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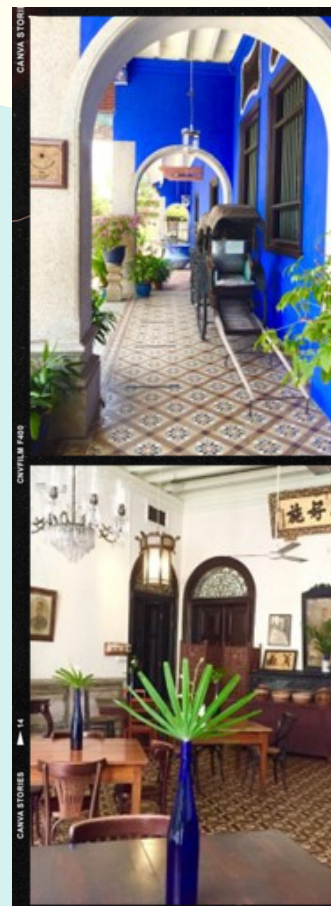


BEST BOUTIQUE HOTELS IN PENANG

According to Ahmad et al. (2017), boutique hotels encapsulate the essence of local history and cultural attributes, offering visitors an opportunity to immerse themselves in true local culture and partake in captivating historical encounters. Malaysia has a significant number of heritage features, including historical buildings, historic landmarks, and distinctive local culture which offer opportunities to both developers and boutique hotel operators (As et al., 2018). Penang, Malaysia offers many boutique hotels for a cultural and relaxing experience such as the Blue Mansion, Jawi Peranakan Mansion and Penaga Hotel.

BLUE MANSION

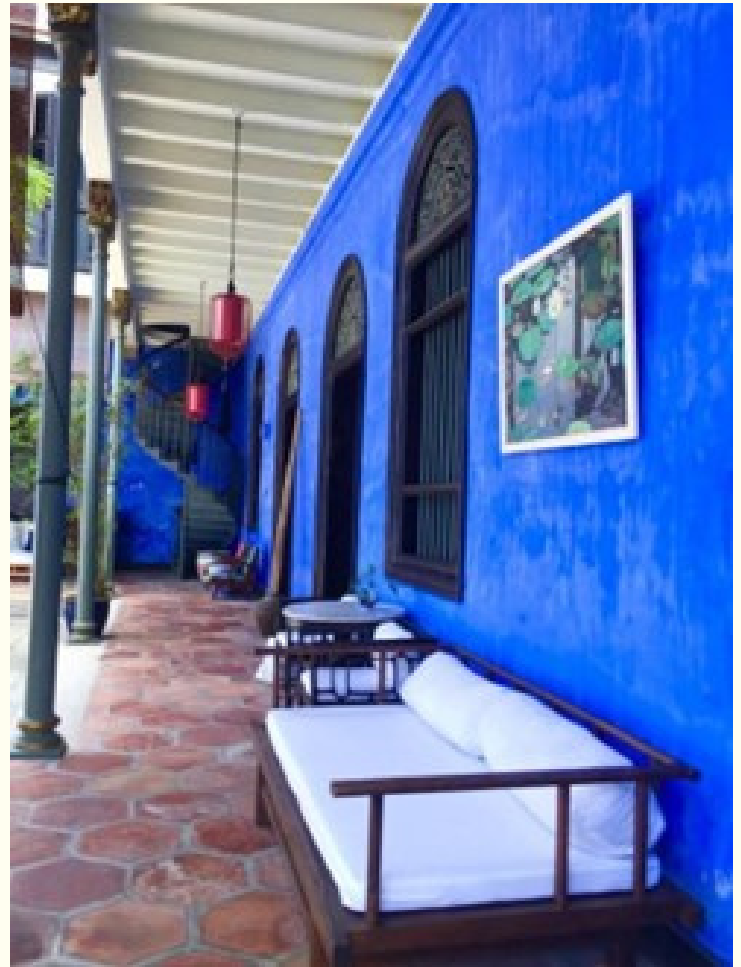
Cheong Fatt Tze mansion or also known as The Blue Mansion is a boutique hotel that can be found at Lebuhraya Leith, George Town, Penang, Malaysia. The narrative of this hotel started during the latter part of the 19th Century, when Cheong Fatt Tze harboured the ambition of providing his descendants with a residence that embodied the qualities of grandeur and refinement. Following the death of his last son, the Mansion underwent a transfer of ownership to a group of Penang conservationists who embarked upon the task of meticulously restoring it to its previous state of grandeur. The restoration of Cheong Fatt Tze's Blue Mansion was successfully finished by the end of 1995, resulting in the total revitalization of its architectural structure. The Blue Mansion underwent extensive renovations and was eventually transformed into a boutique hotel, as well as made accessible for the public. The restoration project was honoured with the Malaysian Institute of Architects (PAM) Architecture Award for its outstanding design excellence in 1995. Additionally, it received UNESCO's prestigious Most Excellent Project in the Asia Pacific Heritage Award in 2000 (Cheong Fatt Tze the Blue Mansion, n. d).



