

# MALAYSIA

## ASIAN MELTING POT

Ever since cries of *Merdeka!* – freedom – rang out in 1957, marking independence from Britain, Malaysia has hurtled at full pelt towards the future. But this is a nation that doesn't gloss over its heritage; paddy harvest festivals, royal court dances and regional sultans remain as a vivid microcosm of enduring Asian cultures.

**Tamara Thiessen** offers a best-of guide to this multicoloured, multicultural country.



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TRULY ASIA

From the rivers and jungle trails of Sabah to the history-laden streets of Malacca and the rustic paradise of the Terengganu coast – we bring you Malaysia

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■ SIGHTS

# TRULY ASIA

From the spice-scented antiquity of Malacca and the coral reef wonder-worlds of Peninsula Malaysia, to Borneo's rainforests, indigenous tribes and river journeys – this is a country of captivating cultural, culinary and geographic diversity



PHOTOS: HILTON BATANG AI (OPENING SPREAD); LESTER LEDESMA (OPPOSITE PAGE); GETTY IMAGES (ABOVE)

## MALACCA Multi-colonial charisma

Malacca's Chinese old-town charm and Portuguese-Dutch-British history remains pretty well intact. Like many others, I almost wrote off the city's attractions simply because they are hard to find; first, you have to bypass the bland civic surrounds that hold no hint of the spicy tropical port, a hub during the 15th- to 18th-century trade route between Europe and Asia.

Behind the Mahkota Parade shopping precinct on the river's left bank, the historic quarter starts at the foot of St Paul's hill. Setting out to climb it to reach the church of the same name, I dodged a flurry of gaudily flowered *becas*, or trishaws, which pass in front of the reconstructed Sultanate Palace. Neighbouring the church are the remnants of fort A' Famosa, built after the Portuguese captured Malacca from ruling sultans in 1511.

Sidetracking from the Heritage Trail is necessary: the small city is spread out haphazardly along both sides of the Sungai Melaka river. Cross to the right bank of the river through an Amsterdam-like quarter of picturesque canal-side bars and houses into the heart of old China Town. The area around Jalan Hang Jebat – known as “Jonker Street” – bustles with *Nonya* (Straits Chinese) culinary delights, noodle shops, temples and workshops.

**A taxi from KL airport takes 90 minutes. A suite-package at the business-oriented Everly Resort Hotel ([www.vhhotels.com](http://www.vhhotels.com)) includes hotel transfers.**

## OPENING SPREAD:

A cultural presentation at the Hilton Batang Ai Longhouse, Sarawak

## OPPOSITE PAGE:

An elderly gentleman cycles through Malacca's heritage district

## THIS PAGE:

Morning fog envelops the forests of Danum Valley

## SABAH Highlands, islands and primates

Despite encroaching oil palm plantations and the past destruction of its lowland rainforests, northern Borneo's Sabah is the most eco-rich of the island's two Malaysian states and a global biodiversity hotspot.

The Danum Valley Conservation Area is one of the last refuges for the charismatic “man of the forest”, the orangutan – a mascot of Borneo's exotic yet endangered wildlife. Danum's giant dipterocarp trees, creepers, fruit trees and palms provides a habitat for Sumatran rhinoceros, the Bornean pygmy elephant, the whiskered *binturong* or “bear-cat”, plus thousands of endemic flowering plant species. Step quietly through the forest on one of the solo trails, such as the canopy walkway, and you may encounter orangutan munching away in the trees. Red leaf monkeys regularly put on a live show before the dining area of the Borneo Rainforest Lodge ([www.borneorainforestlodge.com](http://www.borneorainforestlodge.com)); I even glimpsed the shy Bornean gibbon while soaking in my bungalow's outdoor jacuzzi.

Also accessible from Sabah's east coast are the reefs and islands of the Sulu-Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion – which the WWF calls a “hyper-diverse underwater world”. Springboard into these shimmering straits with a stay at Matakang Reef Dive Resort ([www.matakang.com](http://www.matakang.com)), which lies amid a cluster of forested islands in the Alice Channel.

