

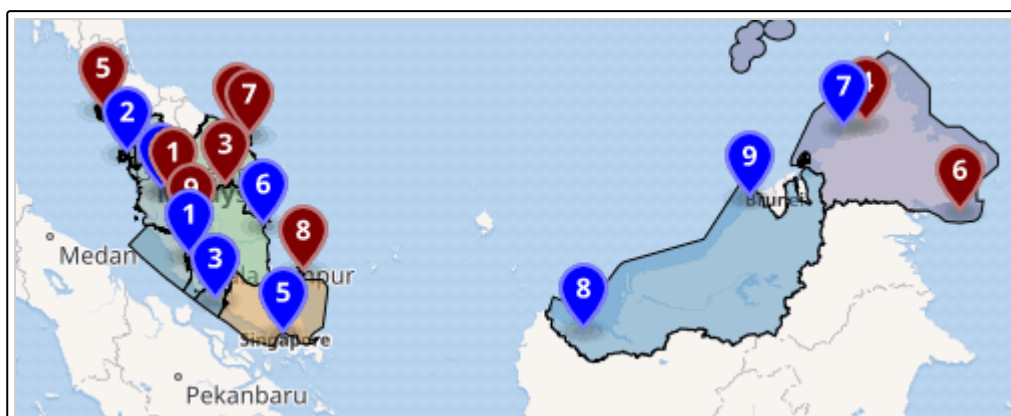
Malaysia

Malaysia is a country in [Southeast Asia](#), on the Malay Peninsula, as well as on northern [Borneo](#). The country is one of Asia's tiger economies, having seen great economic and human development during the last several decades. While the capital Kuala Lumpur is a cosmopolitan city, deep jungles cover vast swaths of the land, and the offshore islands are home to pristine beaches and some of the world's best scuba diving sites. Malaysia is also a foodie's paradise, with its diverse ethnic groups contributing to an incredibly rich culinary heritage.

Regions

Malaysia is divided into two main geographical regions, commonly known as Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia. See [Geography](#) for more information.

Peninsular Malaysia



Map of Peninsular and East Malaysia



West Coast (Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Negeri Sembilan, Malacca)

The more developed region, offering the modern capital, Kuala Lumpur, UNESCO World Heritage cities with colonial flair and the Langkawi archipelago. Perlis, Kedah and Perak are the gateways to Thailand overland.

East Coast (Kelantan, Pahang, Terengganu)

The more traditional Muslim region, home to Taman Negara (National Park), numerous unspoilt islands and the Jungle Railway, which winds through the rural hinterlands. Kelantan is the gateway to Thailand overland.

Johor

Comprising just one state, two coastlines, endless palm oil plantations and the gateway to Singapore via a causeway or bridge.

East Malaysia

Sabah

Superb scuba diving in Sipadan island plus muck diving at Mabul, nature reserves, the federal enclave of Labuan and the mighty Mount Kinabalu.

Sarawak

The southern state of East Malaysia (Borneo). Home to traditional longhouses, lush jungles and national parks in contrast to the state capital, Kuching. It is the gateway to Brunei and Indonesia overland.

Cities

- **1 Kuala Lumpur** — the multi-cultural national capital, home of the Petronas Twin Towers
- **2 George Town** — the capital of Penang and hub of Malaysia's second largest metropolitan area, famed for its colonial-era architecture, multi-cultural populace, food and arts scene
- **3 Malacca** — the historical city of Malaysia with colonial-style architecture
- **4 Ipoh** — the capital of Perak, with a historic colonial old town and tin mining area
- **5 Johor Bahru** — capital of Johor and Malaysia's third largest city
- **6 Kuantan** — capital of Pahang and commercial centre of the East Coast
- **7 Kota Kinabalu** — close to tropical islands, lush rain forest and Mount Kinabalu
- **8 Kuching** — capital of Sarawak, and largest city in East Malaysia



The iconic Petronas Twin Towers, Kuala Lumpur

- **9 Miri** — resort city of Sarawak located near the border of Brunei and gateway to [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#), [Gunung Mulu National Park](#)


Other destinations

- **1 Cameron Highlands** — famous for its tea plantations
- **2 Perhentian Islands** (*Pulau Perhentian*) — glittering jewels off the East Coast still undiscovered by mass tourism
- **3 Taman Negara** — a large area of rainforest national park spanning [Kelantan](#), [Pahang](#) and [Terengganu](#)
- **4 Kinabalu National Park** ^W — home of Mount Kinabalu
- **5 Langkawi** — an archipelago of 99 islands known for its beaches, rainforest, mountains, mangrove estuaries and unique nature. It's also a duty-free island
- **6 Sipadan** (*Pulau Sipadan*) — one of the best dive spots in the world
- **7 Redang** (*Pulau Redang*) — popular island destination for scuba divers
- **8 Tioman** (*Pulau Tioman*) — once nominated one of the most beautiful islands in the world
- **9 Fraser's Hill** — a time warp to the colonial era

Understand

Malaysia is a mix of the modern world and a developing nation. With its investment in high technology industries and moderate oil wealth, it has become a rich nation in Southeast Asia. Malaysia, for most visitors, presents a happy mix: there is high-tech infrastructure and things generally work well and more or less on schedule, but prices remain more reasonable than, say, [Singapore](#). The demographics between the rich and poor can also be quite apparent: for example, a high rise luxury condominium building built right across the street from old, rundown shop lots or flats. However, you will not find extreme rural poverty or gigantic urban slums as in other countries in Southeast Asia.

In terms of attractions, peninsular (West) Malaysia contains islands with gorgeous beaches and a fraction of visitors found in [Thailand's](#) most popular beaches, mountain retreats surrounded by tea plantations, interesting historical cities, world-famous food, and the highly modern, multi-cultural capital of [Kuala Lumpur](#). East Malaysia contains lush jungles with diverse native population and wildlife, as well as stunning natural attractions such as giant caves, beautiful mountains and fantastic diving sites. Notably, however, Malaysia is not as popular among backpackers as other Southeast Asian destinations such as [Thailand](#), [Cambodia](#) and [Vietnam](#), partly due to the relatively higher costs, and partly due to the more religious and conservative, albeit generally tolerant, culture. It also lacks the ancient Hindu and/or Buddhist temples and temple complexes of its neighbors, though it does have some large ones built since the 19th century.

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|---|---|
|  | |
| Capital | Kuala Lumpur |
| Currency | Malaysian ringgit (MYR) |
| Population | 32.4 million (2020) |
| Electricity | 240 volt / 50 hertz (BS 1363) |
| Country code | +60 |
| Time zone | UTC+08:00, Asia/Kuala_Lumpur |
| Emergencies | 999 (emergency medical services, fire department, police) |
| Driving side | left |
| edit on Wikidata | |

History

Before the rise of the European colonial powers, the Malay Peninsula and the Malay archipelago were home to empires such as the Srivijaya (whose capital was near modern Palembang, Sumatra, but which included the entire Malay Peninsula and lands further north at its greatest extent), the Majapahit (centred in Java, now part of Indonesia, but believed by most scholars to have included the entire Malay Peninsula and most of coastal Borneo among its vassal states) and the Malacca Sultanate. The Srivijaya and Majapahit empires saw the spread of Hinduism to the region, and to this day, despite the fact that Malays are Muslims, many Hindu legends and traditions survive in traditional Malay culture. Mass conversion to Islam only occurred after the arrival of Arab traders during the Malacca Sultanate.



The Dutch Square in Malacca

During the 16th century the Portuguese established the first European colony in Southeast Asia by defeating the Malacca Sultanate. The Portuguese were religiously intolerant and cruel, so the Sultan of Johor assisted the Dutch in defeating them, and the Netherlands took control of the city. The British also established their first colony on the Malay peninsula in Penang when it was ceded by the Sultan of Kedah in 1786. Finally, the area was divided into Dutch and British spheres of influence with the signing of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty in 1824. With this treaty, the Dutch agreed to cede Malacca to the British and in return, the British ceded all their colonies on Sumatra to the Dutch. The line of division roughly corresponds to what is today the border between Malaysia and Indonesia.



Fort Cornwallis in George Town, Penang marked the site where the British colonisation of Malaya began in 1786.

Before World War II, the Malay Peninsula was governed by the British as the Federated Malay States (Selangor, Perak, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang), which were governed as a single protectorate, the Unfederated Malay States (Johor, Kedah, Perlis, Terengganu and Kelantan), which were each governed as separate protectorates. The Straits Settlements (including Malacca, Penang and Singapore), which were crown colonies directly administered by the British colonisers. These colonies and protectorates were collectively referred to as "Malaya". British Borneo consisted of the British colony of North Borneo, the Kingdom of Sarawak, which was ruled by a British family known as the "White Rajas", and the British protectorate of Brunei.

World War II was disastrous for the British Malayan Command. The Japanese swept down both coasts of the Malay Peninsula and despite fierce fighting, much of the British military was tied down fighting the Germans in Europe and those that remained in Malaya simply could not cope with the Japanese onslaught. The British military equipment left to defend Malaya was outdated and no match for the modern technology used by the Japanese, and the only two British battleships based in the region, the HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse, were sunk by Japanese bombers off the East Coast of Malaya. By 31 January 1942, the British had been pushed all the way back to Singapore, which fell to the Japanese on 15 February 1942. The situation was no different on Borneo, which fell to the Japanese on 1 April 1942 after months of fierce fighting. The Japanese occupation was brutal, and many, particularly

the ethnic Chinese, suffered and perished during the occupation. Among the most notorious atrocities committed by the Japanese were the Sandakan Death Marches, with only 6 out of 2,345 prisoners surviving the war.

After World War II, the Federated Malay States, Unfederated Malay States and the Straits Settlements of Malacca and Penang were federated to form a single British colony known as the Malayan Union, with Singapore being split off to form a separate colony. In the Malayan Union, the sultans of the various states ceded all their powers except those in religious affairs to the British crown. However, widespread opposition to the Malayan Union led the British to reconsider their position, and in 1948, the Malayan Union was replaced by the Federation of Malaya, in which the executive positions of the sultans were restored. In Borneo, the White Rajas ceded Sarawak to the British crown in 1946, making it a crown colony of the United Kingdom.

On 31 August 1957, Malaya gained independence from the British. At midnight, the Union Jack was lowered, and the Malayan flag raised in its place at what is today *Dataran Merdeka* (Independence Square) in Kuala Lumpur. The crowd, led by the first Prime Minister of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman, then proceeded to chant "*Merdeka*" seven times. On 16 September 1963, Malaysia was formed through the merging of Malaya with the British colonies of North Borneo (now known as Sabah), Sarawak and Singapore, with Brunei deciding not to join. The first several years of the country's history were marred by the Confrontation (*Konfrontasi*) — actually a series of acts of aggression by Indonesia that ultimately ended in her defeat and a formal peace that has held ever since — and claims to Sabah from the Philippines.

On 9 August 1965 Singapore was officially expelled from the federation after several bloody racial riots as Singapore's majority Chinese population and the People's Action Party, led by Lee Kuan Yew (later the long-ruling Prime Minister of Singapore), were seen as a threat to Malay dominance. There were further racial riots in 1969, which led to the forced resignation of Tunku Abdul Rahman; his replacement by Tun Abdul Razak; changes in the Malaysian Constitution that sought to prevent the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition led by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) from ever being defeated in a future national election; and the start of the New Economic Policy, which sought to aggressively promote the economic interests of the generally poorer Malay community (and also the non-Malay indigenous peoples of East Malaysia) over those of the generally less poor Chinese community (with the poorest major ethnic group, the Indians, and also to a very large extent the Orang Asli [aboriginal people] in the Peninsula mostly ignored in the process).

