

My Trip to Penang

by Lauren R.

I came to Surat Thani knowing I would have to go to Penang to get my Non-Immigrant B Visa. Not everyone has to do this, but I didn't have enough time back home (in the States) to get my non-immigrant B work visa before leaving. Four other teachers had been travelling before they settled into the Surat Thani life so they also needed to go to Penang to get their visas. We formed our little group and prepared to set off for Malaysia a few days after we all arrived in Surat Thani.

At 6 am on the appointed day a lady in a pick up truck picked us up at our house. As soon as we were settled into the bed of the truck, she asked us to pay 1,000 baht to ensure our ride back home from Penang to Surat. We had all paid Mam, one of the Thai staff members at SE, to book our tickets before hand but they were just one way. A short ride in the pick up truck brought us into town and we awaited the arrival of a mini bus to take us to Penang. All together we took two different minibuses, a large cushy coach bus, and a ferry to get to Georgetown, the main city on Penang Island. After the double border (going out of Thailand, being in no mans land for a few minutes drive, and then going into Malaysia-the only time our bags were scanned the entire trip) we were driven a couple hours before we were dropped at the ferry port. Not everyone takes the short 20 minute ferry ride from mainland Malaysia to Penang because there is also a bridge buses can take, so don't worry if you don't end up on a boat. Sometimes a bus is taken so that after the border you get back on the bus and are dropped in Georgetown.

*If you take the ferry remember that it costs a ringgit and change to get on. Coming from Thailand you probably won't have ringgit but you can exchange money at some of the places the minibuses stop. * The ferry dropped us off in the middle of Georgetown. Sweaty and tired we walked for about twenty minutes, exchanged some money and made our way to Love Lane where we had been told there would be cheap hostels. Right before the turn for Love Lane we found the Crystal Guesthouse.



For twenty ringgit a night we were given towels and a dorm bed with A/C. Love lane is right by little India and you really can't go wrong with any of the food there. It's delicious and cheap and just amazing. After dinner we found a bunch of other foreigners at the Reggae Bar which is a short walk up

the street from the Crystal Guesthouse. The hostel informed us that we would have to hand in passport pictures as well at the Thai consulate and offered to take them for us for 1 ringgit (~10baht). We agreed and had them done when we woke up. After our pictures were printed we set off for the Thai Embassy.

The 101 bus picked us up across the street from the 7-11 (about fifteen steps after you turn right out of Crystal Guesthouse/across the street from Love Lane). We asked the bus driver to help us and after a good ten minute ride we were told to get off at a stop in the middle of nowhere. (The bus stop is called Jetty.)

<https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Royal+Thai+Consulate-general,+1+Jalan+Tunku+Abdul+Rahman,+Pulau+Pinang,+Malaysia/Sokka+Gakkai+Malaysia,+Jalan+Burma,+Malaysia/@5.4267444,100.3097883,16z/data=!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x304ac3acc80be5eb:0xd74ea6236acc4956!2m2!1d100.305573!2d5.424713!1m5!1m1!1s0x304ac3a621a2771d:0xf56e1fd6943b0abb!2m2!1d100.316375!2d5.427306!3e2>

