

CHINATOWN

K U A L A L U M P U R



Typical table setting of a coffee shop in Chinatown.

CHINATOWN

K U A L A L U M P U R

STEVE BRISTOW & EDWIN LEE



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acknowledgements

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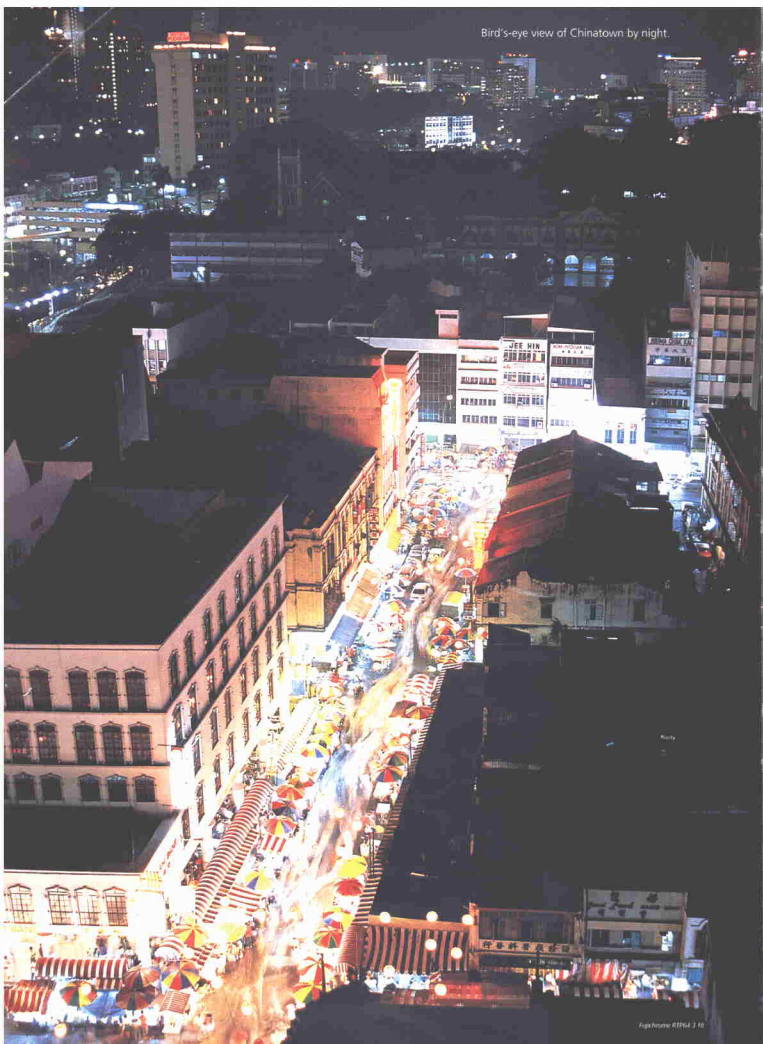
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Bird's-eye view of Chinatown by night.



It comes to me as no surprise that Kuala Lumpur's Chinatown should one day find itself deserving of a photographer's keen eye or a writer's wit—one has only to pay a short visit to Jalan Petaling to see why. But I was quite unprepared for a book of this calibre on a place that many of us in Kuala Lumpur take for granted, and to which some have never been. Through vivid colours and composition, this book propels us into a world that is at once wondrous and familiar; a world of trades and wares, of shops and façades, of smells and foods, of lights and festivals, and of bazaars and markets.

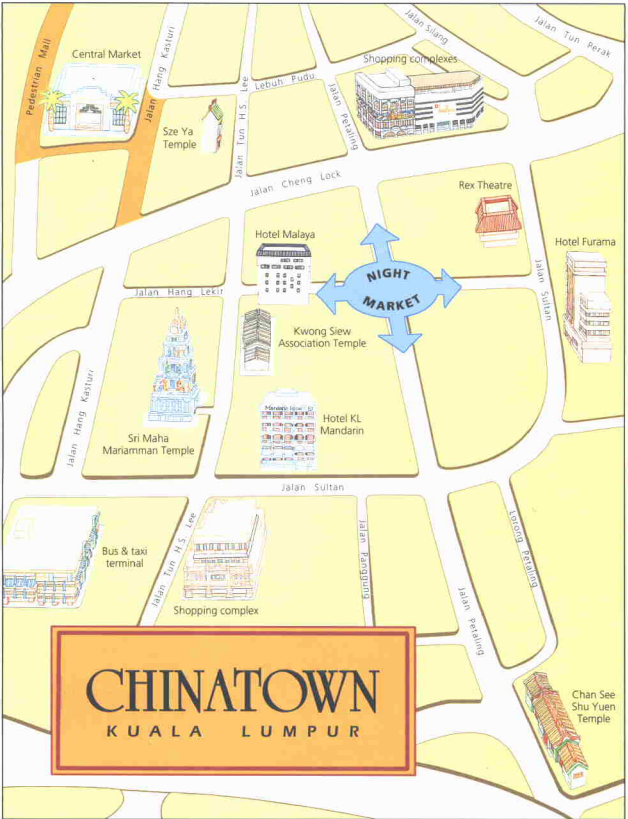
It must surely have demanded an uncommon talent and skill, not to mention an abundance of patience, to capture the magic and allure of such a commercial and business-oriented proposition as Chinatown. What a coup for Steve Bristow and Edwin Lee to have achieved this in their first collaborative effort! This is not merely a book about a certain place. It is a legacy to future generations, who will experience a Chinatown different from that of today;

perhaps one much relieved of its earthy, everyday spirit, or exorcised of its imperfections and rendered more comfortable and conducive to touristic forays.

Indeed, this book may well be the first and last documentation of a Chinatown that has evolved from a shanty town into a bustling enclave in a little over a century. In contrast to this natural maturing process, the next several years will see the area transformed by design. There are plans to cover its thoroughfares and air-condition the resulting pedestrian malls and walkways. While one can see the advantages of such a grand scheme, those who know the place well cannot help but feel a sense of loss. Therefore a book such as this is particularly well-timed; one wonders if a greater hand might not have moved the writer-photographers to their noble task. To them I offer my admiration and congratulations. I also congratulate the publisher for their belief in the validity of such a book, and for making it available to all who would know Kuala Lumpur's Chinatown at her natural best.



Professor Khoo Kay Kim, DPMP, JSM
Professor of Malaysian History
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Nestled in the heart of Kuala Lumpur is a hive of Chinese culture and commerce whose origins date back to the city's earliest times. It is a place possessed of a spirit that is basic and unpretentious, yet intriguing, festive and surprisingly cosmopolitan; a centre of activity known to many as Chinatown.

There is no doubt that the area attracts foreigners and locals alike. But what is the special allure that draws so many people to it?

At daybreak, it could well be the sight of mouth-watering *dim sum* being served from steaming trolleys in Jalan Petaling, or the notion of enjoying a delicious bowl of porridge at the roadside stalls of Jalan Hang Lekir. Perhaps it is the exotic promise of the wet market, tucked away in the lanes and alleys behind Jalan Petaling.

By midday, the old shop-fronts of Jalan Petaling are obscured by the umbrellas of pushcarts and stalls that pack the sidewalks and spill into the street, forcing passers-by to share the road with the traffic that has slowed to a crawl. Plans to transform Jalan Petaling into a pedestrian mall will at least remove the fear of many a pedestrian of being bumped by a car while negotiating the busy street.

The sweltering heat of the afternoon sun doesn't prevent hoards of lunchtime patrons from descending on the area's restaurants, coffee shops and stalls to savour their favourite duck rice, *hokkien mee*, *yong tau foo* or fish ball noodles.

Afternoon is also a good time to have one's shoes mended by a sidewalk cobbler, or palm read by a fortune teller. One could also muse on the latest in Chinese funerary items, such as handphones, cassette players, credit cards and even Mercedes Benz limousines, all

made with paper. The Chinese herbalists of Jalan Petaling still weigh out their concoctions of barks and roots with old hand-held scales. Businesses that are several generations old flourish in turn-of-the-century shophouses in this part of town. Not everyone in Chinatown, however, is a stickler for tradition-bound methods; many subscribe to the conveniences of modern technology. As a result, one can quite easily find a fruit seller sporting a handphone, or an elderly seller of *mooncakes* abandoning his abacus in favour of an electronic calculator.

Evening sees the activities in Chinatown reach fever pitch. Streets turn into roadside eateries at night. Chairs and tables fill every nook and cranny; sparks fly from charcoal and gas burners; and the air is filled with the aroma of a hundred dishes being fried, grilled, steamed or boiled.

