

# By George!

zafigo

For women travellers in Asia

14 Things Every Woman Traveller Should Know  
And Do When In Penang's George Town



# Welcome To Zafigo

## Created For Women Travellers

**Zafigo** is dedicated to the woman traveller, whether she is on the move for work, leisure, or to settle into a new home. We offer city guides, local insights, lifestyle ideas and tips to make travel safer, easier, better and more interesting for women.

In each destination, we gather the best editors, writers and seasoned travellers who know their cities like the back of their hands, to give us the scoop on what women should know before they arrive and how to make the most of their time while there.

We produce original stories and city guides, and curate the most engaging contents across the Web to inspire conversations among women travellers. We want our readers to connect to women around the world through [Zafigo.com](https://www.zafigo.com).



Pic credit: [levi.com.my](https://www.levi.com.my)

**Marina Mahathir**  
*Founder of Zafigo*

When I was packing for a meeting in Pakistan some years ago, I faced a dilemma. What is appropriate to wear in that country? Google yielded very little information. The episode made me realise that there is a gap of information for women travellers.

Travel is, after all, a very gendered business; female travellers have very different concerns from male travellers. I realise that my friends rely on me for tips on the various places I've visited. Why not share them with more women?

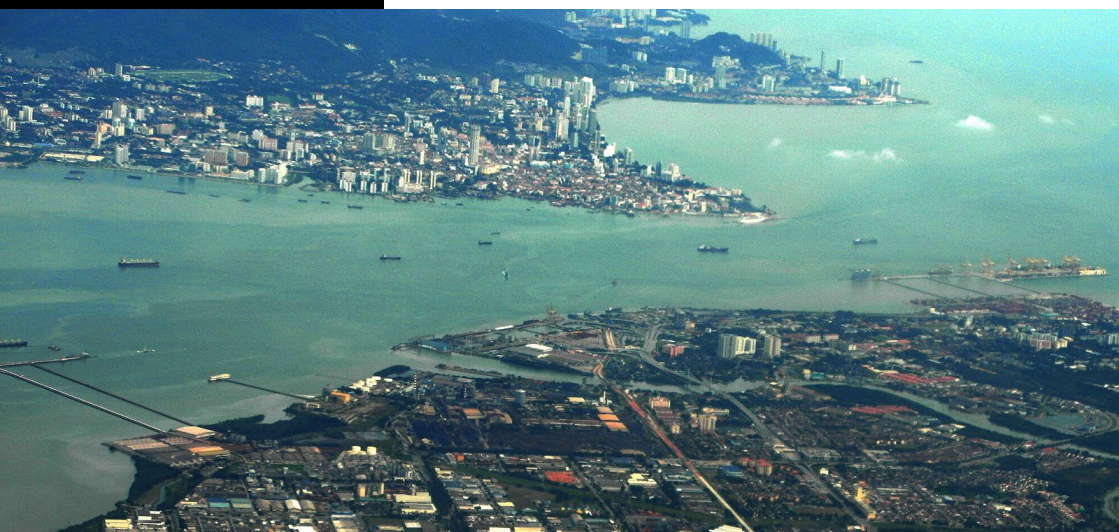
In case you're wondering, Zafigo is a corruption of 'Safe I Go', the main concern of women travellers everywhere. Ultimately, Zafigo hopes to become a global community of women travellers sharing their insights and supporting each other so that wherever we go, we can look up a Zafigo friend.



# Penang Island, Mainland, George Town, World Heritage Zone, Core Zone, Buffer Zone... I'm Confused!

- **George Town** is the capital of Penang state, which consists of Penang Island and Seberang Perai, a strip of land across in Peninsula Malaysia. Separated by the Straits of Malacca, Penang Island and Seberang Perai are linked by two bridges: The 13.5km Penang Bridge and the newer 24km Penang Second Bridge.
- In 2008, **George Town** was recognised as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, covering two zones in the north-eastern tip of the city. The Core Zone is a 109-hectare site on the north-east of Penang Island that consists of over 1,700 buildings. Surrounding that is a 150-hectare band called the Buffer Zone. The earliest wave of heritage appreciation activities took place in the Core Zone (especially around Lebuh Armenian and Lebuh Pantai) but in the last couple of years, the goodness has spilled over into the Nagore enclave in the buffer zone as well.
- There are two ways to commute between Penang Island and Mainland: Drive across one of the two bridges, or take the **Penang Ferry service** that has been operating since the 1920s, making it the oldest ferry service in Malaysia. We recommend taking the 15-minute ferry ride – it's a fun, inexpensive way to soak in Penang's sky and seashore. You only have to pay RM1.20 when you come back from the Mainland. Operating roughly between 6.00am-12.00am, the ferry departs at 20 to 30-minute intervals.