By Noraziah Mohd Amin



The rooms consist of The Ming Collection seamlessly combining contemporary luxury with the lavishness reminiscent of the 19th century, offering convenient access to both the pool and Oriental garden. The rooms are outfitted in a distinctive manner, using accessories sourced from the family of Cheong Fatt Tze. Additionally, these rooms are provided with contemporary amenities, like espresso makers. The Ming Collection (Lean Hwa, Nanyang, Escoy and Sinkeh), the Liang Collection (Hakka, Fragrant Poem, Batavia, Scholar, Towkay, Shangtung, Peony, Taipu, Fengshui and Chang Yu), the Tang Collection (the 50s Room and The Old Kitchen), the Han Suites (Yantai, Mandarin) and the Town Houses (Tjiong on Ropewalk and Zhang on Rope Walk) (Cheong Fatt Tze the Blue Mansion, n. d).



For dining, guests can head to Indigo Restaurant, situated on the ground level, which draws inspiration from the esteemed figure of Cheong Fatt Tze. It presents a harmonious fusion of Eastern and Western elements, evident not only in its ambiance but also in its culinary offerings. Indigo operates on a daily basis, offering lunch, dinner, and special event services (Cheong Fatt Tze the Blue Mansion, n. d). Apart from Indigo Restaurant, there is

also Cafe Mangga situated under an aged mango tree inside the premises of George Town's renowned historic house. This establishment provides a selection of both traditional and modern comfort dishes, as well as invigorating beverages for patrons to enjoy. Customers can experience the pleasure of indulging in delectable cuisine and engaging in relaxed, sunlit talks during daylight hours, or revel in the melodic strains of live music while savouring refreshing beverages in the evening, all within the enchanting ambiance of the Mangga garden. Besides, there is a bar called "The Bar" which is a serene lounge area that offers visitors a unique vantage point of the renowned Blue Mansion, where they may indulge in a variety of drinks including specialty cocktails, wine, coffee, tea, and an all-day menu. Breakfast is served at the Courtyard which exemplifies the convergence of the elements of "feng" (representing wind) and "shui" (representing water), resulting in the establishment of a refined area inside the Mansion characterised by the most potent natural energy flow (Cheong Fatt Tze the Blue Mansion, n. d).



JAWI PERANAKAN MANSION

Jawi Peranakan Mansion is a boutique hotel named after “Jawi Peranakan” which refers to individuals who are native-born descendants resulting from the marriages between Malay women and Muslim males, mostly originating from the southern region of the Indian sub-continent. These men often come from Tamil and Malabari backgrounds, as well as from the Hindi-speaking regions of India (Trisha, 2021). This hotel is located at Jalan Hutton, George Town, Penang, Malaysia.

The locality of the mansion is characterised by a diverse assortment of architectural styles, namely including Anglo-Indian-Muslim tropical bungalows. This area, historically known as “India-Muslim millionaires street,” showcases a fusion of cultural influences. The design of this boutique hotel incorporates elements of the Mughal style, using a skillful combination of fabrics, ceramic tiles, and window grills to reflect the aesthetic of the historical time. The Jawi Peranakan Mansion, a masterpiece crafted by the creative mind of Chris Ong, unveils a treasure trove of luxury with its array of 8 opulent mansion rooms and 6 exquisite family suites (Jawi Peranakan Mansion, n. d).