**One-hour flight from Kota Kinabalu to Lahad Datu. From there transfers are provided by resorts.**



### **SARAWAK River journeys, longhouses and tribal dance**

What Sarawak lacks in mountains and seascapes, it makes up for in tribal colours and tradition. Inhabited by over 200 indigenous tribes – collectively called Dayaks – and large populations of Chinese and Malays, Sarawak’s tribal tapestry can be lapped up at marketplaces and cultural shows, in longhouse stays and upriver journeys. Between its 800km coastline and mountainous hinterland, the largest Malaysian state is riddled with 55 rivers that form a navigable 3,300km network. Start in Kuching with a sunset crossing of the snaking Sungai Sarawak on a small motorised *tambang* (water taxi). The river is the colour of *teh tarik* (pulled tea), and divides the Malay villages from the waterfront bazaar, temple

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

and mosques. Rivers are still the only means of access to some remote villages – roll up your trousers, buy some good river-walking sandals (and possibly leech socks) and prepare for a mind-altering trip into the heart of Borneo. Starting from the Hilton Kuching, an eco-tour organiser will take you back to nature for as many days as you like, journeying to the hydroelectric lake of Batang Ai. From here, you’ll take a three-hour longboat journey upriver in the hands of skilful Iban boatmen; Iban trekkers act as guides, foraging and fishing for lunch along the way. Nights are spent in the traditional longhouse of Nanga Sumpa, in rustic jungle huts and a hammock, capped off with a stay at the Hilton Batang Ai.

**Kuching is a 90-minute flight from Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.**

**THIS PAGE:** An Iban Shaman wearing traditional dress takes stock on a Sarawak riverbank



### TERENGGANU COAST Diver's dream

The 244km Terengganu coast in eastern Malaysia is fringed with coral reefs, coconut palms and casuarina trees. It is also the launch pad for the Redang Marine Park, which houses nine rainforest-covered islands.

Pulau Redang is the largest island – snorkelling, diving, trekking and beach lazing are the key attractions here as there are few cultural highs. Over 30 diving and snorkelling sites can be reached within a five- to 30-minute boat journey, including shipwrecks, black coral gardens and submerged chambers. In the sapphire seas circling the Redang Archipelago, I saw fairyland coral colours, nudibranch havens, incandescent fish and splendid green- and hawksbill turtles.

