

welcome to Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei



Rainforests & Oceans

For many people this region is defined by its equatorial rainforest. Significant chunks of primary jungle – among the most ancient ecosystems on earth – remain intact, protected by national parks and conservation projects. Seemingly impenetrable foliage and muddy, snaking rivers conjure up the ‘heart of darkness’ – but join a ranger-led nature walk, for example, and you’ll learn about the mind-boggling biodiversity all around, from the pitcher plants, lianas and orchids of the humid lowlands, to the conifers and rhododendrons of high-altitude forests. The icing on this verdant cake is the chance to encounter wildlife in its natural habitat.

The most common sightings will be of a host of insects or colourful birdlife, but you could get lucky and spot a foraging tapir, a silvered leaf monkey or an orangutan swinging through the jungle canopy. The oceans are just as bountiful with the chance to snorkel or dive among shoals of tropical fish, paint-box dipped corals, turtles, sharks and dolphins.

Urban Adventures

If urban exploration is more your scene, you won’t be disappointed either. Singapore is the region’s overachiever, a showstopper of a city combining a historical legacy of elegant colonial buildings with stunning contemporary architecture and world-class



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Entwined by shared history, Southeast Asia's terrific trio offer steamy jungles packed with wildlife, beautiful beaches, idyllic islands, culinary sensations and multi-ethnic cultures.

(left) Sri Mariamman Temple (p484) in Singapore's Chinatown
(below) Turtles at Sipadan, Sabah, Malaysia (p359)



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attractions such as its zoo, museums and amazing botanical gardens (two of them!). Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur (KL), is less organised but perhaps more appealing because of that – a place where Malay *kampung* (village) life stands cheek by jowl with the 21st-century glitz of the Petronas Towers, and shoppers shuttle from traditional wet markets to air-conditioned megamalls. The historical cores of Melaka and George Town (Penang) are on the Unesco World Heritage list for their unique architectural and cultural townscapes, developed over half a millennium of Southeast Asian cultural and trade exchange. Both should be high on your to-visit list, but if you're looking for somewhere more under-the-radar then try Brunei's surprisingly unostentatious

capital Bandar Seri Begawan: its picturesque water village, Kampung Ayer, is the largest stilt settlement in the world.

Cultural Riches

Mirroring the natural environment's diversity is the region's potpourri of cultures. Muslim Malays, religiously diverse Chinese, and Hindu and Muslim Indians muddle along with aboriginal groups (the Orang Asli) on Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo's indigenous people, scores of tribes known collectively as Dayaks. Each ethnic group has its own language and cultural practices, which you can best appreciate through a packed calendar of festivals and a delicious variety of cuisines.