the Dataran Pahlawan shopping mall, shows happen only when there's enough demand, and even then they may not be in English. Melaka's history is presented from a strongly nationalistic angle; nevertheless, it's quite good theatre.

**Pure Bar** (591A Jln Taman Melaka Raya) Popular with locals, this has become Melaka's most fun nightclub/bar. It's also gay friendly.

**Arena** (The Jetty) At the foot of the jetty in front of the Holiday Inn, this glass-walled night spot has a big stage for live bands and a hopping bar.

**Golden Screen Cinemas** (☎ 281 0018; 2nd fl Mahkota Parade; tickets RM8) Shows everything from Western blockbusters to Bollywood flicks. There's another branch at Dataran Pahlawan.

## SHOPPING

Taking time to browse Chinatown's eclectic mix of shops is an activity in itself. Melakan favourites include Nonya beaded shoes, Nonya 'clogs' (with a wooden base and a single plastic-strip upper), antiques (know your stuff and haggle aggressively), Southeast Asian and Indian clothing, handmade tiles, charms, crystals and more. Peek into the growing array of silent artists studios, where you might see a painter busy at work in a back room.

**Dataran Pahlawan** (Jln Merdeka) Melaka's largest mall, it has a collection of upmarket designer

shops and restaurants on the ground and upper floors and a craft and souvenir market in the basement portion.

**Malaga House** (☎ 281 4770; 70 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) This huge shop is in an elegant building stuffed to the gills with antiques and replicas – it's not cheap, but it's bursting with character.

**Top Spinning Academy** (79 Jln Tokong; ☹ 10am-4pm) Be prepared for a very enthusiastic traditional top-spinning lesson by *gasing uri* extraordinaire Simpson Wong. You aren't expected to purchase anything, although you probably will if you get the hang of the spin – a top is only RM2.

**Orangutan House** (59 Lg Hang Jebat; ☹ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue) Also at 96 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lok and 12 Jln Hang Jebat, these brightly painted T-shirt shops display the work of local artist Charles Cham. Themes span Chinese astrology animals to rather edgy topics (at least for Malaysia) such as 'Use Malaysian Rubber', above a sketch of a condom.

**Wan Aik Shoemaker** (56 Jln Tokong) Raymond Yeo's beaded Nonya shoes are considered Melaka's finest and begin at a steep but merited RM300. Tiny silk bound-feet shoes (from RM90) are also available, although nowadays they are just a curiosity rather than a necessity.

For practical needs such as camera shops, a pharmacy or electronics store, head to **Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex** (☎ 282 6151; Lot B02, Jln Merdeka).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Melaka is 144km from Kuala Lumpur, 224km from Johor Bahru and just 94km from Port Dickson.

### Air

Recently upgraded Melaka International Airport is 20km north of Melaka in Batu Berendam. **Firefly** ([www.fireflyz.com.my](http://www.fireflyz.com.my)) offers flights between Melaka and Singapore (three weekly) and AirAsia is likely to follow suit with routes to Indonesia.

### Boat

High-speed ferries make the trip from Melaka to Dumai in Sumatra daily at 10am (one way/return RM119/170, 1½ hours). Ferries also run to Pekan Baru (one way/return RM159/269, six hours) in Sumatra at 9.30am on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Tickets are available

at the **Tunas Rupert Follow Me Express** (☎ 283 2505; Jln PM2) and other ticket offices near the wharf. **Maxmarine** (☎ 282 0883; G-15 Jln PM 10) runs ferries four days a week to Bengkulu in Sumatra. At all ports in Sumatra, citizens of most countries will have to purchase a one-month visa on arrival (US\$25).

### Bus

Melaka Sentral, the huge, modern long-distance bus station, is inconveniently located opposite a huge branch of Tesco off Jln Tun Razak, in the north of town. A taxi into town should cost RM15, or you can take bus 17 (RM1) or the Panorama Melaka bus (RM2; see Getting Around, opposite). Frequent buses head to Singapore (RM22, 4½ hours), KL (RM12.40, two hours) and Johor Bahru (RM19, 3½ hours). There are also less frequent departures for Jerantut (RM22.90, five hours via Temerloh), Mersing (RM22.80, 4½ hours), Kota Bharu (RM51.20, 10 hours), Kuala Terengganu (RM42.90, eight hours) and Muar (RM4.70, one hour). Luggage deposit at Melaka Sentral is RM2 per bag. There is also an accommodation reservation counter for hotels in Melaka, a money changer and restaurants.

