Malaysia

HOME

Malaysia is a south-eastern Asian country. It consists of two parts, a peninsula and east Malaysia on Borneo. Tioman Island and the Perhentian Islands are on the peninsula, while the world-famous Sipadan is on Malaysian Borneo.  
The whole of Malaysia lies in the coral triangle. It has a wide biodiversity and includes the biggest fish of the world: the whale shark and manta ray.

Water temperatures are moderate, going from 25C/77F till 30C/86F. Malaysia has a tropical climate. It is affected by the monsoons that result in a dry season and a rainy season. Some diving areas will be limited or affected from November till May.

SIPADAN

Sipadan and Mabul are small islands in Malaysian Borneo. They are located on the east coast, in the Celebes Sea and are part of the coral triangle.

Sipadan is well known in dive midst and is listed as Top Dive Destination of the World. It has a wide biodiversity, still beautiful corals and deep drop-offs. Because of this fame, there are some restrictions so the beautiful fauna and flora can be protected longer.  
Everybody diving the island, needs to have a permit. Only 120 people are allowed per day. So, book in advance! Even so, on a one-week holiday, not all dives will be made around Sipadan. The most will be on the nearby Mabul. Prices are expensive even with the competition under dive centers.  
I have heard you aren’t allowed to bring cameras anymore as lots of people don’t care about anything anymore when taking pictures, but I don’t believe that. Check with your dive center.   
Of course, the no-gloves policy rule is implemented too.

One of the best dive sites are the Turtle Cavern and Turtle Tomb, the place where turtles go to die! That is what everyone is told but the truth is that the turtles die because they can’t find the way out anymore. So not only dead turtles, also lots of live ones (that hopefully will find the exit) are around.  
These dives are not easy ones as they are in a cave. You must have the acquired specialties and level to be able to go.

There is no sleeping possibility in Sipadan. All divers come from resorts on Mabul, 20 minutes by speedboat. This island has lesser big stuff, like turtles and sharks, but is more enjoyable for its muck diving. You’ll find frogfish, ghost pipe fish and maybe some cool octopuses like the blue-ringed.

A great dive site is the Seaventures Dive Rig, an old oil rig transformed into a dive resort. Not only can you spend the night on the rig and watch the beautiful sunset, you can also dive under the platform. On and around the pylons, there is a great number of little critters what makes this a very cool macro dive by day and by night!

You can dive Sipadan and Mabul the whole year round. Rainy season runs From October till May so the conditions can be a bit rougher. As Mabul is a muck dive area, be aware the visibility could be less too.

If you want to get to Mabul, you have to fly to Tawau from Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. Your dive resort will pick you up and bring you to the island.

PERHENTIAN

The Perhentian are islands on the northern east coast of Malaysia, just before the Thai Border. They consist of two main islands with some smaller ones around.  
As the islands are in the east, they are affected by the northeast monsoon. From November till March, the islands are as good as deserted. Almost all resorts or dive centers will be shut down. The best time for diving is from April till October, with a peak in July and August.

Water temperatures flux between 26C/79F and 30C/86F, with an average of 28C/82F. Currents are gentle so the dives are easy. Visibility goes from 10 meters/33 feet till 20 metres/66 feet.

Around the islands, you can spot the normal tropical reef fish, turtles and reef sharks. There are some tiny wrecks, like sugar wreck and two newly sunk police boats. If you go on a day trip to Redang Island, you’ll have some clearer waters.

There are two ways to get to the Perhentian. You can take the bus from Kuala Lumpur to Kuala Besut and then take the boat till the islands. Or you fly to Kota Bharu and take a taxi till the ferry in Kuala Besut.

TIOMAN

Tioman is the biggest island of the Mersing Marine Park, on the southeast coast of the Malaysian peninsula. It is close to Singapore so it gets lots of Singaporean divers and liveaboards as it is their nearest dive area.

The diving season in Tioman runs from February till November. Visibility is best in the beginning and the end of the season. It is also the best time to maybe spot some whale sharks and mantas. Visibility goes down during summer but it should still be around 10 meters/33 feet. Water temperatures range between 27C/80F and 30C/86F with an average of 29C/84F. Currents are gentle so Tioman is a good place to do your Open Water Diver.

Tioman is a big island with different kampungs (villages). Each village has some dive shops. Remember there is only one ATM near the airport so even though the dive centers take credit cards, you should bring enough cash. Every visitor needs to pay a marine park fee.

If you are not visiting on a liveaboard, you should get to Mersing and there take the ferry of the speedboat to the island. The boats have a vast schedule, leaving in the morning, coming back in the early afternoon. There are busses out of Kuala Lumpur and Singapore to Mersing that have a direct route.