

[On the Route of the Chitrapuram Parade in Georgetown, Malaysia](#)

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It is a humid April night in Georgetown, the most cosmopolitan city of Malaysia. Penang Island's Hindu population has gathered to follow a five-mile, ten-hour procession marking the Hindu New Year. Musicians playing nagasvaram and drums lead the chariot carrying the black, five-metal image of Lord Muruga from the downtown Mariamman Temple to His Waterfall Temple on the outskirts of town. High up on the chariot's well-lit spire is a priest attendant wearing a red turban and fancy gilt rudraksha beads.

Periodically, the cart stops for men and boys to boisterously smash coconuts on the road. Fathers hold their sons up to the altar to receive Muruga's blessings in the form of sacred ash from Tiruchendur, India, or perhaps a scarf or garland. Hindu businessmen along the route have set up stands with free refreshments, and everyone has hung woven banana leaves from the doorways. Auspicious Hindu drawings have been marked permanently on the asphalt along with Chinese "good luck" characters.

The Chinese shopkeepers soberly honor Muruga with incense as they would a passing emperor that they cannot afford to not be on good terms with. Women and children welcome Muruga respectfully in the Chinese manner of shaking folded hands. Merchants and well-wishers with not a drop of Indian blood in them enthusiastically come forward with trays of coconuts, bananas, camphor, cloth, incense and money. It is obvious that this is not just community relations. Some boys slap vibhuti on faces until their older friends advise of the inappropriateness of this.

In the early hours of pre-dawn the procession arrives at the Waterfall Temple where devotees complete their vows of penance, head-shaving and the like and Lord Muruga is returned to His hilltop sanctum home for another year.

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