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Itineraries

Essential Malaysia & Singapore

This itinerary cherry picks the best of the two countries with a focus on urban adventures but also with the chance to experience the region's amazing biodiversity.

Spend your first three days in Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur (KL) where you can explore cultural diversity in Chinatown, marvel at the soaring steel-clad Petronas Towers and discover the treasures of the Islamic Arts Museum.

Next head inland to Taman Negara. Even on a two-day visit to this magnificent national park you can clamber across the canopy walkway and do some short jungle hikes. Return to KL and hop on a flight to Penang where three days will give you a good taste of the heritage districts of George Town and other island highlights such as Kek Lok Si Temple.

Historic Melaka, another Unesco World Heritage Site, deserves a couple of nights but visit midweek to avoid the crowds. Then head across the causeway to Singapore where you can spend your final four days enjoying everything from maxing out your credit card at glitzy shopping malls and sampling delicious hawker food to visiting the eye-boggling space age architecture of Marina Bay and the excellent zoo and night safari.
The Grand Tour

Starting on the Peninsula and finishing in the wilds of Borneo, this itinerary includes classic sights, some off-the-beaten-track gems and time to relax and take it all in.

Schedule a week in Kuala Lumpur and surrounds for sightseeing and acclimatisation. Day trips could include Batu Caves and Putrajaya, a showcase of modern Malaysian architecture. The sleepy old royal capital of Kuala Selangor, near to which you can observe the dazzling natural display of fireflies, is also only a couple of hours’ drive from KL.

After a pit stop in Ipoh, which has some great colonial-era architecture and places to eat, your second week is spent in the cooler climate of the Cameron Highlands where you can take walks past verdant tea plantations. Return to the coast and hop across to Pulau Pangkor.

The urban delights of George Town, on Penang are up next; the city’s Unesco World Heritage district is packed with colourful, fascinating sights. This large island is also Malaysia’s number one food destination. A quick flight away are the resorts, gorgeous beaches and jungle hinterlands of Pulau Langkawi.

Into week four and it’s time to cross the mountainous spine of the peninsula to Kota Bharu, a great place to encounter traditional Malay culture. Island- and beach-hopping down the east coast, pausing at Pulau Perhentian, Cherating and Pulau Tioman. Kenong Rimba State Park offers jungle adventures without the crowds.

Singapore can easily swallow up a week of shopping, museum viewing and world-class eating. From here you can fly to Kuching in Sarawak, a good base for a longhouse excursion or for arranging a trek in Gunung Mulu National Park. Rack up the visa stamps by taking the overland and river route from Sarawak to Sabah via Brunei stopping in the capital Bandar Seri Begawan.

Having made it to Kota Kinabalu, relax for a few days dipping into the art scene of Sabah’s capital or heading to the nearby islands of the Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park. Your final challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to climb Mt Kinabalu. Alternatively, it’s difficult to resist the chance to eyeball close up the supercute ginger apes at Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre.
On this grand tour of Borneo tackle the island's top five treks and enjoy some world-class diving and snorkelling plus encounters with endangered wildlife.

From Kuching explore the local long-houses and Bako National Park. Fly to Miri, which is the base for trips to the impressive Niah National Park and Bario in the vine-draped Kelabit Highlands.

Travel overland to Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei's capital. Also schedule in the sultanate's Ulu Temburong National Park, a pristine sliver of primary rainforest.

Chill out in Kota Kinabalu before setting off for Mt Kinabalu. Catch some ape love at the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre, followed by a layover in historic Sandakan. The mighty Sungai Kinabatangan offers wildlife enthusiasts plenty of photo fodder. If you’ve got the time (and the dime), head deep into Sabah’s green interior for a trek through the Danum Valley Conservation Area. The magnificent dive sites of the Semporna Archipelago accessed from Semporna provide an ideal climax.

On this grand tour of Borneo tackle the island's top five treks and enjoy some world-class diving and snorkelling plus encounters with endangered wildlife.

This abridged itinerary for the time-challenged offers a sample of the best of Malaysian Borneo, including top national parks, snaking rivers and time spent lounging on longhouse verandahs.

Start in Kota Kinabalu (KK), which encapsulates Southeast Asian city life on a manageable scale and where you’ll be obliged to spend a day or two sorting permits to tackle Sabah’s star attraction, Mt Kinabalu. Consider a day-trip cruise (including buffet dinner) down one of the tea-brown rivers in the Beaufort Division, or learn a little about the local culture at the Mari Mari Cultural Village.

Leapfrog by plane from KK to Miri and then on to Gunung Mulu National Park, home to the world’s largest caves, and several challenging jungle treks, including the marathon Headhunters Trail. Pass through Miri once more for a flight down to Kuching. Sarawak’s capital is a real charmer and will easily keep you occupied for several days. Break up your time in town with a visit to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, Bako National Park and, if you have time, to a longhouse such as Annah Rais Longhouse.
The southern end of Peninsular Malaysia is no slouch in offering up a diverse range of travel experiences, plus there's easy access to and from Singapore, the logical start and finish to this trip.

Leave yourself several days to soak up the island state of Singapore's manifold attractions. If you're strapped for cash then Johor Bahru just across the causeway is a cheaper base. It's a decent hangout, not least for street food and nearby Legoland.

The lethargic riverside town of Muar has a colonial-era district that's worth a look, and can be used as a base for assaults on Gunung Ledang, Johor's highest mountain, located within the Gunung Ledang National Park. Recover in Unesco World Heritage Site–listed Melaka where you can spend several days enjoying the enduring Portuguese and Dutch influence.

