

An Insider's *Malacca*



Baba Cedric Tan, in the limelight recently as Robert in *Dah Sa-Chupak Tak Boley Sa-Gantang*, shows us Malacca as only a Malaccan can

PHOTOGRAPHS BY AND COURTESY OF SHER MIN GASPAR (sher_min@yahoo.com)

Selamat Datang! Welcome to Malacca, the historic town and heartland of the Malay-speaking Baba and Nyonyas in Malaysia. If you intend to find, experience and take away something very Peranakan here, you have come to the right place. If you are not so familiar where to go, perhaps this article may provide some guide to things Peranakan in town. Most of the places here are situated in the heart of town, i.e. the Heeren-Jonker Street enclave, but some can be a slight distance away. So lets begin. Happy visiting and thank you for contributing to our economy!

SOMEWHERE TO STAY

A great opportunity to stay in a typical shophouse without having to scurry all the way to the wash room at the back of the house to answer nature's call. Some of these old shophouses on Heeren Street have been restored and converted to 2 and 3 star hotels or lodges where rooms come with attached wash room. The 3-storey home of the late Tan Kim Seng is currently **Hotel Puri**. Across the road nearby is the **Baba House**. Both hotels retain the original halls and courtyards. The Baba

House's gilded carvings and furniture in the reception area and courtyard evoke the feeling of a typical Peranakan home. Both hotels have a coffee house situated 2 doors away in an adjacent shophouse serving regular fare.

At the end of the street just next to the Malacca River estuary is the **Heeren Guest House and Cafeteria**. It has a commanding view of the hustle and bustle on the river and that makes up for the lack of typical interior fittings. The coffee house located in the first hall on the ground floor serves set continental and local meals.

FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

A trip up good old Malacca is never complete without savoring her Nyonya dishes. It is also a chance to compare if the taste and texture is almost the same as mum's cooking. Most of the good restaurants are concentrated in the **Melaka Raya** commercial area - **Bibik Neo, Nyonya Suan, Bayonya, Makko, Manis Sayang, Ole Sayang**—with the exception of **Auntie Lee Restaurant** in **Ujong Pasir** and **Nancy's Kitchen** in **Third Cross Street** (Jalan Hang Lekir). I like Auntie Lee's, Bibik Neo's and Bayonya's fare as they remind me of my grandma's *laok*.



from left to right:
Heeren Guest House,
Hotel Puri, Baba House
front and lobby



from left to right:

Bibik Neo Restaurant, Bayonya Restoran, Nancy's Kitchen, wan ton mee stall, ice kacang shop and Hoe Kee chicken rice

Another eatery that serves Nyonya *laksa*, *mee rebus*, *mee siam* besides curry rice is **Jeta Grove** in Melaka Raya. On Sundays and public holiday, a set menu of *nasi kemuli* (*tok panjang* delicacies served at Malacca Peranakan weddings) is dished out. On a smaller scale, **Low Family Corner** in **Tengkera** (next to Tengkera mosque) serves good home made *cendol*, *laksa* and *mee siam* for brunch while **Uncle Chai's** restored *panggung* is the ideal setting to enjoy *chendol* and light refreshments away from the blazing afternoon heat. Like all sea-fronting houses on Heeren Street, Uncle Chai has a *panggung* or pavilion behind the house where the tide used to sweep under until recent land reclamation. To access both Low's and Uncle Chai's 'makan' area, please go through the back entrance of the premises.

MORE GLORIOUS FOOD

The next few eateries do not serve Nyonya food but were and some are still synonymous with Jonker Street. Firstly is the famous *pork satay* with pineapple and peanut gravy. Starting off as a stall on the junction of First Cross Street and Jonker Street where The Geographer is currently situated, the business then occupied the shop opposite the current site at the junction of Jonker and Temple Streets. At least 2 other branches have sprouted; one on Jalan Portugis (not far from the current site) and the other in Melaka Raya.

One old-timer meal is the 'curry-babi kuah tauyu (braised pork in light sauce) rice'. It was sold in the morning in the same initial shop the satay man was occupying. Now it is sold from a shophouse next to the main road near the roundabout in Malim Jaya.

Then there is the *wan ton mee* stall that is still operating on Jonker Street. It is now next to the *ice kacang* shop near Lam Sam Leong beaded shoe shop. The 'dry' *wan ton* noodles and *ice kacang* make a splendid combination for tea.