In 1975, boat people from across the South China Sea in Vietnam started coming, and Malaysia became one of the most important places of first refuge for Indochinese refugees, but in general, only those of the Muslim Champa minority were invited to stay permanently. Later, during the period of tremendous economic development under the long premiership of Mahathir Mohammed, a large number of immigrant workers were invited from Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, and several other countries in the area, and even more immigrated illegally. This further increased the diversity of the population, and quite a number of



Malaysian flag flying in *Dataran Merdeka*, Kuala Lumpur

the workers were reported in local newspapers to have intermarried with local women, but it also led to social strife as many Malaysian men resented the competition, and while the economy depended on immigrant workers to do jobs most Malaysians were no longer willing to do, now that their standard of living was higher, most Malaysians also did not want to permanently absorb a large and potentially almost limitless number of poor people from the much more populous countries in the region. Some immigrants were expelled and even caned for immigration violations, but the issue has never been really resolved.

Things came to a head in 2015 when allegations of corruption by then-prime minister Najib Razak surfaced in connection with 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), which was originally set up to promote economic development by attracting foreign investment. The allegations led to the *Bersih* (Malay for "clean") rally in which protesters unsuccessfully called for Najib to step down. However, widespread discontent arising from the 1MDB corruption scandal continued to simmer, eventually leading to a shock first-ever electoral defeat for the incumbent BN coalition in the 2018 general election.

Politics

Malaysia is a federal constitutional monarchy consisting of 13 states and 3 federal territories, nominally headed by the king (*Yang di-Pertuan Agong*, lit. Paramount Ruler), whose position rotates among the rulers of the 9 royal states of Malaysia every five years, giving Malaysia a unique political system of rotational monarchy. The current king, Tuanku Abdullah from Pahang, was sworn into office on 31 January 2019 and his term ends on 31 January 2024. In practice, the king is only the nominal head of state, while the prime minister is the one who wields the most authority in government.

Malaysia's government is largely based on the British Westminster system, consisting of a bicameral national parliament. The lower house, known as the *Dewan Rakyat* (Hall of the People) is elected directly by the people. The upper house, known as the *Dewan Negara* (National Hall), consists of 26 members elected by the state governments, with each state having 2 representatives, while the remaining members are appointed by the king. The head of government is the prime minister, who is the party leader of the winning party in the lower house.

At the state level, each of the states also has its own unicameral *Dewan Undangan Negeri* (State Legislative Assembly), with the head of the state government being the *Menteri Besar* (First Minister, often translated as "Chief Minister" in English-language media) in the royal states, and the *Ketua Menteri* (Chief Minister) in the non-royal states.

Geography

Malaysia comprises two geographic regions, Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, which are separated by the South China Sea.

Peninsular Malaysia (*Semenanjung Malaysia*) occupies all of the Malay Peninsula between Thailand and Singapore, and is also known as West Malaysia (*Malaysia Barat*) or the slightly archaic Malaya (*Tanah Melayu*). It's home to the bulk of Malaysia's population, the capital and the largest city Kuala Lumpur, and generally more economically developed. Peninsular Malaysia consists of plains on both the East and West Coasts, separated from each other by a mountain range known as the *Banjaran Titiwangsa*, with the West Coast being more densely populated and generally more well-developed than the East Coast.

Separated some 800 km to the east of Peninsular Malaysia is **East Malaysia** (*Malaysia Timur*). East Malaysia occupies the northern third of the island of Borneo, shared with Indonesia and tiny Brunei. Much of the development on East Malaysia is centred around the cities of Kuching, Miri and Kota Kinabalu. Outside of the major cities and smaller towns are impenetrable jungle where head hunters once roamed and coastal plains rising to mountains. East Malaysia is rich in natural resources and is very much Malaysia's hinterland for industry and tourism, though those who make the trip will find it to be a world-class ecotourism destination.

People

Malaysia is a multicultural society. While Malays (a branch of the Austronesian group) make up a 52% majority, 27% of Malaysians are Chinese (who are especially visible in the cities), 9% are Indians, 12% are members of aboriginal peoples (often called *Orang Asli*, Malay for "Original People"), and there is a miscellaneous grouping of 1.5% "others", including Thai communities in northern border states and the Portuguese clan in Malacca. The majority of the population (including virtually all Malays, as well as a significant minority of Indians) adheres to Islam, the state religion, and there are substantial minorities who practice Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Sikhism and animism, which are allowed under the constitution, subject to the supremacy of Islam — for example, it is illegal to proselytize other religions to Muslims.

Culture

Malaysia shares many cultural similarities with its neighbours, Brunei, Indonesia and Singapore due to their common history. As the first great kingdoms to emerge in the region were Hindu kingdoms with much influence from India, Malay culture has substantial Indian influences. This is most visible in Malay cuisine with its relatively heavy use of curries, albeit using local instead of Indian spices, meaning that Malay curries often have a unique local flavour that is different from their Indian counterparts. Malaysia's minorities also continue to maintain their own distinct cultures, with the Chinese and Indian communities continuing to preserve the traditions brought from their ancestral homelands. In particular, Malaysia's ethnic Chinese community is considered to have preserved Chinese culture and language the best among all the overseas Chinese communities of the world. Moreover, as Malaysia was unaffected by the Cultural Revolution, the ethnic Chinese community of Malaysia has preserved many elements of traditional Chinese culture that have been lost in mainland China.

Holidays

One of the significant characteristics of Malaysian culture is its celebration of various festivals and events. The year is filled with colourful, exhilarating and exciting activities. Some are religious and solemn but others are vibrant, joyous events. One interesting feature of the main festivals here is the 'open house' custom. This is when Malaysians celebrating the festival invite friends and family to come by their homes for some traditional delicacies and fellowship.

Ramadan

Ramadan is the 9th and holiest month in the Islamic calendar and lasts 29–30 days. Muslims fast every day for its duration and most restaurants will be closed until the fast breaks at dusk. Nothing (including water and cigarettes) is supposed to pass through the lips from dawn to sunset. Non-Muslims

Multicultural Malaysia celebrates a vast range of festivals, but the ones to look out for nationwide are Islamic holidays, most notably the fasting month of **Ramadan**. During its 29 or 30 days, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking and sex from dawn to sunset. Not all Muslims follow the tradition, or sustain the full period of Ramadan fasting, but most do make a very serious effort. Pregnant, breast feeding or menstruating women are not expected to fast, nor are the elderly, the infirm, or travellers. People get up early before sunrise for a meal (*sahur*), and take off early to get back home in time to break fast (*buka puasa*) at sunset.

At the end of the month is the festival of **Eid ul-Fitr**, known locally as **Hari Raya Puasa** or **Aidilfitri**, when many locals take one to two weeks off to 'balik kampung' or return to their home towns to meet family and friends. Accordingly, this is one of the many times in a year when major cities like Kuala Lumpur have virtually no traffic congestion.

Another important festival is the Muslim festival of **Eid ul-Adha**, known locally as **Hari Raya Haji** or **Aidiladha**. It is during this festival that Muslims perform the Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca. In local mosques, cows and goats are donated by the faithful and sacrificed, after which the meat is distributed to all. Family reunions are also celebrated during other main festivals when locals usually put on traditional costumes and finery as these festivals are an integral feature of Malaysian society.

During the month of Ramadan, non-Muslims are expected to be considerate of those fasting. Non-Muslims, as well as Muslims travelling (*musafir*), are exempt from fasting but it is polite to refrain from eating or drinking in public. Public school systems also require non-Muslims to refrain from eating in front of those who are fasting. Many restaurants close during the day and those that stay open maintain a low profile. Business travellers will notice that things move rather more slowly than usual. The upside for foreign travellers are the Ramadan bazaars in every city and town, bustling with activity and bursting at the seams with great food. Hotels and restaurants also pull out all stops to put on massive spreads of food for fast-breaking feasts. During the month of Ramadan, meals at the end of fasts are usually considered grand feasts. Worldwide fast-food chain McDonald's is known for holding several all-you-can-eat Ramadan feasts during the month.

Other major holidays include **Chinese New Year** (around January/February), **Deepavali** or **Diwali**, the Hindu festival of lights (around October/November), the Buddhist holiday of **Wesak** (around May/June), and **Christmas** (25 December). During Chinese New Year, George Town and Ipoh become the major cities as many local Chinese working and living in KL originated from there. However this situation is changing gradually, as more and more people are

are exempt from this, but should still refrain from eating or drinking in public as this is considered very impolite. Working hours are decreased as well in the corporate world. Exact dates of Ramadan depend on local astronomical observations and may vary somewhat from country to country. Ramadan concludes with the festival of *Eid al-Fitr*, which may last several days, usually three in most countries.

- 11 March – 9 April 2024 (1445 AH)
- 1 March – 29 March 2025 (1446 AH)
- 18 February – 19 March 2026 (1447 AH)
- 8 February – 8 March 2027 (1448 AH)

If you're planning to travel to Malaysia during Ramadan, consider reading [Travelling during Ramadan](#).

Lunar New Year dates

The year of the *Dragon* began on 4 Feb 2024 at 16:25, and the Lunar New Year was on 10 Feb 2024

- The year of the *Snake* will begin on 3 Feb 2025 at 22:10,

making Kuala Lumpur their home town. While visiting during such festivals, travellers will be able to experience many wonderful celebrations, but the downside is many ethnic shops/eateries will be closed. The best option is to visit during the period just after the first two days of the major festival (Hari Raya/Chinese New Year), when shops will open, and the festive mood has still not died down.

Another major celebration is **Deepavali**, celebrated by the Malaysian Hindus as the festival of light originating from classical India and one of the main cultural celebrations. In Malaysia, locals practice this tradition by wearing new clothes and receiving token gifts of money. This practice has been adapted by all Malaysians regardless of their religion.

They distribute red packets or *ang pow* during Chinese New Year, green packets or 'duit raya' for Hari Raya Aidilfitri and multi-coloured packets during Deepavali.

and the Lunar New Year will be on 29 January 2025

- The year of the *Horse* will begin on 4 Feb 2026 at 4:02, and the Lunar New Year will be on 17 Feb 2026

Contrary to popular belief, the change of the zodiac does not occur on the first day of the Lunar New Year, but instead occurs on Li Chun (立春 *lì chūn*), the traditional Chinese start of spring.

Some uniquely Malaysian festivals of note include the **Harvest Festival** at the end of May each year and the '**Pesta Gawai**' in early June, both thanksgiving celebrations held in East Malaysia.

Thaipusam is a Hindu festival that falls in January or February and is one of the must-see events. The largest procession in the country takes place at Batu Caves, Selangor. Male devotees carry decorated altars or *kavadi* up a flight of 272 steps towards the temple, all this while also having religious spears and hooks pierced through external surfaces of their bodies. The ability is attributed to divine intervention and religious fervour. Female devotees join the procession carrying pots of milk on their head instead.

Climate

The **climate** in Malaysia is equatorial. The north-east monsoon (October to February) deluges Borneo and the East Coast of the Peninsula in rain and often causes flooding, while the West Coast (particularly Langkawi and Penang) escapes unscathed. The milder south-west monsoon (April to October) reverses the pattern. The southern and central parts of Peninsular Malaysia, including perennially soggy Kuala Lumpur, are exposed to both but even during the rainy season, the showers tend to be intense but brief.

Malaysia is close to the equator, so warm weather is guaranteed. Temperatures generally range from 32°C (90°F) at noon to about 26°C (79°F) at midnight. But like most Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia's sun-shining days are interrupted by monsoon season every year, and night temperatures can hit a low of about 23°C (73°F) on rainy days.

Temperatures tend to be cooler in the highlands, with the likes of Genting Highlands, Cameron Highlands and Fraser's Hill having temperatures ranging from about 17°C (63°F) at night to about 25°C (77°F) in the day. Mount Kinabalu is known to have temperatures falling below 10°C (50°F).