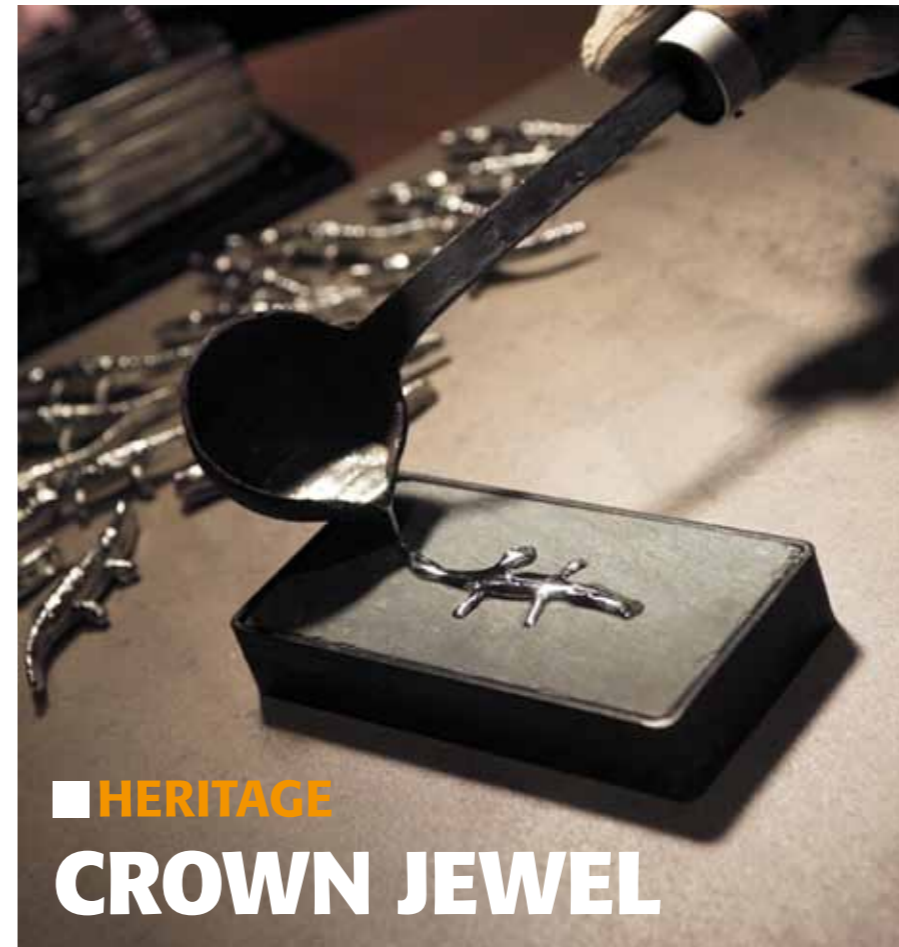
The Berjaya Redang Resort is secluded, set between

a beachy cove and hilly rainforest in an Eden of geckos, birds and flowers. With its own five-star dive centre and spa, it gets the most consistent reviews ([www.berjayahotel.com](http://www.berjayahotel.com)). On an adjacent jungle trail through Teluk Dalam beach, I encountered mouse deer and squirrels. Back on the mainland, head to the Kuala Terengganu markets for batik, silk, basketry and brassware.

An ancient Islamic stronghold, the coast of Terengganu – meaning “bright rainbow” – features the longest beaches in Malaysia. One of the pearliest stretches is Pantai Kijal. Don't miss the ethereal floating mosque, Masjid Terapung.

**Fly from KL to Kuala Terengganu, then transfer to the island by ferry or a resort-operated speedboat from nearby Merang.**

**THIS PAGE:**  
Hawksbill turtles are a common sight in the waters off Redang, Terengganu



■ HERITAGE  
**CROWN JEWEL**

Royal Selangor's commitment to craftsmanship has seen the family firm sail through 125 years of competitive challenges. **Justine Moss** finds out how a 19th-century start-up turned into a modern national treasure

**WHEN A YOUNG PEWTERSMITH** set sail from the Chinese port of Shantou in 1885 with his sights set on Kuala Lumpur, he could never have envisioned how his plans for a small tin workshop would evolve into a multinational corporation with a royal warrant and a reputation for fine artistry.

Today, Yong Koon's company is an iconic Malaysian brand with a distribution to more than 20 countries. Its products are sold in Harrods in London and Wako in Tokyo, with standalone stores in Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Australia.

Since Royal Selangor's humble beginnings producing simple household items, the company has beaten off its competition by embracing change. In 1979, the brand was conferred the warrant

"Royal Pewterer" by the Sultan of Selangor. Since then it has expanded to encompass jewellery and sterling silver products, and now employs 400 skilled craftsmen.

"Over the last five or six years, we've made a conscious effort to reposition the brand," explains Chen Tien Yue, great-grandson of the firm's founder. "We are aware that, even though people recognise our brand, they may think first about our tankards and photo frames. We have made a conscious effort to introduce new products that are relevant to today's consumer."

The company has introduced 1,000 tableware and gift items, with hot sellers including photo frames, clocks, plates and vases, and accessories for coffee, tea and wine.

