

Penang Sister City 50th Anniversary Delegation Visit Outcomes

Tuesday, 22 October 2024
Council

Strategic Alignment - Our Community

Program Contact:
Chief Executive Officer

Public

Approving Officer:
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 14 May 2024, Council approved the Lord Mayor's travel to the City of Adelaide's sister city, George Town, Penang, as part of the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the relationship.

This report provides an overview of the activities undertaken as part of the Lord Mayor's visit to Penang Island.

The Lord Mayor was joined by Councillor Elliott, and a group of external delegates, who participated in a broad program of meetings and activities put together by the City Council of Penang Island in collaboration with the Office of the Lord Mayor.

The City of Adelaide's delegation visit to George Town this year follows the one in early December 2023, when over 30 delegates from the City Council of Penang Island visited Adelaide for a week and celebrated the 50th anniversary of the sister city relationship on 8 December 2023.

During the visit, a wide range of topics were discussed, including heritage preservation and restoration, circular economy and waste recovery, education, and UNESCO Heritage and Biosphere reserve designation activities.

Despite the Capital City status of the City of Adelaide, the asymmetry compared with the size and economic activity of George Town and its status is significant.

It is evident that there is untapped potential to do more with this relationship, which reaches beyond the City of Adelaide's remit, realising the potential for greater State Government involvement.

There may be more opportunity for benefits to be achieved if the metropolitan and state relationships were included in the 250th anniversary of the establishment of George Town, Penang, by Francis Light, and the 200th anniversary of the founding of Adelaide, by Col. William Light, both coincidentally take place in 2036. This occasion is a significant opportunity for collaboration, government and community involvement, and celebration.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT COUNCIL

1. Notes the report.
2. Notes that the Lord Mayor has had discussions with the South Australian State Government to highlight the potential of South Australia broadening the relationship with George Town and the broader Penang Island area.
3. Requests the State Government work with the City of Adelaide to examine the potential for a Sister State relationship with Penang to better exploit the opportunities presented by the longstanding local government and historic ties.
4. Requests the State Government consider planning for a project to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of Penang and the 200th Anniversary of the founding of Adelaide which take place in 2036.

IMPLICATIONS AND FINANCIALS

City of Adelaide 2024-2028 Strategic Plan	Strategic Alignment – Our Community Celebrate and honour community and cultures
Policy	Not as a result of this report
Consultation	Not as a result of this report
Resource	Not as a result of this report
Risk / Legal / Legislative	Not as a result of this report
Opportunities	There is the potential for greater State Government involvement in developing connections with Penang. In particular with regard to the future planning for the coincidence of the 250 th anniversary of the establishment of George Town, Penang, by Francis Light, and the 200 th anniversary of the founding of Adelaide, by William Light, which takes place in 2036.
24/25 Budget Allocation	Not as a result of this report
Proposed 25/26 Budget Allocation	Not as a result of this report
Life of Project, Service, Initiative or (Expectancy of) Asset	Not as a result of this report
24/25 Budget Reconsideration (if applicable)	Not as a result of this report
Ongoing Costs (eg maintenance cost)	Not as a result of this report
Other Funding Sources	Not as a result of this report

DISCUSSION

1. On 14 May 2024, Council approved the Lord Mayor's travel to the City of Adelaide's sister city, George Town, Penang, as part of the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the relationship.
2. This travel was in response to both the invitation from Dato' Rajendran P. Anthony, Mayor of the City Council of Penang Island, dated 12 April 2024, and the December 2023 visit from the City Council of Penang Island to Adelaide.
3. The purpose of the Lord Mayor's visit to Penang was to mark the 50th anniversary of the sister city relationship between George Town, Penang and the City of Adelaide (CoA) and to continue to strengthen the relationship following the 2023 activities.
4. A summary of activities undertaken as part of the Penang Island visit is outlined in the itinerary [\[Link 1\]](#) and accompanied by photos as shown at [Link 2](#).

