1 Kota Bahru  Immerse yourself in the Museum Precinct and delicious local food at the night market. 7 hrs to Tanjung Gemok, then 1½–2 hrs to Pulau Tioman

2 Pulau Tioman  Explore the island’s jungle and stunning beaches, and take a diving or snorkelling trip. 2½ hrs to Kota Kinabalu, then 2 hrs to Kinabalu National Park

3 Mt Kinabalu  The physically demanding (but ultimately rewarding) ascent of Mt Kinabalu takes a minimum of two days. 1 hr then 2½ hrs to Semporna

4 Semporna Archipelago  Do an introductory dive on Mabul or Kapalai before qualifying for one of the limited daily slots for sublime Sipadan. 3½–4½ hrs to Kuching

5 Kuching  The friendly atmosphere, wealth of sights and great local cuisine can easily soak up a few days. Don’t miss Bako National Park and Semenggoh Nature Reserve.