

Long John's Treasure Island

Taking the ferry from Lumut, the first view you have of Pangkor Island, set in the straits of Malacca, is of forest-covered hills descending straight to the water's edge. Then a Malay fishing village gradually comes into sight, hugging the base of the hills and jutting out on stilts over the water. The first port of call, after 30 minutes sailing, is Sungai Pinang Kecil, where the ferry docks between the fishing vessels and you can see new wooden additions to the fleet being made. You can alight here or travel down to the final stop - Pangkor town itself - a further 10 minutes' boat ride away. Whilst the ferry terminal is larger here, the town is again dominated by the main industry for the island's 23,000 population - fishing.

Alighting from the ferry you are warmly greeted by the local taxi drivers (there are approximately 40 on the island, driving anything from old Toyotas and Mercedes to newer 12 seat mini-buses offering to take you to your destination. All the tourist accommodation is on the western side of the island, and ranging from international-standard hotels through to a Government controlled long-house to local "tents", looking more like beehives of wood and corrugated iron with steeply pitched roofs and without windows, roomy enough for a couple - as long as you don't roll over in your sleep!

A modern resort hotel is situated on Pangkor Laut, a little island off the south-west shore of the main island, a five-minute boat ride from Pasir Bogak beach. Also known as Fantasy Island, it has beautiful beaches and good snorkelling. An international hotel is sited at the north of the island and has a nine-hole golf course, open to non-residents, where addicts can enjoy a game and perhaps catch a glimpse of a hornbill or the odd monkey. For the day visitor both hotels charge a small entrance fee, which includes lunch.

There is basically one road on the island, which runs from Pangkor ferry terminal to Pasir Bogak beach, perhaps the most popular beach accommodation-wise. Palm trees fringe this sweeping bay, and from the shoreline it is hard to see the numerous hotels and hostels that cluster along it. Silver sand, running down into clear, emerald-coloured waters, makes this beach the ideal place to laze and soak up the sun, taking a refreshing dip to cool off every so often. You can also go horse riding along the beach when the local horses are brought down for their daily exercise.

From Pasir Bogak, the road - rather a grand term for this partly tarmac track - heads north, twisting over a ridge before plunging down to another stretch of silver sand and emerald coloured water, known as Teluk Pewyu - Turtle Bay. The name is derived from the green sea turtles, which have returned here in the late 1980's to lay their eggs after an absence of more than 20 years.

Again the road twists and climbs before heading into Teluk Nipah, from where at low tide a sand spit enables you to cross over to Pulau Glam - Coral Island. The sea here is the clearest of all, and whilst the coral can be hard to find, snorkellers can catch sight of colourful fish darting in and out of the rocks which abound along this coast. Passing small kampongs with banana, papaya, pineapple, coconut and durian trees, the road reaches its northern-most point at Teluk Belanga (Golden Sands). From here

it turns south-east and bends its way up and down hill to Sungai Pinang before leading into Pangkor town.

Along the way, a small Indian Temple can be seen, while at Sungai Pinang Besar the Buddhist temple in the Fu Lin Kong gardens is well worth a visit. The gardens boast their own miniature Great Wall of China, and have some interestingly painted rocks on display. Whilst you make your way to the temple look out for the small read fish left out on wooden frames to dry.

South of Pangkor town the road comes to a dead-end but you should spare the time to go down this road, for the remnants of a Dutch Fort, built in 1670, can be found at Telok Gedung. Nearby there is a large stone on which is carved "Incralo 1743" and a picture of a child being held by a tiger. This was carved by the Dutch to remind them of the child of a local Dutch official who, it is believed, was taken away by a tiger. It is more likely, though, that the local people, who were rebelling against the Dutch occupation, may have had something to do with the child's disappearance!

We went off-season and the taxis always seemed to be at our beck and call, but this must obviously be a different story during Hari Raya, when the Malay's take their holidays. However, bicycles can be hired by the hour or the day, though you are likely to spend as much time pushing them as riding them if you attempt the island tour by this mode of transport. Alternatively, for those who really want to see the island by themselves with a little less exertion, you can hire a moped inclusive of a basket for the cat or dog!

Unwilling to suffer the rigours of sore seats from either a bicycle or a moped, we elected to take the grand tour by taxi. This had a pleasant bonus in that our taxi driver lived in a kampong between Nipah Beach and Teluk Blangah and was more than keen to take us there for a refreshing drink of fresh coconut milk and to tell how the Government sold his father an acre and a half of land for M\$400!

Pangkor is famous for its fresh seafood, and there are numerous outlets in the town and around Pasir Bogak Beach, where you can sample the local delicacies such as barbecued squid and "satay". Not to be confused with those meats barbecued on sticks as seen in Singapore, satay in Pangkor is made of read fish which has been dried then barbecued to a crispy sweetness.