

# PENANG

## Island of Contrasts

*Photographs and text by  
Dennis M. Allen*



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*Endpaper: A colourful collection of souvenir tee-shirts for sale on the streets of George Town.*

*Title spread: The stunning afterglow of sunset at Batu Ferringhi.*

*Following pages: Early morning view of Penang Island from Butterworth on the mainland.  
Sunset at Batu Ferringhi beach.  
Penang Bridge at sunrise.  
One of many beaches along Penang's northern coastline.*

*Opposite: Mythical Chinese figure depicted on a temple doorway.*

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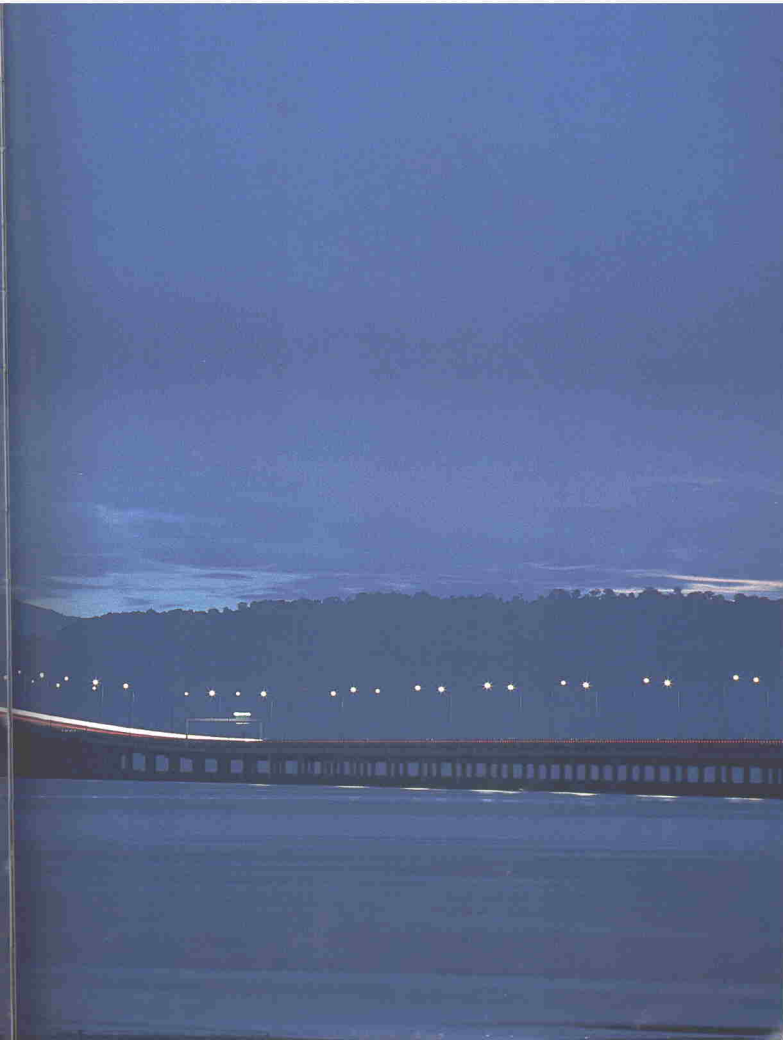








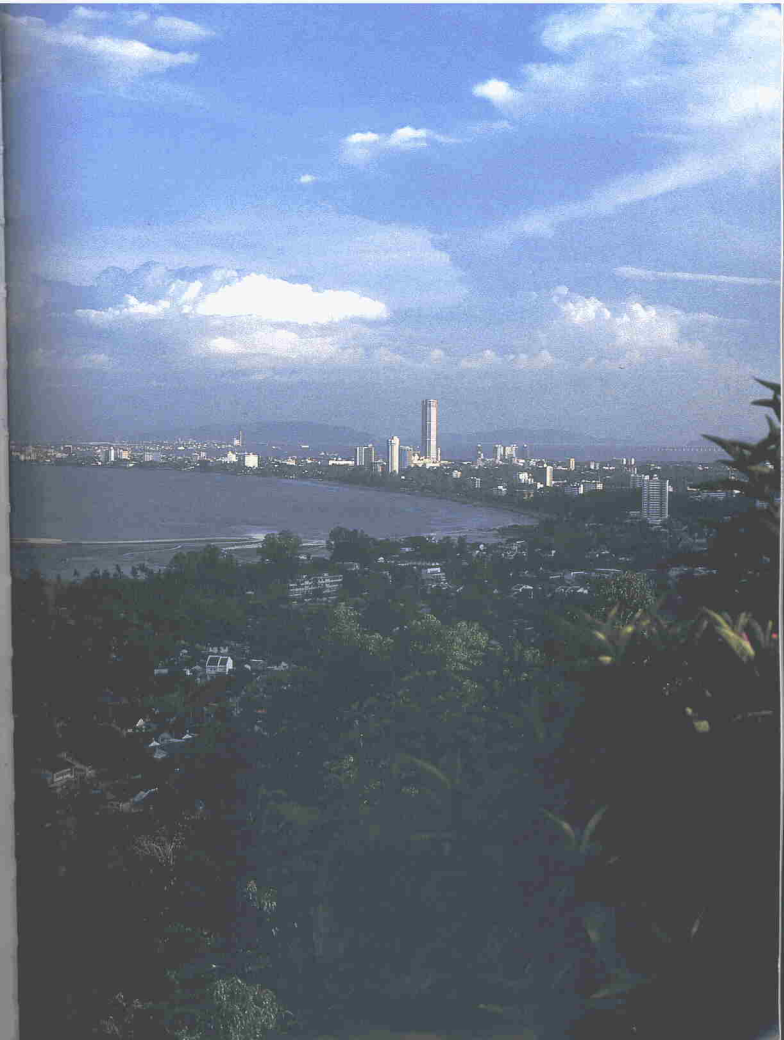




# PENANG ISLAND



Opposite: George Town from Bukit Mutiara.





## *Historical Background*

Widely known as the “Pearl of the Orient” Penang is Malaysia’s most popular holiday destination. The territory of the state consists of the island of Penang (Pulau Pinang) and the mainland coastal strip known as Seberang Prai (formerly Port Wellesley). The two are linked by a 24 hour ferry service and the 13.5 kilometer Penang Bridge, the third longest road bridge in the world.

In 1786 Captain Francis Light of the Britain East India Company established Penang Island as the first British settlement in the far East. The island’s original name was Prince of Wales Island, but was later changed to Pulau Pinang, meaning Island of the Betelnut.

From the early 1900’s Penang developed fairly quickly. The island’s first hydroelectric plant was completed in 1905, and consequentially its first tramway began operating in 1906. By 1910 Penang had been turned into a major port, mainly due to the increasing demand for rubber in the West. In 1941, two years after the outbreak of the Second World War, the Japanese invaded Penang and took control of the island until formally surrendering to allied troops on 4th September 1945. Penang then remained under British control until the independence of Malaya in 1957.

Today, Penang is a busy port, commercial and tourist centre with a multitude of cultures. The population is nearly one million, of which about 50 per cent live on the island. Chinese, Malays and Indians form the three largest groups, with small numbers of Eurasians, Japanese, Europeans and Americans.

The capital George Town has an unmistakably Chinese flavour, but retains many architectural reminders of its colonial history.

