

Welcome to Kuala Lumpur

Imagine a city, its skyline punctuated by minarets, Mogul domes and skyscrapers, its colourful, food-stall-lined streets shaded by banyan and rain trees.

Asian Cybercity

This is Kuala Lumpur (KL), Malaysia's sultry capital, packed with historic monuments, steel-clad skyscrapers, lush parks, megasized shopping malls, bustling street markets and trendy nightspots. Also an essential part of the vibrant mix are incense-wreathed, colourfully adorned mosques and temples of the country's Malay, Chinese and Indian communities. A reverence for these ancient cultures is balanced with a drive to be plugged into the contemporary world, as evidenced by an exciting contemporary art and design scene and a buzzing digital economy.

Historical Canvas

Today's KLites are separated by barely a handful of generations from the tenacious Chinese and Malay tin prospectors who founded the city. By the time the British made it the capital of Peninsular Malaysia in the late 19th century, KL had only been in existence for a couple of decades.

Since then, the city has been the scene of history-defining moments for Malaysia. Stadium Merdeka was where, in 1957, the country's first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman punched his fist seven times in the air and declared independence. And the Petronas Towers were officially the tallest buildings in the world when they opened in 1998.

Delicious Diversions

Reach for the sky by all means, but also keep a close eye on what's happening closer to the ground. To fully connect with locals, join them in two of their favourite pastimes: shopping and eating. Malaysian consumer culture achieves its zenith in KL, where you could spend all day browsing glitzy air-conditioned malls such as Pavilion KL and Mid Valley Megamall in search of bargains. Alternatively, explore Central Market for locally made souvenirs, then dive into the culinary melting pots of nearby Chinatown or Masjid India.

Take to the Streets

It won't take you long to realise, despite the heat, this is a city best explored on foot. Walk and you can catch all the action and save yourself the frustration of becoming entangled in one of KL's all-too-frequent traffic jams. To tackle this problem, a new mass rapid transit (MRT) system is under construction. Soaring property values are also causing characterful old buildings to be torn down and replaced with bland new towers. Such disruptions aside, parts of KL retain the laid-back ambience and jungle lushness of the *kampung* (village) it once was.



Why I Love Kuala Lumpur

By Simon Richmond, Author

In KL, it's all about the food – this city offers a mouth-watering mix of Asian culinary traditions. Start with a breakfast of fresh *popiah* and congee at Imbi Market, seguing into a snack of freshly made *roti* and spicy chicken curry at Jln Belfield's SS Spicy Food stalls. Move onto Chinatown for a must-have bowl of *asam laksa* on Madras Lane. Save room for afternoon tea somewhere nice (Majestic Hotel fits the bill) and for supper on Jln Alor – the perfect end to a KL dining day.

For more about our author, see p264.