

THE MIMIM IN MELAKA

By bus, car or cruise ship, historic Malacca is a convenient and rewarding getaway from Singapore, writes **Mike Smith**.

Malacca is a lively city heavily influenced by its former Dutch, Portuguese and British rulers. The Malaysian city has colonial forts and buildings, a rich Peranakan culture and great places to shop and eat. You can easily get there from Singapore by bus, car or cruise ship and there are hotels to suit all budgets. Enjoy a weekend excursion to this very walkable city, but do not expect to have the main sites to yourself!

Legends on Land + Sea

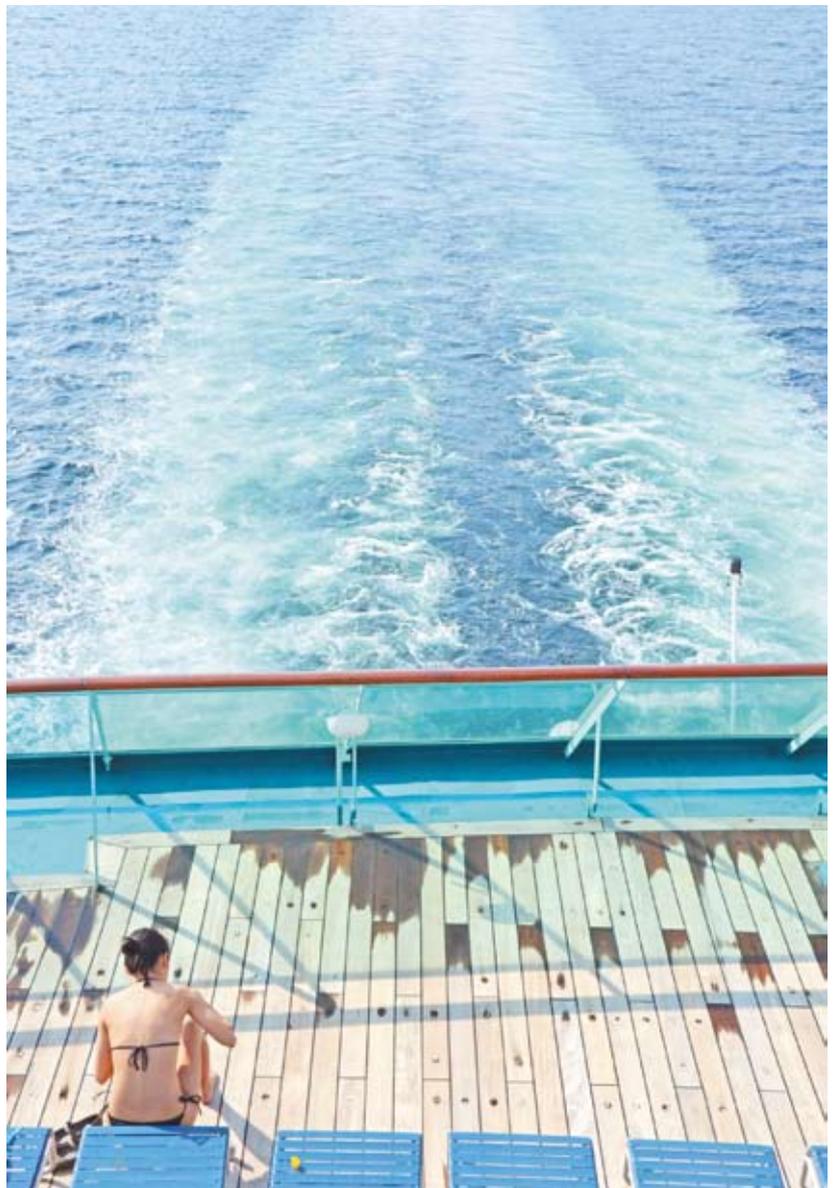
I'd never travelled on a cruise ship so opted for the Royal Caribbean "Legend of the Seas" which was scheduled to call at both Penang and Malacca. Within 30 minutes of reaching the Marina Bay Cruise Terminal I had checked in my luggage, received my "sea pass", cleared immigration, got my room key and was enjoying a buffet lunch and beer on board!