As Royal Selangor began to expand its range, it was important to change the

**Visit the Royal Selangor Visitor Centre in KL, where you can enrol in its School of Hard Knocks and bang out your own pewter dish. To commemorate its 125th anniversary, a limited-edition tea set (only 125 available) has been launched. [www.royalselangor.com](http://www.royalselangor.com)**



mindset of some long-time employees; this transition was made smoother by a critical mass of managers with a positive attitude to change. "It's essential to have a lot of people who want to do something different with the company," says Tien Yue.

Head of design Loh Seow Yee oversees a team of sculptors, graphic designers and palette designers. She admits it can be difficult for her team to retain a fresh perspective and repeatedly come up with ideas, but she has ways to engage them. "Before we start a project, I put together a mood board to inspire the team. For the upcoming Arabica coffee-set range, I asked them to imagine a person sitting in front of them, drinking coffee."

This kind of thinking has transformed the brand into a national icon. "For a company to survive this long there must be a high degree of resourcefulness," says Tien Yue. "We have a fantastic team, great designs and an entrepreneurial spirit."



■ TASTES

## CROSSROADS CUISINE

With influences stretching from northern China through India to the Malay Archipelago, Malaysia is at the crossroads of migratory cuisine, writes **Tamara Thiessen**

Malaysia's distinctive cuisine can be sampled on its streets, thanks to the countless hawker stalls serving native specialities

**STREET FOOD IN MALAYSIA IS** among the most varied in Asia. According to Penang food writer, Helen Ong, despite all the accolades for the spicy island's fine dining, the best grub is still hawker food. "The Assam *laksa*, Hokkien *mee* and *nasi kandar* are the best in Malaysia, though KL has a lot to shout about – their *wonton mee* is darker and fuller-flavoured, and their Cantonese food is excellent."

Food stalls operate round-the-clock in open and undercover markets, the most moody being the evening *pasar malam*, which offer noodles, rice, roti and satay. Open-air *taman selera* – literally "appetite

parks", though we would call them hawker centres – cook up a daily storm.

For snacking en-route, stop at roadside stalls for grilled corn on the cob, coconut pudding *kelapa*, prawn crackers, peanuts, fresh fruit and fried *pisang* (bananas). *Nasi* (rice) and *mee* (noodles) are staples.

The most ubiquitous eateries here are coffee shops, which serve typical fare at tables topped with lollipop-coloured plastic baskets of cutlery and chopsticks. The council rate these for cleanliness – stick to the 'A's and steer away from the 'C's.

The universal Malay breakfast is *nasi lemak* served from stalls, in restoran and at

hotel breakfasts. This delicious concoction of coconut, pandan leaf and aromatic rice is garnished with fried anchovies, sliced cucumber, peanuts and hard-boiled egg.

Other common rice dishes include *nasi kuning*, yellow rice with egg, coconut and cucumber, and *nasi goreng* with slithers of chicken and potluck. Vegetarians should ask for *nasi dengan sayur*, rice with vegetables.

Both Chinese and Malay dishes call heavily on noodles in soups and as main meals. Typical Malay noodle dishes are: *mee goreng*, spicy fried thick noodles, and *mee mamak*, curry-powdered fried yellow noodles. You decide on how you want them



Hokkien mee for four: Malaysia's best grub is its hawker food

**Be brave about durian; they are a matter of acquired taste**

cooked – “wet” with sauce or “dry”, chilli-powered or mild.

Beef and chicken are the most common meats: tangy coconut beef *rendang* is served with turmeric rice while *ayam masak merah*, red cooked chicken, is a casserole of chicken pieces in tomato. Coconut flavoured meat curries are also available as fish and vegetable versions.