Away from the city there are spectacular beaches along the north coast road to Batu Ferringhi, and there is unspoiled natural scenery all along the far side of the island.

(Left) Captain Francis Light the founder of Penang.

(Right) Post box from the reign of King George VI.





*The impressive Kek Lok Si Temple is situated high on a hill overlooking Air Itam village. It is the largest Buddhist temple in Malaysia, and one of the finest in South East Asia.*

*Construction began in 1890 and took over twenty years to complete.*

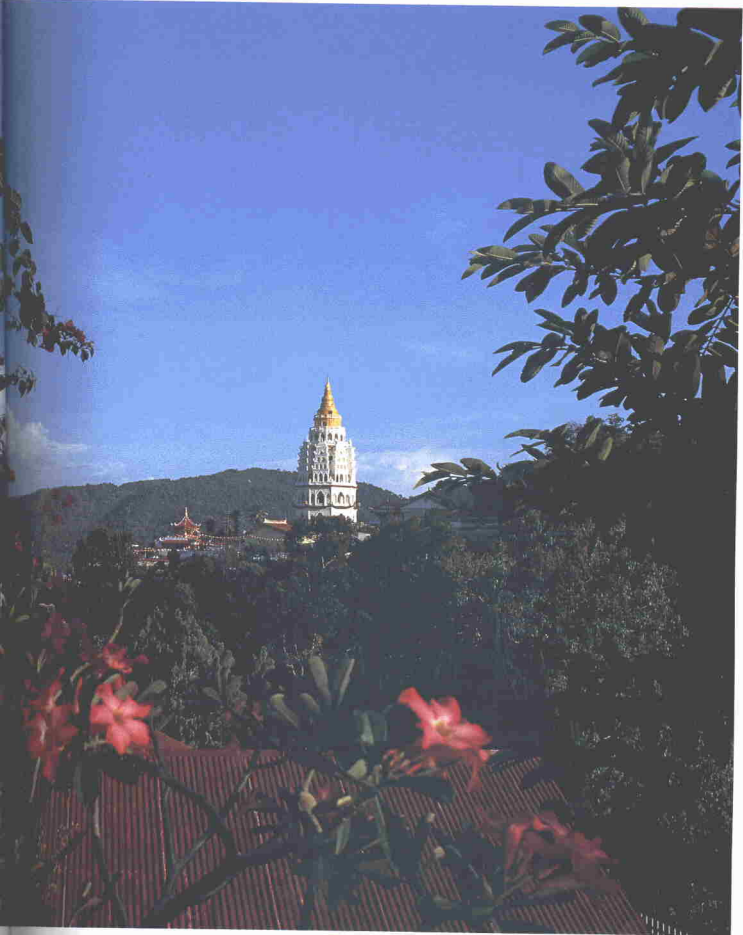
*The temple grounds cover 10 Hectars, and there are an estimated 10,000 Buddha images to be found within its prayer halls and pagodas.*

*The main attraction for visitors is the enormous central column known as the 'Pagoda of a Thousand Buddhas'.*

*The pagoda is made of seven connected tiers and rises to a height of 30 metres. A climb to the top tier is rewarded with a magnificent view of George Town and beyond.*

*(Overleaf) The magnificent main prayer hall in the Penang Buddhist Association building.*

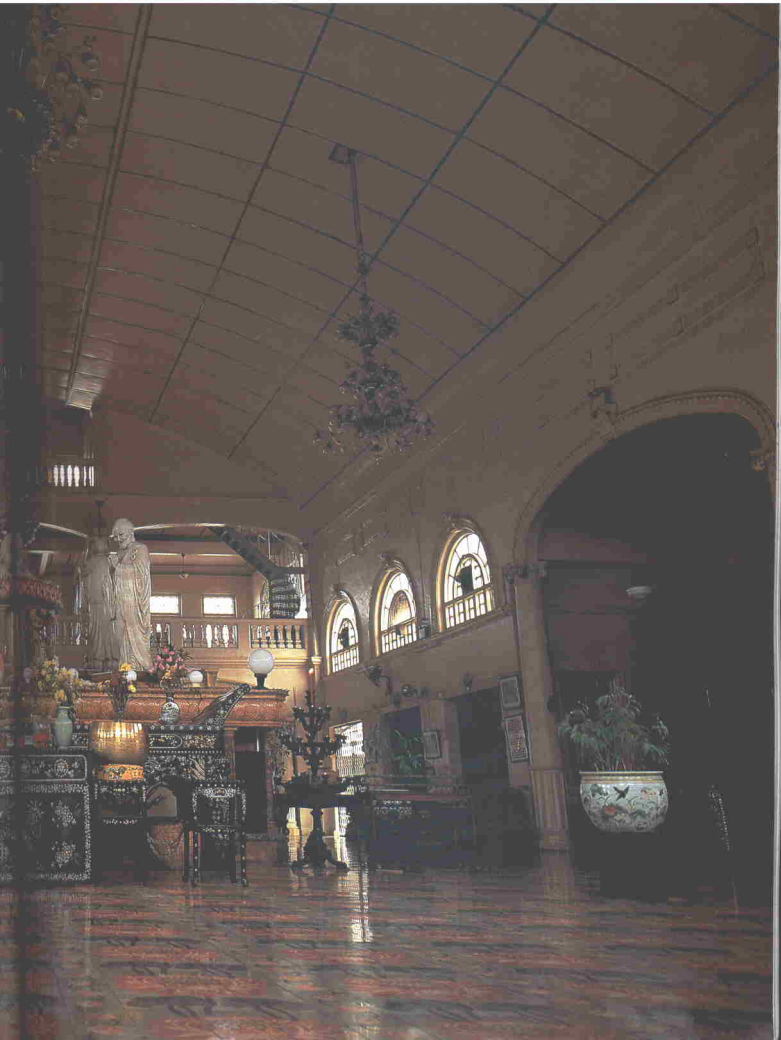




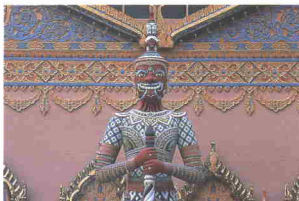
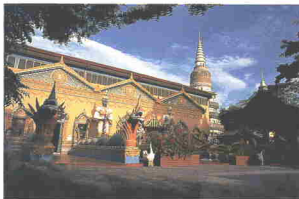


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*The entrance to Wat Chayamankalaram, a colourful Thai Buddhist temple in Lorong Burmah is lined with gigantic Naga serpents, mythical creatures that link earth to heaven. Inside the enormous meditation hall lies a huge gold plated Reclining Buddha measuring 32 metres, the third largest Reclining Buddha in the world. The walls of the meditation hall are lined with delicate oil paintings of Buddha and behind the central image are niches where urns containing the ashes of devotees are placed.*





*(Left) Sri Mariamman temple in Leboh Queen is the oldest Hindu temple in Penang. Built in 1883 it houses a priceless statue of Lord Subramaniam which is decorated with gold, diamonds and other precious stones.*

