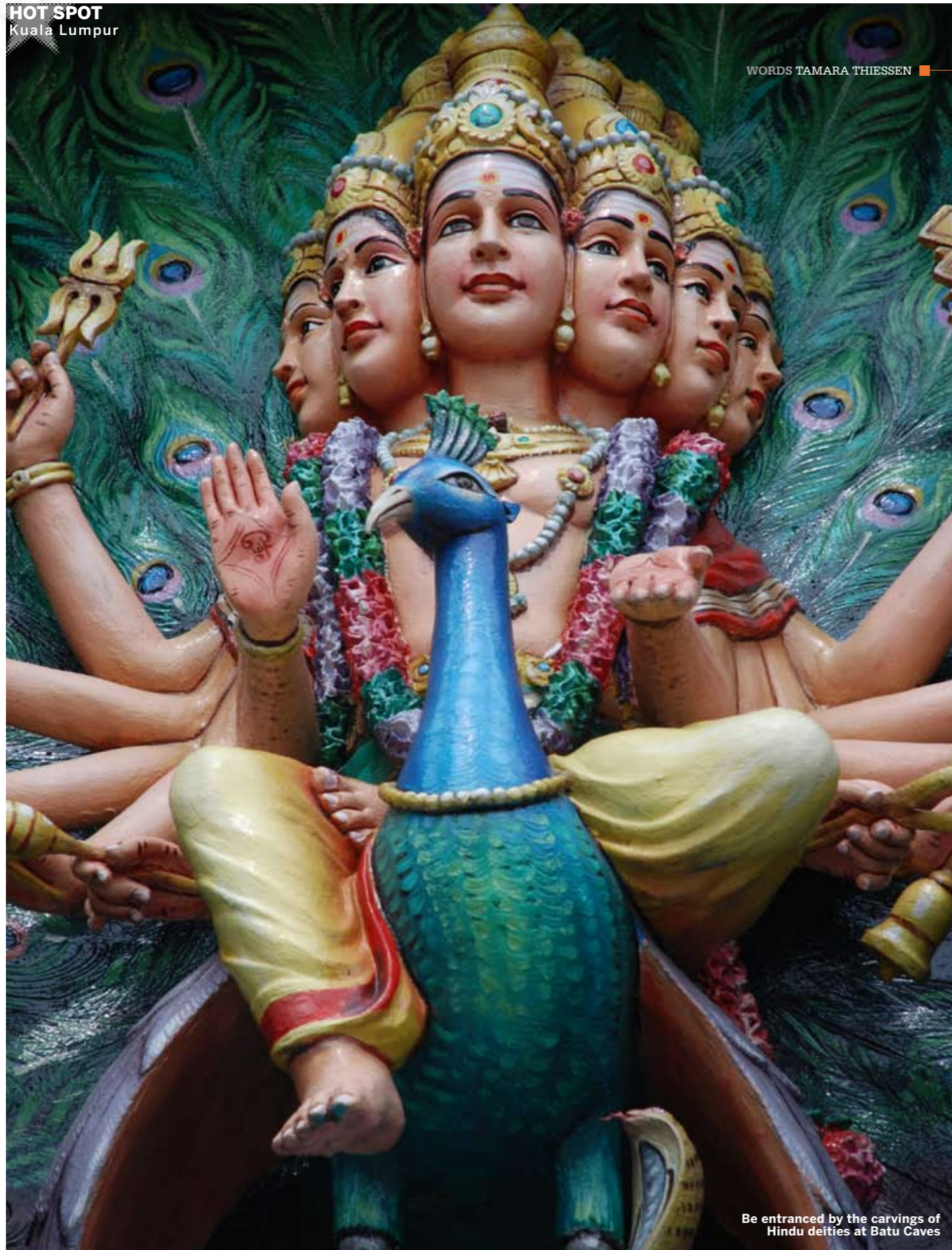




WORDS TAMARA THIESSEN



Be entranced by the carvings of Hindu deities at Batu Caves

Photo: Tamara Thiesen

KL Kool

From cultural hotspot to 21st-century city chic, Kuala Lumpur has it all. Here are the top 10 highlights.

{ HIGHLIGHT NO 02 }

SURIA KLCC



Double vision

The 452-metre high **Petronas Twin Towers** (also known as KLCC) were knocked from poll position as the world's tallest building not long after opening in 1998, but that doesn't detract from the twins' architectural beauty. The towers are designed using Islamic geometry, and are a central meeting place in busy KL. Encircled by a 20ha landscaped park, complete with children's playground, paddling pool, and jogging track, it's a great place for family R & R. The cocooned shopper's world inside offers luxury and mid-range flagship stores, SURIA KLCC and Isetan department stores, and a bevy of cafés. Dozens of different culinary stalls serve up excellent Malaysian food for as little as RM10 (AU\$3) in the fifth-floor food court. For unparalleled city views, ride the free elevator to the Skybridge on the 41st floor, which connects the two towers. Or soak up one of the best dusk ambiances in KL sitting on the steps in front of the towers, overlooking the lake as the twins' silver façades light up.