After dark, the night market in Jalan Petaling is in full swing. Oblivious to the glare of fluorescent lights and the beat of the latest Cantonese pop or western hit, eager shoppers haggle over the prices of trinkets, T-shirts, handbags and a host of other bargain price goods.

The late show at the Rex Cinema signals a close to the day's activities in Chinatown. Except for a few stalls, a welcomed lull quickly settles in the area as the street sweepers quietly move in to clean up the aftermath.

Spurred by the impetus of Kuala Lumpur's ambitious development plans, the jackhammers and pile-drivers of the city's developers steal ominously closer to this backwater of historical architecture, culture and lifestyle that has largely resisted change. One wonders how much longer Chinatown can hold out.

a glimpse of the past

To explore the origins of Chinatown is to discover the history of Kuala Lumpur itself. The streets of Chinatown are the oldest in Kuala Lumpur, and just a stone's throw away lies the city's birthplace—the confluence of the Klang and Gombak rivers, from which Kuala Lumpur derives its name. (Kuala Lumpur means “muddy river mouth”.)

This was the landing-place in 1857 of Raja Abdullah and his party of 87 mining labourers, who had journeyed for three days up river from Klang in search of tin mining land.

After further discoveries of tin, the tiny outpost grew into a thriving shanty town. The population swelled with poor but industrious immigrants from China, lured by the prospect of opportunity and wealth.

Yap Ah Loy was one such tin miner, who by sheer strength of character attained great influence and prosperity. In 1869, by agreement with the Malay chiefs, he was appointed “Captain China”, or headman, of Kuala Lumpur. He soon became noted for the efficiency of his administration. He built a prison, a school, a hospital and a market, as well as a large gambling hall.

Yap Ah Loy's Kuala Lumpur was a mining town of mud-walled *atap*-roofed houses separated by narrow alleys barely four metres wide. Fires and floods frequently took their toll on the ramshackle town, but despite these natural disasters and even a civil war,

Yap Ah Loy managed to rebuild and maintain relative law and order in the district.

After a fire destroyed the whole town in 1881, Yap Ah Loy, with the influence of the new British Administration, which had just moved its headquarters from Port Klang to Kuala Lumpur, rebuilt the town in a more permanent form. He laid out streets and constructed roads to the principal mining areas. He opened a brickyard in the area now called Brickfields, and all new buildings were constructed with bricks and tiles. It was then that the streets of present-day Chinatown took shape.



right Yap Ah Loy

The British Administration introduced regulations concerning street width, drainage and access to back alleys. As business and commerce flourished in early Kuala Lumpur, single-storey buildings soon made way for structures with two or three floors. The newly rich tin miners and traders hired immigrant Chinese builders and craftsmen to put up shophouses of the style already familiar in Singapore and Penang. The wealth and status of the rich merchants were reflected in the architecture. It became fashionable at the turn of the century to include elements of neoclassical architecture that had been introduced by the colonizing culture. Till today elaborate friezes, columns and cornices dress the elegant façades of the shophouses that line most of the streets of Chinatown.

The early 1900s saw a rough, rollicking town with a population that was largely male. A great number of them patronized the red-light district of High Street (now Jalan Tun H.S. Lee) where more than 50 registered brothels operated. Although most of the prostitutes

were Chinese, there were almost as many Japanese in the trade, and they eventually dominated one end of Jalan Petaling.

Jalan Petaling was also home to Chinese jewellers, watchmakers, tailors, dentists, oculists and pawn-brokers. Chinese restaurants and theatres also operated in the street, as did the many gambling dens for which Jalan Petaling gained notoriety and was dubbed the "Monte Carlo" of Malaya.

Rickshaws were the main mode of transport in the old days, and bullock carts were used to haul the heavier cargo. Just as they do today, street hawkers plied their trade from the sidewalks of old Chinatown. This excerpt from the Malay Mail dated 11 August 1913, shows that the street trade hasn't changed much in all these years—"These men have a most amusing way of proclaiming their wares. The cake seller shouts, 'Keh! Keh! Curry puff! Curry puff!'; the dried fruit man hits a little gong and the ice cream seller shouts in a shrill voice 'I scream! I scream!'"

Descriptions of Chinatown today as a thriving relic of the past are appropriate, for to walk through the streets and lanes of Chinatown is to walk through the opening chapters of Kuala Lumpur's history.

Chinatown is a living museum that is an important aspect of the cultural heritage of Malaysia.



left Two rickshaw pullers taking a break.

overleaf Chinatown in the 1930s.



KING U
PHOTOGRAPHER
相影

鏡子相樓

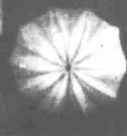
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PHOTOGRAPHER

恒泰棧

THE PHARMACY

鏡子相樓

如雲印





buildings in Chinatown



above The Kwong Siew Association Temple in Jalan Tun H.S. Lee, built in 1888. MAP B3*

right A devotee fulfilling his religious duties. The quiet and serene ambience of the temple offers temporary respite from the hustle and bustle outside.

Chinatown has an interesting mixture of architecture which dates from Kuala Lumpur's earliest times until the present. Rows of old shophouses are interspersed with more recent structures, some of which are quite bland by comparison. Most of the buildings in Chinatown can be better appreciated by looking up above their garish signboards and the roadside stalls which hide much of their façades from view.

The most elaborate buildings are the Chinese temples. The skill of the Chinese craftsmen of the day is evident in the remarkable details seen in these structures.



*This book comes with a pull-out map; the number B3 refers to the area in the map where the Kwong Siew Association Temple is located. Other captions in this book have similar numbers; use them to locate the places of interest described in the captions.

This doorway, stained from years of burning joss sticks, displays the skill of early Chinese wood-carvers and sculptors.





The Sze Ya Temple is the oldest temple in Chinatown. Built on land donated by Yap Ah Loy, it is a fine example of a traditional Chinese temple. It features an ornate interior and elaborate roof ridges, and is believed to have been built by craftsmen from southern China. The temple can be accessed through an arched gate from Lorong Bandar 17 or an ornate lane entrance in Jalan Tun H. S. Lee. MAP B2

above Dragon motif above the temple gate.

left Ornate gateway to the temple.

right Elaborate interior of the Sze Ya Temple.



Fig. 10.16 100/15.6



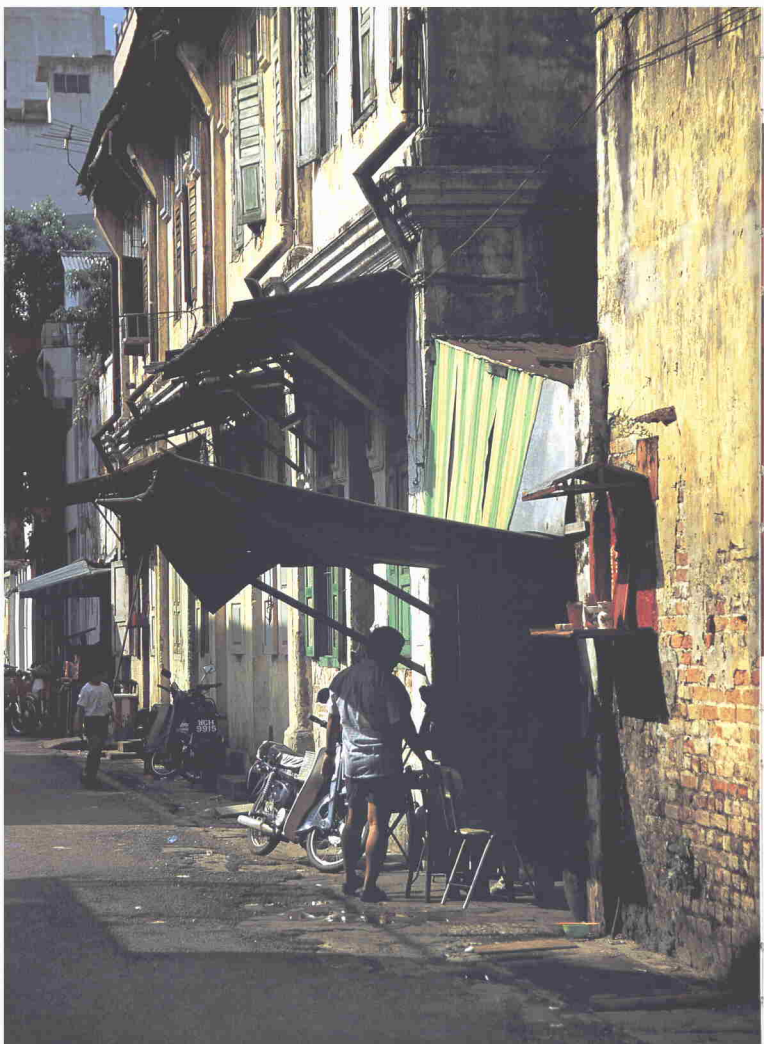
above The Chan See Shu Yuen Temple at the south end of Jalan Petaling was built in 1906. This remarkably well-preserved temple captures the magnificence of traditional Chinese architecture at its fullest expression. Rooftop figurines and wall friezes in terracotta depict scenes from Chinese history and mythology. MAP D6

right Coils of incense burning inside the temple.

below The courtyard of the Chan See Shu Yuen Temple.