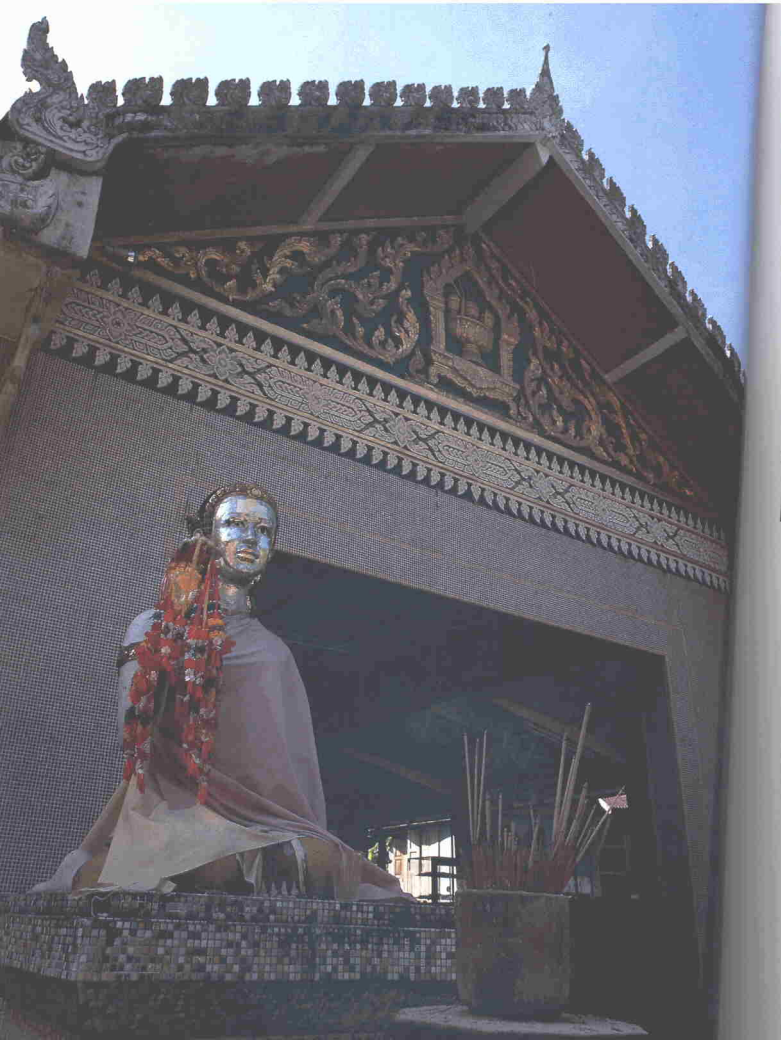
*(Right) The Kapitan Kling mosque in Leboh Pitti was constructed in 1800 of Indian Islamic architectural influence. It is the main house of prayer for Penang's Indian Muslim Community.*



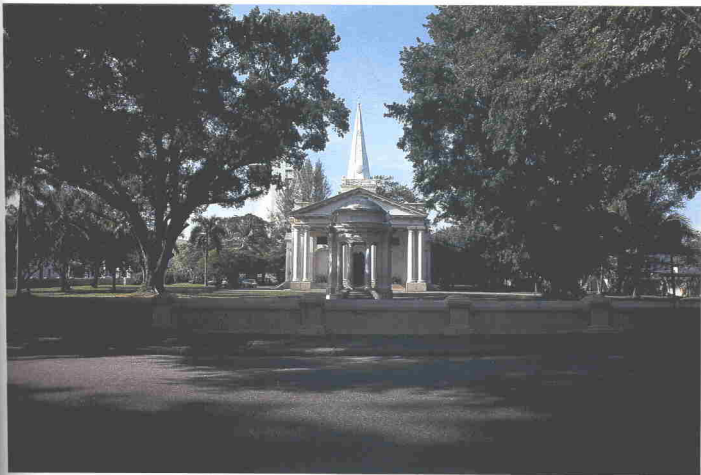
*Khoo Kongsi is the most spectacular Chinese clan house in Malaysia. It was built in 1843 by Chinese migrants of the Khoo family and is a fine example of intricate Chinese design and craftsmanship. Kongsis are mutual benefit societies constructed as a communal place of worship for all members of a particular family or clan. Khoo Kongsi's most striking exterior feature is its dragon shaped roof and on either side of the central shrine are ancestral halls honouring the patron saints of the Khoo clan.*











*The multi-religious element of Malaysian culture is one of the most interesting aspects of the country.*

*(Left) Delicate image at the entrance to a Thai Buddhist temple.*

*(Above) St. George's church is the oldest Anglican church in South East Asia.*

*(Right) Catholic church of the Immaculate Conception in Lorong Burmah.*

*(Right, below) The Penang state mosque, completed in 1980, is an elegant example of contemporary Islamic architecture.*





(Right) The ornately designed Snake Temple was built in 1850 and dedicated to the Chinese deity Chor Koo Seng. The Temple is guarded by a number of Wrangler's Pit Vipers which coil around various objects in the main prayer hall. The snakes are considered 'officers' of the deity and believed to be holy and symbols of good fortune. They are kept docile by the continuous burning of incense sticks. (Above) Traditional puppetry is an integral part of many Taoist festivals held throughout the year. (Left) Chinese New Year cards for sale. Red is the Chinese symbol of good luck and happiness.



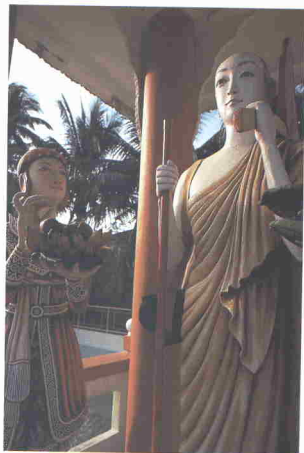
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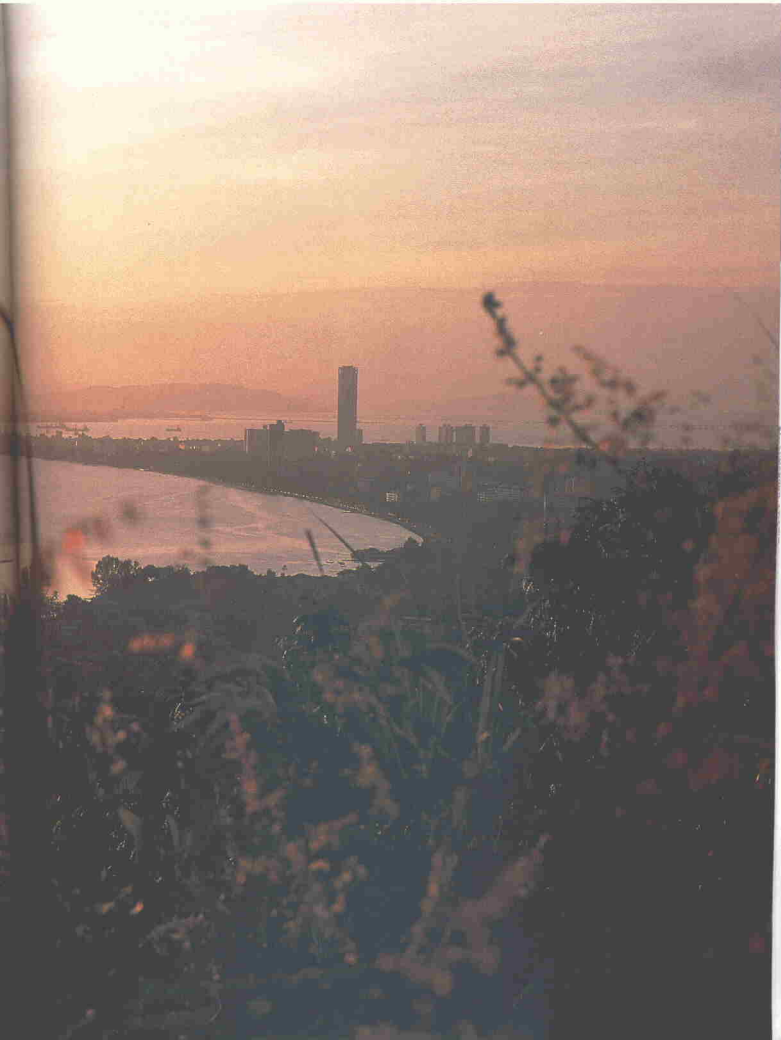


