

Malaysia Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Malaysia's accommodation possibilities range from rock-bottom flophouses to luxurious five-star resorts. Outside the peak holiday seasons (around major festivals such as Chinese New Year in January/February) big discounts are frequently available – it's always worth asking about special offers.

Budget places are those indicated with prices under RM70 per room; at such hotels and guesthouses don't expect much in the way of comfort, although most will offer a choice of rooms with or without air-conditioning and with or without attached bathrooms.

Midrange (in Kuala Lumpur, RM71 to RM300; elsewhere RM70 to RM200) hotels will offer pleasant extras such as swimming pools, nicely designed rooms, and facilities such as restaurants and business centres. Top-end hotels charge RM201 (in KL RM301) and above per room.

A 5% government tax applies to all hotel rooms. There's likely to be an additional 10% service charge in all top-end places for a total of 15% government tax – the exception is federally administered Labuan, where the total is 10%.

Top-end places often quote prices exclusive of tax and service charge – these charges are represented as ++ (called plus-plus), for example RM120++ for a double. Net means that tax and any service charges are included – these are the prices quoted in most budget (and some midrange) places. Tax and service charges are also applied to food, drinks and services in the more expensive hotels and restaurants. We quote net prices for all budget and midrange places.

For more information on accommodation options in Sabah, see p422.

Camping

Many of Malaysia's national parks have official camping grounds and will permit camping in nondesignated sites once you are deep in the jungle. There are also many lonely stretches of beach which are ideal for camping. Likewise, it is possible to camp on uninhabited bays on many of Malaysia's islands. A two-season tent with mosquito netting is ideal. A summer-weight sleeping bag is OK, but the best choice is a lightweight bag-liner, since even the nights are warm.

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

PRACTICALITIES

Electricity

- Connect to the reliable electricity supply (220V to 240V, 50 cycles) with a UK-type three-square-pin plug.

Newspapers

- Read the English-language newspapers the *New Straits Times*, the *Star* and the *Malay Mail*. In Malaysian Borneo you'll also find the *Borneo Post*, the *Eastern Times* and the *Sabah Times*.

Radio

- Listen to Radio Malaysia's three main radio stations: HITZ FM (92.9 FM; top 40), MIX FM (94.5 FM; adult contemporary) and Light & Easy FM (105.7 FM; easy listening). Frequencies given are for the KL area, and may differ in other parts of Malaysia. These stations are not available in Malaysian Borneo.

Television

- Watch Malaysia's two government TV channels, TV1 and TV2, three commercial stations, TV3, NTV7 and TV9 as well as a host of satellite channels.

Weights & Measures

- Use the metric system for weights and measures.

Homestays

Staying with a Malaysian family will give you a unique experience many times removed from the fast-paced and largely recognisable life of the cities and towns. It's worth enquiring with **Tourism Malaysia** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2693 5188; www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my; 17th fl, Putra World Trade Centre, 45 Jln Tun Ismail, Kuala Lumpur) and each of the state tourism bodies about the homestay programmes operating throughout the country in over 25 off-the-beaten-track *kampung* (villages). Also see p422.

Hostels & Guesthouses

At beach centres and in the main tourist cities you will find a variety of cheap hostels and guesthouses. These options may be huts on the beach, private homes or houses divided by partition walls into a number of rooms. Dormitory accommodation is usually available. Rooms are spartan, but this is the cheapest accommodation option around and often the nicest, with a real family atmosphere. These places often cater only to foreign travellers and offer their customers lots of little extras, such as free tea and coffee, bicycles and transport, to outdo the competition. You'll normally pay around RM6 to RM30 for a dorm bed or RM15 to RM70 for a hotel-style room with air-con.

Hotels

Standard rooms at top-end hotels are often called 'superior' in the local parlance. Most hotels have slightly more expensive 'deluxe' or 'club' rooms, which tend to be larger, have a better view and include extras such as breakfast or free internet access. Many also have suites.

At the low end of the price scale are the traditional Chinese-run hotels usually offering little more than simple rooms with a bed, a table and chair and a sink. The showers and toilets (which will sometimes be Asian squat-style) may be down the corridor. Note couples can sometimes economise by asking for a single, since in Chinese-hotel language 'single' means one double bed, and 'double' means two beds. Don't think of this as being tight; in Chinese hotels you can pack as many into one room as you wish.

The main catch with these hotels is that they can sometimes be terribly noisy. They're often on main streets, and the cheapest ones often have a serious design flaw – the flimsy walls rarely reach the ceiling. This is great for ventilation but terrible for acoustics and privacy.

Longhouses in Malaysian Borneo

These communal homes, the traditional dwellings of the indigenous peoples of Borneo, may contain up to 100 individual

family 'apartments' under one long roof. The most important area of a longhouse is the common veranda, which serves as a social area. These days there are two main types of longhouse: tourist longhouses and authentic longhouses. While a visit (or stay overnight) to a tourist longhouse is easy enough, it's unlikely to be of much interest. A visit to an authentic longhouse can be a magical experience, but is tricky to arrange and there's a very specific etiquette; see p374 for details.

Resthouses

Some of the old British-developed resthouses in Malaysia are still operating. These were set up during the colonial era to provide accommodation for travelling officials, and later provided comfortable shelter for all types of travellers. Many of the resthouses are still government owned but are privately operated. Some have been turned into modern midrange resorts, others retain old colonial décor. The average price for a room in a resthouse is between RM70 and RM100, and this usually includes air-con and attached bathroom.

ACTIVITIES

Despite that tropical heat, there are plenty of ways to work up even more of a sweat by being active in Malaysia.

Bird-Watching

Malaysia's tropical jungles and islands are home to a tremendous variety of bird species. On the peninsula, Fraser's Hill (p126), Taman Negara (p285), Kenong Rimba State Park (p295) and Endau-Rompin National Park (p260) all offer excellent bird-watching. In Malaysian Borneo, Mt Kinabalu (p439), Gunung Mulu (p409), Similajau National Park (p392) and Gunung Gading (p377) are similarly rich in bird species.

See p63 for a brief overview of the region's bird species.

Caving

Malaysia's limestone hills are riddled with caves (*gua*) to lure spelunkers. Some of these, such as the Batu Caves (p123), near KL, are easily accessible and can be visited with little special equipment or preparation, while others are strictly the terrain of the experienced caver. The most challenging

caves on the peninsula include Gua Charas (p279), Gua Musang (p331) and those in Taman Negara (p285). Malaysian Borneo has one of the world's premier caving destinations, Gunung Mulu National Park (p407). **Challenge Borneo** (☎ 012-882 1921; www.challengeborneo.com) is a reliable operator.

Cycling

Malaysia's excellent roads make it one of the best places in Southeast Asia for bike touring. Perhaps the most popular route is the one up the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, with its relatively quiet roads. However, if you're fit and energetic, you may prefer the hillier regions of the peninsula's interior or Malaysian Borneo.

Diving & Snorkelling

Reasonable prices, an excellent variety of dive sites and easy access make Malaysia a great diving choice for both first-timers and old hands. The main centres include Pulau Perhentian (p314), Pulau Redang (p310), Pulau Tioman (p268), the Seribuat Archipelago (p258) and Pulau Sipadan (p477).

Island-based boat dives are the most common, but a few areas, like Sabah's Pulau Sipadan, have some cracking sites right off the beach. Also available are live-aboard boats to get you to more remote spots. Most sites are over fairly shallow reefs, but there are also a couple of islands with deep drop-offs.

The standards of diving facilities in Malaysia are generally quite high and equipment rental is widely available. Most places offer instruction leading to Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) certification (which will then allow you to dive), and this certification is almost universally recognised. While it is possible simply to show up and dive at some of the larger dive centres like Pulau Tioman, it's a good idea to make arrangements in advance, if only to avoid waiting a day or two before starting.

Most dive centres charge around RM180 to RM250 for two dives, including equipment rental. PADI open-water courses average around RM1000. Many resorts and dive operators also offer all-inclusive dive packages, which vary widely in price.