You must not forget the chicken rice balls served from breakfast to lunch from **Hoe Kee** and **Chung Wah** shops. Sometimes they prepare asam fish too which adds a spicy kick to the rice. They are located next and opposite Chung Khiaw bank respectively. The original producer of these rice balls, **Heng Hainanese Chicken Rice Ball**, carries on the trade from the shoptlot located next to MB Finance in Melaka Raya.

Another type of delicacy worth a try is nasi mai som, which consists of rice with roast pork, *char siew*, omelette, *kangkong*, *taukuah*, chinese sausages, roast duck etc., and can be found on Jalan Bunga Raya and Jalan Bendahara. Delicious *cha kuay teow* coupled with cool *ice kacang* or lychee drink can be

found in **Saturday Ice Café** opposite the Yong Chuan Tian temple on Bandar Hilir Road.

Let's feast our eyes on those mouth watering **Nyonya cakes** next. It will be a great experience if you stroll through the kitchen of **Charlie Lee** and witness how cakes are made from basic ingredients. To get there, turn left from Jalan Tengkera into the first lane you see after passing Tengkera mosque (which is on the right side of the road) if you are coming from town. Drive inwards until you reach the house at the end of road facing the sea. Fresh moist cakes—*kochee*, *lepat kacang*, *apam*, *putu tegal*, *bengkah*, *genggang*, *galing galo*, *pulut tekan*, *rempah udang*, black and red *kueh ku*, *apam berkuah* and occasionally *tapay* are sold daily except Thursdays. You can find him selling his cakes and *popiah* in the pasar malam in the evening if you cannot meet him at home earlier in the day.

Another cake maker is **Bok Kim**, based opposite Bernas warehouse on the main road leading to the wholesale market in Batu Berendam. You can find *rempah udang*, *kochee* and *kueh ku* on sale in the mornings and early evenings. Both Charlie and Bok Kim accept advance orders.



from left to right:

Heng Hainanese Chicken Rice Ball, Charlie Lee and his Nyonya kueh, more kueh, Aik Cheong Coffee Shop and Bibik Belachan

You can also partake of **Low Family Corner's** yummy *kueh chuchur* with freshly scraped coconut for breakfast and try the freshly fried *kueh kuria* coated with pure *gula melaka* sold from a stall fronting the beach along Limbongan Road during tea time. Supper can be reserved for *yew char kueh* with that hot steaming coffee from **Aik Cheong**—the powder being easily obtained from the shop at Jonker Street. Or you can enjoy tea in the reception hall of **Jonker House** after shopping on Jonker Street.

If you are looking for curry powder, *belachan* and *gula melaka*, try the Ong family curry powder. The precious bottles of curry powder are actually chained in a showcase near the window of the house at the Heeren Street-Kubu Road junction.

Bibik Belachan's (you guessed it right) progeny are still

churning out that dried salty shrimp paste. Call Uncle Richard Gan (living in Bukit Beruang) or his sister in Tanjong for that special paste that adds zing to your Nyonya food. Alternatively you can purchase this product, curry powder and *gula melaka* at the shop at the Heeren Street-Kubu Road junction near the Ong residence. During the *geragoh* season, you can find the bottles of pink *chinchalok* sold as well. You can also find pure *gula melaka* sold in the shop along Temple Street facing Jalan Portugis.

If you are looking for fresh herbs and spices for *nasi ulam*, try the big wet market next to the bus terminal. All sorts of fresh ingredients for *nasi ulam* to local dishes, from *daun limau purut* to banana leaves, *bermis* to *batang kelo*, *bunga kantan* to *kunyit*. It will be a good place to look for local fruits and *gula melaka* too.

WALKING INTO HISTORY

Now to burn those calories. There are many interesting places to see within the old quarter of the town where Heeren, Jonker and Temple Streets are located. First on my list is the **Baba Nyonya Heritage Museum** belonging to the Chan clan consisting of three shophouses with similar 'Eclectic' façades and long interiors along Heeren Street. It is an opulent home with beautifully gilded carvings and perhaps showcases Peranakan lifestyle at its best. It is an excellent repository of porcelains, embroideries, silverware and furniture, all displayed in the typical manner. A walk through this museum is like a walk into the past and I am sure that you will reminisce and regret throwing those 'unwanted old stuff' away after that trip. Another place of interest is the **Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka Clubhouse** also located on Heeren Street, whose interior reflects the arrangement of a middle class family. The association is not open to the public and can only be accessed if a member is present. The **State History Museum** located in the red **Stadhuis** Building also exhibits some Peranakan furniture and porcelain but overall the Heritage Museum captures the Peranakan spirit best.