Penangites typically refer to Seberang Perai as Mainland, and when they speak of Penang, they usually mean the island exclusively.



# 14 Things Every Woman Traveller Should Know And Do When In Penang's George Town

#1

## Use Komtar to get your bearings

Locals have this saying: If you ever get lost, just look at KOMTAR. At 232m (761ft), the island's tallest and most recognisable landmark can be seen from any point within George Town. It may no longer be the hippest hangout but it's still an important commercial nexus with major banks, an ICT mall and the state government's administrative offices located here. All the intra-city bus routes radiate from this terminal, and this is also the main place to buy inter-city bus tickets and hail trishaws.

#2

## Stretch your Ringgit with the Travel Privilege Card – Penang

A joint initiative by the Ministry of Tourism & Culture, Tourism Malaysia Penang and [Penang Tourist Centre](#), this smartcard is one of the most useful and cost-effective ways to explore Penang with. Costing only RM20, it provides up to **20% discount** on transportation, tourist attractions, dining and shopping. Available at Penang Tourist Centre and selected museums.



#3

## Work those leg muscles

With its narrow, atmospheric streets, George Town is ideal for walking everywhere. You can stop and marvel at street art, scrutinise stunning architectural details, and observe all the little things that give the heritage area its charm. Remember to wear sensible shoes (or get a pair made, see #9).

#4

## Ride in a trishaw

It may be touristy but is an enjoyable experience no less that harks back to the days when these three-wheeled vehicles were the main mode of transport. It can, however, be a tad uncomfortable on a hot day.

**Tip** Wait till the early evenings when temperatures drop.



#5

## Sleep soundly at these women-friendly hotels



A suite at Container Hotel | Pic credit: [@containerhotel](#)

These three lodgings are recommended for their modern comforts, central locations and special provisions for women travellers:

**Queen's Hostel** will win you over with amenities selected for their appeal to women: Rain showers, mini theatre and beauty essentials (hair dryers, straighteners, and OPI nail lacquers). The highlight is the dorm itself, sprawled with plush mattresses divided by makeshift curtains for privacy.

From spacious women's dorms with spring mattresses and personalised lockers with bed lights, to free breakfast and WiFi, you're well insulated from rude surprises at **Syok @ Chulia Hostel**.

For a unique experience, consider the female-friendly pod at **Container Hotel**. You get two fluffy pillows, earplugs (on request), privacy blinds, individual ventilation and an amenities bag. You also get to live in a bit of history as it's located in the centenary building of Kwong Wah Yit Poh, the country's oldest Chinese language newspaper founded in 1910 by Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat Sen.

#6

## Chic cafés for chill-outs and cakes

Once synonymous with street food, Penang's fabled culinary scene has expanded considerably with a raft of achingly cool cafes and coffee bars that even non-hipsters love to be seen at. Perennial favourites include **China House** (an art gallery slash reading room slash performance space slash café with over 30 types of decadent cakes), **Mugshot Cafe** (excellent coffee) and **Cozy in the Rocket** (262 & 264, Lebuhr Pantai. **Opens** 10am-5pm, closed Mondays; great handmade pastas).

Newer cafes that are fast gaining popularity are cheesecake specialist **Moody Cow Café** (order the hate-it-or-love-it salted egg yolk variant), **Passion Heart** (scrumptious homemade cakes; try the compedak butter cake), **Das Rad** (goulash and spaetzle) and **Book Sandwich** (beef *rendang* and *sambal udang* sandwiches).

**Tip** What are Penang's not-to-be-missed dishes and delights? Find out in our article <http://zafigo.com/stories/from-the-web/8-dishes-you-must-try-when-in-penang/>

#7

## There's more to street art than photo opportunities

Lithuanian artist Ernest Zacharevic's murals, which started as a commission for George Town Festival 2012 to liven up old buildings, still have travellers flocking to the city. In truth, the street art renaissance started in 2009 with the city-wide installation of steel rod caricatures that depict historical events and figures with witty captions, such as this one at Kimberly Street: An old-timer summarising a hipster's convoluted order of "one tall double shot decaf espresso" as simply "Kopi O Kaul!". To catch them all, [travel blogger Timothy Tye's street art guide](#) serves as a good primer.

#8

## Learn from traditional craftsmen

A phrase you'll hear often is "living heritage", referring to a shrinking but still sizeable pool of artisans who carry on generations-old trades. [Penang Heritage Trust](#) organises regular workshops on local crafts such as rattan weaving, Nyonya shoe beading and wood carving.



