

# Understand Kuala Lumpur

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# Kuala Lumpur Today

While KLites get on with day-to-day life with good cheer, tensions simmer beneath the surface of this modern, multicultural city. Prime Minister Najib Razak has tightened his grip on power in the face of ongoing allegations of corruption and a faltering economy. Meanwhile, it's full steam ahead on major infrastructure developments for the capital, including a new mass rapid transit (MRT) line and the River of Life urban-regeneration project.

## Best on Film

**Entrapment** (1999) The climax of this Sean Connery and Catherine Zeta-Jones thriller takes place at KL's Petronas Towers.

**Sepet** (2004) Chinese boy falls for Malay girl in Yasmin Ahmad's romantic comedy.

**Interchange** (2016) Fantasy thriller set in KL that delves into the city's supernatural depths.

## Best in Print

**Urban Odysseys** (edited by Janet Tay and Eric Forbes) Short stories that capture KL's multifaceted cultural flavour.

**KL Noir** Three volumes of short stories homing in on the city's sinister, spooky underbelly.

**The Letter** (Somerset Maugham) A short story and play based on the real-life scandal of a murder in KL in 1911.

**My Life as a Fake** (Peter Carey) This reworking of *Frankenstein* evokes the sultry side of KL.

**Found in Malaysia** (The Nut Graph) Compilation of 50 interviews with notable Malaysians.

**The Consumption of Kuala Lumpur** (Ziauddin Sardar) How the once sleepy capital has evolved into a modern economic marvel.

## Najib Under Fire

Since July 2015 Malaysia's prime minister, Najib Razak, has been implicated in an ongoing corruption scandal involving the government's 1MDB sovereign investment fund that aims to turn Kuala Lumpur (KL) into a global financial hub. The fund racked up huge debts at the same time as it appears that nearly US\$700 million had been transferred from it into Najib's personal bank accounts; subsequent news reports suggest the total may exceed US\$1 billion.

In July 2016 the US Department of Justice moved to seize more than US\$1 billion in assets connected to the 1MDB fund and in September it was claimed that Najib was personally implicated in the suit under the moniker 'Malaysian Official 1'. In the meantime, the prime minister – who claims the transfer was a political donation and denies any wrongdoing – has shut down Malaysian investigations, clamped down on media reporting and purged critics from his ruling party.

The public remains sceptical of Najib and the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition; for the past several years the Bersih movement (which calls for fair elections) has been organising protest rallies in KL and across the country. Tens of thousands have marched in the streets dressed in yellow T-shirts and tops, the colour of Bersih. At KL rallies in 2015 and 2016 they were joined by former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, who has been vocal in his demands that Najib resign.

## KL's Changing Skyline

At the southern end of Chinatown, the old Merdeka Park has been cleared and construction is under way on the controversial Merdeka PNB118 tower, which will rise up next to Stadium Merdeka and Stadium Negara by 2019 – at 682m, it will be Malaysia's tallest building. The estimated cost of the tower, slated to be the