My stateroom, with a sea view, was comfortable and well appointed. Activities on board included dining, drinking, rock climbing, crazy golf, table tennis and chilling in the small swimming pools. There were also dance classes, cooking lessons, evening cabarets and of a course a casino.

Dutch Squared

After calling at Penang, the ship sailed south on a calm sea to anchor in Malacca on day three. We were ferried by tender / lifeboat to shore and immediately headed for bustling Dutch Square. With classic red







buildings dominated by Christ Church, a clock tower and the Stadthuys, it is an ideal location to shoot photographs or browse the numerous tourist shops. The colourful trishaws are decorated with flowers, dolls, flags and ghetto blasters and they compete to offer guided tours of the historical UNESCO World Heritage centre.

Preferring to go on foot, I climbed the steps to the ruins of St Paul's Church. Originally built in 1521, all that remains is a shell of a building with interesting large, old tombstones and superb views over the city.

Porta de Mall

Wandering down the hill through A Formosa, a Portuguese Fortress, I stopped at the small gatehouse of Porta de Santiago. This gate,

with neighbouring old cannons, is perhaps the most popular spot in Malacca. A festival was in progress by the gate with martial arts enthusiasts, Malaysian handicrafts and henna tattoos.

A hundred meters away the huge Dataran Pahlawan (Melaka Megamall), with a wide range of local and international outlets, provided a good stopping point for a coffee and a fix of air-conditioning!

Jes its Jonkers

Retracing my steps to Dutch Square, I crossed the river to Jonker Street. Shop here for souvenirs, tacky touristy gifts and junk / antiques depending on your point of view and luck. In the evening it's the place to go for food, drinks and music. Be forewarned, it can get extremely crowded, particularly at weekends.

To get a better understanding of Malacca and its people I took a guided tour of the Baba and Nyonya Heritage Museum, a former ancestral home preserved as a private museum exhibiting costumes, antique furniture and art. Babas and



Nyonyas, also known as Peranakans were originally ethnic Chinese who assimilated into the Malacca community.

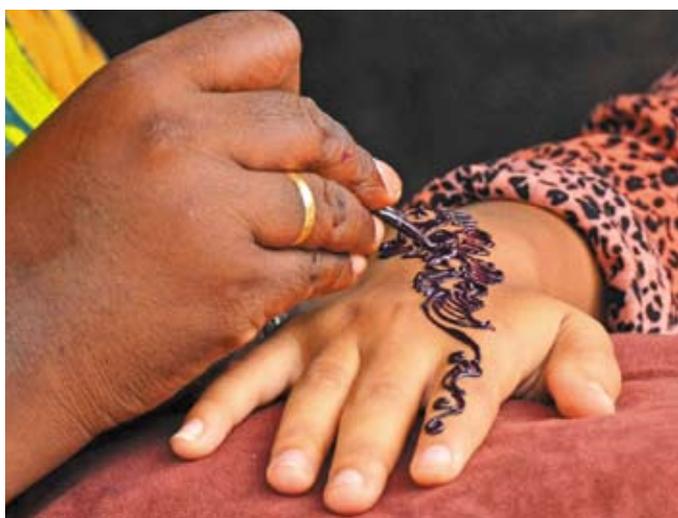
The Baboon

Thirsty and ready for a drink, I popped into The Baboon House, a student hangout with an art gallery at the entrance and an open courtyard and bar in the main area. The unrenovated walls, rickety stairs and unkempt appearance make a relaxing setting. The beer was cold and the food simple, but tasty.