(Top) Penang Street Art | Pic credit: [travel2penang](#) (Bottom) China House | Pic credit: [Facebook](#)



#9

## These shoes are made for walking

One of Penang's most famous living heritage is custom shoe maker Wong Heng Mun from [Hong Kong Shoe Store](#). The one-month lead time may kill you but your feet will thank you for the snug, glove-like comfort.

#10

## Clan house culture

The [Leong San Tong Khoo Kongs](#) is the most distinctive and reputable clan house in Penang. It's usually closed in the evenings, but every last Saturday of the month, Khoo Kongs turns on the lights at its courtyard between 6.30pm-10.00pm to accommodate exciting Chinese art and cultural performances on the opera stage.

#11

## It's in the bag

Your beloved leather handbag finally gave way?

**Foo Ah & Co** (159 Lebuhraya Chulia Tel +604 261 3223) repairs bags and other leather goods cheaply and speedily.



#12

## Beauty through the ages

If you've ever wondered how our mums (and grandmas) dolled up before the advent of digital perms and Korean waves, get a blowout at an old-school perm parlour. You can find these legacy institutions along Jalan Dato Kramat and Lorong Hutton, recognisable by the portraits of women with their resplendent pompadours in the window displays.

#13

## Modern art in an old bus depot

**Hin Bus Depot** is a contemporary art centre housed in a 68-year-old abandoned bus depot that has been lovingly restored while keeping to its nostalgic aura. With expansive outdoor, indoor, semi-outdoor spaces, a lawn and outdoor mural area, there is always something going on (and most of their exhibitions are free), so be sure to check their [calendar](#) of events.

#14

## Sunday strut along car-free streets

Between 7am-1pm every Sunday, Lebuhr Pantai, Lebuhr Bishop, Lebuhr Gereja and Gat Lebuhr Gereja are made car-free for Project Occupy Beach Street, and transform into a street carnival of al fresco bazaars, outdoor markets, outdoor sports and other family-friendly activities.



Hin Bus Depot | Pic credit: [Aleksandr Zykov/Ellkr](#)

## Getting Around George Town



Bikes for rent | Pic credit: [Darby Bognot/Flickr](#)

**RapidPenang** is the city's main public bus network; **iOS users** can download their [mobile app](#) to check bus arrival times. Flash your passport to purchase a rapid Passport (RM30) for 7 days of unlimited travel and rebates from partner merchants.

**Penang CAT** is a free shuttle bus service that plies the heritage sites and major thoroughfares (download the map [here](#)).

Like Kuala Lumpur, Penang also has the double-decker [Hop-On Hop-Off](#) bus that stops at 22 attractions along two different routes (City and Beach).

Regular taxis don't go by meter. Cabbies charge a fixed price depending on the destination; [Grab](#) and [Uber](#) are popular (and usually cheaper) options.

With a rising number of designated lanes, cycling is an increasingly popular way to commute around George Town. Shops in the core zone offer rental on folding bikes, tandem bikes, family four-seaters and even classic Japanese city bikes. Getting consistently good reviews are [Metro Bike](#), [George Town Bicycle Rental](#), [Freedom Leisure Cycle Supply](#) (155 Lebuhraya Victoria) and [Townbikes](#) (5 Lorong Chulia).

# Emergency Contacts

## Police and emergency numbers

The emergency number in Malaysia is **999** (**112** on mobile phones). It's also handy to have a safety app installed on your phone. Here are a few to consider:

### Red Alert

Besides a panic button that can be activated with a tap of the screen, which then launches its Black Box audio-capturing feature, this app also enables geo locations that sends your GPS location to registered contacts on your phone. Available on [Android](#).

### Alarms & Sirens!

This app offers a collection of siren sounds that you can activate to scare off attackers or at least throw them off guard, and attract attention to yourself and the situation. The list of sounds includes air raid alarms and police sirens. Available on [iOS](#).

### Malaysia Hotlines

Find contact numbers that would come in useful in cases of emergencies, including that of local authorities and foreign embassies. You can dial the numbers from within the app. Available on [iOS](#) and [Android](#).

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## Medical Assistance

Should you require hospitalisation, note that while public hospitals are open to foreigners, there is usually a long waiting time. You will likely need a referral so visit a GP first instead of heading straight to the hospital. Private hospitals are usually more accommodating but they might require proof of funds so it would be wise to ensure you're properly insured.

For milder issues, there are walk-in clinics, with some that are open 24 hours. Have at least RM100 on hand to cover consultation fees and medicine.

If you need medicines, you can find pharmacies at all shopping malls. Basic over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin, paracetamol and cough syrup can also be purchased at supermarkets, convenience outlets, traditional Chinese medicine stores, and small sundry shops.





## *Guides, Ideas, Tips & Stories*

for the woman traveller exploring and navigating the cultural maze in Asia



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