Agathome Wiki: 1125111





left Ramshackle old houses in a Chinatown lane. MAP C5
above Doorways of Chinatown.

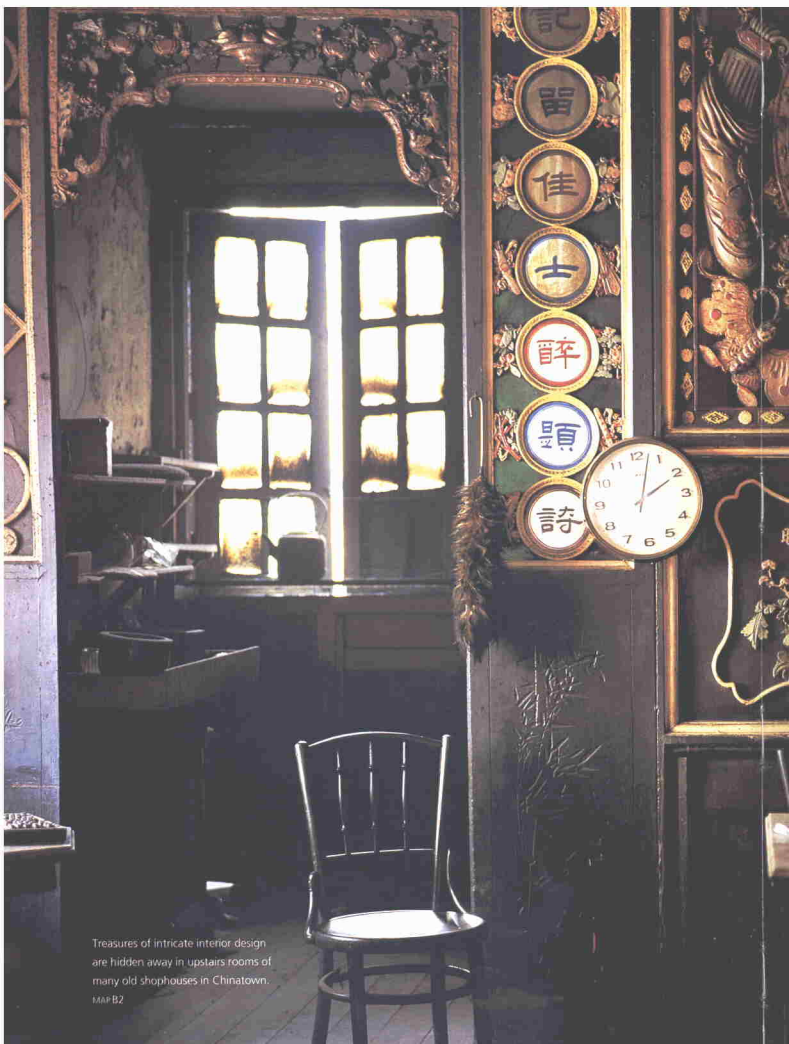




left Beside this doorway sits an altar for the "land god" (*Tu Di Gong*). During prayers and festivals, joss sticks and candles are burnt as offerings. MAP C4

above Two old timers relaxing outside their Chinese association building in Jalan Balai Polis. The street houses several Chinese associations, where

older members spend their time relaxing over a chat or a smoke.

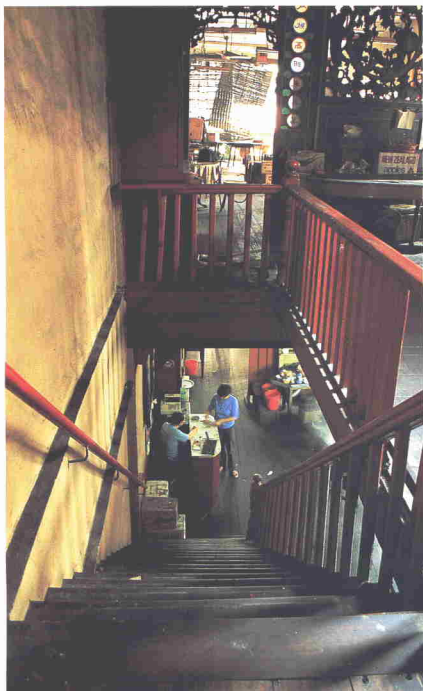


Treasures of intricate interior design are hidden away in upstairs rooms of many old shophouses in Chinatown.

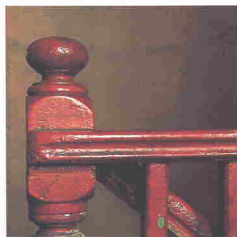
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MINOMOTO



By Lim Joo 111514.5



left This wooden stairway is a typical feature of the two- and three-storey shophouses of Chinatown. MAP B2

top Faded sign on a coffee shop wall.

above Detail of a stairway banister.

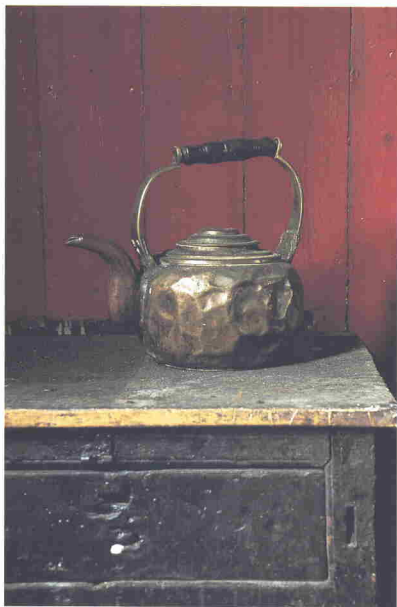
right Colourful shophouse in Jalan Petaling.





above Only the ghosts of bygone days inhabit this dusty upstairs room.

right This old kettle has outlived its usefulness, and now gathers dust in a back room.





left The architectural style of a traditional shophouse dates to early this century and typically features an ornate neoclassical façade that includes a covered walkway. Old shophouses usually have simple wooden interiors; some also have a narrow air well in the centre. MAP C4

below The influence of the West is evident in the design of this shophouse.

right Stylo—colourful, brash and occasionally featured in television commercials. It is arguably the most photographed barber shop in Malaysia.

MAP B2







ராகஸ்

REX

屏柏

Baskin-Robbins



Page three of six 3/18



far left The Rex Cinema will win no awards for its architectural style, but it does screen plenty of award-winning movies. The existing structure was built after a fire razed the original wooden building. MAP D2

left The historical value of Chinatown's shophouses is increasingly being recognized. This new shopping complex in Jalan Sultan incorporates the façades of the original shophouses in its design.

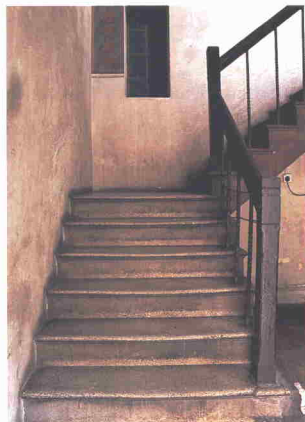
below Nature slowly reclaims these crumbling ruins of shophouses, which have been mysteriously passed over by the wrecker's hammer. The future of Chinatown's older shophouses remains uncertain; large tracts of these buildings situated on the edge of Chinatown have been demolished in the name of development.





above The Cantonese Grocers Association Building in Jalan Sultan is a splendid example of the neoclassical style so popular in the early twentieth century. MAP D3

above, right Entrance to the Cantonese Grocers Association.
right Old stairway.





