

Boutique beauty in Melaka

Douglas Elliot shows you the best boutique hotels to stay at while exploring the Unesco World Heritage Site that is Melaka

Melaka's remarkable past is what makes this town an interesting stop on your travels through Malaysia. From a sleepy fishing village in the 14th century, its place in world history was sealed when Parameswara, a Hindu prince from Sumatra made it his domain. Admiral Cheng Ho also made his mark when he came bearing gifts and offers of protection from the Ming Emperor. Subsequent colonial powers – Portuguese, Dutch and British – all vied for power over this important trading post and eventually, Melaka became one of the three Straits Settlements that included Penang and Singapore. These days, Melaka is a bustling little town filled with heritage and boutique hotels and is a well-deserved inclusion on your Malaysian travels.



The Majestic Malacca

Melaka 101

While in Melaka, you might encounter a few of these terms. Here's a handy list that breaks it down.

►Peranakan

A word that describes the culture of the Peranakan Chinese (descendants of early Chinese immigrants who married Malay locals) and can refer to anything from the people and cuisine to décor and more.

►Baba Nyonya

An honorific term used by the Peranakan Chinese – the men are called Baba, while the women are known as Nyonya.

►Kristang

Also known as Portuguese-Eurasian or Melaka Portuguese, these are the descendants of Portuguese people who have married locally.

►Straits Settlements

A former group of British territories in Southeast Asia that included Singapore, Penang, Melaka and Labuan.

The Majestic Malacca

In 1929, this was the mansion of a Chinese tycoon named Leong Long Man who died two years after moving in. His son took over ownership, squandered his inheritance and the house was sold to somebody who turned it into a hotel. It has now been restored into one of the finest boutique accommodations in Melaka. Remnants of the original Victorian tile flooring and teakwood fittings remain – a reminder when the town was a Straits Settlement. Porcelain tubs await in each of the 54 rooms and its sheer size is matched only by the king size four-poster bed that centres the room. Sample the finest Kristang (Melakan Portuguese) cuisine made by Chef Melba Nunis and be sure to try a Peranakan-style body treatment at the much acclaimed Spa Village. 188 Jalan Bunga Raya (+606 289 8000/majesticmalacca.com). Rooms from RM490 per night.



The Stable Melaka

An unassuming little number, The Stable Melaka exudes an unabashedly rustic ambience. Surrounded by wooden beams and exposed brick walls, the owner of this establishment cleverly converted a 16th century horse stable built during the



Dutch occupation of Melaka into a fine living space. Split into two levels, you'll find a kitchen nook and artworks depicting old Melaka lining the wall downstairs while on the first floor, a king size bed takes centre stage. The guesthouse is located at the busy intersection of

Hereen and Hang Kasturi, so expect to hear the flurry of activity outside the louvered windows, which actually adds to the character of the place.

Jalan Hang Kasturi (+6012 623 9459/thestablemalacca.com). Rooms from RM380 per night.

45 Lekiu

Housed in a historic pre-war building is 45 Lekiu, a boutique guesthouse in the heart of town where sophistication meets elegance. The contemporary styling of the space pairs well with the Art Deco design, dark coloured furniture contrast brilliantly with textured red brick walls, and Peranakan influence is seen in the selection of antique furnishings. Dominating the upper first floor is the master bedroom with a king size bed



while the attic generously accommodates another two twin beds. There's a rooftop patio on the third floor and a lap pool on the ground floor so guests have great views

and a chance to cool down after a day of exploring. *45 Jalan Hang Lekiu (+6012 380 0338/45lekiu.com). Rooms from RM1,299 per night.*



Rosa Malacca

The commanding brownstone façade of Rosa Malacca brings to mind images of a New York street scene. Located in a quieter part of town, this 60-room hotel is designed with discerning hipsters in mind with its industrial elements. Red bricks and concrete walls are offset by furniture

in hues of black, white and grey. Rooms are fitted with every modern convenience and the in-house restaurant, Bica, offers alfresco dining in their glass ceiled courtyard. *212 Jalan Parameswara, Kampung Bandar Hilir (+606 281 9888/rosa.com.my). Rooms from RM200 per night.*

Courtyard at Heeren

No boutique hotel listing is complete without mentioning the Courtyard at Heeren. This celebrated boutique hotel is strategically located in the old part of town

and a short walk to tourist attractions like the Jonker Street night market and the Melaka River. It's decorated in typical Peranakan fashion and features antique furnishings, intricate woodcarvings, louvered windows and an indoor courtyard reflecting the emblematic architecture of the heritage zone. Each of the 15 rooms retains the original tile flooring while ornate beds anchor the thematic look, and bathrooms have been modernised and boast rain showers.

91 Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock, Taman Kota Laksamana (+606 281 0088/courtyardatheeren.com). Rooms from RM200 per night.



1825 Gallery Hotel

The Melaka River meanders through the city and once played the role of an important trade route in the 15th century. Situated on the river bank, the 1825 Gallery Hotel is the modern reimagining of a warehouse that used to stock imported flours. A confluence of old and new, its modern design pays homage to both Chinese and British influences. The original timber



floor and ceiling highlight its centuries old history, while

oriental rugs and artefacts add a cosy touch. A stroll away from St Francis Xavier's Church and the Stadthuys (it was once the residences of the Dutch governor and officers), this hotel is an ideal point from which to start sightseeing.

27 Jalan Bunga Raya, Kampung Jawa (+606 288 2868/1825galleryhotel.com). Rooms from RM147 per night.