*The delicately crafted Arahant Uppagutta Pagoda, was constructed in Burmese style, and stands in landscaped gardens in Lorong Burmah.*

*(Overleaf) The early morning George Town skyline is dominated by Malaysia's tallest building the 65 storey Komtar, which houses all departments of the State Government, and has developed into Penang's liveliest social and cultural centre.*





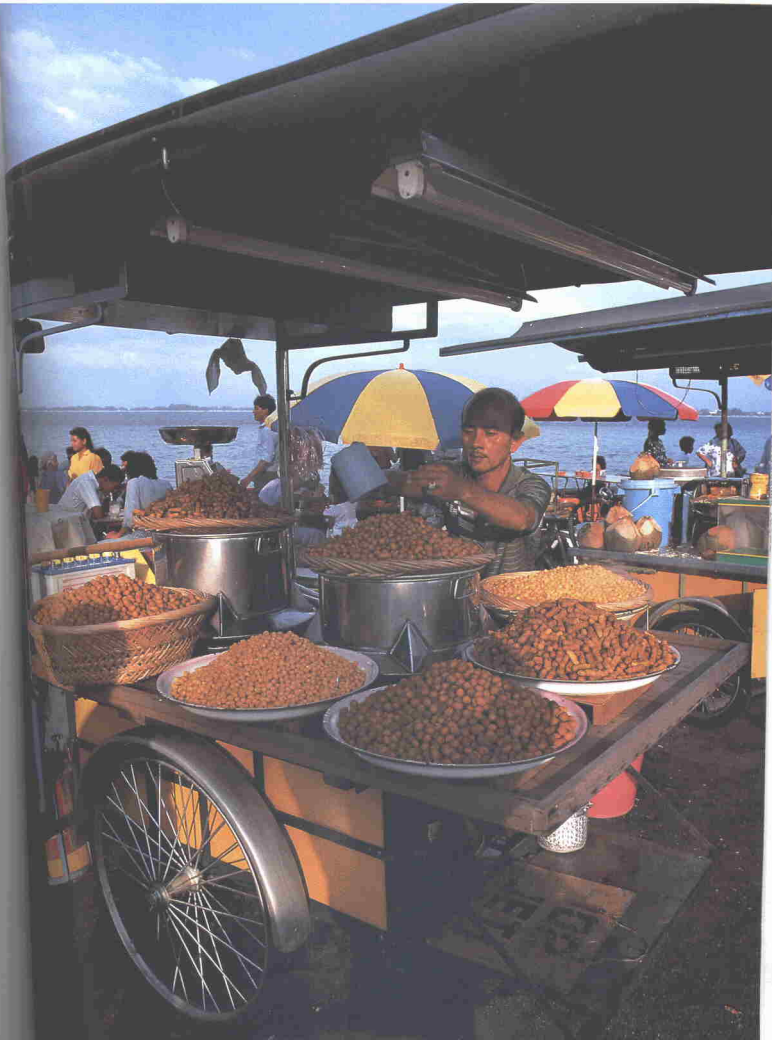


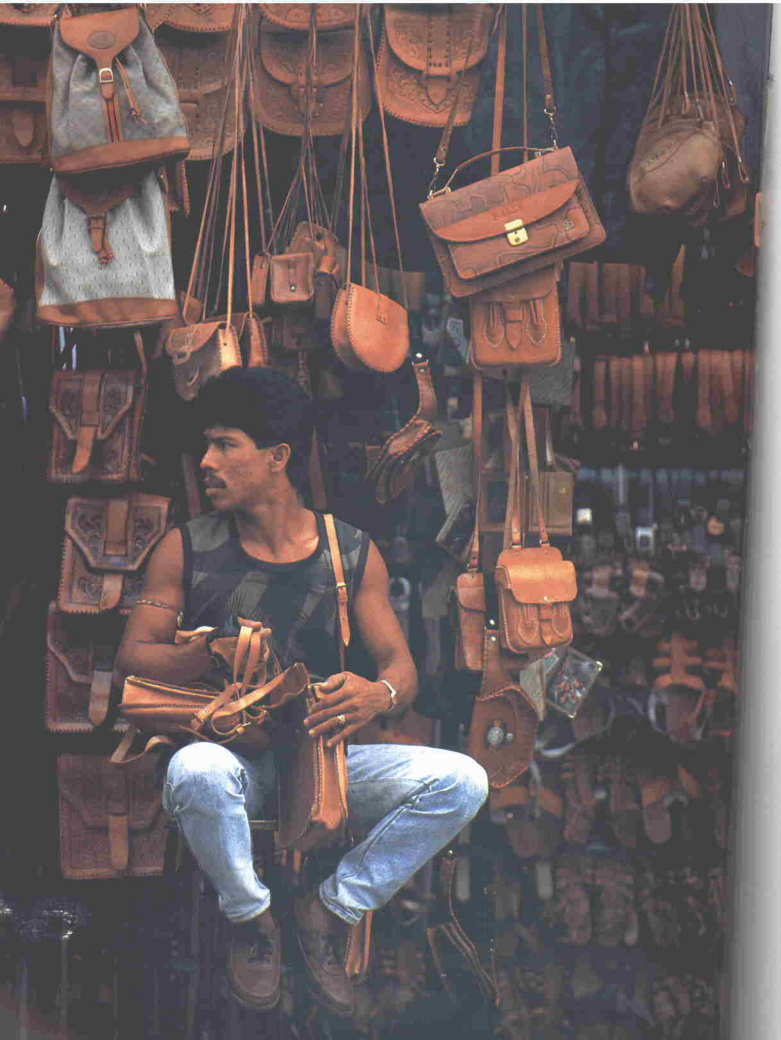


*The narrow and congested streets of George Town help create a bustling, vibrant atmosphere within the island's capital, an unmistakably Chinese town. A short walk through the crowded streets will uncover hundreds of thriving little businesses providing every imaginable service.*











*Everyday scenes from the streets of George Town.  
(Left) Stall selling cheap leather goods.  
(Above) Door-to-door deliveries of bread and cakes.  
(Right) Flower sellers on Leboh Pitt.*



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興和

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IMPORTER OF CHINA GOODS

BATTAN PRODUCTS





*(Left) Many small businesses manufacture rattan products in Malaysia. The quality of workmanship varies considerably, but with careful selection, attractive and inexpensive items can be found.*

*(Above) An interesting method of egg delivery.*

*(Right) Penangites really enjoy their food, numerous hawkers stalls selling everything imaginable are available everywhere on the island.*





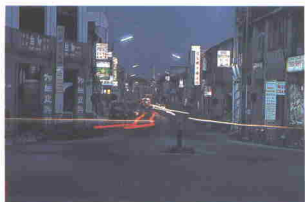


*(Left) Trishaw driver relaxing whilst waiting for a fare.*

*(Above) Mobil Milo! Interesting way to promote sales of the popular chocolate drink.*