RESPONSIBLE DIVING

Please consider the following tips when diving or snorkelling, and help preserve the ecology and beauty of the reefs:

- Do not use anchors on the reef, and take care not to ground boats on coral. Encourage dive operators and regulatory bodies to establish permanent moorings at popular dive sites.
- Avoid touching living marine organisms with your body, or dragging equipment across the reef. Polyps can be damaged by even the gentlest contact. Never stand on coral, even if it looks solid and robust. If you must hold onto the reef, touch only exposed rock or dead coral.
- Be conscious of your fins. Even without contact the surge from heavy fin strokes near the reef can damage delicate organisms. When treading water in shallow reef areas, take care not to kick up clouds of sand. Settling sand can easily smother the delicate organisms of the reef.
- Practise and maintain proper buoyancy control. Major damage can be done by divers descending too fast and colliding with the reef. Make sure you are correctly weighted and that your weight belt is positioned so that you stay horizontal. If you have not dived for a while, have a practice dive in a pool before taking to the reef. Be aware that buoyancy can change over the period of an extended trip: initially you may breathe harder and need more weight; a few days later you may breathe more easily and need less weight.
- Take great care in underwater caves. Spend as little time in them as possible as your air bubbles may be caught at the roof and thereby leave previously submerged organisms high and dry. Taking turns to inspect the interior of a small cave will lessen the chances of damaging contact.
- Resist the temptation to collect or buy coral or shells. Apart from the ecological damage, taking home marine souvenirs depletes the beauty of a site and spoils the enjoyment of others. The same goes for marine archaeological sites (mainly shipwrecks). Respect their integrity; some sites are even protected from looting by law.
- Ensure that you take home all your rubbish and any litter you may find. Plastics in particular are a serious threat to marine life. Turtles can mistake plastic for jellyfish and eat it.
- Resist the temptation to feed fish. You may disturb their normal eating habits, encourage aggressive behaviour or feed them food that is detrimental to their health.
- Minimise your disturbance of marine animals. In particular, do not ride on the backs of turtles as this causes them great anxiety.

The northeast monsoon brings strong winds and rain to the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia from early November to late February, during which time most dive centres simply shut down. Visibility improves after the monsoon, peaking in August and September. On the west coast conditions are reversed and the best diving is from September to March.

In Malaysian Borneo the monsoons are less pronounced and rain falls more evenly throughout the year. However, the same general seasons apply, with the best diving on the east coast from May to October and on the west from October to March.

For operators at Pulau Tioman see p268, at Pulau Perhentian see p314, at Kota Kinabalu see p427, at Semporna see p476 and at Miri see p400.

Golf

Welcome to the home of flood-lit golf – playing at night when it's cooler is a favourite pastime in Malaysia. KL offers over 40 courses in and around the city, including the **Royal Selangor Golf Course** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 9206 3333; www.rsgc.com.my; Jln Kelab Golf, off Jln Tun Razak; green fees from RM60); and there are world-class courses elsewhere on the peninsula – see p181 and p203. If you want to tee off in a cooler environment head to Fraser's Hill (p126) or the Cameron Highlands (p150). For more information contact the **Malaysian Golf Association** (☎ 03-9283 7300; www.mgaonline.com.my).

Jungle Trekking

Almost all of Malaysia's national parks offer excellent jungle trekking, including Taman Negara (p288) on the peninsula and

JUNGLE-TREKKING TIPS

Jungle trekking can be one of the true highlights of a trip to Malaysia. To the uninitiated, however, it can be something of a shock – like marching all day in a sauna with a heavy pack strapped to your back. The following guidelines will help to make the experience as painless as possible. See p620 for information on how to deal with leeches.

- On overnight trips, bring two sets of clothing: one for hiking and one to put on at the end of the day (keep your night kit in a plastic bag so that it stays dry). Within minutes of starting out, your hiking kit will be drenched and it will stay that way throughout your trip. If you'll be travelling through dense vegetation, wear long trousers and a long-sleeved shirt. Otherwise, shorts and a T-shirt will suffice. Whatever you wear, make sure that it's loose fitting.
- Drink plenty of water. If you're going long distances, you'll have to bring a water filter or, if you want to keep your carrying weight down, a water purification agent like iodine.
- Get in shape long before your trek and start slowly – try a day hike before setting out on a longer trek.
- Take a guide if you're setting off on a longer and/or lesser-travelled trek.
- Bring talcum powder to cope with the chafing caused by wet undergarments. Wearing loose underwear (or better yet, no underwear at all) will also help prevent chafing.
- If you wear glasses, be sure to treat them with an anti-fog solution (ask at the shop where you buy your glasses). Otherwise, you may find yourself blinded by steamed-up glasses soon after setting out.

Gunung Mulu National Park (p408) in Malaysian Borneo. There are treks to suit all levels of ability, from 20-minute jaunts to 10-day expeditions.

Kayaking & White-Water Rafting

Kayaking is offered by **Kuching Kayak** (☎ 082-253005; www.kuchingkayak.com; 269 Jln Padungan) in Kuching.

White-water rafting trips are offered by **Nomad Adventure** (☎ 03-8024 5152; www.nomadadventure.com) on Sungai Kampar, near Gopeng on the way north from KL to Ipoh. In Malaysian Borneo arrange white-water rafting trips with **Challenge Borneo** (☎ 012-882 1921; www.challengeborneo.com) in Kuching and **Riverbug** (☎ 088-260501; www.traversetours.com; Wisma Sabah, Jln Haji Saman, Kota Kinabalu).

Mountain Climbing

Mt Kinabalu (p437) is an obvious choice. However, this is not the only mountain worth climbing in Malaysia. Gunung Mulu (p409), in Sarawak's Gunung Mulu National Park, is a challenging four-day climb. On the peninsula, there are several good climbs in Taman Negara, including Gunung Tahan (p289), which stands at 2187m. There are also a few lesser peaks scattered around that make pleasant day outings. Keen mountain

climbers should try to pick up a copy of *Mountains of Malaysia – A Practical Guide and Manual* by John Briggs.

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are usually open from 8am to 4.15pm Monday to Friday. Most close for lunch from 12.45pm to 2pm, and on Friday the lunch break is from 12.15pm to 2.45pm for Friday prayers at the mosque.

Bank hours are generally 10am to 3pm on weekdays and 9.30am to 11.30am on Saturday.

Shop hours are variable, although a good rule of thumb for small shops is that they're open from 9am to 6pm from Monday to Saturday. Major department stores, shopping malls, Chinese-run emporiums and some large stores are open from around 10am until 9pm or 10pm, seven days a week.

Restaurants generally serve breakfast 7am to noon, although a Malaysian breakfast is something that you could just as well eat for lunch and most places serving such food will be open straight through from early morning to late night. Unless mentioned otherwise the restaurants listed are open daily for lunch (noon to 2.30pm) and dinner (6pm to 10.30pm).

Most of Malaysia follows this working week: Monday to Friday, with Saturday a half-day. But in the more Islamic-minded states of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu, government offices, banks and many shops are closed on Friday and on Saturday afternoon. These states have declared Friday the holiday, and their working week is from Saturday to Thursday, which is a half-day. However, federal government offices follow the same hours as the rest of the country.

CHILDREN Practicalities

Travelling with the kids in Malaysia is generally a breeze. For the most part, parents needn't be overly concerned, though it pays to lay down a few ground rules – such as regular hand-washing – to head off potential problems; see p622 for more on health issues. Children should especially be warned not to play with animals, as rabies occurs in Malaysia.

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan and others contains useful advice on how to cope with kids on the road and what to bring along to make things go more smoothly, with special attention paid to travelling in developing countries. Also useful for general advice is www.travelwithyourkids.com.

There are discounts for children for most attractions and for most transport. Many beach resorts have special family chalets. Chinese hotels can also work out a bargain as they charge by the room rather than the number of people. Cots, however, are not widely available in cheap accommodation. Public transport is comfortable and relatively well organised, although pushing a stroller around isn't likely to be easy given there are often no footpaths and kerbs are high.

Baby formula, baby food and nappies (diapers) are widely available. However, it makes sense to stock up on these items before heading to remote destinations or islands.

Sights & Activities

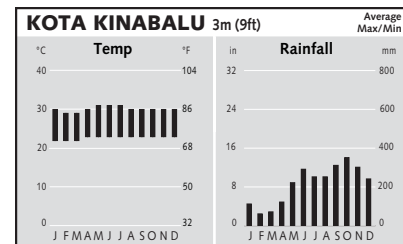
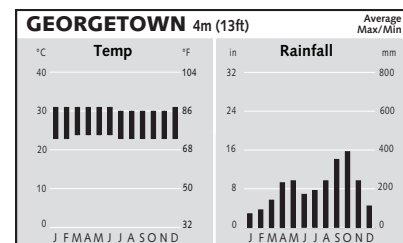
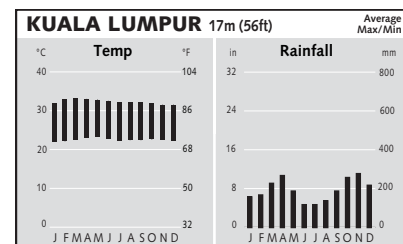
Some beach destinations suitable for families with younger children include Pulau Perhentian (p313), Pulau Kapas (p308) and Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park

(p434). Those with older children might enjoy some of the jungle parks of the country, including Taman Negara (p285) and, over in Sarawak, the Bako (p368) and Gunung Mulu (p405) National Parks. For more animal encounters also consider the Sepilok Orang-Utan Rehabilitation Centre (p467) in Sabah and the Kuala Gandah Elephant Conservation Centre (p296) in central Pahang.