Vegetarians are surprisingly well served in Malaysia. No meal is laid without mixed vegetables in light oyster sauce or stewed in coconut. In Sabah and Sarawak, “local vegetable” can mean roots collected from the jungle that morning, such as dark-green fern tops. Fusion food is nothing new to Malaysia. A taste-bud highlight of Malacca and Penang is *Nonya* food – grandma’s Straits Chinese cuisine – which combines Malay spice with Chinese sour flavours to produce dishes like tangy,

fishy *Assam laksa*. Visiting coastal areas, dive into

the pescetarian menus: grilled fish and calamari are sold by the weight; *sambal udang* prawns are soaked in shrimp and tamarind paste, chilli, garlic and shallots. Flashier aquarium-sized Chinese restaurants feature more formal seafood – butter prawns and black-pepper crab, oyster fried with egg, and steamed fish.

The sweet of tooth should visit Chinese cake shops for yam pastry buns, egg custard tarts, steamed red-bean cakes and Hakka soybean cakes. A healthier choice is Malaysia’s incredible tropical fruit platter – from the humble, multi-species banana, to the hairy-coated rambutan. Be brave about durian; they are a matter of acquired taste, believe me, and one of my greatest recent achievements has been learning to love, rather than loathe, this fruit.

**Tamara’s Quickie Char Kway Teow**



- 500g flat fresh rice noodles or 375g packet dried and ready to use
- 1-2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 tbsp peanut oil
- 200g shelled prawns (leave tails on if desired)
- 1 small chilli, sliced
- 2 cups fresh bean sprouts
- 1 egg (optional)
- 1/3 cup chopped chives or shallots, 2cm lengths
- 100g or 1/2 cup shelled cockles (optional)
- 2 tbsp soy sauce – preferably 1 dark, 1 light
- 1-2 tbsp chilli paste, *sambal olek*
- 1 tbsp *belacan* shrimp paste



1. Heat oil in wok, add chilli and shrimp paste and fry for one minute.
2. Add garlic, then prawns and fry 1-2 minutes until cooked.
3. Add rice noodles and stirfry 2-3 minutes until tender. Add egg and combine. Add cockles if used, then bean sprouts, chives/shallots, soy sauce and *sambal olek*.

PHOTOS: K.T. GOH; TAMARA THIESSEN (SIDEBAR)

■ CITY GUIDE

# KUALA LUMPUR



Petronas Towers with the Asy-Syakirin Mosque in the foreground

In the mid-19th century, Chinese tin prospectors settled on the convergence of the Klang and Gombak rivers, giving rise to KL's name, meaning "muddy confluence". Today, with a population of 1.6 million, the condo-towered conurbation stands out for its cutting-edge architecture, Islamic garden havens and vibrant street culture.

Thirty kilometres south, the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) is a startling mix of tech park, walled villas, mangroves, Malay towns and botanical gardens developed around twin cities Putrajaya and Cyberjaya. The former – Malaysia's answer to Silicon Valley – is a custom-made garden city of administrative buildings and convention centres. The latter is a nucleus of new technologies within the MSC.

**DISTANCE** Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) is located 43km south of the city, its two terminals linked by the Aerotrain rail, which will have you in the city within an hour. A taxi takes 40 minutes.

**ORIENTATION** From KL Sentral station, taxis, buses and trains, light rail (LRT) and monorail link to the old city centre and to the Golden Triangle: the business and shopping district which spreads from Bukit Bintang in the north-east, to Petronas Twin Towers, Suria KLCC plaza and the KL Convention Centre.

**SLEEP** The 28-storey Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur is an internal-gardened sanctuary with a lofty glass-walled lobby, rooftop pool and fabulous fine dining restaurant Lafite. Its 662 rooms are topped

by two floors of plush executive rooms, plus the pampering-crazy Horizon Club lounge. 11 Jalan Sultan Ismail, tel: +603 2032 2388, [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)

With a connecting passage to the KL Convention Centre, Traders Hotel has established itself as the leading business stay in the "new" part of town, with its efficient service, sartorial originality and clever choice of rooms and suites. Room (and gym) views plunge towards the city centre park in front of the Twin Towers. City Centre, tel: +603 2332 9888

