Melaka

Outlined to the west by sandy coastline and filled inland with waves of jungle-carpeted hills, the sultry city-state of Melaka is the cradle of modern Malaysia. While everything from international trade to the country's political system (based on the Malaccan sultanate) began here, the city and state have, for the most part, avoided becoming a congested metropolis and instead remain peaceful enclaves basking in the memory of a majestic past. It's said that the soul of the country can be glimpsed here. It's true, this is Malaysia's good side and it has become one of the county's most popular destinations. The variations on traditional cuisine, including the famed Malay-Chinese Nonya food, are reason enough to visit.

The road from past glory has been potholed even in recent history. Massive land reclamation projects, begun during the economic boom only to taper off during the ensuing economic downturn, pushed the historic waterfront so far inland that it endangered the traditional livelihood of the Portuguese fishing community. Today, Melaka's rich seam of heritage is under threat from those twin fruits of development: commercialisation and modernisation.

While the coastlines of Pulau Besar and Tanjung Bidara don't compare to the country's other beaches, they do make a relaxing getaway or day trip from the state's capital. Melaka is close enough to Kuala Lumpur (KL) for a day trip, but allow at least a couple of days to do justice to this fascinating historic enclave.
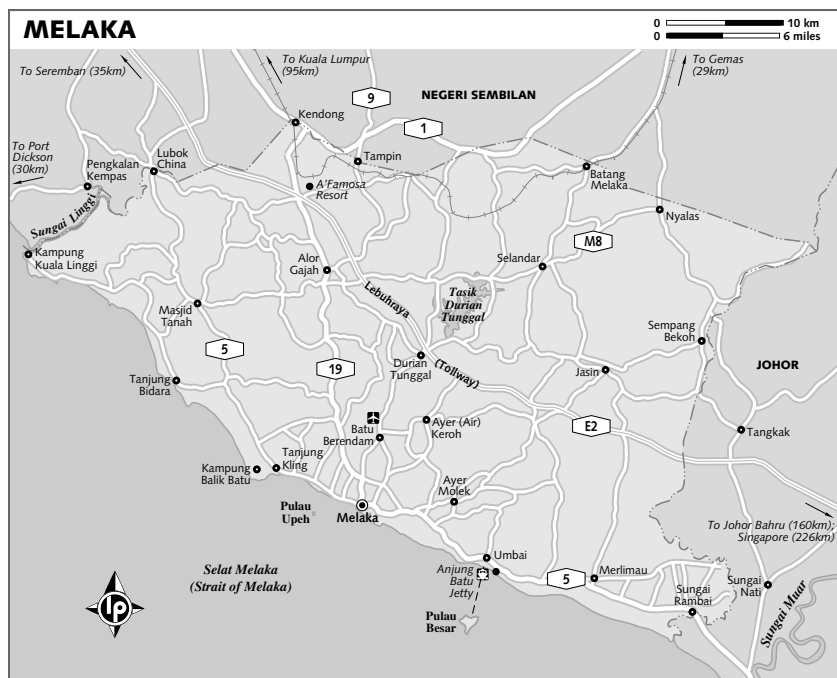

HIGHLIGHTS

- Browsing and grazing at Friday- and Saturday-night **Jonker's Walk Night Market** (p158) then stopping for a drink at an open-air café
- Indulging your tourist-tacky desires by taking a ride in one of Melaka city's uniquely kitsch **trishaws** (p151)
- Pondering *popiah* (spring roll), checking out chicken rice balls and lingering over *laksa lemak* (curry laksa) in Melaka city's **restaurants** (p156)
- Topping up your suitcase with spinning tops, creative clothing and perhaps an antique treasure after a day of **shopping** (p161) in Melaka city's Chinatown
- Getting an up-close tour of the Peranakan experience at the **Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum** (p144)
- Enjoying the views and the cool air of the sanctuary at **St Paul's Church** (p141)
- Driving through villages and farms to the coastline of the Strait of Melaka and its long white-sand beach, **Tanjung Bidara** (p166)

★ Tanjung Bidara

★ Melaka

| ■ TELEPHONE CODE: 06 | ■ POPULATION: 688,694 | ■ AREA: 1652 SQ KM |

MELAKA

To Seremban (35km)
To Kuala Lumpur (95km)
To Gemas (29km)
To Port Dickson (30km)
NEGERI SEMBILAN
JOHOR
MELAKA

Kendong
Tampin
Pengkalan Kempas
Lubok China
Batang Melaka
A'Famosa Resort
Nyalas
Kampung Kuala Linggi
Sungai Linggi
Alor Gajah
Selandar
Tasik Durian Tunggal
Sempang Bekoh
Masjid Tanah
Lebuhraya
Durian Tunggal
(Tollway)
Jasin
Tanjung Bidara
Ayer (Air) Keroh
Batu Berendam
Tanjung Kling
Tangkak
Kampung Balik Batu
Ayer Molek
Pulau Upeh
Melaka
Selat Melaka (Strait of Melaka)
Umbai
Anjung Batu Jetty
Merlimau
Sungai Nati
Sungai Rambai
Pulau Besar
To Johor Bahru (160km); Singapore (226km)
Sungai Muar

0 ___ 10 km
0 ___ 6 miles

MELAKA CITY

Back when KL was a malaria-ridden swamp and Penang was yet to become the 'Pearl of the Orient', Melaka was already one of the greatest trading ports in Southeast Asia. Today the city is a sleepy backwater compared with its high-rolling cousins, but that's exactly where its charm lies. There isn't even a major airport or city rail station so the only way in or out from within Malaysia is by road. With the oldest functioning mosque, Catholic church and Buddhist temple in the country, the city's past has been preserved, nearly pickled in fact, around its Chinatown and colonial centre. Yet despite being exceedingly old, Melaka manages to entice visitors with its present-day personality, a quirky amalgam best represented by its resident artists, cooks, fortune-tellers and fabulously creative trishaws (bicycle rickshaws). The action blends effortlessly with the surrounding Peranakan, Portuguese and Dutch architecture; Buddhist, Taoist and Indian temples; and Islamic mosques.

And have we mentioned the food? If you're eating local dishes, it's unlikely you'll have a bad meal. From the distinct Peranakan dishes to Eurasian Portuguese cooking and Indian banana-leaf shops, the citywide restaurant aromas add further colour to the cultural mosaic that makes Melaka such an astonishing destination.

HISTORY

The history of the city-state of Melaka is a tale that begins with a legend then falls into the hands of battling colonial forces. However it's told, the story of the state is inseparable from that of the city for which it was named. Historians have not been able to pinpoint the exact year that Melaka was founded but most agree it was sometime in the late 14th century. Before this time, Melaka was a simple fishing village.

Parameswara, a Hindu prince from Sumatra, was the founder of Melaka (see the boxed text, p136). Under Parameswara, the city became a favoured port for waiting out monsoons and resupplying trading ships plying the strategic Selat Melaka (Strait of