For several ideas of how to entertain the kids in Kuala Lumpur see p98.

CLIMATE

The tropics can take some adjusting to. It's hot and humid year-round in Malaysia with temperatures rarely dropping below 20°C, even at night, and usually climbing to 30°C or more during the day. Take it easy when you first arrive and avoid running around in the heat of the mid-day sun.



Rain tends to arrive in brief torrential downpours, providing a welcome relief from the heat. At certain times of the year it may rain every day, but it rarely rains all day. Although the region is monsoonal, it's only the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia that has a real rainy season – elsewhere it's just a time of year when the average rainfall is higher than at other times of the year.

Throughout the region the humidity tends to hover around the 90% mark, but on the peninsula you can always escape from heat and humidity by retreating to the delightfully cool hill stations.

For current weather forecasts check the website of the **Malaysian Meteorological Department** (www.kj.gov.my/english/weather/weather.html).

For tips on the best times to visit, see p18.

COURSES

The best place to look for interesting courses is KL (p97) where you can learn many things – from a language to a traditional Chinese instrument. Elsewhere in Malaysia, travel to Balok Beach in Pahang to study batik (p279), and to Kota Bharu for cookery and batik courses (p324).

CUSTOMS

The following can be brought into Malaysia duty free: 1L of alcohol, 225g of tobacco (200 cigarettes or 50 cigars) and souvenirs and gifts not exceeding RM200 (RM500 when coming from Labuan or Langkawi). Cameras, portable radios, perfume, cosmetics and watches do not incur duty.

The list of prohibited items: counterfeit currency, weapons (including imitations), fireworks, drugs and 'obscene and prejudicial articles' (pornography, for example, and items that may be considered inflammatory, or disruptive to Malaysia's ethnic harmony).

Visitors can freely carry only RM1000 in and out of Malaysia; there's no limit on foreign currency. When you enter Malaysia, you must fill out a Currency Declaration Form on which you are required to declare both the amount of ringgit notes, if the figure exceeds RM1000, and any amount of foreign currency you are carrying. Keep this form in your passport as you must produce it when leaving Malaysia.

Drug trafficking in Malaysia carries the death penalty.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Operators mentioned in this book have been personally checked by the authors and should be reliable. However, you should always check terms and conditions carefully.

Animal Hazards

Rabies occurs in Malaysia, so any bite from an animal should be treated very seriously. Snakes are probably the thing you'll encounter most in the jungle; see p622 for details on how to deal with snake bites.

Scams

Like any big city Kuala Lumpur has its share of scams. Many of these involve card games or the purchase of large amounts of gold jewellery. Still others involve people who claim to have a relative studying abroad; these always start with the scammer asking you where you come from – the best answer is none at all.

For details of a scam at the Malaysia–Thailand border see p197.

Theft & Violence

Theft and violence are not particularly common in Malaysia and compared with Indonesia or Thailand it's extremely safe. Nevertheless, it pays to keep a close eye on your belongings, especially your travel documents (passport, travellers cheques etc), which should be kept with you at all times. Muggings do happen, particularly in KL and Penang, and physical attacks have been known to occur, particularly after hours and in the poorer, run-down areas of cities.

Credit-card fraud is a growing problem in Malaysia. Use your cards only at established businesses and guard your credit card numbers closely.

TRAVEL ADVISORIES

For latest travel advisories check the following websites:

Australia (www.smartraveller.gov.au)

Canada (www.voyage.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel/index.html)

UK (www.fco.gov.uk/travel)

USA (travel.state.gov/travel)

A small, sturdy padlock is well worth carrying, especially if you are going to be staying at any of the cheap chalets found on Malaysia's beaches, where flimsy padlocks are the norm.

DISCOUNT CARDS

A Hostelling International (HI) card is of limited use in Malaysia, as only KL, Melaka and Port Dickson have HI hostels, though the card can also be used to waive the small initial membership fee at some YMCAs and YWCAs. Bring it if you have one.

An international student identity card (ISIC) is worth bringing. Many student discounts, such as for train travel, are available only for Malaysian students, but some places do offer discounts for international students.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Malaysian Embassies & Consulates

For a full list of Malaysian embassies and consulates outside the country check out www.kln.gov.my/?page=mission.

Australia (☎ 02-6273 1543; 7 Perth Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Brunei (☎ 238 1095; 61 Simpang 336, Jln Kebangsaan BA 1211, Kg Sungai Akar, Bandar Seri Begawan BS8675)

Canada (☎ 613-241 5182; www.home.istar.ca/~mwaottawa; 60 Boteler St, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8Y7)

France (☎ 01 45 53 11 85; 2bis, rue Bénouville, Paris 75116)

Germany (☎ 030-885 7490; Klingelhoefer Strasse 6, D-10785 Berlin)

Indonesia (☎ 021-522 4947; Jln HR Rasuna Said Kav X/6, No 1-2 Kuningan, Jakarta Selatan, Jakarta)

Netherlands (☎ 070-350 6506; Rustenburgweg 2, 2517 KE, The Hague)

New Zealand (☎ 04-385 2439; 10 Washington Ave, Brooklyn, Wellington)

Thailand (☎ 679 2190; 33-35 South Sathorn Rd, Tungmahek, Bangkok 10120)

UK (☎ 020-7235 8033; 45-46 Belgrave Sq, London SW1X 8QT)

USA (☎ 202-572-9700; 3516 International Court NW, Washington DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Malaysia

The following countries are among the nations with diplomatic representation in Malaysia. Unless mentioned all are in Kuala Lumpur and are generally open 8am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

Australia (Map p100; ☎ 03-2146 5555; www.australia.org.my; 6 Jln Yap Kwan Seng)

Brunei (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2161 2800; Level 19, Menara Tan & Tan, 207 Jln Tun Razak)

Canada (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2718 3333; Level 17, Menara Tan & Tan, 207 Jln Tun Razak)

France (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2053 5500; 196 Jln Ampang)

Germany (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2142 9666; www.kuala-lumpur.diplo.de; Level 26, Menara Tan & Tan, 207 Jln Tun Razak)

Indonesia Georgetown (☎ 04-227 5141; 467 Jln Burma, Georgetown, Penang); Kota Kinabalu (Map p424; ☎ 088-219110; Jln Kemajuan; ☎ 8am-1pm, Mon-Fri); Kuala Lumpur (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2145 2011; 233 Jln Tun Razak); Kuching (☎ 082-241734; 111 Jln Tun Haji Openg, Kuching, Sarawak; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri); Tawau (☎ 089-772052; Jln Apas, Tawau, Sabah)

Ireland (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2161 2963; Ireland House, Amp Walk, 218 Jln Ampang)

Netherlands (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2168 6200; 7th fl, Amp Walk, 218 Jln Ampang)

New Zealand (Map p100; ☎ 03-2078 2533; Level 21, Menara IMC, 8 Jln Sultan Ismail)

Singapore (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2161 6277; 209 Jln Tun Razak)

Thailand Georgetown (☎ 04-226 8029; 1 Jln Tunku Abdul Rahman, Georgetown, Penang); Kota Bharu (☎ 09-744 0867; 4426 Jln Pengkalan Chepa, Kota Bharu, Kelantan); Kuala Lumpur (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2148 8222; 206 Jln Ampang)

UK (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2170 2200; www.britain.org.my; 185 Jln Ampang)

USA (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2168 5000; <http://malaysia.usembassy.gov>; 376 Jln Tun Razak)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

With so many cultures and religions, there's an amazing number of occasions to celebrate in Malaysia. Although some of them have a fixed date, the Hindus, Muslims and Chinese all follow a lunar calendar, so the dates for many events vary each year. Tourism Malaysia publishes a Calendar of Events pamphlet with specific dates and venues of various festivals and parades – state tourist offices have more detailed listings.

Apart from Ramadan (see p490) the other major Islamic event is Hari Raya Haji, marking the successful completion of the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). It's a two-day holiday in many of the peninsular states, and is marked by the consumption of large amounts of cakes and sweets. The major Chinese event of the year is Chinese New Year; the major Indian celebration is Deepavali.

RAMADAN & ASSOCIATED FESTIVALS

The major Islamic events each year are connected with Ramadan, the month during which Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset. Fifteen days before the start of Ramadan, on Nisfu Night, it is believed the souls of the dead visit their homes. During Ramadan Lailatul Qadar (Night of Grandeur), Muslims celebrate the arrival of the Quran on earth, before its revelation by Mohammed. A Quran-reading competition is held in KL (and extensively televised) during Ramadan.

