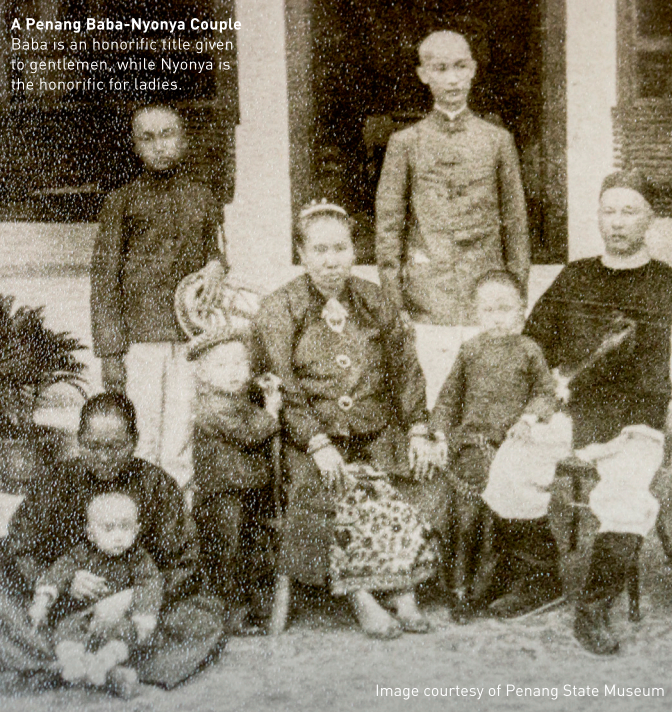


BABA-NYONYA



The Baba-Nyonya or Peranakan Chinese is a group of very early Chinese settlers who immigrated here in northern Malaysia and over the centuries, openly adopted and absorbed local cultures, creating a new and unique culture of their own. Over time, they also married other races into their families.

Although named the Straits Chinese by the British, they arrived much earlier than the formation of the Straits Settlements.

While they kept their Taoist beliefs, they also practised local rituals such as the mandi bunga (floral baths). They infused local cuisine into their recipes, and adopted local symbolic motifs in their fashion.

Members of this community call themselves Baba-Nyonya. The term Baba-Nyonya is more closely associated with those in Penang.

THE BABA-NYONYA OF PENANG & MALACCA

The Penang and Malaccan Baba-Nyonya are two slightly different communities of different origins. It is believed that the Malaccans had arrived in the early 15th century as part of the royal entourage of the Chinese Princess Hang Li Po, who was gifted as a bride to the Sultan of Malacca. The Baba-Nyonya of Penang came as seafarers from southern Fujian.

Generally, you could tell one from the other through the language that they use. In Penang, they speak mainly Hokkien with words borrowed from Malay, while the Malaccans have adopted a Malay patois, including many Hokkien words, as their mother tongue.

Through the old trade triangle of Phuket and Medan with Penang, these three cities today share the same Baba-Nyonya lineage. Similarly, Malacca Peranakan Chinese have expanded their families and influence towards the south to Singapore.



Mandi Bunga
The first and the fifteenth days of the Chinese lunar calendar are auspicious days for the Chinese. On these days, Nyonyas would prepare a Mandi Bunga (floral bath), which is a Malay ritual for both wellness and beauty, as well as to wash away bad luck.

THE QUINTESSENTIAL NYONYA

Nyonyas growing up in wealthy households were expected to learn a variety of skills that ranged from preparing Nyonya dishes to embroidery and beading; all the skills traditionally required for attracting a good husband.

They dress exquisitely well, with their choice of attire as the kebaya, an elegant dress with a Malay influence, that is suitable for most occasions.



The Kebaya
Like their eclectic fusion of food, Nyonya fashion adopted styles from the Malay (the Sarong) and the Chinese (embroidery motifs), among others.



The Mysterious Kamcheng
A richly-decorated Kamcheng or covered jar like this would be used for decoration or given as a gift on auspicious occasions, such as a wedding.



Cucuk Sanggul
Traditional hairpins, often arranged above a garland of fragrant Bunga Melur or Jasmine buds.



THE OBJETS D'ART
The wealthiest Peranakans would often commission various items from craftsmen in China, made to their own specifications. The Kamcheng, for example, would bear Chinese motifs such as peonies and phoenixes.

