

PENANG, MALAYSIA

The Van Gogh is again at anchor today and we are taken to the quayside by ships tender. Most passengers are taking an organised tour to see the many temples here, so there is no queue for the tender boats and we get to shore quickly.

The weather is very humid and our clothes are drenched with sweat by the time we reach the quayside. A sudden tropical storm does nothing to ease the oppressive heat, so we decide not to walk the 3 kilometres to the city centre.

Instead we hire a trishaw and "driver" who pedals us slowly but surely to the centre of the city and its huge shopping malls. The trishaw experience is a little like the infamous Tuc Tuc vehicle in Sri Lanka, only more so.

The front of the vehicle comprises a forward facing seat, behind which sits the "driver" on his pedal cycle. There is barely enough room for two people to sit -



maybe we have put on weight with all this good food on the Van Gogh!

The 20 minute journey into town is hair-raising to say the least; our driver weaves in and out of fast moving traffic while pointing out all the sights to us. We sit, cramped in our tiny seat, with an uninterrupted view of the traffic at almost ground level.

There seems to be an acceptance of these curious trishaws by other motorists, and our driver appears to be able to change lanes without any tooting of horns. He overtakes and undertakes at traffic lights, and at one point almost tips us up into the 2 foot deep storm drain on the side of the road. Halfway through the journey he pulls into a side street to tighten his bike chain with a spanner he keeps under the seat.

At the shopping mall we find 5 floors of clothes stores, shoe shops, phone shops, jewellery and electronic goods. The prices are about 20% dearer than at home in the UK, so no bargains to be had here. Owain buys a ring though and we stock up on sellotape, writing paper and a 2008 diary.

At lunchtime we opt for a Japanese meal in the Mall. Soup, vegetables, sizzling beef, rice, ice cream and green tea costs around £2. We are so impressed with

this meal that when we meet up with our guest lecturer friends Tony and Sheila later, we return to the same restaurant for an evening meal.



By the time we have finished in the Prangin Mall shopping centre, it has gone dark and we decide to journey back to the ship by proper taxi. Travelling in the Trishaw was certainly an experience, but not one we would wish to repeat in the dark!