There are still some Peranakan ancestral homes along Heeren and Jonker Streets. **The Chee family ancestral home** opposite Hotel Puri is probably the most imposing with her tall spire, ornate façade and grand courtyard, so unlike the rest of the houses with their typical shophouse architecture. Three doors away at 111, Heeren Street is the ancestral home of the late **Tun Tan Cheng Lock** and the late **Tun Tan Siew Sin**. The **Eng Choan Association** building with its typical Chinese temple façade and coiling dragon pillars lies opposite the *Tan rumah abu*. Most houses still retain the family emblematic plaque (*jee ho*) above the door and you may occasionally see a pair of traditional, painted 'family lanterns' (emblazoned with the family surname) flanking a central *tien teng* ('heavenly lantern') adorning the entrance. Gone are the precious *pintu pagar* or carved and gilded swing doors at the entrance of most houses, which are now kept for safety after a spate of thefts. However the louvred windows, decorative plasterwork, Chinese glazed tiles, *pat kuah* (octagonal) patterns on windows and greco-roman pillars still adorn the façades of many houses in this area, Tranquerah,



clockwise from top left:
Baba Nyonya Heritage Museum, Persatuan Peranakan Cina Melaka Clubhouse,
rumah abu of Tun Tan Cheng Lock, the Stadhuis

Bukit China and Bandar Hilir.

JUNK OR JEWEL?

There are numerous antique stores located along Jonker Street—**Abdul, Fatimah, Classic, Mecca, Kowloon, P&M, Gold Moon, Chin Nang, Chin Teck, You San** and **Malacca Junk Store**. Look out for jewellery, porcelain and furniture but bear in mind that reproductions may be mingled with original pieces. Some shops solely deal in replicating old furniture—go to **Heerentage** on Heeren Street for red-and-gold and brown-and-gold pieces while **Ming Style Antiques** on Jonker Street specialises in fine classic Ming and Qing dynasty styles.

If you are lucky, you will be able to witness the gold plating process at **Ban Onn**. You can add back the golden shine to the faded gilding on your *kerosang* or even clean the tarnish or replace the missing pearl on your silver *kerosang* here. Other traditional trades to be seen along Jonker Street are the funeral paper-house maker and picture framer.

On Friday to Sunday nights, the Jonker Street area is cordoned-off, and transformed into **Jonker Walk** — a pedestrian mall where local food and souvenirs are sold and Chinese cultural activities are in full swing. You can purchase Charlie Lee's Nyonya cakes then and perhaps sample pineapples tarts from various producers too. While feasting on the Hainanese Association's chicken rice or slurping away *ice-cream potong*, you may be able to catch a bunch of elders doing the line dance, or a performance by the orchestra of the Chiang Chew Association, among other activities.

As you walk along Jalan Hang Lekiu, you can drop into **Ng Siong Seng** to purchase *tay liau* for prayers, and during mooncake festival, molasses-filled mooncake with sesame topping are sold here. If you have a taste for the macabre and are game to look at coffins, then 'feast your eyes' at the coffin store along this street. Newly imported *tok wee* (table valances) or red *chai kee* (door hangings) can be found in **Tak Sin** or



from left to right:
Fatimah, Malacca Junk Store, Ancient Curio Store

Lian Hoe along Kampong Pantay Road. To replace old lanterns or lamps in your verandah or hall, you may consider switching to traditional crown-shaped hexagonal *tien teng* lanterns with metal frames and glass panels. These traditional lanterns can only be found in the blacksmith shops along Jalan Hang Kasturi. If you have developed a liking for the traditional painted canvas-covered lanterns, then you will need transport to visit the residence of Mr Ang Teng Ta behind Senyum supermarket at Lereh.

ADDING COLOUR TO YOUR LIVES

For starters, you can capture your spouse and yourself on film donning traditional wedding costumes or the *Peranakan baju panjang* and *baju china* in any of the photo studios. All you need to do is to fix an appointment with **Mr Thomas Tan** and for a fee, this precious moment will be archived for posterity. You can also contact him to discuss your plans to tie the knot in the 'dulukala' style and the variety of artifacts at your disposal.