*(Right) Inexpensive laundry in George Town.*





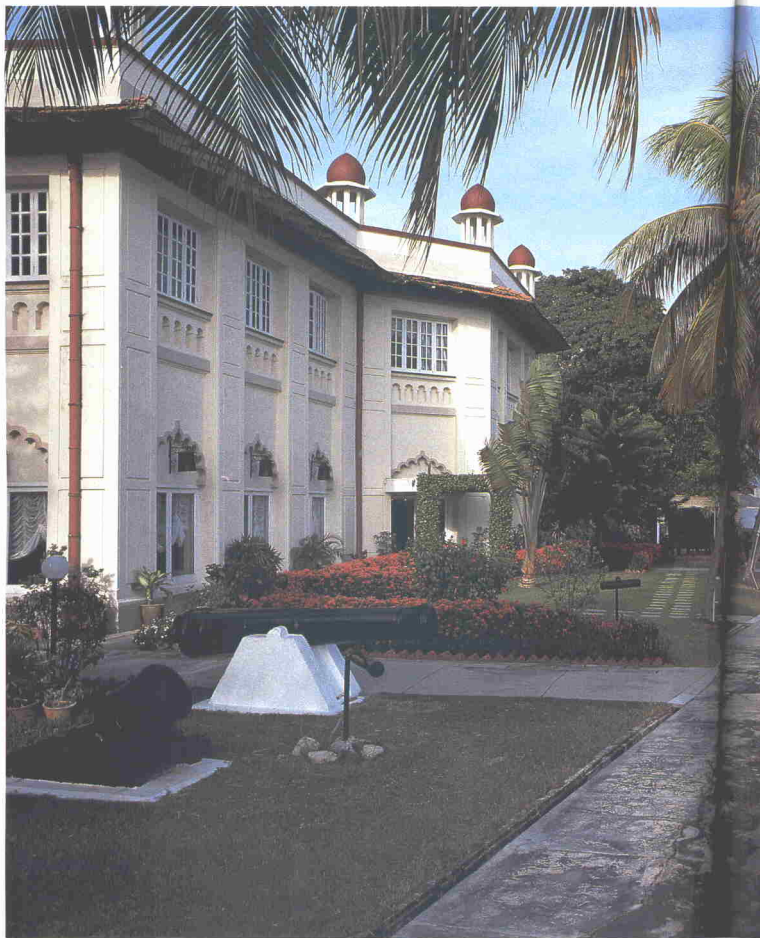
*(Right) The Penang Clock Tower was presented to George Town in 1897 by a Chinese millionaire to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations.*

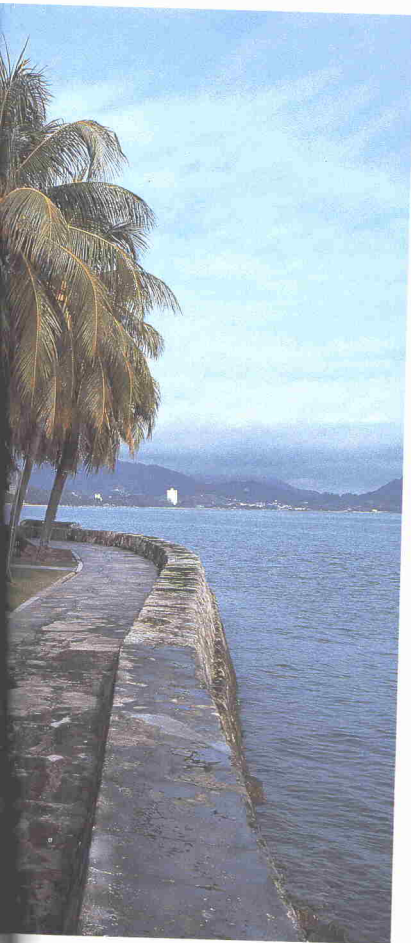
*(Above) Baskets of coconut husks, which are a source of cheap fuel for hawkers stalls.*

*(Left) Chulia Street at night.*









*There are many magnificent architectural reminders of Penang's history in and around the streets of George Town.*

*(Left) The Eastern and Oriental Hotel was established in 1885. Affectionately known as the 'E and O', the hotel continues to convey an atmosphere of years gone by.*



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*An interesting selection of homes to be found around George Town.*

*(Overleaf) Without doubt Penang's most popular holiday spot is Penang Hill, it stands 830 metres above sea level and is a cool retreat from the searing heat below.*

*The hill was developed by the British in 1899, but as there were no roads to the summit it was not fully utilised until the completion of a funicular railway system in 1923. The railway has been in operation ever since and a railcar ride to the top of the hill is one of the highlights of a visit to the island.*

*(Following page) Night view of George Town from Penang Hill. Outlook from the gardens of the hill's only hotel, the Bellevue.*















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安錦耀

福

GYMNASIUM



*The colourful Chingay procession, (Left and right) is held every year on Christmas Day, December 25th.*

*(Above) The amazing Hindu festival of Thaipusam is one of the most spectacular events in South East Asia.*