**EAT** In a 1920s planter's bungalow on a city peak, Tamarind Hill cooks up traditional Thai and Burmese dishes including tom yum soup, Mandalay chicken, green curries and mango sticky rice. 19 Jalan Sultan Ismail, tel: +603 2148 3200, [www.tamardindrestaurants.com](http://www.tamardindrestaurants.com)

**PLAY** Away from the rowdy beach party scene of Bukit Bintang, a cool clubbing strip of international DJs and "lifestyle lounges" dwells among Asian Heritage Row. Blanc Le Club (no. 19-23) is the latest addition with its stylish house music. Jalan Doraisamy, tel: +603 2698 0903, [www.asianheritagerow.com](http://www.asianheritagerow.com)

**SPA** The Sensory Exploration Room at Spa Village is part of an exceptional Ritz-Carlton spa experience where guests unwind in a star-twinkling room with a multisensory combo of smells, sights, sounds and tastes, plus scalp and foot massages. The Ritz-Carlton, 168 Jalan Imbi, tel: +603 2782 9090, [www.spavillage.com](http://www.spavillage.com)

**DRINK** Gorgeous inside and out, day and night, SkyBar on the top of Traders Hotel offers a bird's-eye view of the KL skyline. Hold a cocktail in one hand and almost touch the Twin Towers with the other, while you chill on a cushy perch around the neon-lit infinity pool. 33rd floor, tel: +603 2332 9888; 10pm-1am Sun-Thurs; 10pm-3am Fri, Sat

**SHOP** Though some prefer the new Pavilion KL shopping centre on Bukit Bintang, the older favourite is glass-clad Suria KLCC, inside the Petronas Twin Towers, which accommodates Parkson, Isetan and Marks and Spencer, flagship luxury stores and prêt-à-porter boutiques, cafés and restaurants. Junction of Jalan Ampang & Jalan P. Ramlee, [www.suriaklcc.com.my](http://www.suriaklcc.com.my)

**DAY TRIP** A cultural and panoramic thrill, the Batu Caves – 13km by taxi from the centre – form a sacred Hindu site. During January's *Thaipusam*, or penance festival, thousands of devotees make a pilgrimage here with steel rods threaded with oranges and limes hooked to their body, and carrying mini-shrines. The 272-step climb to the stalactite-filled temple, past sculptures of Hindu deities and elephants, is punishing, but well worth it for the views.

**KIDS INTOW** Child-friendly restaurants and shops (T-shirts, jewellery, sweets, computer games and DVDs) plus the largest indoor theme park in Asia are found in the heart of the city at Berjaya Times Square. [www.timessquarekl.com](http://www.timessquarekl.com)

**INFORMATION** [www.tourism.gov.my](http://www.tourism.gov.my)

PHOTO: LESTER LEDESMA



■ CITY GUIDE

# KOTA KINABALU



Named after the famous mountain whose silhouette frames the city, folklore holds that Kinabalu means “Chinese widow” – *Kina* being the tribal Dusunic word for Chinese and *balu* Malay for widow. Brush-stroked with blue bays and forested islands, KK has a sublime ocean setting and permanent holiday atmosphere. The town, which was baptised “Jesselton” by the British North Borneo Company in 1899, was largely levelled during World War II, but a few colonial gems remain. Despite a seven-storey limit on building height due to air traffic, a current development boom aims to make over the hotchpotch of makeshift downtown shop-lots.

**DISTANCE** Domestic and international flights (from Brunei, Singapore, Manila, Cebu, HK, Taipei, Kaohsiung, Seoul and Tokyo) arrive at the newly revamped Kota Kinabalu International Airport. Taxis and hotel transits get you to the city, 7km north.

**ORIENTATION** From the top of Signal Hill you will see the city constricted to a narrow belt of land reclaimed from the sea in the 1920s. The Waterfront Esplanade runs about 1km along the bay, lined with five-star hotels, shopping plaza, restaurants, and fish and handcraft markets. Mosques and museums are on the city limits.