Historic Context

5. The George Town / Adelaide sister city relationship was signed in December 1973, having been initiated during Premier Don Dunstan's visit the previous year. At that time, he identified the similarities between the cities and encouraged the development of the relationship. The former Premier specifically highlighted the similar population size of about 1.5 million people, clearly referencing the entire greater Adelaide area.
6. The relationship has been carried forward by the City of Adelaide, which currently has a population of 26,000, despite being the capital city and cultural and institutional heart of greater Adelaide.
7. Sister cities are rarely based on such an extraordinary historical link, in this case based on the unique achievements of a father and son in implementing strategies for colonisation.
8. Francis Light developed the earliest free port in Southeast Asia on behalf of The East India Company on the island of Penang in 1786. The port rapidly attracted migrants from China, India, Thailand, as well as Indonesia and Malaya, and Great Britain. The resultant community is multifaith and multicultural with historic areas reflecting the constituent communities.
9. His son William Light surveyed Adelaide and the state in 1836 on behalf of the Adelaide Development Company, with an ethos of a model colony with religious freedom underpinned by land purchase by free citizens.

Current Reciprocal Activities

10. A small delegation from Adelaide recently visited in August 2024 to reciprocate after a sizeable visit by Penang Island Councillors and State Ministers in December 2023 to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the sister city relationship.
11. It was an opportunity to share common areas of interest, sign a recommittal agreement, and reassess the relationship's impact and potential future opportunities.
12. The clear successes of the relationship to date have been in international education and interest in heritage conservation. The cities have distinct and culturally significant built heritage as well as cultural assets and over many decades have shared expertise through exchanges and service provision.

Education

13. The sister city link between Penang and South Australia is almost at a familial level. This has advantaged the Adelaide international student market. Since there is limited access to tertiary education for some cohorts of the community in Penang, there has been an opportunity for many decades for a consistent flow of students to Adelaide facilitated by the prominence of the SACE curriculum and certification (Cambridge University also provide school certification).
14. Other universities are marketing strongly into Penang, and the University of Wollongong now has a Penang campus.

Heritage, George Town UNESCO World Heritage, UNESCO Biodiversity Reserve

15. The George Town World Heritage site achieved UNESCO World Heritage status on 7 July 2008 and has subsequently seen building construction and property values increase and tourism blossom. Some of the heritage projects which were visited included:
 - 15.1. Fort Cornwallis, a major heritage restoration project within the George Town World Heritage Site (GTWHS) involving extensive restoration and preservation works.

- 15.2. Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, also known as 'Blue Mansion', a second major heritage site representing the mixed heritage of the area through Chinese Imperial architecture, with European elements represented. It is a UNESCO award-winning example of adaptive reuse, operating as a hotel, restaurant, and museum.
- 15.3. Suffolk House. The original Suffolk House was Francis Light's residence. After that it served as the Governor's residence, function venue, and meeting house. In 1993, a restoration project began with the Penang Heritage Trust with assistance from the SACON Heritage Unit.
- 15.4. Prominent Hokkien clanhouses established in the 18th century including She Tek Tong Cheah Kongs, and the Leong San Tong Khoo Kongs temple. These clanhouses provided vital community services and support throughout George Town's development.
16. A recent campaign has seen the Penang Hill Biosphere Reserve given official designation under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme. This reserve includes Penang Hill, some inland areas, and a marine area.
17. The listings and investments in conservation were developed strategically following planning by the sovereign wealth fund Khazanah Nasional Berhad through Think City, George Town World Heritage Inc, and the separate thought-leadership organisation called The Penang Institute.
18. The Biosphere was founded through the endeavours of the philanthropic private sector vehicle, The Habitat Foundation (Habitat), which also undertakes outreach, education, destination management, and scientific research.
19. Think City, The Penang Institute, and Habitat have values and strategic directions aligned with our state's environmental and green agenda. The Penang State Government was particularly keen on involvement and understanding of our Green Hydrogen technology.

