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LAUNCH OF A FRENCH HERITAGE TRAIL IN PENANG

.CITY GUIDE.

French Heritage Trail

Penang, Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur - Penang, 8th September 2020 – The Embassy of France in Malaysia and ThinkCity, in partnership with Alliance Française de Penang and the George Town Conservation and Development Company-GTDCDC, are pleased to launch today a heritage trail to guide visitors in their discovery of the many sites of French memory in Penang - on the island as well as on the peninsula, in Seberang Perai.

This exciting new heritage trail will allow visitors a dive into the individual stories of French people who have contributed to the collective history of Penang since the end of the 18th century. Through this journey, the French Heritage Trail aims to offer Penangites as well as tourists from Malaysia and abroad, a concrete approach to the history of the city and its expatriate communities over more than two centuries. This trail is also a contribution to developing more sustainable tourism activities, encouraging visitors to slow down the pace of their travel, dig deeper into the history and culture of the place, and make sense of less-often visited areas of the city.

The French Heritage Trail in Penang comes in the form of maps and explanations, available to all for free download. “Explorers” can plan their visits along the trail, in different areas of the city, in particular George Town, Pulau Tikus and Seberang Perai. They are encouraged to walk, use public transport and discover or re-discover the city with a fresh look!

French people arrived very early in Penang and actively participated in the development of the city and of Malaysia. There were Catholic missionaries, who built not only churches but also very many schools. There were the first French planters, who arrived in the 1840s, long before the rubber boom. And there are many other French stories in Penang, including the sister-cities twinning established in 2018 between Penang and the French city of Arles, both listed as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO!

“The history of relations between France and Malaysia is based on human stories that go back a very long way. France’s contribution to Malaysia’s schooling system for girls and boys, to architecture or to the development of agriculture is often unknown but is actually a very interesting tale to tell. The maps and documents of the “French Heritage Trail Penang”, published for free on the internet, will allow everyone to experience these stories on the ground and to see the city under a different light. It is also an opportunity to remind everyone that France and Malaysia have strong ties deeply rooted in history!” said H.E. Frédéric Laplanche, Ambassador of France in Malaysia.

Hamdan Abdul Majeed, board member of the GTCDC said that the French Heritage Trail is an important addition to the preservation of Penang’s cultural heritage, aligned with the objective of the memorandum of understanding between Malaysia and France, signed in 2018 to strengthen and further develop co-operation in the area of arts, culture and heritage.

“The French Heritage Trail is a vital addition to Penang’s cultural heritage. It is important to recognise and remember the positive benefits that the French have brought to our nation. The Trail brings a new dimension to Penang’s history and cultural identity, surfacing a rich history that was almost forgotten,” he said.

Hamdan also said that the trail was a significant contribution to the development of Penang’s cultural economy.

“As we are living in uncertain times, the Trail is also certainly a step forward in achieving our goals to build a creative and cultural economy in the state of Penang, which will impact the people here positively in terms of social and economic resilience.”

Officiating the launch of the French Heritage Trail, YB Yeoh Soon Hin, Penang State executive councillor for Tourism Development, Arts, Culture and Heritage (PETACH) said that there is much to learn from the cities in France, given that culture is a key driver to the French economy.

“There is much to learn from France. France’s cultural and creative industries account for around 2% of the French economy and generates nearly 600,000 jobs. It is a key driver that yields €32.1 billion in export revenues, based on 2017 statistics. This is a significant learning for us,” he said.

“There are many similarities between the foremost cultural cities in France and the city of Penang. Here in Penang, we enjoy the privileges of being a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with many precious heirlooms, both tangible and intangible - in our built landscape, our economy, languages, and cultural practices. We must continue to sustain and develop this eco-system,” he added.

YB Yeoh also emphasised the significance of the French Heritage Trail.

“The renewal and advent of the French Heritage Trail is momentous in that it celebrates our shared past and provides an added dimension to the rich cultural heritage that we have in Penang. From agricultural knowledge to the development of beautiful places of worship, Penang has benefitted from the historical French presence, and we are proud to share this with the world.

“We are committed to continue building on strategic partnerships, such as the one we enjoy with France, that will demonstrate an alignment between conservation and development, and we hope to continue investing in making Penang a vibrant and rich city attractive to artists and culture practitioners to make Penang’s economy more diverse and resilient.”

Download the French Heritage Trail in Penang from these websites:

English version:

my.ambafrance.org/trail

French version:

my.ambafrance.org/trailfr

PETACH website:

<https://petach.gov.my/>

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About George Town Conservation & Development Corporation

The George Town Conservation and Development Corporation Sdn. Bhd. (GT CDC) is a partnership between the Penang State Government's Chief Minister Incorporated (CMI) and Think City Sdn Bhd with technical services supported by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. It is a Project Implementation Vehicle set up to improve the public realm following the George Town Special Area Plan. These include the Waterfront Precinct, the Clan Jetties and the Street of Harmony neighbourhoods. Among its key objectives are the regeneration, upgrading and activation of public spaces and selected heritage buildings in the UNESCO World Heritage Site including Fort Cornwallis and Syed Al-Attas Mansion.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

George Town Conservation & Development Corporation

Bharathi Suppiah (CMI)

bharathi@penang.gov.my

Embassy of France in Malaysia

presse.kuala-lumpur-amba@diplomatie.gouv.fr

Think City

Maya Tan

maya.tan@thinkcity.com.my