Tourist information

- Malaysia Tourism Corporation (<https://www.tourism.gov.my/>)

Talk

See also: [Malay phrasebook](#)

The national-level official language of Malaysia is **Malay** (officially *Bahasa Malaysia*, sometimes also known as *Bahasa Melayu*) and **English** is also the co-official language of the state of Sarawak. The Indonesian language, spoken across the border in Indonesia, is similar to Malay, and speakers of both languages can generally understand each other. The main differences are in the loanwords: Malay borrowed more from English, while Indonesian borrowed more from Dutch. Some parts of Malaysia near the Thai border, most notably Kelantan, have dialects of Malay which are nearly incomprehensible to speakers of standard Malay, though most people in these areas will be able to converse in standard Malay if needed.

English is compulsory in all schools and widely spoken in the larger cities, among the well-educated upper class, as well as around the main tourist attractions, although in rural areas a little Malay will come in handy. There is also a local dialect of English spoken among Malaysians in urban areas, not inappropriately known as **Manglish**, which has its own simplified grammar and a vocabulary that is mostly English but includes borrowings from Malay and several other locally-spoken languages; it takes a bit of getting used to if you intend to join in the conversation on local topics. Almost all Malaysians will not pronounce the letter "h", so "three" becomes "tree". Malaysians will almost always try to speak 'standardized English' (British) when approached by Western travellers. In general, police stations and government offices have English-speaking staff on duty.

Arabic is taught to those who attend Islamic religious schools, and many clerics as well as other very observant Muslims have a functional command of Arabic. However, it is not widely spoken, though the Malay language does have a large number of loan words from Arabic. You also might notice some examples of Malay written with Arabic letters. This is called Jawi, and it is still used for religious publications and inscriptions, especially in more conservative states like Kelantan, although the Latin alphabet is much more commonly used throughout the country.

The Chinese community in Malaysia speaks a wide variety of Chinese dialects including Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka, Hainanese, Hokchiu and Hokkien. Mandarin is taught in Chinese schools while Cantonese is commonly heard in the mass media due to the popularity of TVB serials from Hong Kong among the Chinese community, so many are conversant in both, regardless of their native dialect. Malaysian cities with large ethnic Chinese populations will often have a dialect serving as a lingua franca among that community: in Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh, this is Cantonese; in Penang and Klang, Hokkien; and in Kota Kinabalu, Hakka. The most commonly spoken Indian language is Tamil; others include Malayalam, Punjabi and Telugu.

In the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia bordering Thailand, there are various ethnic Thai communities, known locally as the *Orang Siam*, who speak various dialects of Thai. Malacca in the south is also home to a Portuguese community which speaks a Portuguese based creole. The remote forest areas of Peninsular Malaysia are also home to various tribal people known as the *Orang Asli*, who speak various indigenous languages such as Semelai, Temuan and many others. In East Malaysia several indigenous languages are also spoken, especially Iban and Kadazan.

Films and television programmes are usually shown in their original language with Malay subtitles, although some children's programmes are dubbed into Malay.

Get in

Immigration formalities



Visa restrictions:

Entry **will be refused** to citizens of Israel with an Israeli passport unless holding a letter of approval from the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs. Additionally citizens of Israel require an onward ticket and will be asked to purchase one or be **refused entry**. Malaysia is no longer concerned about other nationals' passports that show entry stamps and/or visas from Israel.

Most nationalities can enter Malaysia without a visa and can reside in Malaysia for 14 to 90 days, depending on their nationality. Refer to the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (<https://www.kln.gov.my/>) for current information regarding visa requirements and stay periods. The East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak each maintains its own immigration system and separate controls: even Malaysians from other states require a passport or MyKad on arrival.



Those who wish to enter Malaysia for purposes other than for a Social or Business visit still require a visa for any period (except for US citizens who enter for the purpose of studying) but see here for "loopholes" (http://www.studymalaysia.com/education/art_apply.php?id=immigration).

Nationals of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Montenegro, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Serbia, and Sri Lanka need a visa but can apply for an **e-visa**, which is valid for 3 months for a stay of up to 30 days. You'll have to print out the visa once it's issued and bring proof of sufficient funds, a return ticket, and proof of accommodation when you enter the country.

Nationals of India and China are exempted from visa until December 31, 2024. This is valid for a stay of up to 30 days.

Overstaying a visa will result in a US\$10, €7.50 or RM30 fine per day. However it's fairly simple to avoid overstaying a visa by doing a "visa run" to a neighbouring country overland or via a cheap flight. Malaysia may impose **caning** as a punishment for overstaying a visa.



Note: Since January 1, 2024, all foreign travellers must complete the **Malaysia Digital Arrival Card (MDAC)** (<https://imigresen-online.imi.gov.my/mdac/main>) online for every visit to Malaysia.

(Information last updated 12 May 2024)

The official requirement is to submit the MDAC at least 3 days in advance, but in practice you can submit it on the day of arrival while in the queue to immigration.

Citizens of Australia, Brunei, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States may use the **autogates** to complete immigration formalities when entering and exiting Malaysia via Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). In addition, citizens of Singapore can use the autogates at when crossing the Causeway or Second Link by road (but not by train). Your passport needs to be valid for a minimum of 6 months if entering via KLIA, or 3 months if entering by road from Singapore. Entry through any other immigration checkpoint will require you to be processed at a manned immigration counter.

It is advisable to use autogates if you can, as the immigration queues can be quite brutal. If you are qualified for the autogates, on your first visit you will need to enroll (get your fingerprints collected). To do so, instead of heading to the regular immigration queue, head to the autogates, and see an immigration officer next to them. On subsequent visits, you can go straight to the autogates.

If you are not a Malaysian citizen and cannot use the autogates, **ensure that your passport is stamped on entry**, or you would be considered to have entered illegally otherwise (and Malaysian immigration officials don't always give entry stamps unprompted). Fines on the order of RM3,000 will be imposed when you try to leave without the entry stamp in your passport. Also **ensure that your passport is stamped when you leave**, or you would be considered to have left illegally otherwise, which could cause problems should you wish to visit Malaysia again in the future.

Fingerprinting at Immigration

Malaysian Immigration authorities **fingerprint** visitors on arrival and departure. These fingerprints may well find their way to other country's authorities or other non-state agencies.

Transit visas

Even though citizens of Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka normally require a visa, they can transit the same airport for up to 120 hours provided they arrive and depart on the same airline, land at Sepang, Kota Kinabalu, Kuching, Penang or Senai and present a genuine air ticket.

By plane

National carrier **Malaysia Airlines** (<https://www.malaysiaairlines.com>) (MAS) has extensive coverage within Asia, and intercontinental flights to Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. It regularly ranks high in airline quality assessments. Low-cost carrier **AirAsia** and its sister company, **AirAsia X**, connects an ever-expanding set of countries including Australia, China, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Laos, Macau, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam. Emirates also flies from most cities to Kuala Lumpur via Dubai, and flights to Perth, Australia, make a brief stop in KLIA.

- **AirAsia** (<http://www.airasia.com>), ☎ +60 3 8775-4000, 1 300 88 9933 (in country only).
- **Malaysia Airlines** (<http://www.malaysiaairlines.com>), ☎ +60 3 7846-3000, 1-300-88-3000 (in country only).
- **Emirates Airlines** (<http://www.emirates.com/my/english/index.aspx>), ☎ +60 36 207 4999.



Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang, Selangor.

Most international flights land at **Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA)** (<http://www.klia.com.my>) (**KUL**^{IATA}). KLIA's predecessor, the **Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport (SZB**^{IATA}) in Subang near Kuala Lumpur handles mostly domestic turboprop flights, with limited regional services to Singapore and Jakarta. See the Kuala Lumpur **Get in** section for detailed airport information.

Other airports which have significant numbers of flights to regional destinations are Kota Kinabalu (Sabah), Penang, Kuching (Sarawak), Langkawi and Johor Bahru.

By train

- **From Singapore:** There's a shuttle train service which runs seven times each way during the morning and evening peak periods from Woodlands Train Station (in the north of Singapore) to JB sentral in Johor Bahru, costing MYR5 from the Malaysian side and SGD5 on the Singapore side. Conventional intercity trains then connect Johor Bahru with Gemas (where you can transfer to a train to Kuala Lumpur) and Tumpat, near Kota Bharu. They don't always match up to the shuttle times, so be prepared for long waiting times or get a backup plan by bus should you miss the shuttle. Early morning trains to Singapore and late evening trains to Malaysia are usually packed on the weekdays and the traffic flow reverses on the weekends. Booking online at the KTMB website (<http://www.ktmb.com.my>) may reserve a precious seat without hassle. When travelling from Singapore into Malaysia, both Singaporean and Malaysian immigration checks are conducted at Woodlands Train Station before boarding the train for Malaysia. In the reverse direction, Malaysian immigration checks are conducted at JB Sentral before boarding, while Singaporean immigration checks are conducted on arrival in Woodlands.
- **From Thailand:** Trains from Thailand start and terminate at the border at Padang Besar where Thai and Malaysian immigration formalities are all conveniently done in the station, and you can transfer between Malaysian and Thai trains. There are two Padang Besar stations; one in Thailand and one in Malaysia; be sure to get off the train only at the Padang Besar station in Malaysia, as that is where both Thai and Malaysian immigration checks are conducted, and where transfers between Malaysian and Thai trains take place. There is also a less used eastern route from Hat Yai to Thai border town Sungai Kolok, but there are no through trains to the nearby Malaysian station at Wakaf Bahru (near Kota Bharu).

By bus

Long-distance buses/coaches into Malaysia run from Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. Please see the relevant city pages for more details.

- **Brunei** — There are buses to Miri and Kota Kinabalu, leaving from the waterfront in downtown Bandar Seri Begawan. There are also buses to Limbang.
- **Indonesia** — Direct buses operate between Pontianak in West Kalimantan and Kuching in Sarawak.

- **Singapore** — A multitude of bus companies operate direct routes from Singapore to various destinations in Peninsular Malaysia, including Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, East Coast cities and even Petaling Jaya and Subang Jaya. Frequent public buses make the short run between Singapore and Johor Bahru, and you can save a few bucks by changing at JB's Larkin terminal to a cheap domestic bus instead of taking a more expensive direct bus.
- **Thailand** — Several companies operate services from Kuala Lumpur and other cities in Malaysia to Hat Yai in southern Thailand, where direct connections are available to Bangkok and many other Thai destinations.

By taxi

Special cross-border taxis operate between Singapore and Johor Bahru. See Johor_Bahru#By_taxi for details.

By road

Land crossings are possible from southern Thailand and Singapore into Peninsular Malaysia, as well as from Brunei and Kalimantan (the Indonesian side of Borneo) into Sarawak. There is no official crossing into Sabah from Indonesia even though they share a land border. An International Drivers Permit (IDP) is required. See the respective city or state pages for more detailed information.

Starting from 1st October 2024, a vehicle entry permit (VEP) will be required to drive a foreign-registered car into Malaysia from Singapore. You must apply for the permit online (<https://vep.jpj.gov.my/>), affix the RFID tag that will be sent to your home address to your car, and activate the tag online before you can drive into Malaysia.



Bukit Kayu Hitam checkpoint in Kedah, on the border with Thailand

- **Brunei** — The main crossings are at **Sungai Tujoh** on the Miri, Sarawak, to Bandar Seri Begawan (Brunei) road, and the **Kuala Lurah-Tedungan** checkpoint which is used for traffic travelling between Bandar Seri Begawan and Limbang in Sarawak. You can also access the Temburong district of Brunei by road from Limbang via the Pandaruan (Puni on the Brunei side) checkpoint and Lawas via Trusan (Labu on the Brunei side).
- **Indonesia** — The main crossing is at the **Tebedu-Entikong** checkpoint on the main Kuching-Pontianak road. The other two official crossings are the **Biawak-Aruk** and **Lubok Antu-Nanga Badau** border crossings. All three crossings are between the Malaysian state of Sarawak and the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan. There are also several unofficial crossings that are used by locals, but as a foreigner, you are advised not to use them as that is considered to be illegal entry.
- **Singapore** — The two crossings are the **Causeway** which links Johor Bahru with **Woodlands** in Singapore, and the Malaysia-Singapore **Second Link** which links Iskandar Puteri with Tuas in Singapore. See Johor Bahru Get in section and Singapore Get in section for more details. Generally speaking, the Second Link is less congested than the Causeway, and is more convenient for those who wish to drive up the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, but a lot less convenient for people who just want to visit Johor Bahru. **Cycling into Malaysia** is permitted only through the Causeway but not the Second Link;


use the motorcycle lanes and have your entry processed at the manual motorcycle counters.

