

A Family Makes Time for Each Other in Penang

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Living in Penang, Malaysia has allowed us to take a break from the rat race,” says Mariana Page, thinking about her old life in Boston.

Mariana says that she and her husband, Caleb “Always had the idea, dream, and intention to see what it was like to live elsewhere.” They traveled extensively from their home in Boston, each time looking for a new place to call home. However, every time their trip was over, they’d return, get back into their routine, and all their intentions to move overseas evaporated.

When their son David was born, they continued the search, but continually got stuck in Boston. “More than ever, we wanted David to experience living abroad, to see life outside the U.S.,” Mariana says.

For them, finding the right school for David was the primary requirement of a new overseas home. “We found that Penang had several international schools, all the way up to high school. Some teaching U.S. curriculums, others with International Baccalaureate programs. And they were all English-speaking.” Even though they didn’t know anyone in Penang and had never visited, it quickly became their first choice.

“This time, we did something different. We decided to spend a summer in Penang, and if we liked it, we would just stay. We knew the only way to really experience living overseas was by not having attachments or excuses to return, so we sold our businesses in the U.S. and used the capital gains to create an opportunity fund which buys small software businesses, and we bought one-way tickets to Penang.”

It’s the simple things about the lifestyle in Penang that make Mariana and her family so happy there. They get to focus on the important things: family time, health, travel, and a little bit of pampering.

Mariana gets to drive David to school. “He could take a bus, but I cherish the conversations that come up during my drive. It’s precious time that I enjoy,” she admits.

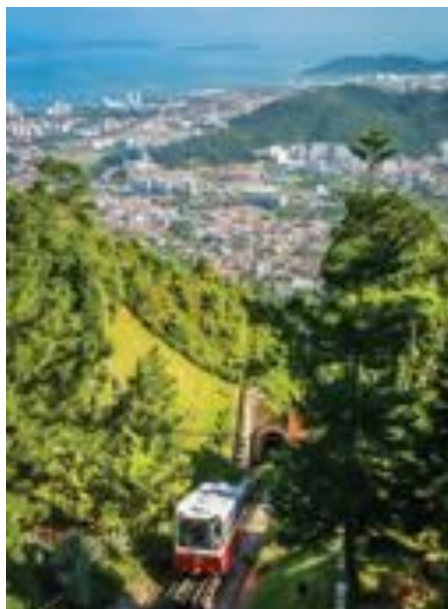
After she drops him off, she chats

with the other school moms who are from around the globe: France, Germany, Australia, Russia. Then she goes for a hike or off to the gym. “I have been paying a bit more attention to my health and giving myself time to get back in shape, something I didn’t give much thought to when I was in the U.S. managing my business,” says Mariana.

Every Monday morning, Mariana goes hiking with an international group of women. “We get together, hike, and chat. Then we reward ourselves with a cup of cold-pressed natural vegetable juice for less than \$1. It’s a great way to start my week, and it’s been a gateway to meet people and make friends. I love every bit of it.”

Caleb is an entrepreneur and works from home; they get to spend a lot of time together. More than ever before. They love their lunch dates.

Working from home is a pleasure since they live in a 3,200-square-foot, four-bedroom, five-bathroom luxury condo.



For views and fresh air in a hurry, getting some altitude in Penang is just a funicular ride away.

“It’s easier and cheaper to pamper myself here.”

“I love our condo...it costs us \$1,800 a month,” Mariana says. “I don’t know what we love the most, the sound of the birds that surround us, or the sea breeze on the hot weather days. You will frequently find us sitting in the front balcony, having a drink, reading, napping, or grilling.”

In the afternoons, Mariana takes advantage of all the pampering available on the island. Massages, facials, manicures, pedicures, laser treatments—all at a fraction of what they would cost in the U.S. “It’s a lot easier and cheaper to pamper myself here. I am just making up for what I missed in previous years,” she adds.

After David gets home from school, they all jump into their 30-meter (98.4-foot) swimming pool. Then they head out for dinner at a nearby street stall where they can eat for about \$12.

Moving to Penang has only fueled their thirst for travel. Since moving there, they have traveled all around Asia. Phuket, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur are only a one-hour flight from Penang. They just got back from four days at Universal Studios in Singapore.

They are delighted with their choice to live in Penang. “It is a great place to live,” says Mariana. “It feels like a small city, which we like. It’s safe, friendly, drug-free, very diverse, and the food is amazing.”

The expat community is large and very active. “I’ve had to learn to say no,” says Mariana. “I have my Latina group, my book club. I’ve taken cooking classes, and I get to exercise every day of the week.”

Once they realized Penang was the right choice, Mariana and Caleb planned to stay for a year until David finished primary school. That was until David asked if they could stay longer. Now their biggest decision is if they should stay through middle school—not a bad dilemma to face.

“In the U.S., both my husband and I were working,” says Mariana. “Now, we are living on one income and savings, but we haven’t sacrificed our lifestyle. The cost of living here is a lot more affordable, and we get to spend so much more time together as a family.”

“Even if we were spending just as much money as we were in the U.S., it wouldn’t matter, because we have certainly improved our quality of life.” ■