



Malaysia

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Best Regional Specialties

- » Laksa asam (p407)
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Best Places for Cultural Connections

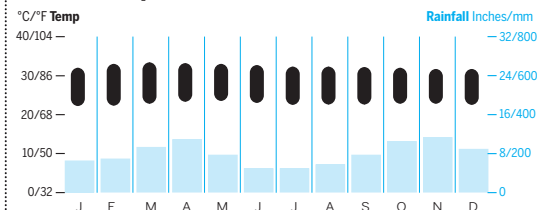
- » Batu Caves (p385)
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Why Go?

Malaysia is like two countries in one, cleaved in half by the South China Sea. The multicultural peninsula flaunts Malay, Chinese and Indian influences, while Borneo hosts a wild jungle of orang-utans, granite peaks and remote tribes. Throughout these two regions is an impressive variety of microcosms ranging from the space-age high-rises of Kuala Lumpur to the smiling longhouse villages of Sarawak. And then there's the food. Malaysia (particularly along the peninsular west coast) has one of the best assortments of cuisines in the world. Start with Chinese-Malay 'Nonya' fare, move on to Indian curries, Chinese buffets, Malay food stalls and even impressive Western food. Yet despite all the pockets of ethnicities, religions, landscapes and the sometimes-great distances between them, the beauty of Malaysia lies in the fusion of it all, into a country that is one of the safest, most stable and manageable in Southeast Asia.

When to Go

Kuala Lumpur



Dec-Feb High season: school holidays and Chinese New Year. Prices rise; bookings essential.

Nov-Mar Monsoon season sees many east-coast peninsular islands shut; Cherating fills with surfers.

Jul-Aug Many restaurants close during the day for Ramadan. Food bazaars open at night.

AT A GLANCE

» **Currency** Malaysian ringgit (RM)

» **Language** Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese (Hakka & Hokkien), Tamil, English

» **Money** ATMs in large towns

» **Visas** Most nationalities get a 30- to 90-day visa on arrival

» **Mobile Phones** Local SIMs are RM16, calls are 30 sen per minute. Data 3G plans are RM15 per week

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 328,600 sq km
- » **Capital** Kuala Lumpur
- » **Country code** 60
- » **Emergency** 999

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	RM3.20
Canada	C\$1	RM3.10
Euro zone	€1	RM4.05
Japan	¥100	RM3.70
New Zealand	NZ\$1	RM2.50
UK	UK£1	RM4.85
USA	US\$1	RM3.10

Set Your Budget

- » **Guesthouse room** US\$8
- » **Meal at a hawker stall** US\$2.50
- » **Beer** US\$2.20
- » **Snorkelling** US\$14

Entering the Country

Thailand and Singapore border Peninsular Malaysia. Indonesia and Brunei border Malaysian Borneo.

Don't Miss

The Petronas Towers observation deck in Kuala Lumpur (KL). Yeah it's a pain getting a ticket but there's no place more iconic of modern Malaysia – plus if you squint you can imagine Catherine Zeta-Jones scaling the walls in a cat suit.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Gorge on endless street food in **Penang** then cool off in the **Cameron Highlands** by exploring mossy forests and tea plantations. Hop over to the **Perhentian Islands** for snorkelling, diving and beachside revelry.

Two Weeks

Follow the one-week itinerary backwards then catch a flight to **Kota Kinabalu** and spend the next week trekking the **wild jungles** of Borneo, perhaps ascending **Mt Kinabalu**, one of the highest mountains in Southeast Asia.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Breakfast** *Nasi lemak* (coconut rice served with a variety of accompaniments), *roti canai* (Indian flat bread), *won ton mee* (egg noodles and wontons), dim sum or rice congee (savory rice porridge).
- » **Barbecue** Fish, lobster, prawns, squid, cockles and stingray. Point to it then watch it get slathered in sambal and grilled in a banana leaf.
- » **Noodles** Fried or in soup. The best include *char kway teow* (fried noodles with egg, soy sauce, chilli and a variety of additions), *laksa*, *curry mee* (curry noodles), *Hokkein mee* (fried noodles with chicken, pork and other additions) and *won ton mee*.
- » **Rice** *Nasi campur* is a lunch favourite of rice and a buffet of toppings.
- » **Dessert** Malaysians *drink* their sweets via sugared fruit juices, sweetened condensed milk in hot beverages and scary looking icy concoctions like *cendol* and ABC (shave ice covered in coconut cream, jellies, beans and other crazy stuff).