- **Thailand** — International checkpoints (from west to east, with the Thai towns in brackets) are at **Wang Kelian** (Satun) and **Padang Besar** (Padang Besar) in Perlis, **Bukit Kayu Hitam** (Sadao) and **Kota Putra** (Banprokob) in Kedah, **Pengkalan Hulu** (Betong) in Perak, and **Bukit Bunga** (Buketa) and **Rantau Panjang** (Sungai Kolok) in Kelantan. Thai immigration has long been known to demand a bribe of RM2/20 baht per person to stamp you in or out, though there has been a crackdown on this. Instead, there is now an official fee levied by Thai immigration if you are crossing the border at peak times (05:00-08:30, 12:00-13:00 or 16:30-21:00 on weekdays, and all day on weekends and both Malaysian and Thai public holidays); this is 25 baht for the driver and 5 baht for each passenger if crossing the border by car, and 10 baht for the rider and 3 baht for the pillion if crossing by motorcycle. No fee is payable if you are walking across the border.

By boat

Ferries connect various points in Peninsular Malaysia with Sumatra in Indonesia and southern Thailand, Sarawak with Brunei, and Sabah with East Kalimantan in Indonesia and Mindanao in the Philippines. Luxury cruises also run from Singapore and sometimes Phuket (Thailand) to Malaysia.



Ferry terminal in Iskandar Puteri, Johor 

- **Brunei** — Ferries travel daily between the Muara Ferry Terminal in Brunei and Labuan island and Lawas in Sarawak. Speedboats, mostly in the morning, also run between Bandar Seri Begawan jetty and Limbang, Sarawak.
- **Indonesia** — The main jumping-off points from Indonesia are the Riau Islands of Batam, Bintan and Karimun; Dumai, Medan and Pekanbaru on the Sumatra mainland as well as Nunukan in East Kalimantan. Ferries link Batam with Batu Pahat, Iskandar Puteri and Johor Bahru; Bintan with Johor Bahru; Karimun with Batu Pahat and Kukup in Johor; Dumai with Malacca, Muar in Johor, Port Dickson (in Negeri Sembilan) and Port Klang, the port for Selangor; Pekanbaru with Malacca. Daily ferries also link Nunukan with Tawau in Sabah. There are also minor crossings like between Bengkalis in Riau and Batu Pahat; Sumatra and Malacca and Muar in Johor; and Tanjung Balai Asahan in North Sumatra with Port Klang, the port for Selangor.
- **Singapore** — A daily ferry runs between Tanah Merah and Desaru, and there are on-demand boat services between Changi Point and Pengerang, all in Johor. See the Singapore Get in section for details.
- **Thailand** — Four ferries travel daily (reduced to three during Ramadan) between Tammalang at Satun and Kuah on Langkawi, Malaysia. Vehicle ferries operate between Ban Taba near Tak Bai in Narathiwat province and Pengkalan Kubur in Kelantan, Malaysia, while passenger boats run between Ban Buketa in Narathiwat province and Bukit Bunga in Kelantan.

On foot

It is possible to enter Malaysia from Thailand on foot at Wang Kelian and Padang Besar (both in Perlis), Bukit Kayu Hitam (Kedah), Pengkalan Hulu (Perak) and Rantau Panjang (Kelantan). From Singapore, it is possible to cross into Malaysia on foot using the Causeway, but be prepared for a very long walk as Malaysian immigration is now located 2km inland from the border. Unlike the previous customs and

immigration complex, the current one was not set up to handle pedestrian traffic, meaning that there are no pedestrian footpaths on the Malaysian side, and you have to walk on the road among vehicular traffic to get to customs and immigration. Crossing the Second Link on foot is not allowed; not that there would be any practical way to continue your journey on either side even if you did.

Get around

Immigration controls are in place for travel between Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, as well as between the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Malaysian citizens need to present their ID cards, while foreign citizens are required to present their passports in order to travel.

By plane

Flying is the only practical option for traveling between Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo, as well as reaching some of the more remote outposts of Borneo. Largely thanks to budget carrier **AirAsia** (<http://www.airasia.com>), Malaysia is crisscrossed by a web of affordable flights with advertised promotional prices starting at RM9 for flights booked well in advance. State carrier **Malaysia Airlines** (<http://www.malaysiaairlines.com>) also has competitive fares which now include equally or even lower-priced tickets if booked in advance through the internet, with a few more frills. Their offshoot **Firefly** (<http://www.fireflyz.com.my>) operates a handy network of turboprop flights radiating out of Penang and Kuala Lumpur's second airport Subang (Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah).

In Sabah and Sarawak, **MASWings** (<http://www.maswings.com.my>), operates turboprop services linking interior communities, including those in the Kelabit Highlands, with coastal cities.

By train

State operator **Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad (KTMB)** (<http://www.ktmb.com.my>) provides relatively inexpensive and generally reliable services around Peninsular Malaysia (but not Sabah/Sarawak in Borneo). The main western line connects Butterworth, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru, while the eastern line runs through Gua Musang and the Taman Negara to Kota Bharu, near the Thai border and the Perhentian Islands.

The pride of KTMB's fleet is the **ETS** (Electric Train Service) from the Thai border Padang Besar to Gemas, with a branch line to Butterworth (with transfers to/from George Town by ferry) from Bukit Mertajam, running modern air-conditioned trains daily at 140 km/h. There is no longer ETS service from Padang Besar to Butterworth; the route is served by **KTM Komuter** trains instead, which while also electrified are designed for commuter rather than long-distance travel. The rest of the network, though, is mostly single-track, with slow diesel locos and all too frequent breakdowns and delays. In May, 2016 KTMB ceased all sleeper trains on the western line, following the electrification of the track to Gemas. An air conditioned 2nd class only, diesel shuttle train now connects the section from Gemas to JB Sentral. Electrification and double tracking of the Gemas to Johor Bahru section is expected to be completed by 2025.



Inside a passenger car of the Sabah State Railway

The **Jungle Railway** is the apt description for the eastern line between Tumpat (close to the Thai border) and Gemas, including stops at Gua Musang, Kuala Lipis, Jerantut (for Taman Negara) and Wakaf Bahru (for Kota Bharu and the Perhentian Islands). The original "Jungle Train" is the slow daytime service which stops at every station (every 15-20min or so). It's 3rd class only, meaning no air-con and no reservations, and some stops may be lengthy as it's a single line and all other trains have priority - hence the "Jungle Train" waits in side loops along the way so that oncoming or overtaking trains can pass. Some find it to be a fascinating and stunningly scenic ride; others feel there's not much to see when you're in the jungle. The eastern line also has one night express train (for which reservations are possible and recommended) going in each direction. In addition to air-con seats, these trains have **Superior Night** (ADNS) sleeper cars, which have upper and lower berths along each side, each bunk having a solid partition at each end and a side curtain for privacy. The carriages shake and rattle quite a bit but are comfortable and clean. These trains have windows for both top and bottom bunks, unlike on Thai sleeper trains.

A third line, known as the **East Coast Rail Link** (<https://www.mrl.com.my/en/>) is under construction between Port Klang and Kota Bharu, with plans for it to pass through Kuantan and Kuala Terengganu along the way. It is scheduled to be completed in 2027.

Tickets can be booked and even printed online at KTMB's site. Enquiries and reservations can be made by phone at KTMB's call centres, ☎ [+60 3 2267-1200](tel:+60322671200) (Malaysia) or, ☎ [+65 6222-5165](tel:+6562225165) (Singapore).

In East Malaysia, the only railway line is run by **Jabatan Kereta Api Negeri Sabah** (JKNS) (<https://railway.sabah.gov.my/>) (Web-site in Malay only), running from Tanjung Aru near Kota Kinabalu to the town of Tenom.

Malaysia's sole luxury train is the **Eastern & Oriental Express** (<https://www.belmond.com/trains/asia/eastern-and-oriental-express/>), which travels from Singapore to Bangkok, with stops in Kuala Lumpur and Butterworth.

By car

Main article: [Driving in Malaysia](#)

Malaysia has an excellent highway network with over 2,000 km (1,200 mi) of expressways, culminating in the **North-South Expressway** (*Lebuhraya Utara-Selatan*) along the West Coast from Johor Bahru at the border with Singapore all the way to Bukit Kayu Hitam in Kedah at the border with Thailand. There is also the **East Coast Expressway** (*Lebuhraya Pantai Timur*), crossing Peninsular Malaysia coast-to-coast from Kuala Lumpur to Kuantan before heading up north towards Kuala Terengganu. Petrol is slightly cheaper than market prices at RM1.90/litre (Ron 95) (in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak). Tolls are payable on expressways, but these are priced at varying degrees, ranging from expensive to reasonable: driving the length of the country 734 km (456 mi) from the Thai border to Singapore costs RM108. While you can drive from Singapore to Thailand within a day on the West Coast, the highway system is considerably less developed on the East Coast, and even less so in Sabah and Sarawak, so be sure to factor in additional travel time if travelling in those areas. Toll prices for highways and causeways inside major cities, especially Kuala Lumpur, are priced exorbitantly, ranging from RM4 to RM7 for each exit.

For those thinking of using GPS (Garmin, Papago, Galactio and Mio-Polnav), the Malaysia maps can be downloaded for free from <http://www.malfreemaps.com/index.php> Garmin user lucky enough to have another choice from <http://www.malsingmaps.com/portal/>. Both party maps is contributed by the amazing non-profit group of people who share a common passion to make a GPS maps of Malaysia.

While driving quality and habits in Malaysia are better than in most of the rest of Southeast Asia, they are not necessarily great, especially compared to what visitors from most Western countries are used to at home. Traffic in Malaysia drives on the left, a legacy left by the British. Beware reckless motorcyclists, especially at night, and especially if you are a pedestrian: locals typically disregard a red light for left turns, putting pedestrians at risk. As a motorist, at traffic lights, motorcyclists will accumulate in front of you — let them drive away first to avoid accidents.

Care is needed when driving in larger cities, such as Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru and George Town. Problems include apparently suicidal motorcyclists, congested traffic lanes throughout the day, and bewildering roads especially in the older parts of the city where planning was virtually nonexistent by the then British colonial occupiers. Out of town, however, cars and motorcycles are the best and sometimes the only way to explore the country. Some of the more rural areas have motorcycles and scooters to rent for as little as RM25/day, a great way to explore the local area or larger islands like Langkawi. As expected, most rental agencies will require a valid driving licence to be presented upon rental. Fuel levels are often compared before and after rental, and the vehicle is also checked for damage, so ensure everything is documented, and request a refund of any excess fuel if possible. The bigger car rental companies like Hertz and Avis may also require you to have a valid credit card where a deposit will be authorised but not deducted from (unless there is damage to the car).

By taxi

Taxis are available in all cities and larger towns, although in smaller places you may have to call one (ask any shopkeeper or consult the yellow-pages). You will generally need to negotiate the fare in advance, although prepaid coupon taxis are usually available at airports. RM5 should suffice for a short cross-town trip, while RM100 is enough to hire a taxi for a full day.

Many taxis will refuse to use the meter, even though there is an official rate. Most taxis now have a sticker on the rear door informing tourists that haggling is prohibited. Taxi drivers, sensing that you are a tourist, may drive around and take a very long route to reach your destination.