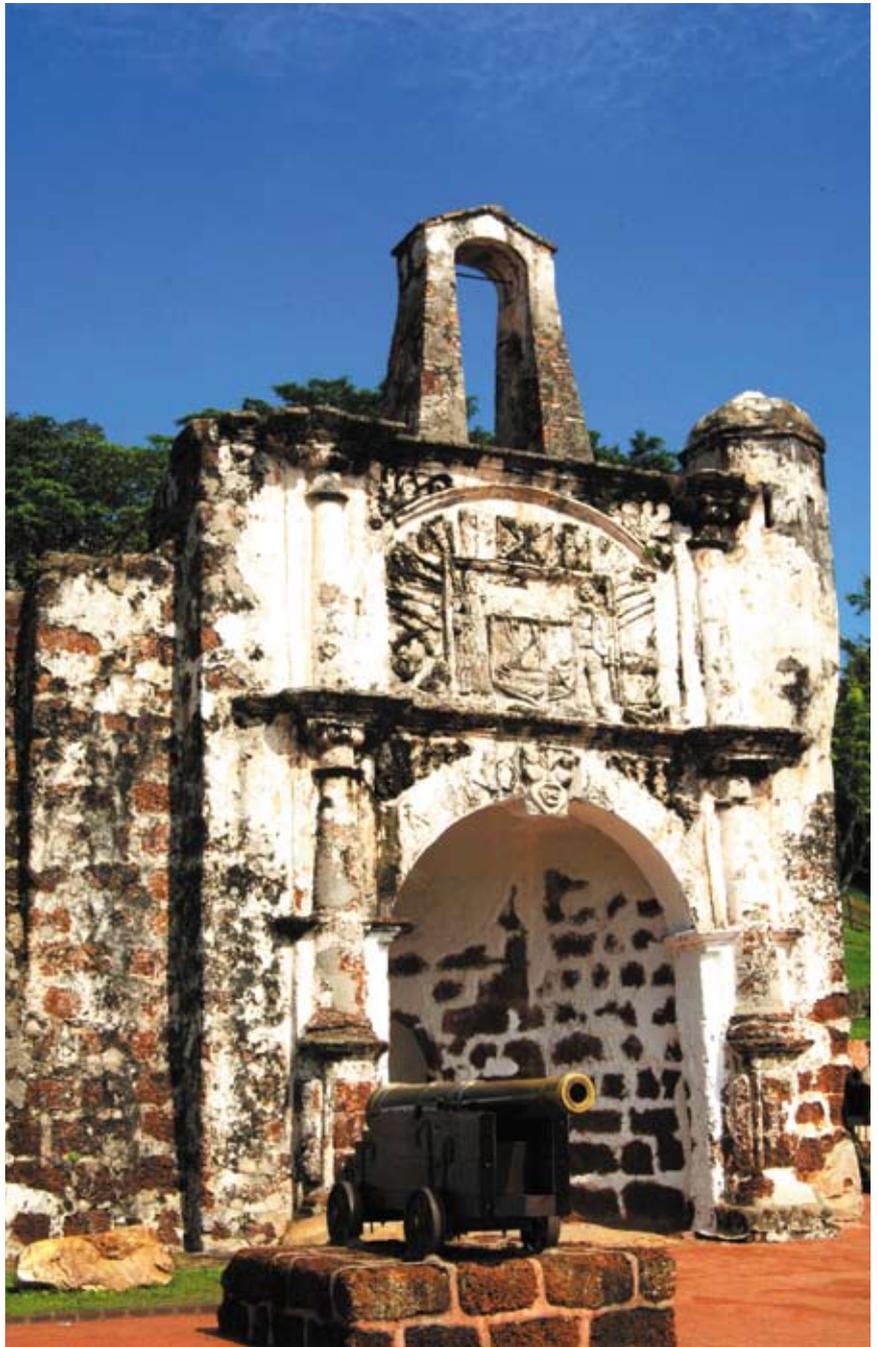
My final stop was at Villa Sentosa at Morten Kampung. The kampong style wooden house built in the early 1900's contains a collection of costumes, embroidery, furniture and relics. The local kueh cakes, curry puffs and coffee made by the host, who still calls this living museum home, were delicious.



The Bamboo

Time was running out and I needed to get back on board ship so I could only reminisce about other parts of Malacca. The Portuguese area is a little run down now but still has good seafood and sunsets. North of Malacca the fishing villages are worth a visit and do look out for road side stalls selling prawn crackers, lemang (sticky rice cooked in bamboo) and of course durian, the king of fruits.

The last night on the "Legend of the Seas" was party time with entertainment director



Dan and his staff working their socks off. The ship cruised back to Singapore overnight and everyone disembarked the following morning.

Royal Caribbean's Legend of the Seas offers family fun and relaxation. Malacca, despite the crowds, has an interesting history, lots of culture and is a very convenient city to visit from Singapore. [AJ](#)

Royal Caribbean Cruises
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