**A-Bus Express** (☎ 281 7669; 125 Jln SP1; [www.a-bus.com.my](http://www.a-bus.com.my)) makes about seven trips per day to/from KLIA International Airport (RM36, two hours). You can book tickets online or at the tourist offices.

### Car

Car-hire prices begin at around RM153 per day for a Proton Wira. If driving, Melaka's one-way traffic system requires patience. Try **Hawk** (☎ 283 7878; 52 Jln Cempaka, Taman Seri Cempaka, Peringgit Jaya), north of town.

### Taxi

Taxis leave from the long-distance bus station. Taxi rates: Port Dickson (RM120), Johor Bahru (RM250), Mersing (RM280), KL (RM160) and KL airport (RM140).

### Train

The nearest **train station** (☎ 441 1034) is 38km north of Melaka at Tampin on the main north-south line from KL to Singapore. Taxis from Melaka cost around RM50 or take the Tai Lye bus (RM4.30, 1½ hours), which leaves every half-hour from Melaka Sentral.



### TRICKED OUT TRISHAWS

Nowhere else in Malaysia will you find such wild and crazy a collection of trishaws. Outrageously kitsch, the favourite decorations are plastic flowers, baby doll heads, religious paraphernalia, tinsel, Christmas lights and a sound system. While taking a ride in one of these things might be the most 'I'm a tourist' thing you do in Malaysia, it's good fun and supports an industry that is dying nearly everywhere else in the country. As a spectator, keep an eye out for Singaporean tourists hiring out trishaws en masse: the effect, with several '80s hits blaring at the same time, cameras snapping and all that glitzy decoration, turns the streets of Melaka into a circus-like parade.

### GETTING AROUND

Melaka is small enough to walk around, but you can save time and sweat with Panorama Melaka, which offers two types of hop-on, hop-off bus services. A **double-decker bus** (red line; RM5; ☎ 9am-8.30pm) makes a 13-stop run, while a **single-decker bus** (blue line; RM2; ☎ 7am-9.30pm) takes in 23 stops including Melaka Sentral. Both buses run every 30 to 45 minutes – buy your ticket (good all day) on the bus. The red line ticket price includes unlimited passage on the blue line, but not vice versa. Stops for both include the Hang Tua Mall, Jln Hang Jebat (Jonker Walk), the Stadthuys, Hotel Equatorial, Renaissance Melaka Hotel and Kampung Portugis. Route maps and more information about the service are available at the Tourism Malaysia office (p242).

Another useful service is town bus 17, running every 15 minutes from Melaka Sentral to the centre of town, past the huge Mahkota Parade shopping complex, to Taman Melaka Raya and on to Medan Portugis.

Bicycles can be hired at some guesthouses and hotels for around RM10 a day. Taking to Melaka's streets by trishaw is a must (see the boxed text, above) – by the hour they should cost about RM40, or RM15 for any one-way trip within the town, but you'll have to bargain.

Taxis should cost around RM10 for a trip anywhere around town with a 50% surcharge between 1am and 6am.

## AROUND MELAKA CITY

### AYER KEROH

☎ 06

About 15km northeast of Melaka, Ayer Keroh (also spelled Air Keroh) has several contrived tourist attractions that are largely deserted on weekdays. Kids will like the lushly landscaped **Melaka Zoo** (adult/child RM7/4, night zoo adult/child RM10/5; ☎ 9am-6pm daily, night zoo 8-11pm Fri & Sat), the second-largest zoo in the country (with 200 different species). The best time to go is at night when the nocturnal animals awaken; take the Friday- and Saturday-night shuttle bus (RM12) that picks up at larger hotels. It's also possible to volunteer at the zoo by cleaning cages and helping out with educational activities; those curious should contact the education unit at [education@zoomelaka.org.my](mailto:education@zoomelaka.org.my).

Just across from the zoo is the **Butterfly and Reptile Sanctuary** (adult/child RM5/3; ☎ 9am-6pm), which has a collection of exotic creepy-crawlies, snakes and some sad crocodiles at the reptile park.