Hari Raya Puasa marks the end of the month-long fast, with two days of joyful celebration. This is the major holiday of the Muslim calendar and it can be difficult to find accommodation in Malaysia, particularly on the east coast. During this time everyone wears new clothes, homes are cleaned and redecorated, and everyone seems to visit everyone else.

There are many other special events, ranging from fun runs, kite-flying and fishing competitions to the Malaysian Grand Prix – see the destination chapters for details of events specific to particular towns and cities.

January–February

Thai Pongal A Hindu harvest festival marking the beginning of the Hindu month of Thai, considered the luckiest month of the year. Celebrated by Tamils.

Chinese New Year Dragon dances and pedestrian parades mark the start of the new year. Families hold open house, unmarried relatives (especially children) receive *ang pow* (money in red packets), businesses traditionally clear their debts and everybody wishes you *kong hee fatt choy* (a happy and prosperous new year).

Birthday of the Jade Emperor Nine days after New Year, this Chinese festival honours Yu Huang, the supreme ruler of heaven, with offerings at temples.

Chap Goh Meh 15 days after Chinese New Year, the celebrations officially end.

Thaipusam One of the most dramatic Hindu festivals (now banned in India), in which devotees honour Lord Subramaniam with acts of amazing physical resilience – see p52.

March–April

Malaysian Grand Prix Formula One's big outing in Southeast Asia is held at the Sepang International Circuit in Selangor around March 20 – see p128.

Panguni Uttiram The marriage of Shiva to Shakti and of Lord Subramaniam to Theivani is celebrated on the full-moon day of the Tamil month of Panguni.

Birthday of the Goddess of Mercy Offerings are made to the very popular Kuan Yin at her temples across the region.

Cheng Ming On Cheng Ming, Chinese traditionally visit the tombs of their ancestors to make offerings and to tend, clean and repair the tombs.

Sri Rama Navami A nine-day festival held by those of the Brahmin caste to honour the Hindu hero of the Ramayana, Sri Rama.

Birthday of the Monkey God The birthday of T'se Tien Tai Seng Yeh is celebrated twice a year. Mediums pierce their cheeks and tongues with skewers and go into trances during which they write special charms in blood.

April–May

Songkran Festival A traditional Thai Buddhist New Year in which Buddha images are bathed.

Chithirai Vishu The start of the Hindu New Year.

Birthday of the Queen of Heaven Ma Cho Po, the queen of heaven and goddess of the sea, is honoured at her temples.

Wesak Day Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death are celebrated with various events, including the release of caged birds to symbolise the setting free of captive souls.

June

Gawai Dayak Annual Sarawak Dayak Festival on 1 and 2 June to mark the end of the rice season, with war dances, cockfights and blowpipe events.

Festa de San Pedro Christian celebration on 29 June in honour of the patron saint of the fishing community; notably celebrated by the Eurasian-Portuguese community of Melaka.

Birthday of the God of War Kuan Ti, who has the ability to avert war and to protect people during war, is honoured on his birthday.

Dragon Boat Festival Commemorates the death of a Chinese saint who drowned himself. In an attempt to save him, the local fishing community paddled out to sea, beating drums to scare away any fish that might attack him. To mark the anniversary, this festival is celebrated from June to August, with boat races in Penang and other places.

July–August

Birthday of Kuan Yin The goddess of mercy has another birthday!

Prophet Mohammed's Birthday Muslims pray and religious leaders recite verses from the Quran.

Sri Krishna Jayanti A 10-day Hindu festival celebrating popular events in Krishna's life is highlighted on day eight with celebrations of his birthday. The Laxmi Narayan Temple in KL is a particular focus.

Rainforest World Music Festival Held annually either in July or August for three days at the Sarawak Cultural Village (p371), this wonderful music and arts festival features musicians from around the world and highlights indigenous music from Borneo.

August–September

Festival of the Seven Sisters Chinese girls pray to the weaving maid for good husbands.

Festival of the Hungry Ghosts The souls of the dead are released for one day of feasting and entertainment on earth. Chinese operas and other events are laid on for them and food is put out. The ghosts eat the spirit of the food, but thoughtfully leave the substance for mortal celebrants. Mainly in Penang.

National Day (Hari Kebangsaan) Malaysia celebrates its independence on 31 August with events all over the country, but particularly in KL where there are parades and a variety of performances in the Lake Gardens.

Vinayagar Chaturthi During the Tamil month of Avani (around August and September), prayers are offered to Vinayagar, another name for the popular elephant-headed god Ganesha.

Moon Cake Festival The overthrow of the Mongol warlords in ancient China is celebrated by eating moon cakes and lighting colourful paper lanterns. Moon cakes are filled with bean paste, lotus seeds and sometimes a duck egg-yolk.

September–October

Navarathri In the Tamil month of Purattasi, the Hindu festival of 'Nine Nights' is dedicated to the wives of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. Young girls are dressed as the goddess Kali.

Festival of the Nine Emperor Gods Nine days of Chinese operas, processions and other events honour the nine emperor gods. Fire-walking ceremonies are held on the evening of the ninth day at the Kau Ong Yah Temples in KL and Penang.

Puja Ketek Offerings are brought to Buddhist shrines (*ketek*) in the state of Kelantan during this festival in October. Traditional dances are often performed.

October–November

Thimithi (Fire-Walking Ceremony) Hindu devotees prove their faith by walking across glowing coals at temples in Melaka.

Kantha Sashti Subramaniam, a great fighter against the forces of evil, is honoured during the Hindu month of Aipasi.

Deepavali Later in the month of Aipasi, Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana is celebrated with the Festival of Lights, when tiny oil lamps are lit outside the homes of Hindu people, as it's believed that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, will not enter an unlit home. For business people,

this is the time to start a new financial year, and for the family a predawn oil bath, new clothes and lots of sweets is the order of the day.

Birthday of Kuan Yin This popular goddess of mercy gets to celebrate her birthday for the third time in the year.

Kartikai Deepam Huge bonfires are lit to commemorate Shiva's appearance as a pillar of fire following an argument with Vishnu and Brahma. The Thandayuthapani Temple in Muar is a major site for this festival.

Guru Nanak's Birthday The birthday of Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion, is celebrated on 22 November.

December

Winter Solstice Festival A Chinese festival to offer thanks for a good harvest.

FOOD

The region's food and drink offerings are simply terrific, with unbeatable variety, high quality and pleasantly low costs. For a complete description, see p70.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Being a predominantly Muslim country, the level of gay tolerance in Malaysia is vastly different from its neighbours, Thailand and Singapore. It's illegal for men of any age to have sex with other men. In addition, the Islamic syariah laws (which apply only to Muslims) forbid sodomy and cross-dressing. Fortunately, outright persecution of gays and lesbians is rare (Anwar Ibrahim's trumped-up case being the most high-profile recent example; see p43).

Nonetheless, gay and lesbian travellers should avoid behaviour that attracts unwanted attention. Malaysians are quite conservative about displays of public affection; women, and straight Indian men, can get away with same-sex hand holding, but an overtly gay couple doing the same would attract attention. It is highly unlikely, however, that you will encounter vocal or aggressive homophobia.

Given all this, you may be surprised to hear there's actually a fairly active and visible gay scene in KL; see p112. The lesbian scene is less obvious but, naturally, exists for those willing to seek it out. Start looking for information on www.utopia-asia.com or www.fridae.com, both of which provide good coverage of gay and lesbian events and activities across Asia, even if some of their listings are rather dated.

The **PT Foundation** (www.ptfmalaysia.org) is a voluntary nonprofit organisation providing HIV/AIDS and sexuality education, care and support programmes for marginalised communities in Malaysia.

HOLIDAYS

In addition to national public holidays, each state has its own holidays, usually associated with the sultan's birthday or a Muslim celebration. Muslim holidays move forward 10 or 11 days each year. Hindu and Chinese holiday dates also vary, but fall roughly within the same months each year.