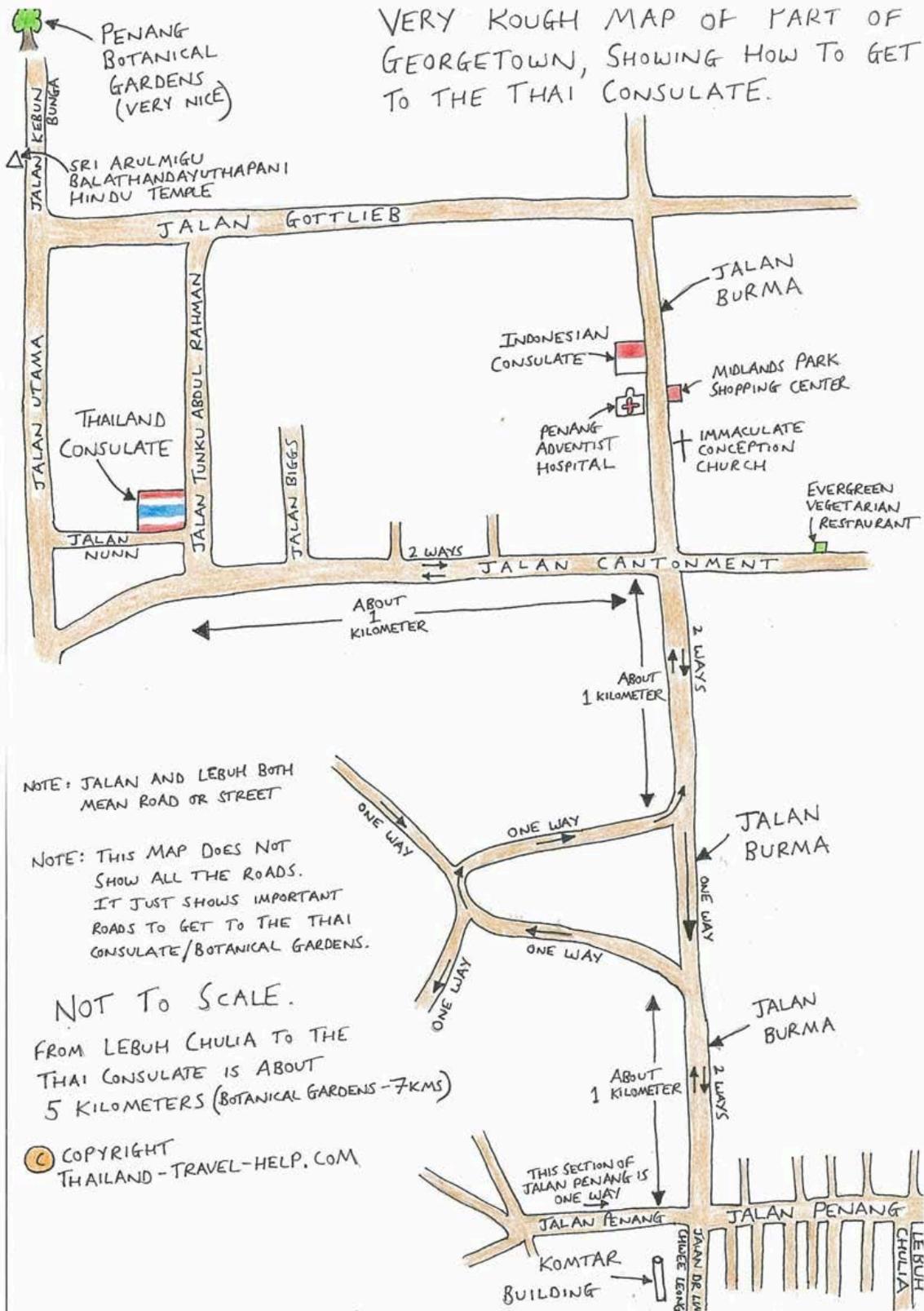
After a bunch of wrong turns (we had no map and only the broken instructions the bus driver had given us) we found our way to the Embassy, which really looks like someone's desk. A bit of paperwork later and with help from a guard, we handed in our passports and eagerly went back to the bus. (Reverse the map.) The stop for the way back is under a couple of trees shading the sidewalk. The 101 bus dropped us off right in front of the hostel. Back in Little India we ate another amazing meal at a different restaurant. You really can't go wrong here, as long as you like Indian food. There was a little café by the hostel as well, but we indulged ourselves with amazing Indian food the entire weekend.

The next day we went back to the Embassy at 2 pm, picked up our passports and went back to Little India to have one last meal of Indian food. I literally ate butter chicken for every meal and could not get enough of it. I still catch myself craving it.

We caught an afternoon bus out of town, but managed to do some exploring earlier that morning. Penang has some awesome street art that really shouldn't be missed. We weren't the only ones taking pictures and usually had to wait a bit in order to get a picture of the art without a smiling, peace sign loving Asian in front of it. There were a few different maps and websites we followed in order to find the art. It was very cool and we got a tour of the city!

On this tour we found a few bottles of hard cider in the fridge. If you are a fan of hard cider, stock up here. It is hard to find in Surat Thani (i.e. I have not found it yet).





The ride home was fine. We got our minibus at the same travel agency that brought us from Surat to Penang and after breaking down for an hour everything else went smoothly. No ferry this time, just buses and we had room to stretch for the first two minibuses. The last one was a bit cramped, but we were almost home. We pulled into the Surat Thani stop around 10pm and easily found a tuktuk to take us home.

There are agencies all over Penang who can get you back to Surat. Pricing is a little bit different everywhere so shop around for the best price. Our hostel even said they could get us home. There were a few bumps in the road as with all trips but the people of Penang really went out of their way to help us over every obstacle we faced. And the Indian food is amazing, the street art very unique, and the expat atmosphere super friendly; which made it a worthwhile trip.

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Royal+Thai+Consulate-general/@5.424713,100.305573,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m2!3m1!1s0x0:0xd74ea6236acc4956>

http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g660694-d1912538-Reviews-Crystal_Guesthouse-Penang_Island_Penang.html