

Want for Nothing and Live a Full Social Life in Penang

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It was 1967 David Cassebohm had just received his Australian Air Force assignment in Penang, Malaysia. He had to look at a map...he had no idea where it was.

The following year, after taking off from the runway in Penang, David's aircraft engine sputtered and stopped. The plane nose-dived into an irrigation canal, ripping out the left main undercarriage and a fuel pump. David managed to free himself from the burning wreckage escaping with his life but suffering some terrible burns. Fifty years, he's come full circle...living as an expat less than an hour away from that crash site...

When it came to planning for their retirement, David (70) and his wife, Chele (62), had always wanted to live in Asia but weren't sure where. They visited Thailand, Singapore and Bali in search of the right place. Then in 2016 they took a cruise that included a one-day port of call in Penang. David was keen to see how Penang had changed since the 60s. "We got off the cruise ship, walked three streets and by the end of the day I was won over...it's enchanting," says Chele. "David spotted a restaurant that was familiar, we went in, and sure enough, it was there in 1967 and he had eaten there!"

The couple went back home to Bowral, New South Wales, and joined every Penang Facebook and expat group they could find. After visiting again in September of 2017, they thought long and hard about the whole idea of moving temporarily. "In the end we decided to sell our home; it was the top of the market, we sold everything. That decision was monumental. We got caught in the momentum of it all and moved here in February 2018," says David.

They found a luxury apartment with two large balconies and views of the jungle and sea, for \$2,379 a month. It has four ensuite bedrooms plus an additional bathroom. The building facilities include a state-of-the-art gym, 45-metre infinity pool, yoga area and massage rooms, which are all put to good use by Chele. "I

get massages every fortnight; a massage in Australia is at least \$83, but here it's only \$26," says Chele. "Having a swimming pool is something I had as a child, but not for 30 years, so just to have one where I can do laps is so incredible. I want for nothing here."

Back in Bowral, having a house cleaner was so expensive they did it themselves, but in Penang, "it's so affordable—it frees you up to do other things and that is a real bonus," says Chele.

While Chele is doing laps at the pool, David can be found on the golf course. It's only an hour away, and a bargain at \$12 per round, which includes a cart. "I bought a three-year membership at Penang Golf Resort on the mainland for \$834 which is what one year in Australia would cost me," says David.

The Penang Golf Club isn't the only club they joined. David and Chele attended the 150th anniversary of the Penang Club, as members. In 1968, David was there to celebrate its 100th anniversary. They bought a lifetime membership for \$7,340 which includes reciprocal memberships at clubs in more than 20 countries.

When they aren't dressing up for nights

out at the club, they have a very relaxed but busy lifestyle; the standard in Penang. "We made more friends here in three months than we had in Bowral in 20 years! I suspect it's because expats are really keen to make a new family," says Chele. "Back home we tended to be homebodies and watched a lot of TV, but we are too busy here to even miss it," adds David. "Here we are in our 60s and 70s with a social life that we've never had before, it's a great place for people in our age group and being here has certainly enriched our lives!"

"We've found that as much as we used to love entertaining at home, it's just so easy to go out. It's a national pastime and if you see the locals eating in a particular spot and it's busy, sit down because you should eat there too," says Chele.

Living in Penang gives Chele and David a new sense of freedom. "We are able to travel to so many more places than we could out of Australia. Penang is so central and travel is so cheap that we don't really have to think too hard about it. Plus, we are living in an apartment so we can

just lock up and go. We couldn't do that back home," says Chele.

"We can stick our stuff in storage and go and live wherever we want for six months: Italy, France, Costa Rica...who knows," says Chele.

But at the moment they are happily planted in Penang. "This place has a certain *je ne sais quoi*, there is something different here, it's the magic of Penang," says Chele. ■

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Nicknamed "The Pearl of the Orient", Penang offers low-cost, luxury living.