Investment and Industry

20. The Penang strategic plan sought UNESCO World Heritage listing for the George Town World Heritage Site (listed in 2008), and a future industrial base through the IT sector.
21. The Penang government developed a tech park to bring over 400 businesses, including international companies such as Google and Intel, together on the site with a growing ecosystem of smaller providers. The aim was to secure talent and inward migration attracted by employment and lifestyle considerations. This appears to have been more noticeable in heritage areas but is being responded to by joint ventures, land reclamation, and housing development.
22. Approximately 5% of the world's semiconductor production occurs in Penang, and US businesses are increasing their investment in the region to ensure secure supply chains.

Business Connection and Investment Attraction

23. The delegation met with Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce, supported by the Malay Indian Chamber of Commerce, and a number of other key business groups. Connections made included; senior business leaders from across many industries; investment, development, construction, professional services, and logistics, and in particular included ties to South Australian-based Safcol, one of the world's major suppliers of fresh, packaged and frozen seafood.
 - 23.1. Attendance included:
 - 23.1.1. Vice-chairs of the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers.
 - 23.1.2. The President and Executive Committee of the Penang Chinese Chamber of Commerce.
 - 23.1.3. Senior members of the Malaysian Indian Chamber of Commerce.
 - 23.1.4. Penang Green Council.
24. Whilst we are unable to assess the entirety of Penang investment in Adelaide, the ownership of Safcol by a Penang investor is one significant link that became apparent during the visit, and there was immediate enthusiasm to arrange a meeting and discussion on future opportunities.

Relationships

25. In December 2023, the Penang State Government joined the 30-person delegation that visited Adelaide led by Mayor Rajendran. The delegation was accompanied by the Minister for Local Government and State Secretary alongside a significant number of Councillors and senior Administration staff from the City Council of Penang Island.

26. In August 2024, our City of Adelaide delegation was greeted not only by the City Council of Penang Island, led by Mayor Rajendran, but also by the Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Tourism.
27. There have also been other delegations over the last 50 years. In particular:
 - 27.1. The Lord Mayor has attended both the 25th and 50th Anniversary exchanges.
 - 27.2. Former Lord Mayor Martin Haese, accompanied by the Director Growth and Chief of Staff, visited in July 2018 to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the sister city relationship.
 - 27.3. Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia, recently visited Penang and was very warmly received.
28. The Council-to-Council relationships are longstanding and robust. The communities are both English-speaking and fondly disposed.
29. Inauguration of a pocket park at Union Square, dedicated to the sister-city relationship. Presented as a prime example of urban greening initiatives and projects being undertaken throughout the Penang Island council area. Additionally, a time capsule was buried to commemorate the occasion, to be unearthed on the 60th anniversary of the relationship.
30. In Adelaide the Australia Malaysia Business Council (SA) is active and aims to foster, support and promote business, investment and cultural opportunities between Australia and Malaysia.

Outcomes

31. The Lord Mayor's visit to Penang received wide media coverage in local news channels. A few examples are provided here. [Link 3](#). [Link 4](#). [Link 5](#).
32. Since returning from Penang, the Lord Mayor has sought to link the Penang Institute with the Festival Centre Trust and Don Dunstan Foundation, Think City with ThinLab, arranged to meet the local CEO of Safcol, and develop sports club links.
33. The Lord Mayor has also had discussions with the South Australian State Government to highlight the potential of South Australia broadening the relationship with George Town and the broader Penang Island area. This is because in Penang the State level involvement and interest in the sister city relationship is significantly more substantial than that of the State Government here. The City Council of Penang Island is larger and has a greater asset base than any Council in South Australia and therefore a broader relationship may be appropriate.

DATA AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Link 1 - [Delegation Itinerary](#)

Link 2 - [Photo's](#)

Link 3 - News Article <https://penanghyperlocal.com/adelaide-mayors-visit-to-george-town-in-conjunction-with-50th-anniversary-of-sister-city-relationship/>

Link 4 - News Article <https://focusmalaysia.my/george-town-and-adelaide-celebrate-50-years-of-special-ties/>

Link 5 - News Article <https://northern.sinchew.com.my/news/20240809/northern/5828582>

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

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