Public Holidays

JANUARY–FEBRUARY

New Year's Day 1 January (except in Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu)

Thaipusam Variable (in Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Penang and Selangor only)

Federal Territory Day 1 February (in KL, Labuan and Putrajaya only)

Sultan of Kedah's Birthday 7 February (in Kedah only)

Chinese New Year Variable, two days in late January/early February (one day only in Kelantan and Terengganu)

MARCH

Hari Raya Haji Variable, February/March

Sultan of Selangor's Birthday Second Saturday of March (in Selangor only)

Anniversary of Installation of Sultan of Terengganu 21 March (in Terengganu only)

Muslim New Year Variable

Sultan of Kelantan's Birthday 30 and 31 March (in Kelantan only)

APRIL

Sultan of Johor's Birthday 8 April (in Johor only)

Good Friday Variable (in Sarawak and Sabah only)

Melaka Historical City Day 15 April (in Melaka only)

Sultan of Perak's Birthday 19 April (in Perak only)

Sultan of Terengganu's Birthday 29 April (in Terengganu only)

MAY

Labour Day 1 May

Raja of Perlis' Birthday Variable, April/May (in Perlis only)

Wesak Day Variable

Harvest Festival Variable (in Sabah and Labuan only)

JUNE

Yang di-Pertuan Agong's (King's) Birthday First Saturday in June

Dayak Festival 1 and 2 June (in Sarawak only)
Prophet's Birthday Variable

JULY

Governor of Penang's Birthday Second Saturday in July (in Penang only)

Governor of Negeri Sembilan's Birthday 19 July (in Negeri Sembilan only)

AUGUST

Malaysia's National Day (Hari Kebangsaan) 31 August

SEPTEMBER

Malaysia Day 16 September (in Sabah only)

OCTOBER–NOVEMBER

Governor of Melaka's Birthday Second Saturday in October (in Melaka only)

Sultan of Pahang's Birthday 24 October (in Pahang only)

Israk Mikraj (Ascension of the Prophet) Variable (in Kedah and Negeri Sembilan only)

Deepavali Variable (no holiday in Sarawak and Labuan)

Awal Ramadan (Beginning of Ramadan) Variable (in Johor and Melaka only)

DECEMBER

Nuzul Al-Quran Variable (in Kelantan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Selangor and Terengganu)

Hari Raya Puasa Variable

Christmas Day 25 December

School Holidays

Schools in Malaysia break for holidays five times a year. The actual dates vary from state to state but are generally in January (one week), March (two weeks), May (three weeks), August (one week) and October (four weeks).

INSURANCE

It's always a good idea to take out travel insurance. Check the small print to see if the policy covers potentially dangerous sporting activities such as diving or trekking, and make sure that it adequately covers your valuables. Health-wise, you may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than your having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure that you keep all documentation. Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home.

A few credit cards offer limited, sometimes full, travel insurance to the holder.

For information on health insurance see p613 and for car insurance see p507.

INTERNET ACCESS

Whether you want to hook up your own computer or just send an email home to family or friends, you should have no technical fears in Malaysia. KL is as wired a city as they come with ubiquitous hot spots for wi-fi connections (often free; see www.wi-fi hotspotlist.com/browse/intl/2000032/for a list) and cheap internet cafés typically charging RM3 per hour for broadband access. Even in the more remote reaches of the peninsula and Malaysian Borneo the internet has spread its tentacles – you'll have to be deep in the jungle to be off line.

Digital warriors should equip themselves with a three-pronged, square-pin plug (as used in the UK) or adaptor for their computer. If your computer is not wi-fi enabled, check whether the internal or card modem is enabled to work outside your home country – not all are.

If you intend to rely on cybercafés, you'll need to carry three pieces of information with you to enable you to access your internet mail account: your incoming (POP or IMAP) mail server name, your account name and your password. Your Internet Service Provider (ISP) or network supervisor will be able to give you these.

Among the internet providers in Malaysia are **Jaring** (www.jaring.my) and **Telekom Malaysia** (www.telekom.com.my).

LEGAL MATTERS

In any dealings with the local police forces it will pay to be deferential. You're most likely to come into contact with them either through reporting a crime (some of the big cities in Malaysia have tourist police stations for this purpose) or while driving. Minor misdemeanours may be overlooked,

but don't count on it and be careful about offering anyone a bribe – Malaysia is not that sort of country.

Drug trafficking carries a mandatory death penalty. A number of foreigners have been executed in Malaysia, some of them for possession of amazingly small quantities of heroin. Even possession of tiny amounts can bring down a lengthy jail sentence and a beating with the *rotan* (cane). Just don't do it.

MAPS

The most useful and up-to-date maps of Malaysia are produced by **Periplus** (www.periplus.com); they have maps covering Malaysia, Peninsular Malaysia and KL. Tourism Malaysia's free *The Map of Malaysia* has useful distance charts, facts about the country and inset maps of many major cities.

For accurate maps of rural areas contact the **National Survey & Mapping Department** (Map pp84-5; Ibu Pejabat Ukur & Pemetaan Malaysia; ☎ 03-2617 0800; Jln Semarak, Kuala Lumpur; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri).

MONEY

See the Quick Reference page on the inside front cover for currency exchange rates.

ATMs & Credit Cards

MasterCard and Visa are the most widely accepted brands. Banks will accept credit cards for over-the-counter cash advances, or you can make ATM withdrawals if you have your PIN. Many banks are also linked to international banking networks such as Cirrus (the most common), Maestro and Plus, allowing withdrawals from overseas savings accounts.

Maybank, Malaysia's biggest bank with branches everywhere, accepts both Visa and MasterCard. Hongkong Bank accepts Visa, and the Standard Chartered Bank accepts MasterCard. If you have any questions about whether your cards will be accepted in Malaysia, ask your home bank about its reciprocal relationships with Malaysian banks.

Contact details for credit card companies in Malaysia:

American Express (☎ 2050 0000; www.americanexpress.com/malaysia)

Diners Card (☎ 2161 1055; www.dinersclub.com.my)

MasterCard (☎ 1800 804 594)

Visa (☎ 1800 802 997)

COMING OF AGE IN MALAYSIA

- The legal age for voting is 21.
- You can drive legally at 18.
- Heterosexual sex is legal at 16.
- To legally buy alcohol you need to be 21.

Currency

The ringgit (RM) is made up of 100 sen. Coins in use are 1 sen, 5 sen, 10 sen, 20 sen and 50 sen; notes come in RM1, RM5, RM10, RM50 and RM100.

After seven years of fixing the ringgit's value to the US dollar, in 2005 the government allowed the currency to float against an undisclosed basket of currencies.

Malaysians sometimes refer to ringgit as 'dollars', which is the old name used for the country's currency. Unless someone makes it clear that they are talking about US dollars, you can be sure they mean ringgit.

Be sure to carry plenty of small bills with you when venturing outside cities – in most cases people cannot change bills larger than RM10.

Taxes & Refunds

There is no general sales tax but there is a government tax of 10%, plus a service tax of 5% at larger hotels and restaurants.

Travellers Cheques & Cash

Banks in the region are efficient and there are plenty of moneychangers. For changing cash or travellers cheques, banks usually charge a commission (around RM10 per transaction, with a possible small fee per cheque), whereas moneychangers have no charges but their rates vary more – so know what the current rate is before using moneychangers. Compared with a bank, you'll generally get a better rate for cash at a moneychanger – it's usually quicker too. Away from the tourist centres, moneychangers' rates are often poorer and they may not change travellers cheques.

All major brands of travellers cheques are accepted across the region. Cash in major currencies is also readily exchanged, though like everywhere else in the world the US dollar has a slight edge.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Malaysians usually have no antipathy to being photographed, although, of course, it's polite to ask permission before photographing people and taking pictures in mosques or temples. For advice on taking better photos, Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures* is written by travel photographer Richard l'Anson.

Burning digital photos to a disk can easily be arranged at photo development shops across the country; it will cost around RM15 per disk. Print film is also commonly available – a 36-exposure roll is around RM8.80. Slide film is a little harder to come by and more expensive – a 36-exposure roll of Fuji Velvia averages RM29 and a 36-exposure roll of Sensia averages RM18. Professional slide film can be found only in the biggest cities – if you're a serious photographer, you may want to bring your own slide film.

Processing prices for a 36-exposure roll of slide film range from RM15 to RM18 (mounted), and 60 sen to 70 sen per exposure for print film. In bigger cities like KL, you'll find photo shops with a decent range of equipment at reasonable prices.

POST

Pos Malaysia Berhad (www.pos.com.my) runs an efficient postal system with good poste restante at the major post offices. Post offices are open daily from 8am to 5pm, and closed on Sunday and public holidays (closed on Friday and public holidays in Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu).

Aerograms and postcards cost 50 sen to send to any destination. Letters weighing 20g or less cost 90 sen to Asia, RM1.40 to Australia or New Zealand, RM1.50 to the UK and Europe, and RM1.80 to North America. Parcel rates range around RM20 to RM60 for a 1kg parcel, depending on the destination.

Main post offices in larger cities sell packaging materials and stationery.

TELEPHONE Fax

Fax facilities are available at Telekom offices in larger cities and at some main post offices. If you can't find one of these try a travel agency or large hotel.