If you need a taxi late at night, it is best to use the dial-a-taxi service as there have been incidents in which taxis flagged down during those hours have been fake/unregistered. An unregistered taxi driver might rob or assault you with the help of other assailants. You are also more likely to get a metered taxi



A map of Malaysia's expressways (all are in Peninsular Malaysia; none are in Sabah or Sarawak), with dotted lines indicating proposed ones that have yet to be built



Taxi in Penang

by flagging one at a street than at a taxi stand.

It is advisable to study maps and compare fares on the internet before visiting the country. Knowing distances between places is helpful when negotiating with taxi drivers. They won't try to fool even a foreigner who demonstrates clearly that he knows the distance from point A to point B is 50 km and not 150 km.



Taxis in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

Do not accept the first rates for inter-city travels by car offered by hotels, as these could be as much as double normal prices. In this case, negotiate with a taxi driver directly for a better and fair price (for example, a hotel near Balok Beach, not very far from Kuantan, asked 800 RM for a ride to Johor Bahru, while a negotiated price with a taxi driver who could be found in downtown Kuantan came down to a normal 400 RM). But for all this you need to know the exact distance and if possible even the exact itinerary between your departure and arrival point.

In Kuala Lumpur, the budget taxis are usually coloured Red and White (City taxi – these taxis are not allowed to travel out of the city e.g. to another state) or Yellow. Taxis are usually small saloons such as Proton Wira and run on NGV (Natural Gas). The Blue taxis are larger saloons or MPVs (Multi Purpose Vehicles) and more luxurious. These cost typically 25–30% more than the budget taxis & are normally available at taxi stands all over Kuala Lumpur including the major malls & hotels.

The Red & White taxis can be hailed off the roads and are metered. Ensure that the taxi driver is a Malaysian (all drivers must have a taxi permit & license with their photo on it) before you board, as unscrupulous taxi owners have been known to rent their taxi out to unlicensed stand-ins. All legal taxi drivers must be Malaysian citizens or permanent residents as the Malaysian government does not issue work visas to foreigners to drive taxis.

Additionally, beware of unlicensed taxis (*taxi sapu*) at the airports. They can literally take you for a ride. There will be touts at the airports offering travellers their taxi service, even pretending to be legitimate. As unbelievable as it may sound, some have been known to rob first time visitors hundreds of ringgit for a single trip into the city, charging 100 times more than the correct fare. At the airports **always** get your taxi from the authorised operators' booths set up in the airport itself & **never** from anyone that solicits directly. They will always claim to be legitimate but are rarely licensed and may be unsafe. The taxi operator booths can provide you with receipts. Another tip is to book your taxis in advance. All good hotels' concierge will be able to assist you with this. If travelling in an unlicensed taxi you may not be covered by your travel insurance should that taxi be involved in a mishap.

By ride-hailing

The most popular ride hailing app is **Grab** (<https://www.grab.com/my/transport/>), which took over Uber's former Southeast Asian operations. You can pay with your card (via the Grab app) or cash; most drivers have change.

By bus

Report Bad Drivers

The cheapest way to travel in Malaysia is by bus. All towns of any size have a bus terminal offering connections to other parts of the country. There are many companies of varying degrees of dependability, but two of the largest and more reliable are **Transnasional** (<https://www.transnasional.com.my/>) and **NICE/Plusliner** (<http://www.plusliner.com.my/>). 24-seater "luxury" buses are recommended for long-distance travel.

If travelling on holidays or even over the weekend, it is advisable to reserve your seats in advance. Many bus companies allow for you to book online directly through their website. However, some only allow online booking for individuals with Malaysian credit cards, which is not really convenient for international visitors. Luckily, most bus operators have banded together into two booking portals and are particularly handy if you have specific destinations but are not sure which bus company to use. Both allow payment with any credit card and require a nominal fee for their service (usually RM1-2).

- **Bus Online Ticket** (<https://www.busonlineticket.com/>), ☎ +603 2027 4626, sales@busonlineticket.com (mailto: sales@busonlineticket.com). (updated May 2019)
- **catchthatbus.com** (<http://www.catchthatbus.com>) ([catchthatbus.com](http://www.catchthatbus.com)), ☎ +603 9212 1818 (MY), sales@catchthatbus.com (mailto: sales@catchthatbus.com).
- **redbus** (<http://www.redbus.sg>) ([redbus](http://www.redbus.sg)), ☎ +65-31582888, support@redbus.sg (mailto: support@redbus.sg).
- **Easybook** (<http://www.easybook.com>) ([Easibook](http://www.easybook.com)), ☎ +60 4 332 7718, enquiry@easybook.com (mailto: enquiry@easybook.com). (updated Mar 2015)

Air conditioning on some buses can be extremely cold so don't forget to bring a good sweater, pants and socks, especially for overnight journeys on luxury buses!

See

Malaysia is a fascinating country with many faces. It's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, and its attractions vary from the iconic Petronas Towers in bustling **Kuala Lumpur** to perfect sandy beaches lined with palm trees and dense jungles with orangutangs and tigers.

There are various impressive **national parks**. Expeditions range from those where you hardly lose sight of the hotel to those where you are fully immersed in the jungle for weeks, with only the guide and yourself. To spot a tiger or wild elephant in its natural habitat you might have to spend more than a few days in the wild, but you'll have no trouble seeing smaller wildlife. **Bako National Park** is the oldest national park in Malaysia and one of the best places to see proboscis monkeys. The vast jungles of **Taman Negara** have become a popular destination for ecotourists, just like the remote but gorgeous

Bus drivers (especially on more "rural" routes) sometimes drive carelessly, speed like maniacs, overtake on blind corners, etc. The vast majority of journeys are problem-free. However, some horrific accidents attributed to reckless driving have led to a crackdown and a nationwide hotline, and an SMS number for reporting these drivers/vehicles has been set up. This number is conveniently pasted on the back of every single large vehicle in the country.



Public bus in Penang



Gunung Mulu National Park, a World Heritage Site famous for its limestone karst formations, stone pinnacles and huge caves. To escape from the muggy tropics, do as the English did and head up to the cool tea plantations of the **Cameron Highlands**, the quaint Tudor-style village on **Fraser's Hill** or climb **Mount Kinabalu** in Sabah.

For many people, Malaysia brings pictures of pristine beaches with great diving opportunities to mind - and for good reason. **Sipadan** off the coast of Sabah, and the beautiful **Perhentian Islands** are among the best (and most popular) places. Coastlines in the less industrialized parts of the country, in general, are well worth driving through for their natural beauty and relaxing seaside kampung (villages). Follow the crowds to the postcard perfect sands of the **Langkawi** Islands, where you can have a cocktail on the beach and stay in one of the many resorts.

If you're most interested in taking the pulse of a city, don't miss **Kuala Lumpur**'s crazy quilt ultra-modern skyline, including the famous Petronas Twin Towers. **George Town**, the capital city of Penang, is known for its great food, colonial architecture, and relatively long-standing and institutionalized Chinese, Peranakan and Indian communities, who share the city with ethnic Malays, Thais and Eurasians. **Ipoh** is a good choice if you enjoy a somewhat slower paced city that features elegant colonial-era buildings from about 100 years ago, and **Malacca** is for those who want to trace the colonial and imperial history of Malaysia several hundred years further back. For a completely different experience, head to **Kota Bharu** to discover a unique conservative Islamic regional culture influenced by Thailand, only a few kilometres away, or visit the diverse cities of East Malaysia, like **Kuching** and **Kota Kinabalu**. Especially when travelling with children, consider visiting one of the country's excellent zoos, such as **Taiping Zoo**, **Kuala Lumpur's Zoo Negara**, **Johor Zoo** and **Malacca's Zoo**.

Do

Malaysia has excellent **scuba diving**. The most popular spots are the islands off the East Coast of peninsular Malaysia (Perhentian, Redang, Tioman and many more), although the dive season is limited to April to September. However, the most famous dive site — often ranked among the best in the world — is Sipadan, off the easternmost tip of Malaysian Borneo. There are many other less well known sites, like Layang Layang.

Whitewater Rafting

You can find tame Grade I to incredibly difficult and dangerous Grade V rapids in Malaysia's many national parks:

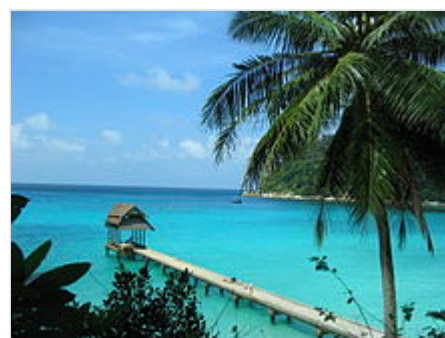
- Jeram Besu - Grade I-III - **Pahang**



Wat Chaiyamangkalaram in **George Town**, **Penang**



Tea plantations in the **Cameron Highlands**, **Pahang**



A beach on **Perhentian Islands**, **Terengganu**.

- Telom River - Grade V - Pahang
- Kuala Perahu - Pahang
- Lipis River - Pahang
- Anak Jelai River - Grade I-II - Pahang
- Tembeling River - Grade I-II - Pahang
- Sedim River - Grade III-IV - Kedah
- Sungai Selangor - Grade I-III - Selangor
- Kiulu River - Grade II - Sabah
- Padas River - Grade III-IV - Sabah
- Sungai Itek (Kampar River) - Grade I-III - Perak
- Sungkai River - Grade I-II - Perak
- Singoh River - Grade V - Perak
- Endau River - Johor
- Nenggiri River - Grade I-III Kelantan
- Kuala Kubu Bahru, Selangor



A first glance at Sipadan's colourful underwater life



Martial arts

Malaysia is home to a uniquely Malay style of martial arts known as **silat**. Silat tournaments are held between different schools in the country, and the Southeast Asian Games is the premier international tournament in silat, with competitors from the neighbouring countries as well. There is also an equally traditional stylised dance version of silat called *silat gayung*, which is quite worth seeing if you have the chance.

In addition, there are also many kung fu masters among the ethnic Chinese community, and Malaysia is consistently one of the top performers in international wushu competitions.



A silat match taking place.



Music

Malaysia is home to a uniquely Malay form of singing called *dikir barat*. Dikir barat is typically sung by a choir, though there may also be solo parts, and is also either sung *a capella*, or accompanied only by percussion instruments. Dikir barat competitions are fairly popular among the Malay community, and are frequently broadcast on Malaysian national television.

Buy

Money

The Malaysian currency is the **Malaysian ringgit**, abbreviated as **RM** (ISO code: **MYR**). It is divided into 100 **sen** (cents). The ringgit used to be referred to as the dollar and you may see the '\$' symbol on older notes. Coins in Malaysia are issued in denominations of RM0.05 (silver),

Exchange rates for Malaysian ringgit

As of January 2024:

- US\$1 ≈ RM4.6

RM0.10 (silver), RM0.20 (silver or gold), and RM0.50 (silver or gold). Banknotes in Malaysia are issued in denominations of RM1 (blue), RM5 (green), RM10 (red), RM20 (orange), RM50 (green/blue) and RM100 (purple). 5 sen coins are mainly given as change in large establishments or supermarkets whereas peddlers and street vendors might be reluctant to accept them. The Singapore and Brunei dollars are also known as *ringgit* in Malay, so when near border areas you might want to check to be sure which currency they are quoting the price in.

Foreign currencies are *not* generally accepted as is. The major exception is Singapore dollars, which may be accepted in Johor Bahru, but at a steep penalty. They're also accepted by KTMB and toll roads, but at an incredibly unfavorable 1:1 exchange rate, an anomaly dating back to the 1970s when the ringgit was interchangeable with the Singapore dollar.