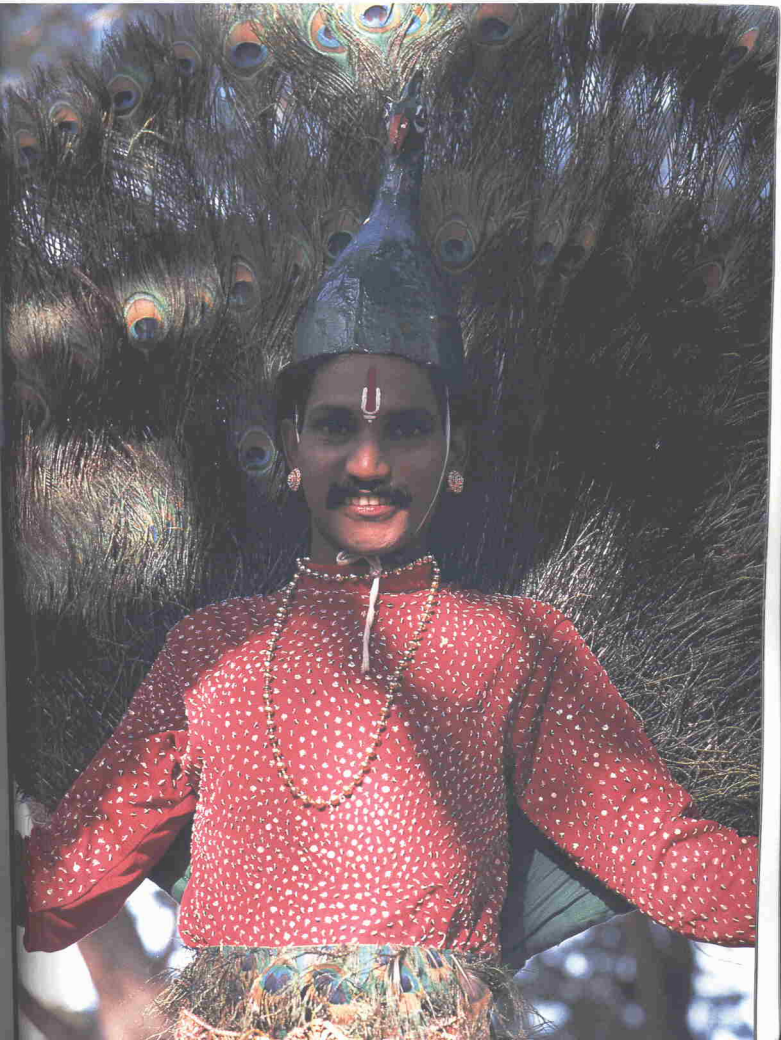




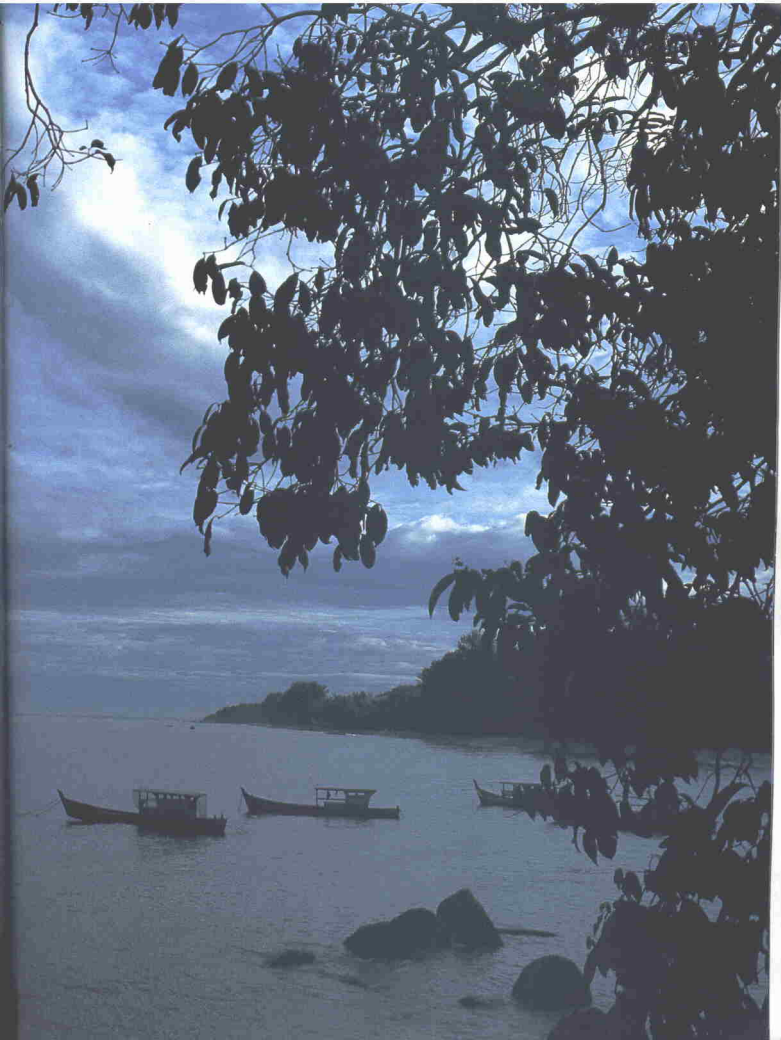
*More scenes from Penang's Chingay procession, which is a non religious festival and involves many members of clubs and associations throughout the island.*

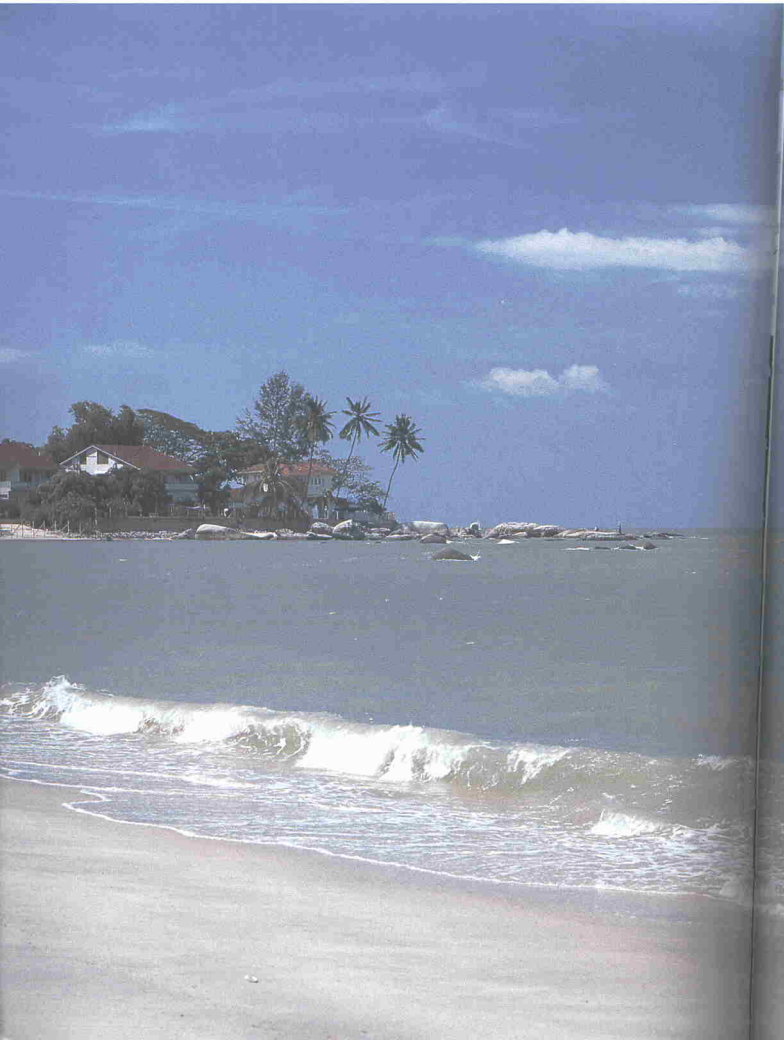
*(Overleaf) Daybreak in a secluded bay at Batu Ferringhi.*