Explore the last remaining stands of lowland forest on the peninsula in Endau-Rompin National Park. Stunning Pulau Tioman is the epitome of an island paradise. Alternatively, indulge in some island-hopping and diving around the 64 gems of the Seribuat Archipelago.
**TAMAN NEGERI PERLIS**
Home to a vast systems of caves and Malaysia’s only semideciduous forest, rich in wildlife, this small and remote state park runs for for 36km along the Thai border. (p216)

**DABONG**
Lined with flowers, trees this attractive village, reached by the Jungle Railway, is an excellent exploration base of Kelantan’s interior including the amazing waterfalls in the Gunung Stong State Park. (p295)

**PULAU LANG TENGAH**
This idyllic, tiny island off the northeast coast of Peninsular Malaysia, is a good diving base and with just three resorts, is quieter and less-developed than neighbouring islands such as the Perhentians. (p304)

**KENONG RIMBA STATE PARK**
A far less visited alternative to Malaysia’s premier national park, this sprawling area of lowland forest rises to the limestone foothills bordering Taman Negara itself. (p282)

**SUNGAI BANTANG RECREATIONAL FOREST**
Accessed from the town of Bekok in Johor, this forest offers trekking routes, campsites and waterfalls and gently cascading rivers in which you can swim. (p248)

**PULAU BESAR**
Said to resemble a pregnant woman laying on her back in the sea, this small, placid island, 10km off the southeast coast of Melaka, was once a retreat for Muslim mystics. (p238)
Lined with flowers, trees this attractive village, reached by the Jungle railway, is an excellent exploration base of Kelantan's interior including the amazing waterfalls in the Gunung stong state Park. (p295)

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Not far from the Kalimantan border, deep in Murut country, this 600m jungle-topped limestone outcrop, riddled with caves, is a bucket-list challenge for rock climbers. (p387)

This seaside park's majestic mangroves are a habitat for monkeys, fireflies, estuarine crocodiles and countless varieties of fish and prawns. Snub-nosed Irrawaddy dolphins can be spotted in the offshore waters. (p421)

PULAU SELIRONG RECREATIONAL PARK

At the northern tip of Brunei's Temburong District, this 25-sq-km mangrove-forested island is an untamed habitat for proboscis monkeys and flying lemurs. (p487)

Not far from the Kalimantan border, deep in Murut country, this 600m jungle-topped limestone outcrop, riddled with caves, is a bucket-list challenge for rock climbers. (p387)

IMBAK CANYON CONSERVATION AREA

Laying deep in the heart of Sabah you need to be on a tour to access this 25km-long canyon lined with pristine rainforest and hemmed in by immense sandstone cliffs. (p359)
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- Christian
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- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
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- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping
- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating
- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment
- Entertainment

Shopping
- Shopping

Information
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport
- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro/MRT/MTR station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Skytrain/Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book

Routes
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove
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Sabah; Brunei Darussalam Originally from the Soviet Union, Anna grew up in Cambridge, UK. She graduated from the University of Warwick with a degree in Comparative American Studies, a background in the history, culture and literature of the Americas and the Caribbean, and an enduring love of Latin America. Her restless wanderings led her to settle briefly in Oaxaca and Bangkok, and her flirtation with criminal law saw her volunteering as a lawyer’s assistant in the courts, ghettos and prisons of Kingston, Jamaica. Anna has contributed to almost 30 Lonely Planet titles. When not on the road, Anna calls London home.
OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that’s all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, Across Asia on the Cheap. Within a week they’d sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Dublin, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony’s belief that ‘a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse’.

OUR WRITERS

Simon Richmond

Kuala Lumpur Journalist and photographer Simon Richmond has specialised as a travel writer since the early 1990s and first worked for Lonely Planet in 1999 on their Central Asia guide. He’s long since stopped counting the number of guidebooks he’s researched and written for the company, but countries covered include Australia, China, India, Iran, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar (Burma), Russia, Singapore, South Africa and Turkey. For Lonely Planet’s website he’s penned features on topics from the world’s best swimming pools to the joys of urban sketching. Simon also wrote most of the Plan Your Trip section and the Understand and Survival Guide sections of this book.

Brett Atkinson

Sarawak Brett Atkinson is based in Auckland, New Zealand, but frequently on the road for Lonely Planet. He’s a full-time travel and food writer specialising in adventure travel, unusual destinations and surprising angles on more well-known destinations. Craft beer and street food are Brett’s favourite reasons to explore places. He is featured regularly on the Lonely Planet website, and in newspapers, magazines and websites across New Zealand and Australia. Since becoming a Lonely Planet author in 2005, Brett has covered areas as diverse as Vietnam, Sri Lanka, the Czech Republic, New Zealand, Morocco, California and the South Pacific.

Lindsay Brown

Peninsular Malaysia’s Northeast Lindsay started travelling as young bushwalker exploring the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. Then as a marine biologist he dived the coastal and island waters of southeastern Australia. He continued travelling whenever he could while employed at Lonely Planet as an editor and publishing manager. On becoming a freelance writer and photographer he has co-authored over 35 Lonely Planet guides to Australia, Bhutan, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea.

Read more about Simon at: https://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/simonrichmond

Read more about Brett at: https://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/BrettAtkinson

Read more about Lindsay at: https://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/lindsayom