International Calls

If you have your mobile phone with you (see p580) once you've sorted out a local SIM you should have no problem dialling overseas. Otherwise our advice is to buy a cheap local mobile phone to avoid the frustration of having to deal with the neglected and run-down public phone system.

International direct dial (IDD) calls and operator-assisted calls can be made from any private phone. The access code for making international calls to most countries is ☎00. Call ☎108 for the international operator and ☎103 for directory inquiries. You'll get the best rate if you buy an international prepaid telephone card, available from 7-Elevens and other small grocery stores and newsagents.

To make an IDD call from a payphone, you'll have to find a Telekom payphone marked 'international' (with which you can use coins or Telekom phonecards; dial the international access code and then the number). Sadly, there are very few regular payphones that allow IDD calls, apparently because of a rash of counterfeit phonecards.

The third option is to go to a Telekom office, where you can make IDD or operator-assisted international calls.

If you're making a call to Malaysia from outside the country, dial ☎60, drop the 0 before the Malaysian area code, then dial the number you want. See the list in the Phone Codes section (right) for area codes for Malaysia's major cities and destinations.

Local Calls

Making domestic telephone calls in Malaysia is usually a simple matter, provided you can find a working payphone (try train stations, shopping malls and big hotels). You can direct-dial long-distance between all major towns in Malaysia. Local calls cost 10 sen for three minutes.

Although there are a few private operator payphones dotted around, they're so rare that they are sure to become extinct. Less rare – although hardly common – are Telekom Malaysia payphones which take coins or prepaid cards which are available from Telekom offices, post offices and some shops such as 7-Eleven. Here you'll also find a whole range of calling cards (Chatz, I-Talk and Ring-Ring are just some of the brands) in amounts ranging from RM10 to RM60 in value.

Mobile Phones

As long as you have arranged to have 'global-roaming' facilities with your home provider, your GSM digital phone will automatically tune into one of the region's

digital networks. If not, and you have your phone with you, the simplest way to go mobile is to buy a prepaid SIM card for one of the services on arrival in the country.

Even if you've not brought a phone with you it's far simpler to buy a cheap mobile on arrival and use that to make your calls while in Malaysia rather than deal with the dilapidated public phone network.

There's little to choose between the three main mobile phone service providers: **Celcom** (www.celcom.com.my; numbers beginning with 013 or 019), **DiGi** (www.digi.com.my; numbers beginning with 016), and **Maxis** (www.maxis.com.my; numbers beginning with 012 or 017). Rates for a local call are around 40 sen per minute and an SMS is 10 to 15 sen. Top-up cards for prepaid SIM cards are available at all 7-Elevens and, if you're planning on calling overseas a lot, it's probably worthwhile getting a calling card too.

Phone Codes

Phone calls to Singapore are STD (long-distance) rather than international calls. Area codes for Malaysia:

Town/Region	Area Code
Cameron Highlands	☎ 05
Ipoh	☎ 05
Johor Bahru	☎ 07
Kota Bharu	☎ 09
Kota Kinabalu	☎ 088
Kuala Lumpur	☎ 03
Kuala Terengganu	☎ 09
Kuantan	☎ 09
Kuching	☎ 082
Labuan	☎ 087
Langkawi	☎ 04
Melaka	☎ 06
Miri	☎ 085
Penang	☎ 04
Sandakan	☎ 089
Singapore	☎ 02

TIME

Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei are all 16 hours ahead of US Pacific Standard Time (San Francisco and Los Angeles), 13 hours ahead of US Eastern Standard Time (New York), eight hours ahead of GMT/UTC (London) and two hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time (Sydney and Melbourne). Thus, noon in the region is 8pm

in Los Angeles and 11pm in New York (the previous day), 4am in London, and 2pm in Sydney and Melbourne. See the World Map (pp636–7) for international time zones.

TOILETS

Although there are still some places with Asian squat-style toilets in Malaysia, you'll most often find Western-style ones these days. In places with squat-style toilets, toilet paper is not usually provided. Instead, you will find a hose which you are supposed to use as a bidet or, in cheaper places, a bucket of water and a tap. If you're not comfortable with this, remember to take packets of tissues or toilet paper wherever you go.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourism Malaysia (Map pp84–5; ☎ 03-2693 5188; www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my; 17th fl, Putra World Trade Centre, 45 Jln Tun Smail, Kuala Lumpur) has an efficient network of overseas offices, which are useful for predeparture planning. Unfortunately, its domestic offices are less helpful and are often unable to give specific information about destinations and transportation. Nonetheless, they do stock some decent brochures as well as the excellent *Map of Malaysia*.

Within Malaysia there are also a number of state tourist-promotion organisations, such as the **Malaysian Tourist Centre** (MTC; Map p100; ☎ 03-2164 3929; www.mtc.gov.my; 109 Jln Ampang, Kuala Lumpur; ☎ 7am–10pm) in KL and the **Melaka Tourist Office** (Map p228; ☎ 281 4803, 1800-889 483; www.melaka.gov.my; Jln Kota; ☎ 9am–1pm & 2–5.30pm), which often have more detailed information about specific areas.

Where there are representatives, Tourism Malaysia and state tourism offices are listed in individual destination entries.

Tourism Malaysia maintains the following offices overseas:

Australia Perth (☎ 08-9481 0400; MAS Bldg, 56 William St, Perth, WA 6000); Sydney (☎ 02-9299 4441; Level 2, 171 Clarence St, Sydney, NSW 2000)

Canada (☎ 604-689 8899; www.malaysiantourism.ca; 1590-111 West Georgia St, Vancouver BC B6E 4M3)

France (☎ 01-4297 4171; www.ontmalaisie.com; 29 rue des Pyramides, 75001 Paris)

Germany (☎ 069-283 782; www.tourismmalaysia.de; Rossmarkt 11, D-60311 Frankfurt-am-Main)

Japan Osaka (☎ 06-6444 1220; 10F Cotton Nissay Biru, 1-8-2 Otsubo-Honmachi, Nishi-ku, Osaka 550-0004); Tokyo (☎ 03-3501 8691; www.tourismmalaysia.or.jp;

5F Chiyoda Biru, 1-6-4 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0006)

Singapore (☎ 02-6532 6321; 01-01 B/C/D, 80 Robinson Rd, Singapore 068898)

Thailand (☎ 02-631 1994; Unit 1001 Liberty Sq, 287 Silom Rd, Bangkok 10500)

UK (☎ 020-7930 7932; www.malaysiatrulyasia.co.uk; 57 Trafalgar Sq, London WC2N 5DU)

USA Los Angeles (☎ 213-689 9702; 818 West 7th St, Suite 907, Los Angeles, CA 90017); New York (☎ 212-754 1114; 120 East 56th St, Suite 810, New York, NY 10022)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

For the mobility impaired, Malaysia can be a nightmare. In most cities and towns there are often no footpaths, kerbs are very high, construction sites are everywhere, and crossings are few and far between. On the upside, taxis are cheap and both Malaysia Airlines and KTM (the national rail service) offer 50% discounts on travel for travellers with disabilities.

Before setting off get in touch with your national support organisation (preferably with the travel officer, if there is one). For general travel advice in Australia contact **Nican** (☎ 02-6285 3713; www.nican.com.au; PO Box 407, Curtin, ACT 2605); in the UK contact **Holiday Care Service** (☎ 0845 124 9974; www.holidaycare.org.uk; Sunley House, 7th fl, 4 Bedford Park, Croydon, Surrey CR0 2AP); in the USA try **Accessible Journeys** (☎ 800-846 4537; www.disabilitytravel.com), an agency specialising in travel for the disabled, or **Mobility International USA** (☎ 541-343 1284; www.miusa.org; PO Box 10767, Eugene, Oregon, 974400).

VISAS

Visitors must have a valid passport or internationally recognised travel document valid for at least six months beyond the date of entry into Malaysia. The following gives a brief overview of other requirements – full details of visa regulations are available on the website www.kln.gov.my.

Commonwealth citizens (except those from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan), and citizens of the Republic of Ireland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, San Marino and Liechtenstein do not require a visa to visit Malaysia.

Citizens of Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovak Republic, South Korea, Sweden, the USA and most Arab

countries do not require a visa for a visit not exceeding three months.

Citizens of Greece, South Africa and many South American and African countries do not require a visa for a visit not exceeding one month. Most other nationalities are given a shorter stay-period or require a visa.

Citizens of Israel cannot enter Malaysia.

Nationals of most countries are given a 30- or 60-day visa on arrival, depending on the expected length of stay. As a general rule, if you arrive by air you will be given 60 days automatically, though coming overland you may be given 30 days unless you specifically ask for a 60-day permit. It's possible to get an extension at an immigration office in Malaysia for a total stay of up to three months. This is a straightforward procedure that is easily done in major Malaysian cities (immigration offices are listed under Information in the relevant destination chapters).