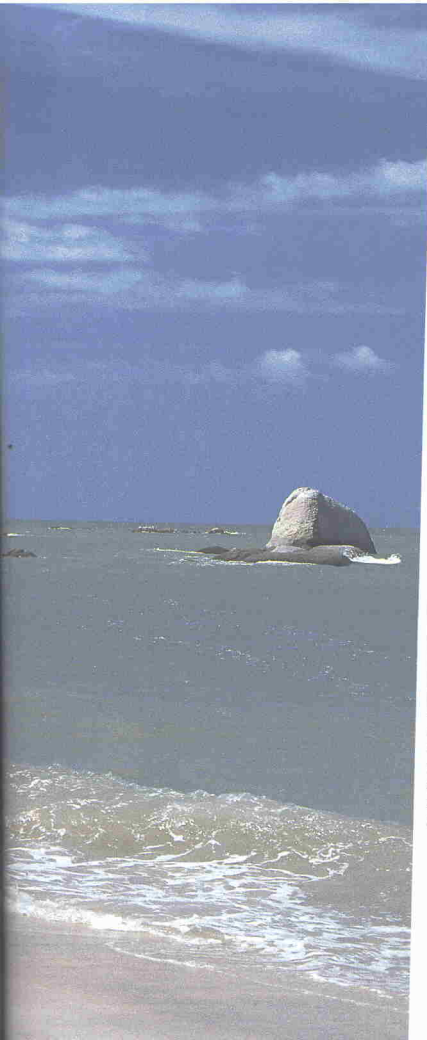












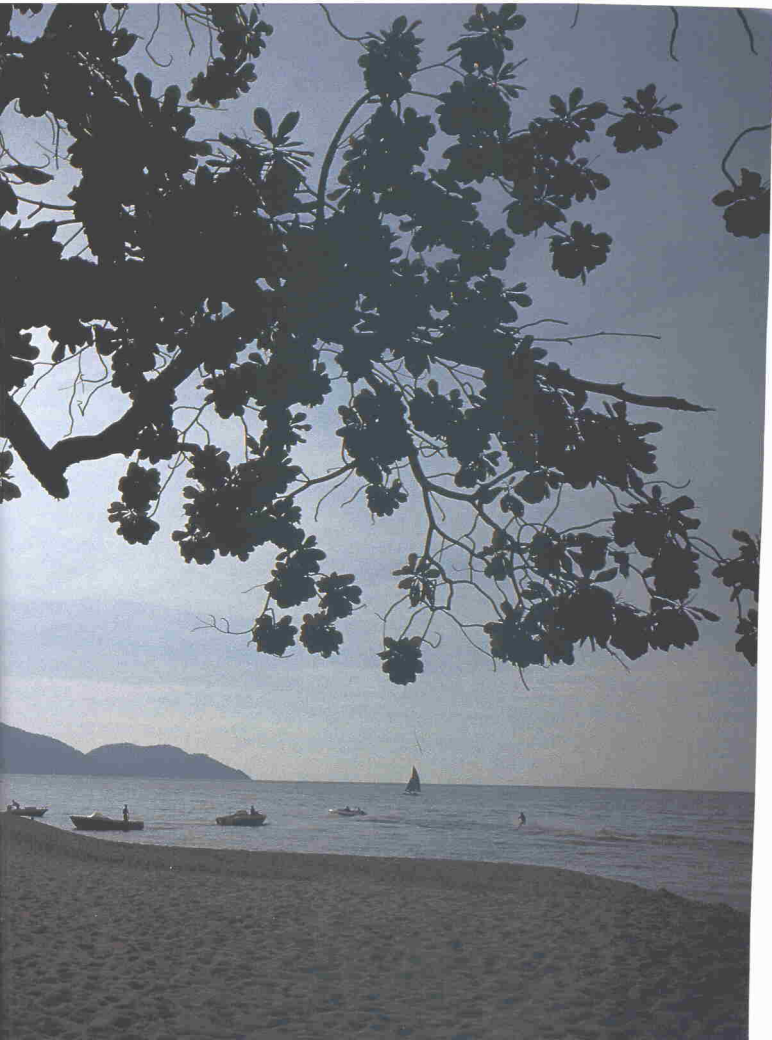
*(Left) A corner of Tanjung Bunga, one of Penang's quieter beach areas.*

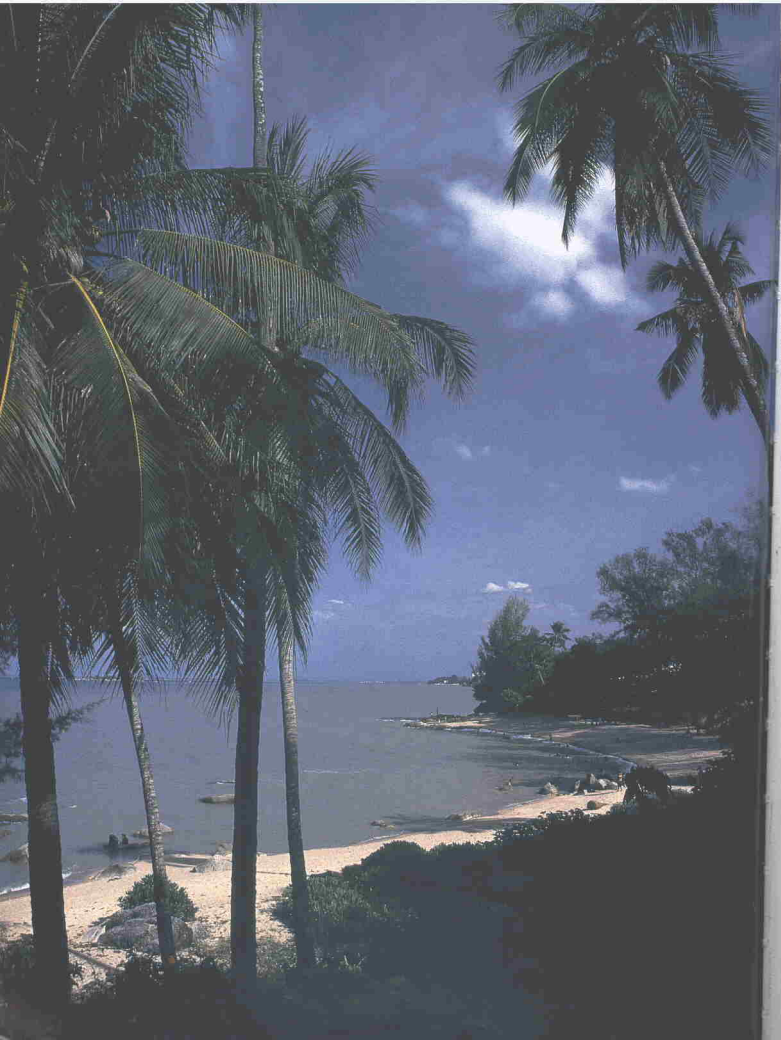
*(Above) Colourful hats for sale at Batu Ferringhi.*

*(Top) Car and passenger ferry plying between George Town and Butterworth on the mainland.*

*(Overleaf) Watersports at Batu Ferringhi.*









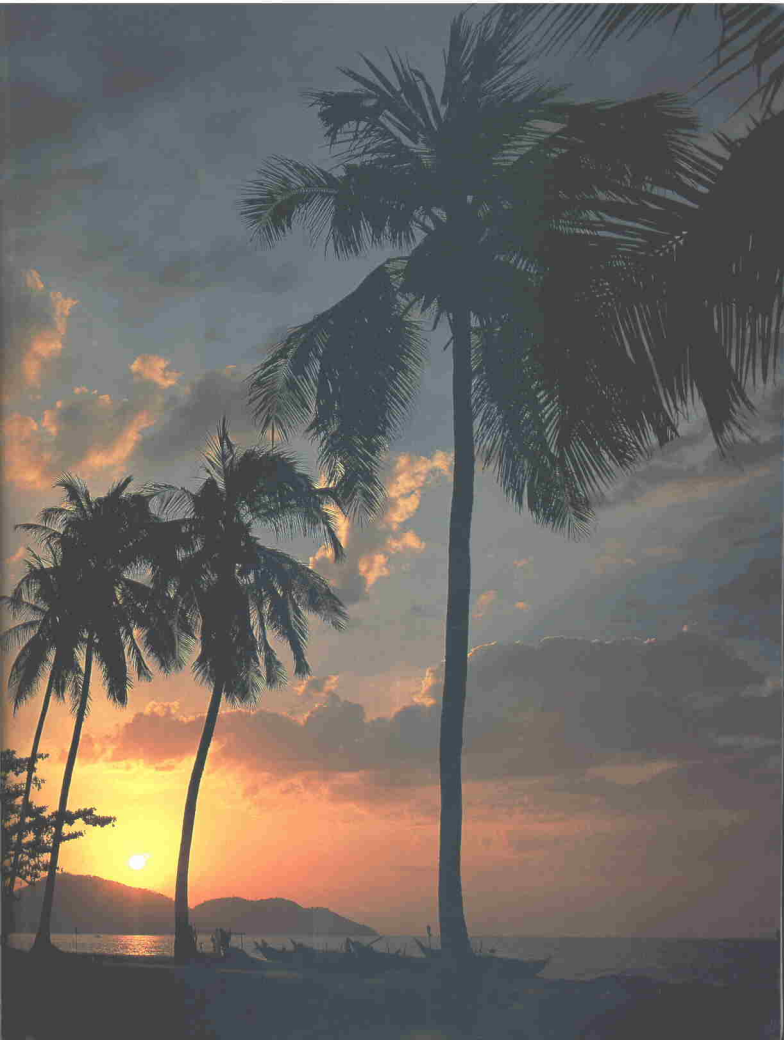
*The entire northern coastline of Penang is lined with a series of palm-fringed, shaded bays, separated by rocky promontories jutting out to sea. The area's main beaches are Tanjung Bunga, Moonlight Bay, Telok Bahang and Batu Ferringhi, Malaysia's premier beach resort where the energetic can enjoy windsurfing, waterskiing, para-sailing and other water sports.*