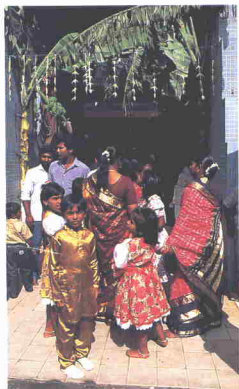
Typically, the Chinese association buildings are cluttered with priceless antique rosewood furniture from China.



left The Sri Maha Mariamman Temple is a prominent landmark in Jalan Tun H. S. Lee. The ornate sculptures are typical of those found in Hindu temples in the south of India. MAP B4

below Indian women in colourful traditional saris attend a wedding in the temple. They and all the other visitors must proceed barefoot as footwear is not permitted inside.

right The interior of the Sri Maha Mariamman Temple is richly decorated with imposing statues and figurines of some of the many deities of Hinduism.

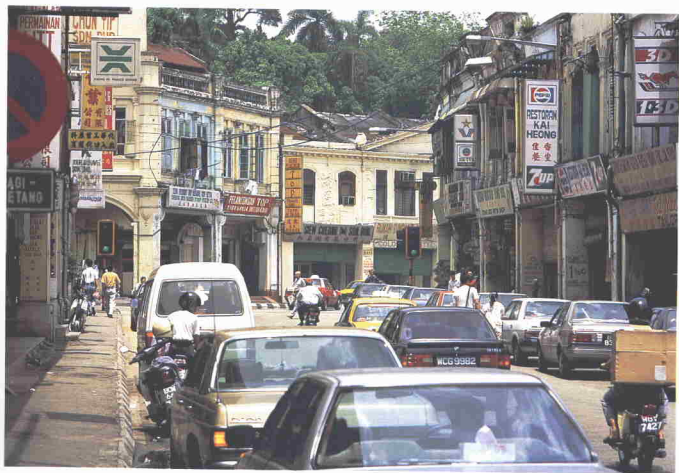






PEJABAT POS
JALAN BALAI POLIS

JALAN



left A curious looking post office in
Jalan Balai Polis, the result of an unlikely
mix of Tudor and neoclassical architec-
tural styles. MAP B5

above Old shophouses dominate the
south end of Jalan Sultan. MAP D4

trades and wares



Although most modern trades and wares can be found in shopping complexes in Chinatown, it is the proliferation of traditional and exotic selections that makes the place unique.

Herbalists and fortune tellers, street cobblers and funerary shops, shops selling Chinese ceramics, antique coins, Tibetan jewels and calligraphers' supplies are all within walking distance of each other. Offering more practical services, picture framers, bicycle repairers, dentists, optometrists, coffin makers and tea merchants also abound in Chinatown.



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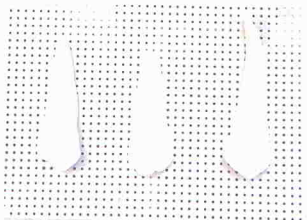
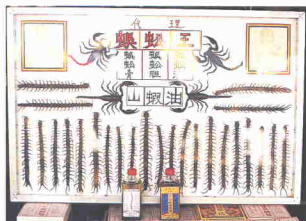


Photograph: PCP100 1/125 ©8

above, left Traditional Chinese medicines in the form of herbs, barks, roots and seeds. MAP C3, D4

left A Chinese herbalist dispensing traditional medicine. In a swift one-handed operation, prescriptions are weighed out using small counterbalanced scales.

above The flower stalls of Jalan Hang Lekir are ablaze with blossoms of all shapes and colours, especially during festive seasons. Cherry blossoms are a favourite during Chinese New Year. MAP B3



above The trades and wares of Chinatown are many and varied. Clothing, antiques, trinkets from Tibet, medicines, caneware, watch repairs

and dental clinics are a few of the goods and services available in the shoppers' paradise that is Chinatown. MAP B-C4



The trishaw or beca, as it is known locally, was an important means of transport in the early days. It is not a common sight in Kuala Lumpur nowadays, except in Chinatown, where it is mainly used to ferry goods within the area.



above An old-fashioned barber corner in the heart of Chinatown, it still has many regular customers. MAP D3

left Knife and scissors sharpening is another specialty of this barber.

right A convenience store, Chinatown style. MAP D3

66



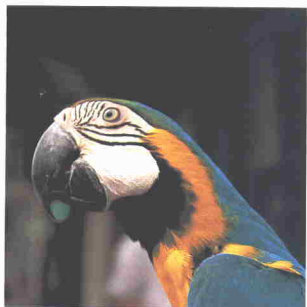


left If you are in the market for a broken camera, an old light switch or a hair dryer, then the Sunday junk market in Lorong Petaling is the place to be. MAP C3-4

right One person's trash is another's treasure in this market.







far left Looking for an exotic bird or an ornate bird cage? You can find it in Chinatown. MAP C-D4

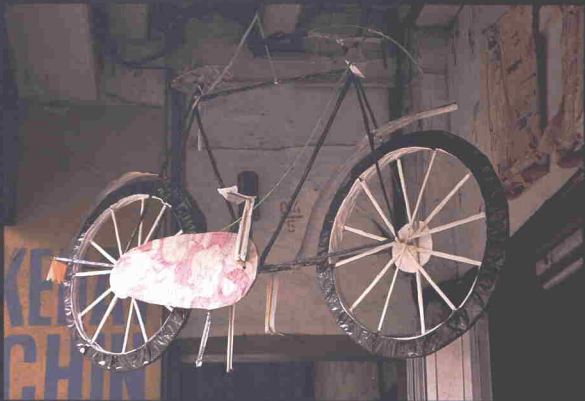
left A colourful parrot for sale.

below A pet shop packed with all kinds of animals: parrots, cockatoos, fishes, mice, squirrels and tortoises. It is no coincidence that tortoise soup is a specialty at nearby restaurants.



國際
陰府護照
PASSPORT





Money to burn. Imitation gold bars, bank notes and credit cards are just some of the large range of combustibles available at Chinese funerary supplies shops. Large items such as Mercedes-Benz limousines can be made to order, and later burnt as offerings to departed souls. MAP C4

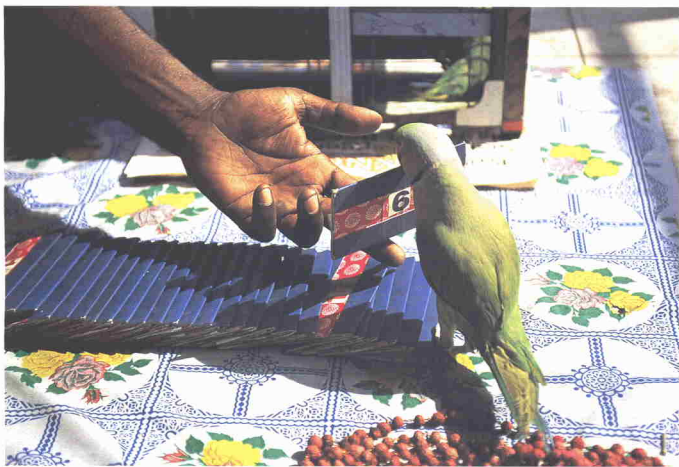
above Even a bicycle is handy in the other world.



left *Pa kua* are talismans that are hung over doorways. The Chinese believe they will repel evil spirits and bring good luck, or safeguard one's *feng shui*.

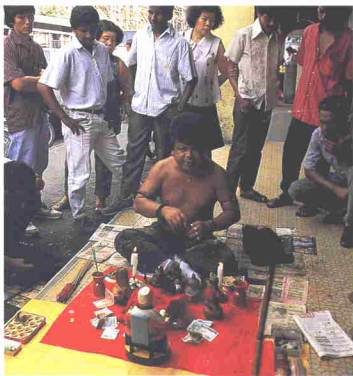
right The colour red dominates the entrance to this joss stick shop. Packed to the ceilings in these tiny shops are all kinds of paraphernalia used by the Chinese for worship. MAP B3





above Indian fortune tellers are a common sight in Chinatown. They are easily recognized by the presence of their winged assistants. Here is one such helper, and it has just selected a card from which a person's fortune will be told—by the fortune teller, of course. MAP B3-4

right Performing a bloody and bizarre ritual, this sidewalk medium becomes entranced and cuts himself with a razor before selecting lottery numbers for paying customers.





left A palm reader's sign.

below A customer about to discover what the future holds in store.





left Chinese calligraphy brushes, essential tools of an ancient art form.
right Signboards of Chinatown.