Nasi lemak, curry mee and wonton soup

{ HIGHLIGHT NO 03 }

Let's eat street

The culinary and cultural essence of Malaysia is condensed into the *gerai makan* (food stalls). A lively nocturnal scene with a bounty of cheap, delicious eats, this is the melting pot in motion. One of KL's best examples is found in the former red-light district, **Jalan Alor**, now a mecca of multicultural morsels. The action starts at sunset as migratory stalls take their place among permanent restaurants. The smoky barbecued stretch, hung with roasted ducks, durians (hold your nose) and jackfruit, has over 50 eateries. Sample grilled meats and fish, *nasi lemak* (literally "rice in coconut" wrapped in banana leaf and stuffed with prawns, chicken and beef), spicy Malay food and *mee* (noodles) dishes in all shapes and sizes.

Photo: Shutterstock/Chin Kit Sen



Starhill Gallery

Photo: Rachel Farnay Jacques

{ HIGHLIGHT NO 01 }

Street shopping

For the best shopping and street exploration in KL, head to the maze of downtown streets between Jalan Bukit Bintang, Jalan Imbi and Jalan Sultan Ismail. Other Malaysian cities are trying to copy the exciting mix of marketplace, mall, satay-stall, hotel, high-tech gadget shops, entertainment and food found in the **Bukit Bintang** zone. As you follow Bintang Walk you may get lost in the multiple plazas: try Plaza Low Yat for electronics, BB Plaza for budget buys, Lot 10 for department stores and retail sophistication, Starhill Gallery for chic fashion and Berjaya Times Square for stylish restaurants and the IMAX experiences.

If you've only got a few days to spin through Kuala Lumpur (KL), take our top-10 tour of the city. Your days and nights will be filled with fantabulous sights, smells and flavours that will leave you longing for more.



HOT SPOT Kuala Lumpur



Photo: Photolibary/JTB Photo

{ HIGHLIGHT NO 04 }

Tropical nights

Asian Heritage Row (or just AHR) is one of the city's hottest party scenes, with several thriving venues packed onto Jalan Doraisamy.

Your choice depends on whether you're looking for sipping and sofas or clubbing and carousing. Connoisseurs like the daiquiris at **Cynna At The Loft** (no. 28-40, tel: +60 (3) 2694 2888); R & B hits from the 70s and 80s are the go at **That Indian Thing** (no. 52, tel: +60 (3) 2698 6357), along with pint-sized margaritas and great Indian food; while the Indochina-inspired **Bar SaVanh** at (no. 62-64, tel: +60 (3) 2697 1180) boasts wooden sculptures, opium den-style banquettes and leather club chairs. Meanwhile, the hotel bars making a real splash are the rooftop pool bars the **SkyBar** (Traders Hotel, Kuala Lumpur City Centre, tel: +60 (3) 2332 9888) and **Luna Bar** (Pacific Regency Hotel Apartments, Menara PanGlobal, Jalan Punchak, tel: +60 (3) 2332 7777). They're a great bet for partying parents who want to leave kids safely in bed but still within arms' reach.

Photo: Tamar Thiesen



{ HIGHLIGHT NO 05 }

Rites and rituals

Make your way to Jalan Petaling (Petaling Street), the main axis of KL's **Chinatown**, then explore by foot before starting the bartering. Also known as Chee Cheong Kai, or "Starch Factory Street", the market was started by merchants

dealing in tapioca. Now you can buy anything from Chinese herbs and medicines, coffins, salted fish, pets, cheap electronics and jewellery to music, toys and clothing. You'll love the rows of 19th-century shophouses and the incense-filled, century-old Chan See Shu Yuen Temple with its techni-coloured roof ridges and intricate carvings. Don't be shy – you don't have to be a devotee to go beyond the glazed ceramic sentries and discover the culturally illuminating rites conducted here.

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{ HIGHLIGHT NO 06 }

Hindu heights

Don't mind the monkeys – they're as at home at the **Batu Caves** as Hindu-Malaysians are. Located 13km north of the city, the 400-metre long cave system has been a sacred site for Hindus since 1892, not long after Tamils first migrated to the British colony of Malaya. During January's *Thaipusam*, or penance day festival, close to one million devotees journey here. Many are burdened down with mini-shrines, pitchers and jugs, their cheeks, chests and backs hooked with metre-long steel rods. This is the *kavadis* (penance) they pay for spiritual favour. You'll probably feel you've paid yours after climbing the 272 stairs to the temple, adorned with larger-than-life sculptures of elephants, beads and Hindu deities.



Photo: Tamar Thiesen

{ HIGHLIGHT NO 07 }

To market, to market

Don't you just love a good market? For plenty of street soul, food, watches and leather goods, head to Chinatown's **Central Market** with its art deco pavilion façade. Once a vibrant "wet market" (selling fresh produce), it's now filled with dozens of arts and crafts stalls. As twilight falls, the district's **night market** unfolds, with vendors unpacking their wares along Petaling Street. Hagggle your way to happiness in this feisty affair then dive into the food-stall offerings, from crispy-skinned roast duck to fried noodles. At these markets you can typically bargain up to 50% off the given price on goods. Over in the expat area of Bangsar, check out the popular **Sunday craft and food market** with its relaxed village atmosphere.