Sabah and Sarawak are treated like separate countries. Your passport will be checked on arrival in each state and a new-stay permit issued. You are usually issued with a 30-day permit on arrival in Sarawak or Sabah. Travelling directly from either Sabah or Sarawak back to Peninsular Malaysia, however, there are no formalities and you do not start a new entry period, so your 30-day permit from Sabah or Sarawak remains valid. You can then extend your initial 30-day permit, though it can be difficult to get an extension in Sarawak. For more information see the Sabah (p421) and Sarawak (p335) chapters.

VISA STAMPS

We've heard of travellers having problems when they leave Malaysia after having entered the country by train from Singapore – this is because the Malaysian immigration officials at Singapore's railway station, which is the southern termination point for Malaysia's Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM), do not stamp your passport. This shouldn't be a problem as long as you keep your immigration card and your train ticket to show how you entered the country. Your details will have been input into the Malaysian immigration computer and should come up when you exit. Stand your ground if anyone asks you to pay a fine.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

The key to women travelling with minimum hassle in Malaysia is to blend in with the locals, which means dressing modestly and being respectful, especially in areas of stronger Muslim religious sensibilities, such as the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Regardless of what local non-Muslim women wear, it's better to be safe than sorry – in the past we've had reports of attacks on women ranging from minor verbal aggravation to full-on physical assault.

Hard as it is to say, the truth is that the closer you get to conservative Muslim areas, the more aggressive some Malay men can be towards women who look obviously foreign. In contrast, you are unlikely to be hassled too much in the Indian-populated highland resorts or the Little Indias of major west-coast cities. You're even safer in Malaysia's many Chinatowns, where harassment of foreign women is just about unheard of.

Be proactive about your own safety. Treat overly friendly strangers, both male and female, with a good deal of caution. In cheap hotels check for small peepholes in the walls and doors. You could always plug the holes with tissue paper or try asking to change rooms, but if you're on a budget you may not have much of a choice in some towns. When you have a choice, stay in a Chinese-operated hotel. On island resorts, stick to crowded beaches, and choose a chalet close to reception and other travellers.

No matter how limited your budget, it sometimes pays to upgrade – take taxis after dark or in seedy areas of town, and treat yourself to a midrange hotel if all your other options are brothels or the equivalent. You won't regret it.

In conservative Muslim areas, halve your hassles just by tying a bandanna over your hair (a minimal concession to the headscarf worn by most Muslim women). When visiting mosques, cover all limbs, and either borrow a headscarf at the mosque entrance or buy one of the cheap silk ones available on the street. At the beach, most Malaysian women swim fully clothed in T-shirts and shorts, so don't even think about going topless.

Tampons and pads are widely available in Malaysia, especially in the big cities, and over-the-counter medications for common gynaecological health problems (like yeast infections) are also fairly easy to find.

WORK

There are possibilities for those who seek them out, from professional-level jobs in finance, journalism and the oil industry to temporary jobs at some guesthouses and dive centres in popular resort areas. Those with teaching credentials can find English-teaching jobs in Malaysia, though pickings are slim compared to Japan and Korea.

JobStreet.com advertises a variety of jobs at <http://my.jobs.com>. Teachers can check some of the many TEFL sites, including the TEFL Job Centre at www.jobs.edunet.com.

Depending on the nature of your job, you'll need either an Expatriate Personnel Visa or Temporary Employment Visa. For details and requirements, check the Immigration Department of Malaysia's website (www.imi.gov.my).

Volunteer Work

There are several opportunities for travellers to find volunteer work in Malaysia.

On the peninsula travellers can take part in reforestation and recycling programmes organised by **Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands** (Reach; www.reach.org.my) in the Cameron Highlands, or assist at the Ma Daerah turtle sanctuary, Terengganu (p307).

Sabah's Sepilok Orang-utan Centre (p467) has one of the best established volunteer programmes, run through **Travellers Worldwide** (www.travellersworldwide.com).

Also in Sabah the **Marine Ecology Research Centre** (www.gayana-resort.com) in the TAR National Park near Kota Kinabalu runs volunteer and educational programmes for volunteers who are over 18. The **Miso Walai homestay programme** (<http://misowalaihonestay.com>) lets travellers get involved with local wetlands restoration projects.

Trekforce (www.trekforce.org.uk) and **World Challenge** (www.world-challenge.co.uk) also bring a lot of (mainly UK) volunteers to Malaysia for conservation and other projects.

Malaysia Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING MALAYSIA

The main requirements are a passport that's valid for travel for at least six months, proof of an onward ticket and adequate funds for your stay, although you will rarely be asked to prove this. Sabah and Sarawak are treated in some ways as countries separate from Peninsular Malaysia, with additional entry procedures; see p335 and p421.

For details of visa and other entry requirements, see p496.

AIR Airports

The major gateway to Malaysia is via the **Kuala Lumpur International Airport** (KLIA; Map p122;

DEPARTURE TAX

There's a RM92 airport tax on all flights out of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (RM45 for flights out of Penang and Johor Bahru). The tax will be included in your ticket price.

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel.

Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

www.klia.com.my) at Sepang, 75km south of Kuala Lumpur (KL). Located near KLIA is the new Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCC-T) from which Air Asia operates. Together both of these terminals handle the bulk of international flights, with the exception of a few regional flights from Asia and Australia, which come via Penang, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and a few other cities (see the relevant chapters for specific airport details).

For airline offices in KL and other cities see the regional chapters.

Tickets

When shopping for a ticket, you should compare the cost of flying into Malaysia versus the cost of flying into Singapore. From Singapore you can travel overland to almost any place in Peninsular Malaysia in less than a day, and Singapore also has direct flights to Malaysian Borneo and Brunei.

KL and Singapore are good places to buy tickets for onward travel from Malaysia, but if you're really in search of bargains, you'll almost always do better in Bangkok (just a train ride away).

To research and buy a ticket on the internet, try these online booking services:

www.cheapflights.co.uk Posts some of the cheapest flights (out of the UK only), but get in early to get the bargains.

www.dialaflight.com Offers worldwide flights out of Europe and the UK.

www.expedia.com A good site for checking worldwide flight prices.

www.lastminute.com This site deals mainly in European flights, but does have worldwide flights, mostly package returns. There's also a link to an Australian version.

www.statravel.com STA Travel's US website. There are also UK and Australian sites (www.statravel.co.uk and www.statravel.com.au).

www.travel.com.au A good site for Australians to find cheap flights. A New Zealand version also exists (www.travel.co.nz).

Australia

Discounted fares from Melbourne or Sydney to Kuala Lumpur start at A\$600 return in the low season (with Austria Air), rising to A\$1200 in the high season (December to February). Malaysia Airlines, Singapore Airlines (www.singaporeair.com) and Qantas Airways (www.qantas.com) all offer good deals; also check some of the Middle Eastern airlines that fly between Europe and Australia.

The travel sections of weekend newspapers such as the *Age* in Melbourne and the *Sydney Morning Herald* are good places to look for air-fare deals.

Two well-known agencies for cheap fares, with offices throughout Australia, are **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) and **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au).

Brunei

Both **Royal Brunei Airlines** (www.bruneiair.com) and **Malaysia Airlines** (MAS; ☎ 222 4141; www.malaysiaairlines.com) have direct flights between Bandar Seri Begawan and KL in Malaysia for around RM1470 return. For more details on flights into and out of Brunei see p601.

Canada

There are no direct flights between Canada and Malaysia; the cheapest fares are going to be on an airline like **Eva Air** (www.evaair.com/html/b2c/english/) via Taiwan. For flights to Malaysia, low-season return fares from Vancouver average C\$1250; from Toronto C\$1350.

The *Globe & Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Vancouver Sun* carry travel agency ads.

Travel CUTS (☎ 800-667 2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency.

You'll also find good deals with **Flight Centre** (☎ 1877 967 5302; www.flightcentre.ca).

Continental Europe

There's not much variation in air fares from the main European cities. All the major airlines are usually offering some sort of deal as well as travel agencies, so shop around. From Paris to KL costs as little as €650 return with **Emirates** (www.emirates.com).

French travel agencies with branches around the country specialising in youth and student fares include **OTU Voyages** (www.otu.fr) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr). Also try **Anyway** (☎ 0892 893 892; www.anyway.fr) and **Lastminute** (☎ 0892 705 000; www.fr.lastminute.com).

Recommended agencies in Germany include **Just Travel** (☎ 089-747 3330; www.justtravel.de); **STA Travel** (☎ 01805-456 422; www.statravel.de) and **Travel Overland** (☎ 01805-276370; www.travel-overland.de).