STICKING BILL 貼招止禁



禁止小販在此營業
HAWKERS ARE PROHIBITED



提防扒手
BEWARE OF PICKPOCKET







Photo: Mike Walker 1980 P.25

left In the narrow five-foot ways of Jalan Petaling, Nepalese traders entice customers with an assortment of jewellery and trinkets from Tibet and Nepal. MAP C4

above A Chinese grocer arranges his stock. MAP C3



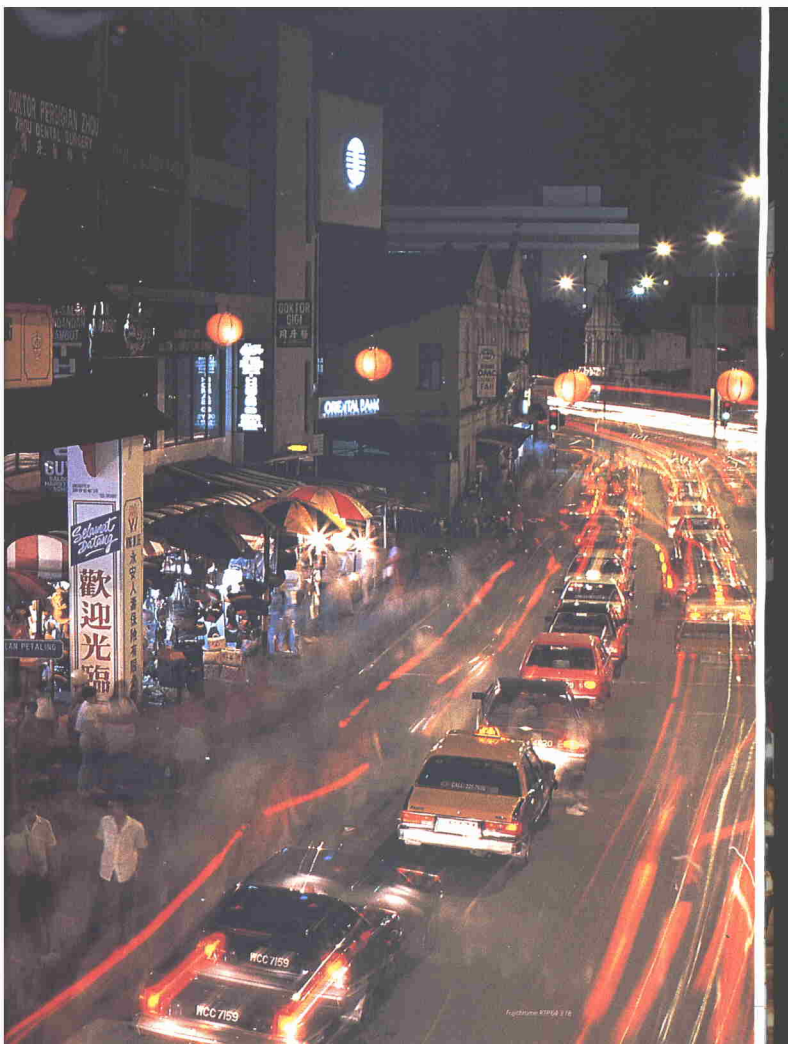
above The news-stands of Chinatown are cluttered with a wide range of magazines, comics and newspapers.

right The abacus, a centuries-old tool used for calculating, is a symbol of commerce and trade and is a common sight on shop counters in Chinatown.





After dark, Jalan Petaling becomes a thriving night market. MAPC3



the people of Chinatown

Chinatown must surely be the most populous place in Kuala Lumpur. Unaccustomed to the lively atmosphere of the area, a newcomer might be fooled into thinking that some festive event was in full swing when everyone was merely going about their business.

There is no lack of social variety here. From shirt-

less labourers, hauling sacks of rice and dried foodstuffs, to dapper executives wielding their attaché cases and handphones; from bargain-hunting, die-hard shoppers to camera toting, souvenir-seeking tourists; from noisy street urchins to courting couples, the people of Chinatown are as colourful as they are numerous.



left Miss Yip Pitt Yoon is an enterprising young woman who knows her Chinese tea. She is manager and part owner of the Evergreen Tea House in Jalan Sultan. Of Hakka ancestry, Pitt Yoon was raised in Ipoh, coincidentally not far from the tea plantations of Cameron Highlands. It wasn't until she visited a tea house that she became hooked on the idea of having her own. Working from 11 am until 10 pm, seven days a week doesn't leave her much spare time, but she doesn't mind because she enjoys the independence of self-employment. Work in the tea house enables her to meet people from all walks of life. During the day most of her clientele are students, who find the quiet surroundings conducive to study. She also has regular customers who find her tea house a relaxing stopover in their journey to the other side of town.

Many varieties of tea from Taiwan and China are available at the Evergreen Tea House. Says Pitt Yoon, "100 grammes of a fine grade Chinese tea will cost as much as 200 ringgit." And which tea does Pitt Yoon recommend? Why, her favourite, of course—Old Shui Shien from China. MAP D3



left The Chinese began drinking tea during the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.–7 A.D.) when wild tea plants were first found around the hills of Szechuan. Centuries of tea drinking has elevated every aspect of the practice—from the preparation to the crockery used—into a fine art.

below, left Quiet and comfortable, tea houses attract many students, who, over a pot of tea, catch up with some study or meet their friends.

below, right Chinese tea houses are very popular in Taiwan, and only recently have they begun to appear in Kuala Lumpur. The Purple Cane Tea House in Jalan Panggung is a popular destination for tea connoisseurs.

MAP C5

SpiceWorld 47754 138 18





left Between 7 am and 10 pm, many people enjoy a plate of Pong Kim Ho's fried *kway teow*. Despite the long hours and hard work, Mr. Pong has an enterprising and independent spirit; and he obviously enjoys his job.

53 years old and "still strong", he has been frying *kway teow* at his stall for nine years; before that he had worked as a cook in a restaurant. His customers are shoppers and tourists, and with *kway teow* being a perennial favourite of hungry people of all races, he's guaranteed plenty of business.

Mr. Pong's wife keeps herself busy in a *kway teow* stall just around the corner. So what do they eat at home after a hard day's work? "Porridge," says Mr. Pong. "Anything but *kway teow*".

MAP C3

below The ingredients of Mr. Pong Kim Ho's tasty fried *kway teow*.





above Ken's butcher stall in the wet market has been offering friendly and efficient service for 50 years. Ken (Foong Tuck Yee) is the third generation of his family to work at the stall his grandfather established. It's hard work, and Ken admits he doesn't like having to rise in the early hours; but like most owners of small businesses in Chinatown, he is willing to put up with the demands of his trade in return for the opportunity of being his own boss. MAP B3

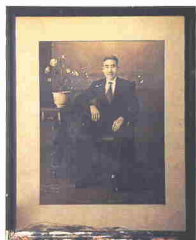


above Mr. Leong is full of stories about the Chinatown of old. He still lives in the house in which he was born in 1935. In fact, five generations of Mr. Leong's family have called this humble shophouse their home. Mr. Leong remembers when the Central Market was not the handicraft and food pavilion it is today, but a bustling wet market where he made a living selling vegetables. Mr. Leong has

more time on his hands nowadays and enjoys chatting with passers-by and spending time with his family.

above, right Mr. Leong's grandparents, who were Cantonese, left China many years ago in search of opportunities in the then young and prosperous town of Kuala Lumpur.

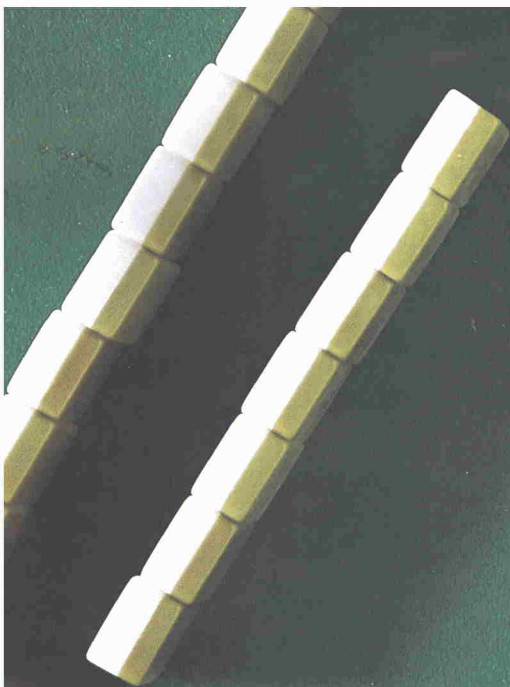
right For foreign tourists, Kuala Lumpur is generally a brief stopover on the way to the popular resorts of



Langkawi and Penang or the beaches of the East Coast. A stroll through the teeming streets of Chinatown, however, is a must as it is almost certain to be a memorable experience.