**SLEEP** The 956-roomed **Sutera Harbour Resort** is a mega resort spread over 384 acres with its own private marina, Olympic-sized pool, golf course and several restaurants, split between the

business-class Pacific wing and luxury leisure Magellan Wing. *1 Sutera Harbour Blvd*, tel +60 (0)88 318888, [www.suteraharbour.com.my](http://www.suteraharbour.com.my)

**EAT** Still known by locals under its old name, Sedco Square, **Seri Selera** is an alfresco seafood complex with dozens of open kitchens and common tables, with fish and crab fresh from tanks. Open from 3pm, try the stalls **Suang Tain Seafood** and **Sri Mutiara**. *Jalan Haji Saman, Kampung Air*

**PLAY** **The Waterfront** is a rather raucous karaoke and clubbing zone; but how to resist the friendly offer, “Do you want to come to BED?” B.E.D. – short for Best Entertainment Destination – is a live band and dance venue. Next door is the open-all-hours pub, **The Loft**. *Jalan Tun Fuad Stephen*

**SPA** A couples’ treatment at **CHI**, The Spa will take you both to another planet. Choose your own special Element Sign from the traditional metal, water, wood, fire and earth selection, then be massaged into yin and yang oblivion with the aid of aromas and oils based upon taste, climate and colour preferences. **Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Resort**, *20 Jalan Aru, Tanjung Aru*, tel: +60 (0)88 225800, [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)

**DRINK** Atop Sabah’s highest building, the 122m revolving restaurant **@mosphere** offers an extensive list of shooters, spirits, cocktails, wine and coffee. Daytime views are spectacular – at night the pastel-coloured décor of the cocktail bar lights up in *Alice in Wonderland* tones. *18th floor, Menara Tun Mustapha*, tel: +60 (0)88 425100, [www.atmospherestaurant.com](http://www.atmospherestaurant.com)

**SHOP** Forget charming precincts and veer like everyone else towards the air-conditioned shopping plazas: Warisan Square has some international couture and classy boutiques, but **Wisma Merdeka’s** shop-lots include electronic and phone stores galore and a good food court.

**DAY TRIP** At **Mount Kinabalu National Park** hit one of the unguided nature trails at the foothills of the 4,095m peak for a taste of its World Heritage-listed flora: ferns and fungi; 1,200 species of orchids; 26 types of rhododendron; and nine kinds of *Nepenthes* or carnivorous pitcher plants. The bird and insect life make for a rainforest orchestra. Drive 88km from KK via Kampung Nabal’s craft store.

**KIDS IN TOW** The chance of seeing orphan orangutans at the **Rasa Ria Resort’s Nature Reserve**, 42km north of KK, could be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Budding naturalist-primatologists can also enjoy the hotel’s Kids Club, paradise pools and slides, beach games and children’s menus. *Pantai Dalit Beach, Tuaran*, tel: +60 (0)88 792888, [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)

**CONCIERGE TIP** The most beautiful sunsets can be beheld at **Tanjung Aru**, 3km south of the CBD, and you do not have to be a guest to enjoy the views and drinks at the Shangri-La’s water-edged alfresco Sunset Bar. The local seaside promontory has many restaurants, beach BBQs and evening food stalls selling delicacies such as chilli-coated green mango.

**INFORMATION** [www.sabahtourism.com](http://www.sabahtourism.com)

PHOTO: MELISSA EWOT/SABAH TOURISM

■ CITY GUIDE

# GEORGE TOWN



Traditional shophouses and ancient temples line the streets of Georgetown

It is rare to find a tropical island destination so rich in history. Pulau Penang – “island of the betel nut tree” – ceded to the British East India Company in 1786 and stayed under colonial rule until Malaysian independence. Named after King George III, George Town is a frenetic capital full of speeding motorbikes and rickety trishaws. The old town’s UNESCO-classified crush of forts and mansions, carpenter and goldsmith guilds, and gaily coloured old wooden buildings are animated by regular feasting and festivity.