But the main attraction in Ayer Keroh is the **Taman Mini Malaysia/Asean** (adult/child RM4/2; ☎ 9am-6pm), a large theme park that has examples of traditional houses from all 13 Malaysian states, as well as neighbouring Asean countries. Also here is **Hutan Rekreasi Air Keroh** (Air Keroh Recreational Forest; admission free), part secondary jungle and part landscaped park with paved trails, a 250m canopy walk, picnic areas and a forestry museum.

Ayer Keroh can be reached on bus 19 from Melaka (RM1.40, 30 minutes), or a taxi will cost around RM35.

### PULAU BESAR

☎ 06

The small island of Pulau Besar, 5km off the coast southeast of Melaka, has some interesting graves and meditation caves that are popular pilgrimages for Indian Muslims, but the main reason to come here is for the white beaches and jungle walks. Unfortunately, in 2010 Besar will become the largest independent oil storage terminal in the country, which will surely make the already not-so-great water even more polluted.

The island's only hotel is the **Chandek Kura Resort** (☎ 295 5899; chalet d/tr RM118/138; 🍴 🚿 🚰) and you can pitch at the **camp site** (☎ 281 8007; per

person and tent rental RM20) next to the resort; call before arrival to secure a site. A handful of basic *kedai kopi* can be found nearby.

Boats (return trip RM40, 30 minutes) depart from the jetty at Anjung Batu (☎ 261 0492) about every two hours from 8am (last boat returns at 10.30pm). The jetty is several kilometres past the old pier at Umbai, southeast of Melaka. Take an SKA bus from Melaka Sentral to Merlimau and ask to be let off at the jetty – it's about a 10-minute walk from the bus stop.

## ALOR GAJAH

Just off the road to KL, 24km north of Melaka, is the countryside town of Alor Gajah. In the town centre is the peaceful and grassy Alor Gajah Square, which is bordered by an array of gaily painted shophouses. Most Melaka–KL buses stop in Alor Gajah so it's possible to stop here between the two cities if you're willing to change buses. A taxi to A'Famosa should cost around RM18.

### Sights

Right in Alor Gajah Square is the **Museum of Custom and Tradition** (admission RM1; ☎ 9am–5.30pm Wed–Thu & Sat & Sun, 9am–12.15pm & 2.45–5.30pm Fri), which exhibits a modest collection of Malay wedding customs, bridal gifts and ceremonial rites.

Half an hour from Melaka and an hour from KL, the 520-hectare **A'Famosa Resort** ([www.afamosa.com](http://www.afamosa.com)) is an all-encompassing resort popular with Malay and Singaporean tourists. Even though the whole place is a little cheesy, you'd be hard pressed not to have fun at the 8-hectare **Water World** (adult/child RM35/27; ☎ 11am–7pm Mon & Wed–Fri, 9am–8pm Sat & Sun), which has two seven-storey-high speed slides, a tube ride and even a man-made beach with a wave pool. **Animal World Safari** (admission with all rides &

shows adult/child RM60/50; ☎ 9am–6pm) spreads over another 60 hectares. The animal shows, with an array of critters dressed in human clothing and doing human activities, aren't something that animal lovers will enjoy. A special rate of adult/child RM75/61 gets you into both the Animal World Safari and Water World. Also within the resort is a 27-hole **golf course** that is rated in the country's top 10.

## TANJUNG BIDARA

☎ 06

For a lovely escape, head to white-sand Tanjung Bidara, about 30km northwest of Melaka. It's well away from the main highway, requiring you to take back roads through rice paddies and farms to get to the shore. It's literally deserted midweek, except for maybe one or two fishermen casting from the beach, and only one valiant stall at the beachfront food court is open outside of Saturday and Sunday. The water lapping on the fine sand is brown with sediment and pollution so it's not the best place for swimming, but it's fun to sit against the jungle and watch the massive freighters head down the famous Strait of Melaka.

The main beach area is at **Tanjung Bidara Beach Resort** (☎ 384 2990; fax 384 2995; tw Sun–Thu RM70, Fri & Sat RM100, chalets RM130/150; ☎ ☎), a quiet, relaxing but musty resort with a small swimming pool and restaurant.

Further budget accommodation is strung out over several kilometres along the beach, broken only by a large military camp. There are several simple beachside chalet guesthouses in the friendly Malay village of Kampung Balik Batu.

Buses 42 and 47 from Melaka go to Masjid Tanah, from where a taxi to Tanjung Bidara Beach Resort or Kampung Balik Batu costs RM10.

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