- €1 ≈ RM5.1
- UK£1 ≈ RM5.9
- AU\$1 ≈ RM3.1
- Japanese ¥100 ≈ RM3.3
- Chinese ¥1 ≈ RM0.65
- SG\$1 ≈ RM3.5
- Thai ฿10 ≈ RM1.3
- Indonesian Rp10,000 ≈ RM3.0

Exchange rates fluctuate. Current rates for these and other currencies are available from [XE.com \(https://www.xe.com/currency/myr-malaysian-ringgit\)](https://www.xe.com/currency/myr-malaysian-ringgit)

Currency exchange counters can easily found in major shopping areas and have a better exchange rate than in banks and airports. Be sure to say the amount you wish to exchange and ask for the 'best quote' as rates displayed on the board are often negotiable, especially for larger amounts. Large foreign banknotes, such as €500, are almost impossible to change for a good rate in some areas, especially in Sabah or Sarawak, where the banks offer a much lower rate comparing to the one you'd get if changing a banknote of smaller amount. Some money exchangers in Kota Kinabalu or Kuching even may refuse your business if you have large foreign banknotes, so the best option is to bring smaller notes unless you are willing to shop around.

Banking

ATMs are widely available in cities, but do stock up on cash if heading out into the smaller islands or the jungle. **Credit cards** can be used in most shops, restaurants and hotels, although **skimming** can be a problem in dodgier outlets. For credit card usage, make sure your credit/debit card is chip based as most merchants no longer accept **magnetic strips** based cards.

Banks in Malaysia do handle international transactions. These ranges from a nominal fee if you are an account holder to a slightly more expensive amount if you are only walking in to use a certain service. International bank HSBC has a presence in Malaysia, with the latter having branches throughout the country. Local banking giants are Maybank, RHB, Hong Leong Bank, Public Bank & CIMB Bank, & they are a very good alternative to the earlier mentioned banks, especially in terms of pricing, local knowledge & presence as well as international services available e.g. money transfers. For any enquiries and transactions, get a number, sit down and wait for your turn to be served. (There is no need to queue while you wait in air-conditioned comfort!)

Banks are open Monday-Friday from 09:30-16:00 and selected banks are open Saturday 09:30–11:30 except on the first and third Saturdays of each month. In the states of Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu, they are open Sunday to Thursday 09:30–16:00.

Due to fraud risk, many Malaysian ATMs do not allow you to withdraw using foreign debit cards. If your card is rejected, try another ATM. If you call your bank or credit company, they are often not aware of what happened because the transaction is declined by the Malaysia bank. Make sure to bring cash or other forms of money in case your debit card is rejected.

Costs

Most Western visitors will find Malaysia quite cheap, although it is noticeably more expensive than neighbouring Indonesia. You can live in hostel dorms and feast on hawker food for less than RM50 per day, but you'll wish to double this for comfort, particularly if travelling in more expensive East Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur is also generally more expensive than the rest of the country. At the other end of the spectrum, luxury hotels and air fares are also quite affordable, with even the fanciest 5-star hotels costing less than RM400/night.

Tipping

Tipping is not customary in Malaysia. A service charge of 10% is included in total bill in most air conditioned restaurants, but otherwise, you are not expected to pay anything more than what is stated in the bill. Most expensive restaurants, bars and hotels may indicate prices in the form of RM19++ ("plus plus"), meaning that sales tax (6%) and service charge (10%) will be added to the bill. Hotel tax of 5% may also be added to this.



Bukit Bintang, a popular shopping area in Kuala Lumpur

Shopping

Kuala Lumpur is a shopping mecca for clothes, electronics, watches and computer goods, with very competitive prices by any standard. Local Malaysian brands include Royal Selangor pewter (thanks to KL's tin-mining heritage), British India and Eilanto. Traditional Malaysian fabrics (*batik*) are a popular souvenir. The cheapest place to easily buy ethnic souvenirs (especially wood-based) is in Kuching, East Malaysia, and the most expensive place is in the major, posh Kuala Lumpur shopping centres.

In general shops are open 10:30–21:30/22:00 in the large cities. They open and close for business earlier in the smaller towns and rural areas. Some shops may also be closed on certain days, such as in Malacca where many shops and restaurants close on Tuesday.

If you buy too much while shopping in Malaysia (which is quite easy to do), surface postage rates are very reasonable. Excess luggage at the airport is still high but not as high as in many other countries. Check first with your airline.

Eat

Main article: Cuisine of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei

The crossroads of Malay, Chinese and Indian cuisine, Malaysia is an excellent place to eat (*makan* in Malay). Look out for regional specialities and Nyonya (Peranakan) cuisine, the fusion between Malay and Chinese cooking. There is even unique Eurasian cooking to be found in the Portuguese Settlement in

Malacca, the heartland of the Portuguese Eurasian community.

Malaysians are very proud of their cooking and most towns or even villages have their own delicious specialities such as Penang char kway teow, Kajang satay, Ipoh bean sprout chicken, Sarawak laksa, Kelantanese nasi dagang and Sabahan hinava. Most eateries rely on word of mouth for advertising and are frequently located in the most inconvenient, out-of-the-way places, so you might want to try asking the locals for their personal recommendations.

If you intend to travel around Malaysia trying out the local food, don't be fooled by the names. Sometimes two entirely different dishes from different parts of the country can be known by the same name. For example, *laksa* refers to completely different noodle dishes in Penang and Sarawak.

Generally, you can eat pretty much anywhere in Malaysia. Food outlets are comparatively clean – the only thing you might avoid when you frequent the street or hawker stalls is ice for your drinks, since the blocks of ice used there might not be up to your hygienic standards. In actual restaurants this is not a problem. Also you might want to avoid ordering water from hawker stalls or the *mamak* restaurants as you may be served unboiled tap water.

Cheaper places often do not display prices; most will charge tourists honestly, but check prices before ordering to make sure.

Eating habits run the gamut, but most foods are eaten by **fork and spoon**: push and cut with the fork in the left hand, and eat with the spoon in the right.

As eating is a favourite 'pastime' of Malaysians, the majority are adept at using chopsticks, regardless of background. Noodles and Chinese dishes typically come with these, while Malay and Indian food is traditionally eaten by hand, though a fork and spoon are often used to eat Malay and Indian food in restaurants and can be requested if not provided.

If eating by hand, **always use only your right hand** to handle the food, as Malays and Indians traditionally use their left hand to handle dirty things. When eating with chopsticks at Chinese restaurants, take note of the usual etiquette and most importantly, *do not* stick your chopsticks vertically into a bowl of rice. This is reminiscent of incense sticks burning at the temple and has connotations of wishing death on those around you. If eating in a group, serving dishes are always shared, but you'll get your own bowl of rice and soup.

Where to eat

The cheapest places to eat are **hawker stalls** and **coffeeshops**, known as *kedai kopi* in Malay or *kopitiam* in Hokkien. These shops sell, besides coffee, many other types of food and drinks. Particularly popular and tasty are **mamak** stalls, run by Indian Muslims and serving up localized Indian fare like *roti canai*.



Nasi lemak coconut rice with sotong pedas (spicy squid), sambal chili paste, boiled egg, slices of cucumber, ikan bilis fried anchovies and peanuts served at a restaurant in Penang

Most hawker stalls stay open till late and some even operate on shifts so you can find the same stall offering different food at different points throughout the day. You can also do take away from any stall: just ask for *bungkus* (Malay) or *ta pao* (Cantonese). A hawker meal will rarely cost you over RM5. Hygiene standards in Malaysia, while not up to those of neighbouring Singapore or Western countries, are still reasonable and much better than, say, China or most of the rest of Southeast Asia. Just be observant, and generally speaking, if a stall is patronised by locals, it should be safe to eat there.



The interior of a kedai kopi near the railway station in Beaufort, Sabah

One step up on the scale is the **kedai makanan** or the more Western-style **restoran**. A type to look out for is the *nasi kandar* restaurant (also known as *nasi campur* or *nasi padang*), with a vast range of curries and toppings to ladle on top of your rice.

Seafood restaurants (*makanan laut*) are comparatively pricey but still an excellent value by most standards; do check prices before ordering though. Local prawns are gigantic, Chinese-style steamed fish is a treat and crab served with sticky chilli sauce is particularly popular.

Last but not least, some less adventurous options. **Food courts** in shopping malls are a good way to sample local delicacies in air-conditioned comfort, paying only a small premium over hawker prices. And yes, you can also find McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut and the usual suspects plus imitators throughout Malaysia.

Dietary restrictions

Being a Muslim-majority country, finding **halal** food in Malaysia is easy, but most Chinese stalls and restaurants, as well as those serving some indigenous ethnic groups of East Malaysia such as the Iban and Kadazan, are *not* halal. Ask if in doubt. Meals at Malay restaurants and Western fast food restaurants like McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut are halal. Restaurants at major hotels are not certified 'Halal' as they serve alcohol as well, but with the exception of Chinese restaurants, they generally don't serve pork. Local Muslims will eat at Western, Chinese and Indian eateries if there is a halal sign on the walls. Most of the restaurants tend to display their halal certification or halal sign on their places. Halal certification is awarded and enforced by a government agency, usually JAKIM.



A vegetarian restaurant in Johor Bahru, Johor

There are *no* **kosher** establishments in Malaysia, so kosher-observant Jewish visitors will have to bring their own food with them and supplement it with fresh fruit. Kosher grocery stores and restaurants can be found in neighbouring Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam, so you might want to stop in one of those countries to stock up before entering Malaysia.

Vegetarianism is well-understood by the Chinese and Indian communities (not so by the Muslim Malays and other indigenous minorities) and many restaurants or hawker stalls will be able to come up with something on request (DO state "no meat, no fish, no seafood – ASK for vegetables and/or eggs ONLY"),

but don't rely entirely on menu descriptions: innocuous-seeming dishes like "fried vegetables" etc. will often contain pork bits in non-halal Chinese restaurants, shrimp paste (*belacan*, commonly used in Malay and spicy Chinese dishes), fish sauce, etc. Indian restaurants usually have very good vegetarian selections – the *roti* (Indian flat bread – any kind; including roti canai, roti naan, capati, tosai) are good choices, and DO insist on being given *dhal* (lentil-based curry dip) lest you'll be given a fish curry dip. Purely vegetarian Chinese restaurants (often serving remarkable "mock meat" products made from tofu, gluten etc.) are quite easy to find in big urban areas with a large ethnic Chinese population. Getting vegetarian food in rural areas, especially those near fishing villages or in Muslim/Malay-dominated regions, may be more difficult, but learning some basic Malay vocabulary will go a long way to help you get your message across – see the [Malay phrasebook](#). Upmarket Western restaurants, such as those serving Italian cuisine, will normally have some good vegetarian options.

Veganism is rarely understood in this part of the world and is largely mistaken as a synonym for vegetarianism. The safest bet for a vegan is to patronize a Chinese Buddhist vegetarian restaurant (most Chinese vegetarian restaurants are essentially vegan and operate on Buddhist principles of non-killing and compassion, and thus they abstain from using dairy products, eggs, and the 5 fetid vegetables [onions, garlic, leeks, etc.] discouraged in Mahayana Buddhism). And if you're still feeling uneasy or unsure, do not hesitate to ask.

Drink

Malaysians like both coffee (*kopi*) and tea (*teh*), especially the national drink *teh tarik* ("pulled tea"), made by the *Mamak* (Indian Muslim) community, and named after the theatrical 'pulling' motion used to pour it. By default, both will be served hot, sweet and with a dose of condensed milk; request *teh o* to skip the milk, *teh ais* for iced milky tea, or *teh o ais* for iced milkless tea. Drinking with no sugar at all is considered odd, but asking for *kurang manis* (less sugar) will ease the pain. However, if you really want no sugar at all, you can try asking for "teh kosong."



A tea house in [Melaka](#). 

Malaysia produces its own tea, but little of it is exported except to neighbouring Singapore due to high domestic demand, so be sure to try some locally-grown tea when you are here. BOH, with its plantations in [Cameron Highlands](#), is Malaysia's largest tea brand.