**DISTANCE** Penang International Airport is located 16km from George Town at Bayan Lepas at the south-eastern tip of the island. WiFi-fitted Rapid Penang buses ply the route, as well as taxis and hotel shuttles.

**ORIENTATION** George Town lies on the north-eastern coast of the small (285 sq km) island with a regular ferry service to Butterworth on the Malaysian mainland. The beach resort zone of Batu Ferringhi is on the north coast, a 20-minute (18km) trip by bus or taxi.

**SLEEP** Disregard the concrete motherboard façade of **Traders Penang**; the interior has a comfortable grandeur. At the heart of the city’s hubbub, find great business facilities and a club lounge where you will not go hungry. Magazine Rd, tel: +604 262 2622, [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)

On the north coast, 18km from George Town, the **Shangri-La Rasa Sayang Resort**

is ideal if you want to colour working days with scenic and aesthetic beauty. Balconies of the Rasa Wing rooms and suites look onto a nirvana of lush gardens; in-house food is full of sophisticated spice and the décor is elevated by refined traditional *objets d’art*.

Batu Ferringgi Beach, tel: +604 888 8888, [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)

**EAT** A wooden latticed and lanterned den of delicious *Nonya* cuisine, **Hot Wok**’s spicy hot Kapitan chicken curry is cooled by ice-cold *cendol* (a coconut milk-based dessert). The furnishings are equally Peranakan (Straits Chinese migrant population) in style, from the ornate carved cabinets to tapestries and wall hangings. 124 E-F Jalan Burmah, tel: +604 227 3368

**PLAY** On Upper Penang Road, the music and live bands at Slippery Senoritas, and the guest DJs, live shows and ladies nights at GLO are both found in apricot-coloured art deco venue, **The Garage**. 2 Upper Penang Rd

**SPA** Planted in lush seaside gardens and styled like a Malay temple, the timber flooring, stonewalls and greenery at the **Rasa Sayang Spa** will soon have you feeling zen-like. Head to one of 11 private bungalows for a deeply de-stressing Himalayan healing stone treatment. Tel: +604 888 8762, [www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)

**DRINK** For British pub grub and olde worlde atmosphere, **Farquhar’s Bar** at the Eastern & Oriental Hotel is a wooded bistro with cool ales on tap and a

menu of fish and chips, bangers and mash, ploughman’s lunches, and steak and kidney pie. 10 Lebuhraya Farquhar, tel: +604 222 2000

**SHOP** In the streets bound by Penang Street, Chulia Street, Campbell Street, King Street and Queen Street, the jewellery and fabric bazaars of **Little India** merge with the herbal medicine stores and antique shops of **China Town**. Bargain and browse in a buzzing potpourri of spices and saris, jade, joss sticks, crystals, herbs and handicrafts.

**DAY TRIP** After a free visit to the Botanical Gardens, head out on the neighbouring 6.7km walking trail to **Bukit Penang** – the main summit among a series of hills that rises to 821m, and which offers respite from the heat – plus glorious panoramas. Alternatively, an old funicular train does the climb in 30 minutes.

**KIDS IN TOW** The beaches on the north coast, between the resorts of Batu Ferringhi and the fishing villages at Teluk Bahang, are a water-sports hub with activities for young children and teenagers. Add in a visit to the local Butterfly Farm or Tropical Spice Garden attractions.

**CONCIERGE TIP** Pass up on the much-heralded evening food stalls of Gurney Drive and mooch instead to the stalls on **Lorong Selamat** and the “Padang Brown” hawker centre at the junction of Perak and Anson roads for the best-quality *laksa* and noodle dishes, and *Nonya* desserts.

**INFORMATION** [www.tourismpenang.gov.my](http://www.tourismpenang.gov.my)

PHOTO: LESTER LEDESMA