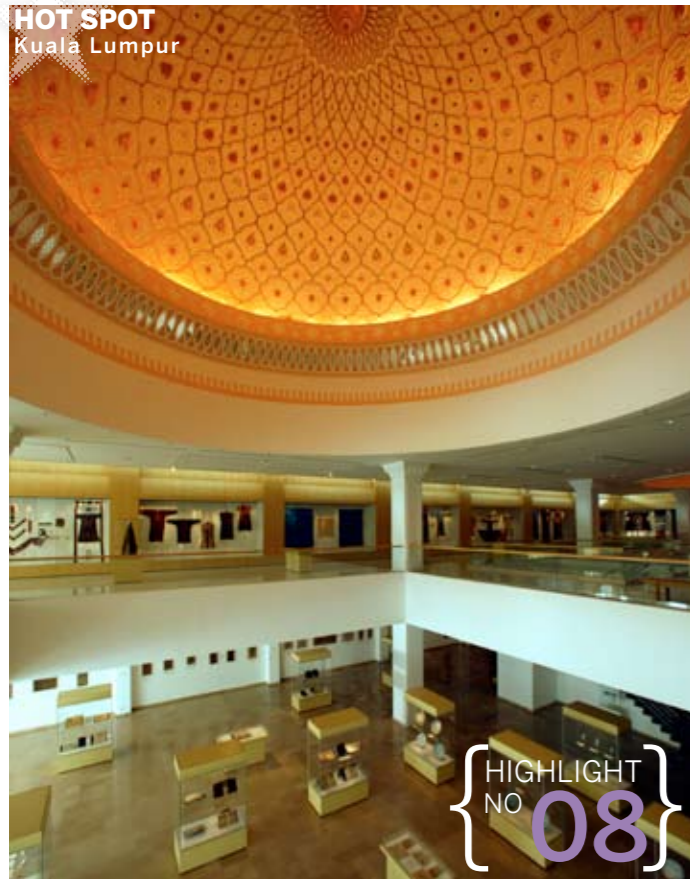
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Photo: Photolibary/JTB Photo



HOT SPOT
Kuala Lumpur



HIGHLIGHT
NO 08



Cultural bites

Find out about Malaysian culture, heritage and natural history at the **Muzium Negara** (National Museum) on Jalan Damansara. Volunteers give guided tours in English on Tuesdays at 10am and Thursdays at 11am (entry RM2; AU\$0.70). Afterwards, head to the **Islamic Arts Museum** on Jalan Lembah Perdana with its stunning contemporary feel (RM12; AU\$4). Highlights include the India, China and Malay World Galleries, the Architecture Gallery, the Qur'an & Manuscripts Gallery, and the reconstruction of a 19th-century room from Ottoman Syria. Also catch the permanent galleries of architecture, jewellery and textiles, glass, metalwork and woodwork.



Photo: Shutterstock/Low Wai Tiam

HIGHLIGHT
NO 09

The colony bites back

Anyone for tropical cricket? Under the 95m flagpole at **Dataran Merdeka** (literally "Independence Square"), Malaysia's independence was announced at midnight on 31st August 1957. With the end of British colonial rule, the Union Jack was lowered to cries of "*Merdeka, merdeka, merdeka!*" (Independence!). This 200m-long manicured *padang* (field) was once the hub of the Empire, duplicating Britain down to cricket matches and pints at the mock-Tudor style Selangor Club, located on one corner. These days the *padang* is a top venue for flamboyant public parades and concerts. It's also the place to be on balmy evenings, eyeing up the city skyline and the Moorish beauty of the Sultan Abdul Samad Building, whose 40-metre clock tower is KL's version of "Big Ben". This strange mix of colonial and Islamic architecture, built in 1897, is currently home to the Supreme and High Courts.

This strange mix of colonial and Islamic architecture, built in 1897, is currently home to the Supreme and High Courts.



Photo: Rachel Farnay Jacques

HIGHLIGHT
NO 10

Mighty mosque

The sound of the Muslim call to prayer rings out serenely throughout the streets from the city's mosques five times a day – how could you resist the chance to see the mosques for yourself? An illuminated spectre on KL's night skies is the **Jameq Mosque**, located at the confluence of the Gombak and Klang rivers, where KL was first settled. For an insight into the strict yet peaceful essence of Islam, visit the **Masjid Negara**, the National Mosque. This massive arrangement of towers, domes and tiles is topped with a roof featuring 18 points, commonly thought to symbolise the 13 states of Malaysia and five pillars of Islam. The mosque is on the boundary of KL's most beautiful green space, the Lake Garden Taman Tasik Perdana, so after being uplifted by the spiritual calm, enjoy a walk among the garden's orchids and hibiscus. ★

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