Another peculiar local favourite is the kopi tongkat ali ginseng, a mixture of coffee, a local aphrodisiacal root, and ginseng served with condensed milk that's touted as an alternative to viagra and red bull combined and is usually advertised with a picture of a bed broken in half.

Other popular nonalcoholic options include the chocolate drink Milo and lime juice (*limau*). Freshly made fruit juices are also widely available, as well as a wide range of canned drinks (some familiar to many foreigners, some less so).

There is also a local drink comprised of white soya milk and black grass jelly (*cincau*) called *soya cincau*. It can be ordered at most hawker centres and local roadside cafes (*kedai kopi/kopitiam*).

Alcohol

Although Malaysia has a Muslim majority, alcohol is available at licensed outlets for non-Muslims. However, some states (notably Kelantan and Terengganu) ban the sale of alcohol. With the exception of tax-free islands (Labuan, Langkawi, Tioman) and duty free shops (for example in Johor Bahru), prices are comparatively high, with a can of beer costing RM7.50 or more even in supermarkets or 7-Eleven stores. However, in East Malaysia, smuggled liquors are widely available. The legal drinking age in Malaysia is 21.



Tuak is widely consumed during Gawai Dayak festival and Christmas Day. ☐

In East Malaysia, particularly Sarawak, *tuak* is a common affair for any celebration or festivals such as Gawai Dayak and Christmas Day. *Tuak* is made from fermented rice to which sugar, honey or other various condiments are sometimes added. It is normally served lukewarm without ice. Visitors can choose from 'strong' flavour of tuak (which is normally fermented for years), or 'mild' flavour (which is sometimes prepared only a week or even a day before). In Sabah, cheap liquors are very widely available at most supermarkets and mini markets in the state. Other alcoholic drinks such as beer and whisky are also widely available. On the other hand, *tuak* in Kelantan also can be considered as a liquor since that it contains a trace amount of fermented *nipah* or sap juice. The alcohol content in Kelantan *tuak* can easily reach 50% after 3 days from the time it was extracted.

Tapai consists of cassava (less often, rice) that is fermented and eaten as a food (though the liquid in the bottom can also be drunk). As it is commonly eaten during Hari Raya Puasa, the major Muslim holiday celebrating the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, it is interesting that Islamic legal authorities associated with the Islamist opposition Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) have given Muslims a special dispensation from laws against consuming alcohol, in the case of *tapai*.



Cassava tapai is shown in plastic bags in the foreground ☐

Water safety

There are differences of opinion on the safety of Malaysian tap water. See [#Stay healthy](#).

Sleep

Malaysia has ample affordable accommodations in all of its cities and towns, with full range from budget until luxury ones. Service charges and taxes are not yet part of the advertised price so be sure to add 16% to the listed price. Hotels and hostels are required to charge a **tourism tax** on international visitors: RM10 per room per night, which may not be included in the advertised rates.

Budget

Budget hotels and youth hostels are available in most cities and around most tourist destinations. As with most budget accommodations, some are more reliable than others. Be cautious when selecting budget accommodation to avoid places that house illegal vice activities.

Larger cities will have YMCAs that are safe bets. Another noticeable budget hotel chain is Tune Hotels, (<http://www.tunehotels.com>) an affiliate of the budget airline, Air Asia. They are expanding and have hotels at numerous locations throughout the country

Mid-range

Mid-range hotels are readily available just about anywhere. Prices of 3–4 star hotels are upwards from RM100 and are generally reliable in terms of quality.

Splurge

Malaysia is home to some of the most affordable 5-star hotels, service apartments, and resorts in the world. They are found in larger cities like Kuala Lumpur, George Town, Johor Bahru, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching and also in some coastal towns and areas. Also, almost all islands have upscale resorts and spas for the wealthy traveller.

Learn

Malaysia's universities are generally well-regarded and draw exchange students from near and far. Among Malaysia's universities, the undisputed most prestigious one is the **University of Malaya** (<http://www.um.edu.my>) (UM), located in Kuala Lumpur. In addition, several foreign universities have established campuses in Malaysia.

Work

Obtaining a working visa takes some effort. The easiest way to work in Malaysia is probably to work for an overseas company and get posted to Malaysia. The Malaysian Immigration Department website (<http://www.imi.gov.my/>) has basic advice. In order to obtain a work permit, you need to have an offer from your future employer who will have to do the paperwork for you. It's very expensive and comes with many restrictions if a company wants to hire a foreigner and as such next to impossible. As stated above, a feasible way is to get transferred. Finding a job is otherwise unlikely unless you are married to a local and even then it remains difficult.

Working days in Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah are from Sunday to Thursday, with Fridays and Saturdays being weekend holidays, similar to most Middle Eastern countries in alignment with Friday prayers of Muslims. The other states observe the normal weekend in the rest of the world. Johor adopts the Friday-Saturday weekend, though businesses may still stick to the normal week cycle to accommodate with Singaporean practices.

Stay safe

Though the crime rate is higher than in neighbouring Singapore, Malaysia is generally a safe country for visitors. Crimes towards tourists are usually restricted to bag-snatching, pickpocketing and petty theft. It is important to keep a close eye on valuable items. Theft is more common in crowded places, such as

markets and on public transport. Generally, if you avoid deserted areas, get back to your hotel before midnight and use your common sense, you're unlikely to be assaulted. Homosexuality is a crime and gay bars may be raided by police; gay and lesbian tourists should be self-aware and careful.

Emergency numbers

Central emergency number
999

Crime



Note: Malaysia treats **drug offences** severely. With limited exceptions, the **death penalty** is possible for those convicted of trafficking, manufacturing, importing or exporting more than 15 g of heroin, 30 g of morphine, 30 g of cocaine, 500 g of cannabis, 200 g of cannabis resin and 1.2 kg of opium, and possession of these quantities is all that is needed for you to be convicted. If the death penalty is not imposed, lengthy imprisonment and mandatory whipping is still expected. Even if a person suspected of drug trafficking is acquitted, Malaysian authorities can still detain that person without any charges for 2 years.

Unauthorised consumption can result in up to 10 years' jail, or a heavy fine, or both. You can be charged for unauthorised consumption as long as traces of illicit drugs are found in your system, even if you can prove that they were consumed outside the country and you can be charged for trafficking as long as drugs are found in bags that are in your possession or in your room, even if they aren't yours and regardless of whether you're aware of them - therefore be vigilant of your possessions.

There have been some reports of pickpockets and snatch-and-run thieves in some of the major cities like Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya and Johor Bahru. As a general precaution, never carry your bags on the side facing the road and always walk facing the oncoming traffic. Additionally, walk a few feet deeper away from the roads. Women travellers should take extra precautions at night.

Johor Bahru is known for having a relatively higher crime rate compared to the rest of Malaysia, and armed robberies and snatch thefts could happen at night in run-down areas of the city. Travel documents and valuables are best deposited in a hotel safe.

In Malaysia, some crimes are punished with caning, known locally as whipping. Being convicted of rape, vandalism, illegal entry, bribery, overstaying your visa, and certain other crimes could get you caned. **This is no slap on the wrist!** Strokes from the thick rattan cane are *very painful*, will take some time to heal and probably leave you with a permanent scar.

Credit card fraud is a growing problem in this country, especially if you order in an on-line store during your stay. Use credit cards only in reputable shops. If you are not sure about the reputation of a certain shop or service, there are several services available that can help to identify fraud and scams such as Trustedcompany.com (<http://trustedcompany.com>) for any online service they want to use.

Corruption

While not as bad as the likes of Thailand, Vietnam or Indonesia, corruption remains a significant issue in Malaysia. Traffic police have been known to pull over motorists to demand bribes of RM100-200; this tends to happen somewhat more often to those driving Singapore-registered cars (recognisable by the licence plates). Nevertheless, there have been some crackdowns on this, and bribery is punishable by up to 20 years in jail. Anyone who tries to bribe public officials may be arrested on the spot and placed in a lock-up overnight to be charged for the offence in the morning. If this happens on a Friday or on eve of public holidays, you will find yourself spending a few nights in the lock-up as the courts are only open Monday to Friday. Do not let this dissuade you from requesting help — generally Malaysian police are helpful to tourists.

Customs and immigration officers are comparatively cleaner than other Southeast Asian countries, though there have been isolated cases where tourists are demanded bribes from immigration officials, even at major airports and border crossings like Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Do check your passport before driving off when entering by land from the Singapore border though, as immigration officers have been known to "forget" to stamp people in, and you will be subject to fines of several thousand ringgit for illegal entry when you try to leave Malaysia if your passport was not stamped on entry.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (<https://www.sprm.gov.my>) (MACC, Malay *Suruhanjaya Pencegahan Rasuah Malaysia/SPRM*) is responsible for investigating corruption throughout the country. A list of MACC branches can be found here (https://www.sprm.gov.my/index.php?id=21&page_id=75&articleid=430).

Traffic safety

Drink-driving is a serious offense and breathalyzer tests by the police are common.

When on foot, be careful when crossing the street. Vehicles will often ignore pedestrian (zebra) crossings. In addition, reports of road rage during accidents are still common, so if you are involved in an accident be very careful when negotiating or dial 999 for help.

Other

Public demonstrations are uncommon in Malaysia due to police crackdowns. Should one occur it may be dealt with in a heavy-handed manner, so **avoid them at all costs**.

It is generally not allowed for non-Muslims or non-Sunnis to proselytize. In particular, attempting to persuade Muslims to convert out of their religion is illegal, and if you are caught doing this, you will be expelled from the country or even face criminal responsibilities.

Natural disasters

Peninsular Malaysia is largely free from earthquakes as there are no nearby faultlines, though tremors can occasionally be felt in the upper storeys of tall buildings when a major quake occurs in neighbouring Indonesia. East Malaysia, on the other hand, especially the area around Mount Kinabalu, does experience occasional earthquakes (such as the fatal one occurring in 2015). Typhoons are also exceedingly rare, though one hit the southern part of Johor in 2001. However, the Nov-Jan monsoon season often results in

flooding due to torrential rains, and landslides are known to occur, most notably on the East Coast. Tsunamis are a rare occurrence, though Penang and a few islands on the north of the West Coast were hit by the infamous tsunami in 2004.

Stay healthy

There are differences of opinion about whether and to what degree **tap water** is safe to drink. It is treated and monitored, but the condition of the pipes is not always reliable. Therefore, you may want to boil or filter it first just to be on the safe side, as many locals do. You can also buy bottled water, which is very inexpensive.

Ice in drinks might be made from tap water, but nowadays, most restaurants and even roadside stalls use the cylindrical variety with a hollow tube down the middle that are mass-produced at ice factories and are safer to consume.

Heat exhaustion is rare, but do consume lots of fluids, use a hat and sunscreen and shower often!

Peninsular Malaysia is largely malaria-free, but there is a significant risk in Borneo especially in inland and rural areas. Dengue fever occurs throughout Malaysia in both urban and rural areas, and can be avoided only by preventing mosquito bites. The mosquito that transmits dengue feeds throughout the daytime, and is most active at dawn and dusk. If you experience a sudden fever with aches and lethargy, seek medical attention immediately. Aspirin and ibuprofen should not be used until dengue fever has been ruled out. Mosquito repellents (*ubat nyamuk*) are widely available. Be careful with mosquito coils, which can easily start fires: set them on a plate or other non-flammable surface and extinguish them before going to sleep.

Haze from burning vegetation in neighbouring Indonesia may come and go without warning from the months of May to August so travellers with respiratory ailments should come prepared.

Most public washrooms charge a small fee (generally between RM0.20-RM2.00, usually depending on the standard of the facilities), so keep some loose change to hand. If the condition of the sitting toilets is questionable, use the squatting toilets instead - both are usually available, and some believe that the latter are more hygienic and (if you can get used to them) are just as easy to use as sitting toilets.

Healthcare

The standard of healthcare in Malaysia is generally high, and Malaysia is rapidly emerging as a popular destination for medical tourism, with treatment costs in general far cheaper than in neighbouring Singapore and Western countries. Almost all Malaysian doctors are able to speak English fluently, while most other medical staff are able to converse in at least basic English.

