

Suburban Café Bliss: A Slice of George Town, Minus the Crowds

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If you've spent any time in George Town lately, you'll know that cafes are practically a cornerstone of this Unesco Heritage site. Toss a stone in any direction and you're likely to hit three. While this abundance suits Penangites just fine, especially with food being our collective love language, it does come with a downside: congestion on any day of the week and brunch-hour traffic that goes well into later parts of the afternoon.

But what if you could enjoy the same (if not better) cafe experience complete with expertly brewed coffee, hearty Western-style fare, and stylish interiors, without fending off parking spots or empty tables with a stick?

Enter *The Hillside Cafe Bar & Restaurant*, a charming suburban escape tucked away in the quiet neighbourhood of Hillside, Tanjong Bungah.

A Homegrown Café with Heart

The Hillside Cafe is exactly what its name suggests - laid-back, locally rooted, and welcoming. More than just a cafe, it doubles as a casual gallery space showcasing works by local artists. The interior is minimalist yet warm, with hand-crafted wooden tables, cement floors, and soft lighting that give the dining room a calming glow. It's the kind of place that invites you to linger.

We caught up with director Elaine Stewart Ng, a Londoner who's made Penang her home for decades. "We wanted something honest and personal," Elaine says. "A space where people could feel at home, whether they're dressed up for date night, stopping by after a morning jog, or catching up with friends over coffee."

And indeed, Hillside is a family-run operation in every sense of the word. Elaine's husband, a local Penangite, heads the kitchen, while the cafe's concept was initially dreamed up by her eldest son Josh and his wife Georgia - both of whom grew up here and attended local schools.

Comfort Food, Done Right

As charming as the cafe is, it's the food that seals the deal. The menu leans heavily on hearty British-inspired fare, prepared with care and a keen eye on quality.

"We used to run a restaurant in central London, and when we moved here, we wanted to bring a piece of that with us, blended with the flavours and warmth of Penang," Elaine explains.

Signature dishes include a proper serving of fish and chips, 'The Healthy Start' a light and wholesome bowl of granola, raisins, and yogurt drizzled with honey and our personal favourite, 'The Works'. This no-nonsense big breakfast plate comes loaded with eggs, homemade sausage, baked beans, a side salad, crispy bacon (non-halal), and toast.

Come dinner, their pasta offerings shine. The Carbonara particularly, is worth a mention. Hillside serves Carbonara the traditional way—al dente pasta with a rich, silky sauce, crowned with a raw egg yolk for that perfect mix-in moment.

More Than Just a Café

Open Tuesdays to Sundays for breakfast (8:00am–11:30am), lunch (11:30am–3:00pm), and dinner (6:00pm–10:00pm), Hillside Café is also pet-friendly, with an inviting outdoor patio where furry friends are welcome.

Whether you're a regular cafe-hopper seeking a quieter scene or simply in need of a good meal and warm hospitality, Hillside Café is a suburban gem well worth the drive.