For those who are crazy about *kebaya*s and sarong, hop over to **Toko Cek Ros** along Laksamana Road (or Riverside opposite St Francis' Church) to view ready-to-sew materials from Indonesia. Or if you prefer to embroider your *rubia* material, then proceed to **Toko Khadijah** which is located a few doors away. If you prefer a modern touch, then **She-dazz** in Mahkota Parade is the place to visit.

Now to find matching slippers. Shops specialising in the production of beaded slippers have sprouted like mushrooms lately. One such shoe shop is **J-Manek** on Jalan Hang Lekir. Besides slippers, Indonesian *kebaya* material and tailor-made pieces are found here. Jonker Street resident **Lam Sam Leong** and Ah Lan along Heeren Street are also *manek* slipper makers and suppliers. Almost all have runners and agents in Singapore



from left to right:
Wah Aik Shoemaker, Lam Sam Leong, traditional lantern

delivering orders made earlier in Malacca. Pioneer Jonker Street based **Wah Aik** known for the famous bound foot and beaded shoes was forced to relocate to Kubu Road due to indiscriminate destruction of its premises. Looks like the relevant authorities have started off with the wrong footing (pardon the pun) for wanting to conserve this area for Unesco's recognition of Malacca as a

historical site. I hope this fiasco will stop and that the traditional trades will be preserved within this old quarter of town.

SELAMAT BERANGKAT!

I do hope that you will have an enjoyable time bargaining, partaking of and picking out products that are to your liking. But please heed the following advice. Failing so may be detrimental to your health. Make sure you have enough space in your car boot. Warm up thoroughly—you may need to strain those arms and legs lugging the materials purchased. Forget about dieting—the only diet you will be on here is a 'see food' diet. Make sure you come prepared with the necessary medication for overeating. Lastly, enjoy yourself. Know that you have created lots of happiness with your financial input!



- **BABA HOUSE** 125, Heeren Street
- **HOTEL PURI** 114, Heeren Street
- **HEEREN HOUSE & CAFETERIA** 1, Heeren Street.
- **BIBIK NEO** 4 & 6, Jalan Taman Melaka Raya
- **NYONYA SUAN** G12 & G14, Jalan PM3, Plaza Mahkota
- **BAYONYA** 164, Jalan Taman Melaka Raya
- **AUNTIE LEE** 385, Jalan Ujong
- **PASIR NANCY'S KITCHEN** 15, Jalan Hang Lekir (Third Cross Street)
- **JETA GROVE** 170, Jalan Taman Melaka Raya
- **LOW FAMILY** 489, Jalan Tengker
- **UNCLE CHAI** 31, Heeren Street
- **JONKERSATAY** 135, Jonker Street
- **JONKER CURRY RICE** G11, Jalan Malim Jaya
- **HENG HAINANESE CHICKEN RICE BALL** 536, Jalan Taman Melaka Raya
- **HOE KEE** 4, Jonker Street
- **CHUNG WAH** 20, Jalan Hang Jebat (First Cross Street)
- **CHARLIE LEE** 72, Jalan Tengker Pantai 2, Jalan Tengker
- **BOK KIM** - tel - 06-3172700
- **AIK CHEONG** 95, Temple Street
- **ONG FAMILY** 169, Heeren Street
- **RICHARD GAN** tel - 06-2324958
- **BABA NYONYA HERITAGE** 48 & 50, Heeren Street
- **PERSATUAN PERAKANAN CINA MELAKA** 149 & 151, Heeren Street
- **BAN ONN** 52, Jonker Street
- **THOMAS TAN** 293, Jalan Tengker tel - 06-2826512
- **TOKO CHE ROS** 59I, Jalan Laksamana
- **TOKO KHADIJAH** 63P, Jalan Laksamana
- **SHE-DAZZ** F57A, 1st floor, Mahkota Parade, Jalan Merdeka.
- **J-MANEK COLLECTION** 23, Jalan Hang Lekir (Third Cross Street)
- **LAM SAM LEONG** 104, Jonker Street
- **AH LAN** 84, Heeren Street
- **WAH AIK SHOEMAKER** NO.56 Temple Street (Jalan Tokong) tel - 06-2849726