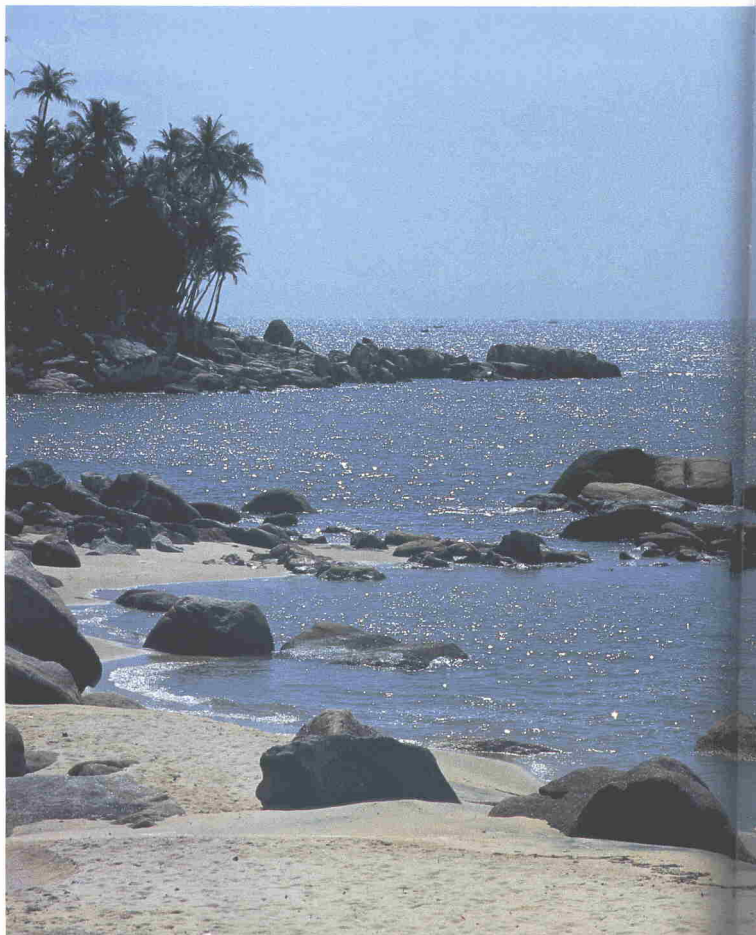
*Mature Casuarina trees line the endless beach as do the many excellent international class hotels established in the area.*

*(Overleaf) Para-sailing at Batu Ferringhi.*

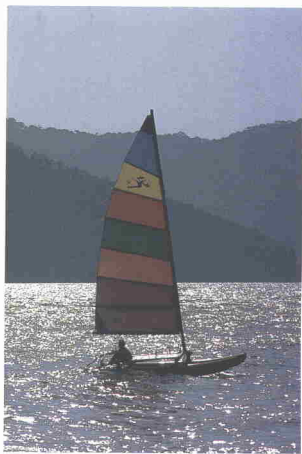
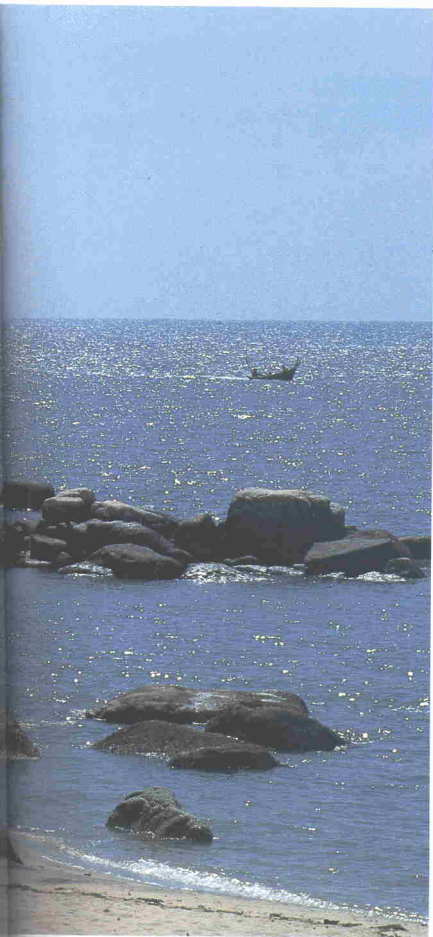












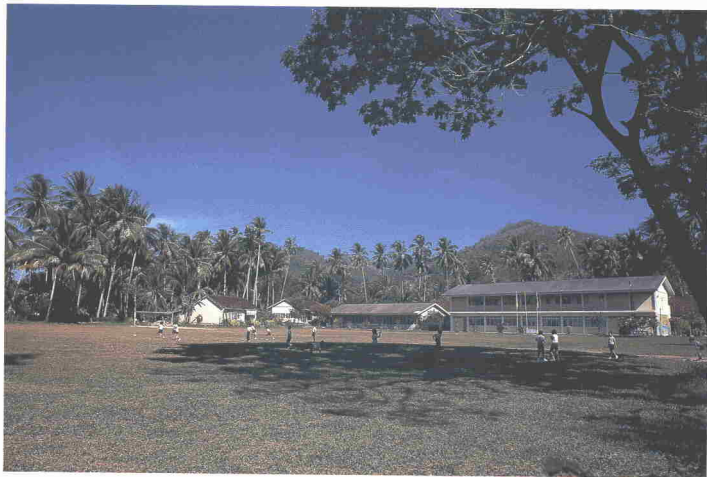
*More scenes from the many beach areas along Penang's northern coastline.*



*The Penang Butterfly Farm has become a popular tourist attraction in recent years. Hundreds of species of butterflies and insects can be seen in natural surroundings.*







*A round the island drive to Balik Pulau, a sleepy town on the far side of the island will be rewarded with wonderful views over undeveloped countryside and a more relaxed unhurried atmosphere.*

*(These pages) Village house and school at Sungai Pinang.*

*(Following pages) Elevated view from a narrow winding road leading to Balik Pulau.*

*Glorious sunset at Batu Ferringhi.*