These two Danish girls are fascinated by Chinatown. They especially enjoy haggling over prices and eating at the roadside stalls.







While strolling through the back streets of Chinatown, it is common to hear from a window or doorway the distinct clicking of *mah-jong* tiles, indication of a game in progress. *Mah-jong* is a favourite pastime of the Chinese. A

parlour game for four, it is played using painted plastic tiles.

above In small upstairs club and association rooms, elderly gentlemen have the time and patience for *mah-jong*. MAP C5





above Chinese chess is another popular leisure activity among the Chinese community, and it can be played anywhere. Using a couple of empty cans for stools, these two men play a game of Chinese chess on a makeshift table on the sidewalk.

left Not exactly the people of Chinatown, but residents nonetheless.

right An Indian boy at a news-stand.







The faces of Chinatown.

Clockwise from top left An elderly Sikh, some playful children, an Indian bread vendor and a Chinese boy minding a cake stall.



above Chinatown is not only a place to eat or shop; to many, it is a place to live. In small dwellings above shop-houses, life goes on for the residents of Chinatown. Clothes hanging on a makeshift clothes-line.

festivals

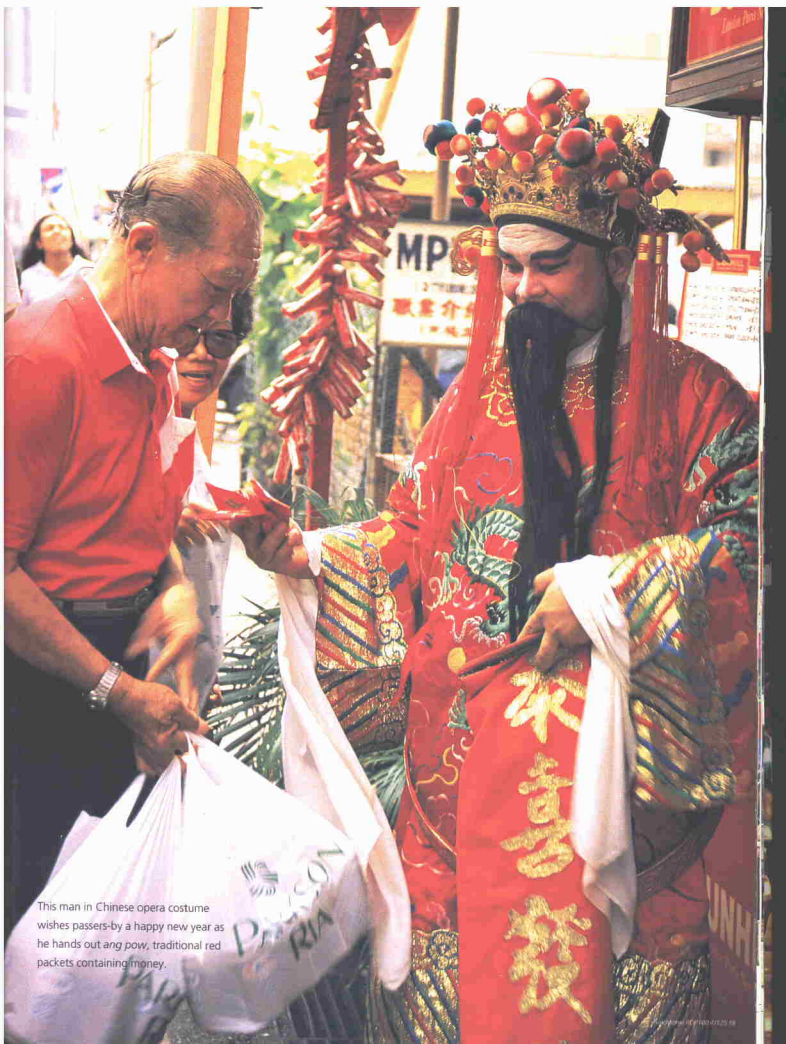
Malaysia's multi-cultural community celebrates many colourful festivals throughout the year. For the Chinese, the lunar or Chinese New Year is the most important event on the calendar. Weeks before this festival, enthusiastic crowds flock to Chinatown to shop for essentials such as Mandarin oranges, pomelos, *nin koa*, fireworks, cherry blossoms and decorations.

Gong Xi Fa Cai or Prosperity To You is a common greeting during the new year celebrations which last for 15 days.



above The Chinese believe the lion dance brings good fortune and prosperity throughout the year—at the very least it keeps the evil spirits away. During Chinese New Year, many Chinese businessmen and shop owners invite a lion dance troupe to perform in their homes and businesses. The “lion” entertains the audience with its acrobatic skill by performing the *cai qing*, a ceremony in which it retrieves a reward of *ang pow* concealed in a head of lettuce suspended several metres above the ground.

left These musicians set the tempo and mood of a lion dance.

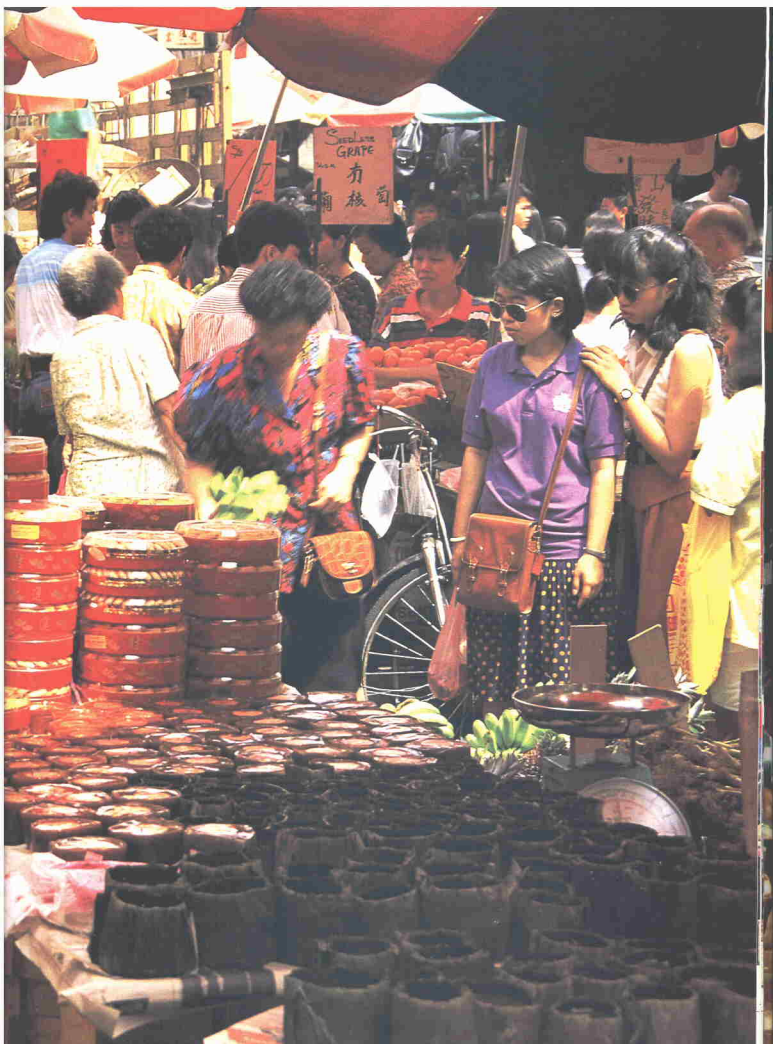


This man in Chinese opera costume wishes passers-by a happy new year as he hands out ang pao, traditional red packets containing money.



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preceding Typical busy street scene in Chinatown during Chinese New Year. Stalls mushroom during the festive season, selling a cornucopia of goods associated with the celebration.

above Mandarin oranges appear on the streets by the case during Chinese New Year. This girl takes a break during a rare moment of quiet at her orange stall. Mandarin oranges are considered auspicious by the Chinese, for they symbolize wealth; they are given as gifts during the Chinese New Year celebrations.



Some decorative, auspicious and just plain tasty Chinese New Year goodies.
Clockwise from top left Oranges, Chinese sausages, bottle-neck gourds, winter squash, *nian gao*, longevity buns.

right Women preparing yee sang, the famous delicacy synonymous with Chinese New Year.

below Ang pow is given during Chinese New Year as a gesture that symbolizes prosperity and happiness.





left The colourful ingredients of traditional yee sang consist of several different vegetables and, of course, the all-important raw fish, from which the dish derives its name.

below These vibrant red fans, decorated with Chinese proverbs, are used as decorations during Chinese New Year.