Malaysia has a public and private health care system. Health services are adequate in large cities, with English-speaking doctors. Some staff have been trained abroad. In the private sector in particular, the medical staff is often made up of well-trained professionals. Outside urban areas, access to health services and



Public hospital in Kuantan,
Pahang



the quality of care vary. Government healthcare facilities are cheap but good, though they tend to be understaffed and consequently, waiting times are long. Due to the shorter waiting times and sometimes hotel-like levels of comfort, most expatriates and visitors prefer to seek out private medical care.

Dental services are readily available and prices are often lower than in western countries. However, root canal treatment is considerably more expensive than in western countries, as it is only performed by dental surgeons and not by ordinary dentists.

Mental health services are available at least in the capital. In the rest of the country, they may not be available very much.

Pharmacies can be found in larger shopping centres and painkillers are available in almost every shop. Prescription medicines may not be available from pharmacies at any time, but only when a pharmacist is present. He or she may be there for part of the day, usually on weekdays. When visiting a doctor, medicines are often available directly from the doctor's surgery or from the hospital pharmacy.

When travelling to Malaysia, you should take out comprehensive travel insurance. Doctors and hospitals usually require payment in advance, especially for foreigners. Credit cards are accepted almost everywhere. Keep all receipts and certificates you receive. You can apply for reimbursement afterwards from your insurance company.

Services in the private sector are more expensive than in the public sector. You should check the details on the spot. Be vigilant when using private medical services. Doctors may prescribe expensive treatments, tests and medicines that are unnecessary. This is especially true for tourists. Malaysia's largest private healthcare groups are **Parkway Pantai** (<https://www.parkwaypantai.com>), which operates the well-known Gleaneagles and Pantai hospital chains, and **KPJ Healthcare** (<http://www.kpjhealth.com.my>). Private medical costs can be high and having travel insurance is a very good idea.

Public hospitals and most private hospitals offer 24-hour on-call medical services. In some Malaysian tourist resorts, you can ask for a doctor at the hotel reception. Pressure chamber treatment is available in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kuantan, Lumut, Ipoh, Sabah and Labuan.

There is limited availability of rental equipment at hospitals. In most cases, assistive devices have to be purchased.

Respect

When entering a home or a place of worship, always take off your shoes (this is often required at hostels too). Also, never eat with your left hand or give a gift with your left hand, and never point with your forefinger (you may use a closed fist with the thumb instead). Do not point with your feet or touch a person's head either.

What's in a name?

- Malaysian **Malay** names are usually given name + *bin* or *binti* (son/daughter) + father's name. *Mohammed bin Abdullah* would usually be called Mohammed by his friends, and Mr. Mohammed for business. Sometimes, the person's given name appears after the Mohammed or Abdul (example: *Mohammed Faizal bin Abdul Nasser*) so, in such a

Swastikas are commonly seen in Hindu and Buddhist temples, and are regarded as a religious symbol by these communities. They emphatically do **not** represent Nazism or anti-Semitism.

Politics

As in many countries, it is best not to criticise the government or the Malaysian royal families as a visitor. You may hear Malaysians criticise their own government, but you do not need to take sides; just listen and feel free to talk about your feelings about your own government. The **bumiputera** policy (laws granting ethnic Malays special rights not granted to the other races) is a very polarising and sensitive issue, and best avoided as a conversation topic with Malays. Anti-Semitism is strong within the ethnic Malay and Muslim communities; Malaysia is one of several countries that do not recognize Israel, and Malaysian Muslims are ardent in their support for Palestine. However, these feelings are not necessarily extended to individual Jewish people, and violence against Jewish visitors is not likely.

Dress

It is advisable to dress respectfully, particularly in rural areas (wearing trousers or a long skirt, not shorts and covering your shoulders is recommended but not essential). In more cosmopolitan cities such as Kuala Lumpur, George Town, Malacca and Ipoh, as well as East Malaysian states (Sabah and Sarawak) attitudes are more liberal. Women are not legally required to wear the hijab, known locally as the *tudung*, except when entering mosques, where it is required for both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Sexuality

As a predominantly Muslim country, Malaysia tends to be conservative about sexuality. Public showing of affection in the more diverse, larger cities is tolerated but might invite unnecessary attention from the public. In more rural areas and in very conservative states like Kelantan and Terengganu on the East Coast of the Peninsula it is frowned upon and is best avoided. **Don't kiss your partner in public**; you'll inflame local sensibilities.

Big cities like Kuala Lumpur have a fairly active gay scene and gay bashing is rarely heard of. However, same-sex relationships are a taboo subject and "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" is punished by up to 20 years jail and whipping (men only) under colonial era laws not usually enforced against consenting adult heterosexuals. Different states may also impose **consecutive** sharia law punishments of up to 3 years and six lashes against Muslims of all genders.

case, he would usually be addressed as Mr. Faizal.

- **Chinese** place their family name first, so *Tan Ah Heng* is Mr Tan for business and Ah Heng to his friends. Many have Western names, so he may also be known as *John Tan*.
- **Indian** names are complex, but the south Indian (Tamil) names usually found in Malaysia have two patterns: either given name + *a/l* or *a/p* (*anak lelaki* (son of)/*anak perempuan* (daughter of)) + father's name, or father's initial + given name. Given names are often long and may be abbreviated, so *Thirumurugan a/l Govindasamy* may just be addressed as Thiru by his friends and Mr Thiru for business.
- **Other ethnic minorities**, such as the Iban and Kadazan have their own naming conventions.

The foolproof method, therefore, is to ask how the person would like to be addressed.

Cope

Electricity

Malaysian sockets are designed for the 3-pin rectangular-pronged British plug. Electricity is delivered at 240 V, 50 Hz.

Newspapers

Malaysia's main Malay newspapers are *Berita Harian* (<http://www.bharian.com.my>) and *Utusan Malaysia* (<http://www.utusan.com.my>). There are also numerous Chinese newspapers, the most popular ones being the *China Press* (<http://www.chinapress.com.my>) (中國報), *Nanyang Siang Pau* (<http://www.enanyang.my>) (南洋商報) and *Sin Chew Daily* (<http://www.sinchew.com.my>) (星洲日報), as well as several Tamil newspapers.

Malaysia's English-language paper of record is the *New Straits Times* (<https://www.nst.com.my>), a splinter from the Singaporean Straits Times, which is available at most hotels and newsstands. *The Star* (<https://www.thestar.com.my>) and *Free Malaysia Today* (<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/>), an English-Malay bilingual online newspaper, are also available.

Connect

Internet

Connecting to the internet in Malaysia is easily accessible in most cities and towns. It was one of the first countries in the world to offer 4G connectivity. Broadband Internet is available in most hotels, internet cafes, and some restaurants. Wi-Fi is usually available in hot spots in almost all restaurants and fast-food outlets and shopping malls. Prepaid internet cards are also available to access wireless broadband, in some cafes.

Customers usually pay RM1-5 per hour for internet services in cybercafes (depending on which city you're in). Internet connections offered in restaurants and cafes are usually free, and more and more food outlets are offering this. These include all Starbucks and Coffeebean, some McDonald's and Subway, and an increasing number of smaller places.

SIM cards

There are a lot of providers, which usually offer good coverage. The easiest SIM to get is U-mobile, from 10 RM (Feb 2024), with ok-ish coverage and a package of "unlimited" internet for 35 RM/month (Feb 2024). SIMs are available in every 7-11 and in some other places. If you travel to Singapore or other

neighboring countries, you can buy a 14-day "unlimited" package for 35 RM (Feb 2024), which works in all of them including Malaysia. Other providers have better coverage but don't offer worthwhile roaming options.

Telephone numbers

The country code for Malaysia is +60.

To call a Malaysian number from abroad

- **from overseas except Singapore** dial the international access code, the country code for Malaysia, the area or mobile operator code without the "0", and then the phone number (for 123-4567 in Kuala Lumpur, in Wikivoyage written as +60 3 123-4567, dial +60 3 123 45467);
- **from Singapore**, dial 02, the code with the "0", and then the phone number (02 03 123 45467).



Phone booths in Sabah

To domestically call a Malaysian number,

- from a mobile phone or a landline phone **outside the local area**, dial the area or mobile operator code, including the leading "0", followed by the phone number (03 123 4567),
- from **within the local area** just dial the phone number without any code; **from mobile phones**, you can always include the area or operator code, although it is unnecessary between phones with the same operator (where you are is immaterial with mobile phones).

To call a foreign number not in Singapore from Malaysia, use the international dialling prefix **00** (on mobile phones: "+"). For Singapore, instead use the pseudo area code 02 and leave out the international prefix and country code.

On the Maxis network, take advantage of 50% IDD rates on international calls via IDD132. This doesn't require any registration: just dial "132" prior to the "00" (don't use "+").

Malaysia also has four **mobile telephone** service providers, Maxis (<http://www.maxis.com.my>), DiGi (<http://www.digi.com.my>), Celcom (<http://www.celcom.com.my>), and U Mobile (<http://www.u.com.my>) which utilise codes **012, 013, 014, 016, 017, 018, 019**, used like area codes. Network connection in Malaysia is excellent. Mobile number portability has been implemented, meaning a code like 012 that traditionally belonged to Maxis, can now be a DiGi subscriber. Mobile networks utilize the GSM 900 and 1800 systems. 3G (WCDMA), EDGE and HSPDA networks are available in larger towns. International roaming onto these networks is possible if your operator allows it. **Prepaid SIM cards** for sale at airports are pretty affordable; a one-week SIM card with a good amount of data might cost about RM20-30 (2019). See also SIM cards above.

Malaysian **landline telephone numbers** have either seven or eight digits. The country is divided into areas which have been assigned two- or three-digit area codes, which have to be dialled when calling from outside the area (or from a mobile phone). The area codes are:

- **03** — Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Selangor (all are Klang Valley), Pahang (Genting Highlands only)
- **04** — Kedah, Penang, Perlis

- **05** — Perak, Pahang (Cameron Highlands only)
- **06** — Malacca, Johor (Muar district only), Negeri Sembilan
- **07** — Johor (all districts except for Muar)
- **082** — Sarawak (Kuching and Samarahan districts)
- **083** — Sarawak (Sri Aman and Betong districts)
- **084** — Sarawak (Sarikei, Sibu and west Kapit districts)
- **085** — Sarawak (Miri and Limbang districts)
- **086** — Sarawak (Bintulu districts and Belaga)
- **087** — Sabah (Interior Division), Labuan
- **088** — Sabah (West Coast and Kudat Division)
- **089** — Sabah (Sandakan and Tawau Division)
- **09** — Kelantan, Pahang (all districts except Genting Highlands), Terengganu

Postal services

Postage stamps for postcards internationally is just 0,9 RM (as of February 2024)

Many international courier services, such as Fedex, DHL and UPS, are available in towns and cities, but the main postal service provider is Pos Malaysia (<http://www.pos.com.my>) which reliably provides postal services to most countries in the world.

Postage rates in Malaysia are cheap. Much cheaper than Thailand, Singapore or Vietnam, and surface post is available as well. The mail is reliable and trustworthy. When posting a parcel, do not seal the box. This is to allow for inspection in case illegal items are posted this way (ask for help at the post office if needed).

A local alternative to the international courier companies mentioned above is the Pos Laju, which provides just as reliable a service at a fraction of the cost!

Non-urgent letters and postcards can be dropped in postboxes inside post offices or red postboxes found outside post offices and along main roads. If there are two slots in a postbox use the one that says "lain lain" for international post.

Post offices are open M–Sa 08:00–17:00 except public holidays, although a few in Klang Valley stay open until 22:00. In the states of Kedah, Kelantan, Johor and Terengganu they are closed on Fridays and public holidays.



Post office in Arau, Perlis

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