The acquisition of the property took place in 2012, when it was in a condition of disrepair. Chris has skillfully undertaken the restoration of the Anglo-Indian mansion, returning it to its former condition of grandeur and elegance. The process of restoring the architectural components of lime plaster walls, wood lattices, plantation shutters, cornices, and so on to their former state required a span of three years. The result is a harmonious fusion, a visual symphony blending 18th/19th-century British aesthetics with the enchanting allure of Muslim design from the Mughal era, adorned with the intricate tapestry of Indian ethnic motifs (Jawi Peranakan Mansion, n. d).



The rooms are equipped with king-size beds, comfortable seating spaces, and daybeds separated by Muslim-inspired coloured decorative glass screens. The headboards of the beds are adorned with intricately designed Mughal-inspired tiles that have embossed patterns. In order to achieve a comprehensive aesthetic, one may consider using roll top writing tables, Kelim carpets, hand block indigo printed fabrics, lanterns, silk, wool Kashmir throws, and brass Mughal



mirrors. The materials used in the furniture and bed linen are carefully selected from the regions along the historic spice route, where the original inhabitants resided (Jawi Peranakan Mansion, n. d). The hotel has a distinctive architectural style characterised by the use of geometrically patterned tiles. The aforementioned pattern is seen to be replicated in the woodwork, fencing, and other dividers. Besides, the hotel has a garden that emits fragrances like gardenia, frangipani, chempaka, and jasmine.



For dining, guests can head to the restaurant owned by the same company as the hotel's called "Jawi House" which is located at Lebuah Armenian George Town, Penang. This restaurant was founded by the Karim family, who are of Punjabi-Jawi Peranakan descent and have a lineage spanning six generations in George Town. Notably, four generations of women from this family have played a pivotal role in the creation of the remarkable food offered at Jawi House. Dining at Jawi House offers a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the rich culinary history that spans centuries. This history harkens back to the era of early spice trade routes, where Malay women skillfully incorporated the spices and herbs brought back by their Persian, Arab, Indian, and Punjabi husbands. The resulting culinary experience is one that leaves a lasting impression on all who partake in it (Jawi House, n. d).

PENAGA HOTEL

Penaga Hotel is another boutique hotel worth visiting which is strategically located in the heart of George Town, Penang, Malaysia at Jalan Hutton. The first structure was originally a two-story terraced building situated in Georgetown, including both residential dwellings and commercial shophouses. Constructed around the 1920s, the structure underwent renovations after the war (Penaga Hotel, n. d). The building was purchased by a couple who proceeded to transform it into a boutique hotel with forty-five rooms, showcasing the building's legacy (Penaga Hotel, n. d).

The notable aspect that makes this boutique hotel is its use of traditional architectural techniques and preservation of old furnishings throughout the reconstruction process. The wood and timber used in the architectural composition of the building were sourced from deconstructed colonial structures (Penaga Hotel, n. d). The rooms are exquisitely adorned with wooden furniture and antique pieces. The addition of elegant elements will enhance the whole ambiance. The rooms are known as Hutton Deluxe, Clarke Terraces, Transfer Suites and Penaga Suites.



For dining, the hotel offers an Italian restaurant named “Rossi Italian” which is renowned for its exquisite food, shown inside a location that has garnered acclaim for its opulent decor, inspired by a rich history, and adorned with wonderful art pieces throughout its walls. With its advantageous location providing views of the swimming pool and a direct line of sight to the garden walk, Rossi Italian is a very suitable venue for hosting various events and offering a relaxed dining experience. Rossi Italian has a diverse selection of meticulously created Italian gastronomic choices, including a variety of handcrafted pasta and pizza selections. For relaxing and body pampering, the hotel’s spa, Teratak Spa offers spa experience that is rooted in Malaysian culture, using indigenous treatments and products. The ambiance of the spa is carefully curated to reflect the distinctive Malaysian touch (Penaga Hotel, n. d).

To conclude, with their distinctive aesthetics and individualised service, boutique hotels provide a unique and immersive experience within the hospitality industry. A stay at a boutique hotel is an excursion into a realm designed to cater to unique preferences, where each detail reveals a narrative, and each service provides a customised experience.



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