Fan Home RSP100 1125 11.8



left *Chap gah mei* is the fifteenth and last day of the Chinese New Year celebrations. The faithful flock to Chinese temples on this day to receive blessings of good fortune for the coming year.

below During the festive season, this altar overflows with offerings placed there by followers of Taoism, a centuries-old religion based on the teachings of Laozi, a Chinese sage.

right Bedecked with glowing red lanterns at Chinese New Year, Chinatown crackles with festivity.







The Mooncake Festival falls on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month. It commemorates the revolt of the Chinese against their Mongol rulers during the Yuan dynasty. It is said that the rebels, plotting to overthrow the Mongol government, launched their coup by giving out mooncakes containing details of the offensive to their supporters. The attack was successful and helped bring about the downfall of the dynasty.

above Over the years, the making of mooncakes containing the famous lotus seed paste has remained unchanged. These women are weighing out balls of lotus seed paste to ensure that each mooncake will be of the same weight and size.

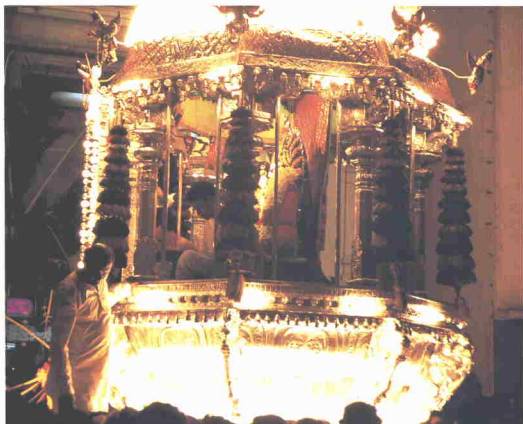
above, right A sliced mooncake reveals its delicious filling of lotus seed paste and salted egg yolk.

right Baked mooncakes ready for the festival.



left Indian women in traditional saris carrying *kavadi* in the form of milk vessels. By carrying *kavadi*, the devotees are fulfilling a vow they had made to Lord Subramaniam who, they believe, has granted their wishes. *Kavadi* can take on more elaborate and bizarre forms, including metal skewers and hooks that are attached to the bodies of their carriers. In an entranced state, devotees with iron stakes through their cheeks and tongues carry their *kavadi* and climb the steps to the temple inside Batu Caves.

below The silver chariot bearing the statue of Lord Muruga will be pulled by devotees in a thirteen-kilometre procession to Batu Caves.



the wet market

The wet market is a daily event in Chinatown. Tucked away in a maze of lanes and alleys behind Jalan Petaling, the market begins in the early hours of the morning and finishes in the mid-afternoon.

Locals prefer to shop in the wet market because they are able to purchase fresh produce at prices cheaper than in supermarkets or grocery shops.

Not for the faint-hearted foreigner, the wet market is truly wet underfoot, smelly and dirty; furthermore the sight of carcasses being cleaned may be off-putting to the uninitiated.

below It is an early start for the wet market stall-owners. This man prepares for the day's trading in the market.

MAP B3

right Inside the wet market.

below, right This stall in the wet market sells more than a dozen kinds of vegetables.



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above A meat stall in the wet market.
right A selection of fresh vegetables,
fish and betel leaves available in the
wet market.







left A man selling pods of the lotus plant on a sidewalk outside the wet market. The pods contain seeds that are used to make the filling for *moon-cakes*; the seeds may also be eaten raw or roasted.

above Chillies, a staple ingredient in Malaysian cooking, are available by the basket-load. This friendly dry-goods wholesaler shows off his produce.





left A heap of durians and their seller await their next customer.

The durian's soft yellow flesh is considered a delicacy by many Malaysians. The pungent odour of the fruit is, however,

off-putting and rather disagreeable to most foreigners, who wonder how people can eat it.

above A fish seller in the wet market.



above Business is brisk for this vegetable seller.

left This man is loading up his trishaw with fresh produce which he will deliver to various restaurants and coffee shops in Chinatown.

right A fully laden trishaw is a common sight in Chinatown.



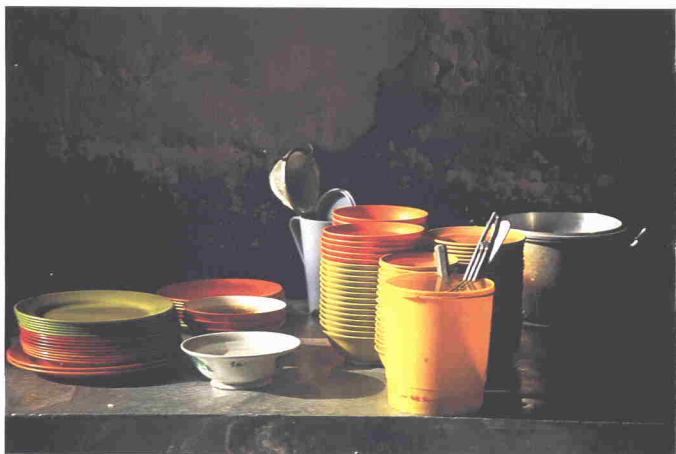


food and drinks

Variety is the word that best sums up the food and drinks in Chinatown—from herbal tortoise soup to McDonald's hamburgers and everything in between. Although the cuisine is predominantly Chinese, the selection of things to eat and drink is virtually endless.

At night, people come from all over the city to watch the world go by over claypot rice or a bowl of noodles at a roadside stall.

The Kuala Lumpur heat guarantees brisk business for drink vendors. Freshly pressed sugar cane juice, honey sea coconut, *air mata kucing* and coconut water are just a few of the thirst-quenching drinks available. For a stiffer drink, try a beer at one of the coffee shops, restaurants or bars.



Azharine Siva / iD 13.3

left Plastic plates and bowls make up the usual tableware at the food stalls and restaurants in Chinatown.

below You can forget about comfort here, but the food is great! These hawker stalls near the wet market cater for the lunchtime crowd. MAP B3



請勿隨地吐痰與
拋垃圾





far left Chopsticks—the most versatile eating utensils ever invented. Their simplicity and superiority are clearly evident at the dining table; however, their use does require practice. Their provenance can be traced back to the earliest dynasties of China, more than 3,000 years ago.

Many Chinese believe that the higher up a woman holds her chopsticks, the farther away she will live from her family after marriage.

above Lunchtime crowds jostle for food at this popular *yong tau foo* stall.

MAP B3

left *Yong tau foo* is a simple and tasty dish of deep-fried vegetables and *rao foo* (bean curd) stuffed with fish paste.



above A few sen will buy you a bag of yeow char kway—deep-fried doughsticks—at this stall. MAP C3

right Food is always close at hand in Chinatown. (Top to bottom) Roast chicken and duck, and Chinese sausages; a parade of vegetables; and a tempting assortment of pastries, ranging from sweet buns to savoury turnovers.





above *Dim sum* is served for breakfast or lunch. It consists of a large variety of small dishes, usually steamed. The customer makes a selection from a trolley wheeled from table to table.

right A Chinese herbal tea stall. Apart from being very refreshing, herbal teas, according to the Chinese, have important medicinal properties.