Kasut Manek
The delicate beadwork of the traditional beaded slipper epitomises Nyonya artistry, as these beautiful shoes would often have been created by their wearer herself. Each pair would have taken months to complete and involved the stitching and stringing of minuscule glass beads - a true labour of love.

THE PERANAKAN HOUSE



The Eclectic Straits Chinese House
Narrow frontage and long depth. The façade is a fusion of ornate Chinese and Western-style details.



Peranakan Tiles
These bright and eye-catching floral motifs are emblematic of the heritage shophouse designs in Penang. A marriage of East and West cultural interpretations made popular in the Victorian era, decorative tiles are commonly seen as dados or decorative panels under the external windows of Straits Eclectic Shophouses in Penang.

The UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town is a living museum of architecture.

While many of the Baba-Nyonya families have moved out from their ancestral homes, their houses have remained largely untouched or restored to their original splendour.

These uniquely charming houses line the quieter streets of the city. You simply have to take a walk around to see them.

MUNTRI STREET
Muntri Street has perhaps the best preserved rows of 19th century Straits Chinese architecture in the country, equivalent to Singapore's Emerald Hill.



Ever since the UNESCO Heritage Site listing of George Town in 2008, Muntri Street has seen the emergence of a bevy of privately-owned boutique enterprises such as the Ryokan Muntri and the Camera Museum. Peranakan tiles and Western art deco come together to create beautifully-ornate façades. It is said that "the more flamboyant the façade, the richer the owner of the house is". The majority of Peranakan Chinese who made their fortune during the tin mining boom in the 19th century built their homes here as a status symbol.



STEWART LANE & SEVEN TERRACES
According to the Wall Street Journal, "...no transformation matches that of Seven Terraces". Seven Terraces is an exclusive boutique hotel.

The façades and interior have been unsparingly restored to their original splendour, and one of its premier suites is furnished with 19th century Baba-Nyonya furniture and collectibles.

Seven Terraces consists of seven units of the original Straits Chinese Houses, among the many others built along Stewart Lane, that have been refurbished to house boutique cafés and guesthouses.

Big and small, they have all taken the effort to preserve the original Peranakan tiles and other ornate architectural flourishes on its façades, thus keeping the colour and flamboyance of the Baba-Nyonya heritage houses alive and well.

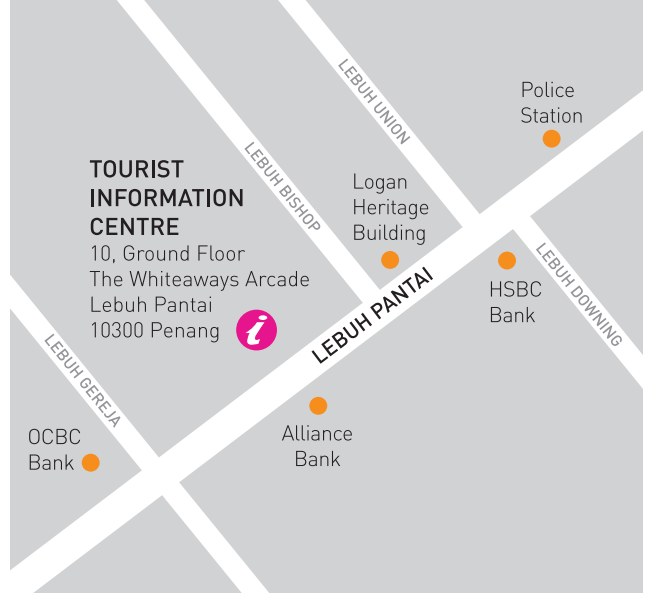


THE PINANG PERANAKAN MANSION
The Pinang Peranakan Mansion is possibly the most opulent example of an Eclectic Straits Chinese House in Penang. Built at the end of the 19th century, it was the residence and office, as well as a symbol of authority, for a famous Chinese Kapitan (head of a local Chinese community).

It features a larger-than-ordinary Baba-Nyonya courtyard, as well as other expensive details such as the Chinese wood-carved panels, English floor tiles and Scottish ironworks. Today it is a much admired Baba-Nyonya museum which houses more than 1,000 pieces of antiques and collectibles.



FREE COPY
BABA NYONYA HERITAGE



The Tourist Information Centre in George Town handles tourist enquiries, provides brochures/directional maps and highlights the latest events and happenings in Penang.

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

Monday-Friday
9.00am to 5.00pm

Saturday
9.00am to 3.00pm

Sunday & Certain Public Holidays
9.00am to 1.00pm

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