天中壺

天下人歌不老

壺中我

高麗人參花
每角 50¢

天 中 壺
WOO CHUNG CHIN UBAT TEH
AIR BUNG
KE UE

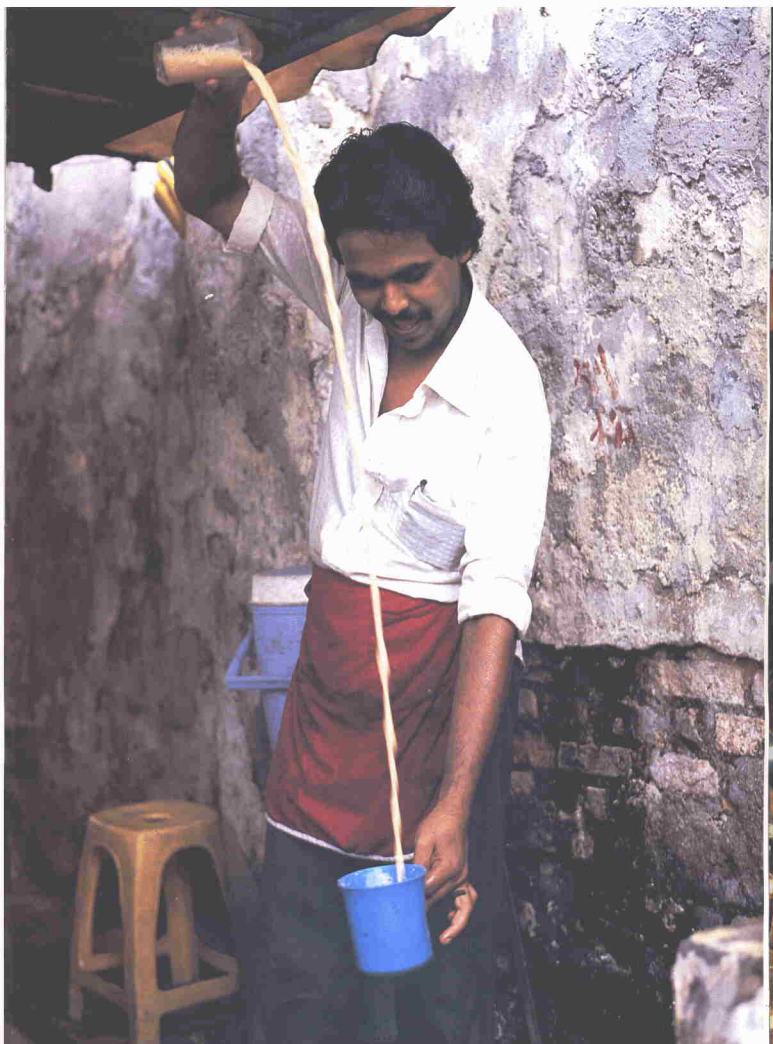




above Three kinds of noodles are available at this stall, which serves them in a bowl of hearty soup with fish- or meatballs. (From left to right): Yellow mee or wheat noodles; flat rice noodles; and fine rice vermicelli.

right *Teh tarik* literally means "pulled tea" in Malay. The name characterizes the unusual and often showy style of tea-making practised by *mamak* (Muslims of Indian descent) operators at their drink stalls. In graceful yet

spectacular motions, the operator pours tea from an enamel mug into a serving glass and then empties the contents of the glass back into the mug. He repeats the procedure several times, each time holding the mug and the glass farther and farther apart until the tea has cooled. Because of the speed at which he performs, he appears to be "pulling" the tea out of the containers in his hands. MAP B3





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above This bartender has poured many a drink in his time in this charming old bar. MAP D3



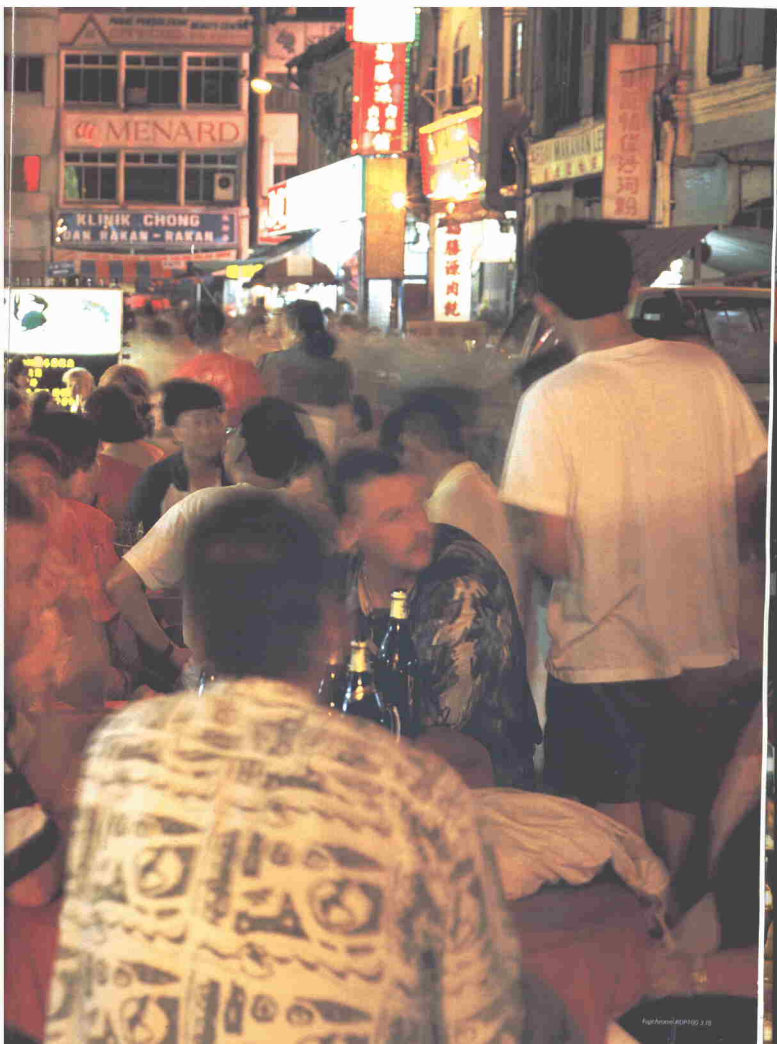
left A range of Asian liquor is available in this bar, cognac, however, remains the preferred drink of most Chinese.

below The old marble tables and bentwood chairs in this bar are typical of the furnishings found in old bars all over Malaysia.

overleaf In Chinatown busy streets by day are unrecognizable as roadside eating places at night.









above This decorative lion mask and the ones behind it are miniatures of the masks worn during traditional lion dances; they add a splash of colour to the streets of Chinatown during Chinese New Year.

air mata kucing Literally meaning “cat’s eye juice” in Malay, this is a sweet drink made from the flesh of dried longans. When fresh, the flesh of the longan—a fruit resembling the lychee—is translucent; perhaps this characteristic coupled with the small, round shape of the fruit and the black colour of its seed showing through the flesh is what makes it appear like the eye of a cat.

ang pow A red paper envelope containing money. Given on auspicious occasions such as Chinese New Year.

atap roof A thatched roof made from palm leaves.

beca Malay for trishaw, a three-wheeled vehicle or tricycle.

cai qing A reward of lettuce and *ang pow* given to a lion dance troupe.

Cantonese A native from the city of Guangzhou in the province of Guangdong (formerly Canton) in China. Also, the dialect of Chinese spoken in Hong Kong and Southeast China; most Chinese in Kuala Lumpur speak this dialect as well.

chap goh mei Fifteenth day of Chinese New Year.

dim sum A meal typically served for breakfast, consisting of many savoury Cantonese-style snacks.

feng shui A form of geomancy which determines the placement of objects according to the harmony of natural forces to attract good fortune.

Gong Xi Fa Cai A greeting wishing a person prosperity; used during Chinese New Year.

Hainanese A native of Hainan island in China; also the dialect spoken by the people of this island.

Hakka A descendant from a group of nomadic Chinese who originated in the north, but eventually emigrated to the southern Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Fujian; also the dialect spoken by this group.

Hokkien A native of Fujian province in China; also the dialect spoken by a person from this province.

jalan Malay for road or street.

kwai teow A lightly oiled rice noodle. It is white in colour and is flat and broad.

lorong Malay for narrow lane.

mah-jong A popular Chinese parlour game.

mamak A term referring to a group of Muslims of Indian ancestry, often from Penang. Many operate stalls selling *roti canai*, *teh tarik* and *nasi lemak*.

mooncake A wheat flour cake filled with lotus paste or sweetened mashed beans.

nasi lemak A simple rice dish cooked in coconut milk and served with chilli, fried anchovies, hard-boiled egg, cucumber and peanuts. This popular Malaysian dish is usually eaten for breakfast.

nin koa Chinese New Year cake. A brown coloured cake made from glutinous rice flour and sugar.

pa kua A small mirror hung over a door to repel evil spirits and to bring good fortune or improve the *feng shui*.

roti canai A thin, flat bread, fried on a hot plate and eaten with curry. *Roti canai* makers skillfully toss the thin dough into the air before folding it into a small pancake.

sari, also saree A length of fabric draped round the body; traditionally worn by Indian women as a main garment.

teh tarik Malay, literally meaning “pulled tea”. It refers to tea prepared in a certain manner, see page 103.

Teochew A native of the Shantou area of Guangdong province; also the dialect spoken by a person from this region.

yee sang A raw fish dish served during Chinese New Year.

yeow char kwai Deep-fried Chinese doughsticks.

yong tau foo Deep-fried bean curd and vegetables stuffed with fish paste.

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