In Italy try **CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06 462 0431; www.cts.it), in the Netherlands **Airfair** (☎ 020-620 5121; www.airfair.nl) and in Spain **Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902 116 226; www.barceloviajes.com).

Hong Kong

Return flights to KL start from around HK\$5150. There are also direct flights from Hong Kong to Penang and Kota Kinabalu.

The Tsim Sha Tsui area is Hong Kong's budget travel-agency centre. Try **Phoenix Services Agency** (☎ 2722 7378; info@phoenixtrvl.com) or **Traveller Service** (☎ 2375 2222; www.taketraveller.com).

Indonesia

Air Asia (☎ 1300 889 933; outside Malaysia ☎ 03-7884 9000; www.airasia.com) has direct connections between KL and Jakarta from as little as RM140 one way, Medan for RM100, Padang RM80, Bandung RM150, Bali and Surabaya for RM160. Malaysia Airlines also does return fares to Jakarta for RM425, Surabaya RM450, Medan RM200, Padang RM270 and Denpasar RM450. Medan to Penang costs around RM200 return. From Kuching **Batavia Air** (www.batavia-air.co.id) flies daily to Jakarta (see p367 for details).

A reliable Jakarta-based agency is **Smailing Tours** (☎ 380 0022; www.mysmailing.com).

Japan

Return flights to KL cost between ¥50,000 and ¥70,000. One-way tickets are expensive, averaging around ¥50,000. It's usually around ¥10,000 cheaper to fly to/from Tokyo, rather than Osaka/Kansai International Airport.

Reliable discount agencies in Japan include **No 1 Travel** (☎ 03-3200 8871; www.no1-travel.com) and **Across Travellers Bureau** (☎ 03-3373 9040; www.across-travel.com) as well as **STA Travel** (☎ 03-5485 8380; www.statravel.co.jp), with branches in both Tokyo and Osaka.

For information on the latest discount prices, pick up a free copy of *Metropolis* in Tokyo or, if you're in the Kansai region, *Kansai Time Out*. The English-language newspapers also run advertisements from the major travel agents.

New Zealand

Low-season return tickets start at NZ\$1200 between Auckland and KL on Emirates; add around NZ\$400 for high-season fares. Round-the-World (RTW) and Circle Pacific fares for travel to/from Malaysia are often good value.

The *New Zealand Herald* has a travel section in which travel agencies advertise fares. **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz) have branches in Auckland and elsewhere in the country; check the websites for complete listings.

Singapore

Malaysia Airlines and Singapore Airlines operate frequent flights between KL and Singapore. One-way tickets start at S\$120 from Singapore (RM350 from KL); seats are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Malaysia Airlines also connects Singapore to various places on Peninsular Malaysia (like Langkawi and Penang), and Kuching and Kota Kinabalu in Malaysian Borneo.

Silk Air (☎ 6223 8888; www.silkair.com), Singapore Airlines' regional wing, has daily flights between Singapore and Langkawi from S\$245.

Going to Malaysia, you can often save some dollars if you fly from Johor Bahru (JB) rather than Singapore. Malaysia Airlines runs the **SPS Coach** (Map pp538-9; ☎ 6250 3333; one way S\$12) directly from the **Copthorne**

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

Orchid Hotel (214 Dunearn Rd) to JB's Senai airport; the trip takes two hours.

With the considerable difference in the exchange rate it's much cheaper to buy tickets in Malaysia, so rather than buying a return fare to KL from Singapore, buy a one-way ticket and then buy the return leg in KL.

Thailand

Round-trip flights from Bangkok to KL cost around 7500B. Also check for deals with Air Asia and Malaysia Airlines. Air Asia one-way fares from KL start at RM140 for Bangkok, RM70 for Hat Yai and RM90 for Phuket.

Bangkok has a number of excellent travel agencies but there are also some suspect ones; you should ask the advice of other travellers before handing over your cash. **STA Travel** (☎ 02-236 0262; www.statravel.co.th; Room 1406, 14th fl, Wall St Tower, 33/70 Surawong Rd) is a reliable place to start. Also check the online agency **SaveFlights.com** (www.saveflights.com) for other information.

UK

London has the best deals for flights to Malaysia. You can take your pick from a wide range of carriers, but the cheapest usually are **Srilankan Airlines** (www.srilankan.aero/), **KLM** (www.klm.com) and **Austrian Airlines** (www.aua.com/uk/eng). Low-season discount tickets are around UK£400 return. Direct flights to KL on Malaysia Airlines cost around UK£500 return, but there are seasonal fluctuations of around UK£100.

Advertisements for many travel agents appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheets, such as the *Independent* on Saturday and the *Sunday Times*. Look out for free magazines such as *TNT*.

Reputable agencies in London:
Bridge the World (☎ 0870 444 7474, 020-7813 3350)
Flightbookers (☎ 0870 010 7000; www.ebookers.co.uk)

STA Travel (☎ 0870 1600 599; www.statravel.co.uk)
Trailfinders (☎ 020-7938 3939; www.trailfinders.co.uk)

USA

Malaysia Airlines does flight deals of US\$700 from New York or Los Angeles to KL. Cheaper fares may sometimes include a stopover.

If you are going to be travelling the region, you could always look into Circle Pacific and Asia Air Pass flights. There are numerous combinations of destinations you can include. For example, **Cathay Pacific's** (www.cathaypacific.com) All Asia Pass costs US\$1300 from New York or Los Angeles to KL, via Hong Kong, with the option of visiting over a dozen other places in the region.

San Francisco consolidators (discount travel agents) have some of the cheapest fares, although good deals can also be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities. The *San Francisco Examiner*, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* all produce weekly travel sections in which you'll find any number of travel agency ads. A good place to start is **STA Travel** (☎ 1-800-781 4040; www.statravel.com), which has a wide network of offices.

LAND Brunei

The main overland route into Brunei is via bus from Miri in Sarawak; see p611 for details. It's possible to travel overland between Limbang (p413) and Lawas (p413) in Sarawak and Bangar in the eastern part of Brunei.

Indonesia

Several express buses (nine hours, daily) run between Pontianak in Kalimantan and Kuching in Sarawak. The bus crosses at the Tebedu/Entikong border. See p367 for details.

Singapore

The Causeway linking JB with Singapore handles most traffic between the countries. Trains and buses run from all over Malaysia straight through to Singapore, or you can take a bus to JB and get a taxi or one of the frequent buses from JB to Singapore.

Buses between Singapore and KL cost between S\$30/RM30 and S\$80/RM80 depending on the quality of the bus service, and take around five hours; for further information on these services see p584, and p115.

Trains linking Singapore and KL cost between S\$30/RM34 and S\$130/RM130

depending on what class of ticket you buy and whether you go for a berth or not. The journey takes about seven hours. For more details see p585.

A good website with details of express buses between Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand is the **Express Bus Travel Guide** (www.myexpressbus.com).

There is also a causeway linking Tuas, in western Singapore, with Geylang Patah in JB. This is known as the Second Link, and some bus services to Melaka and up the west coast head this way.

If you have a car, tolls on the Second Link are much higher than those on the main Causeway.

Thailand BUS & CAR

You can cross the border by road into Thailand at Padang Besar (p217), Bukit Kayu Hitam (p214), Rantau Panjang (Sungai Golok on the Thai side) and Pengkalan Kubor (p328).

TRAIN

The rail route into Thailand is on the Butterworth–Alor Setar–Hat Yai route, which crosses into Thailand at Padang Besar. You can take the **International Express** (☎ 03-2267 1200; www.ktmb.com.my) from Butterworth all the way to Bangkok. Trains from KL and Singapore are timed to connect with this service.

From Butterworth to Hat Yai the 2nd-class fare is upper/lower berth RM65/73, to Bangkok RM95/103, from Alor Setar to Hat Yai RM58.40/66.40 and to Bangkok RM88.40/96.40.

From Alor Setar there is an additional daily northbound train to Hat Yai (from RM12, three hours). And from KL there is one through service daily (the Senandung Langkawi) to Hat Yai (seat/upper berth/lower berth RM44/52/57).

From Hat Yai there are frequent train and bus connections to other parts of Thailand.

The opulent **Eastern & Oriental Express** (www.orient-express.com) also connects Singapore and Bangkok. The train, which runs at least once a month (check the website for the schedule and other details), takes 42 hours to cover the 1943km journey. Don your linen suit, sip a gin and tonic and dig deep

for the fare: from US\$1780 per person in a double compartment, up to US\$3620 in the presidential suite. You can go as far as KL or Butterworth for a lower fare.

SEA Brunei

Boats connect Brunei to Lawas and Limbang in Sarawak, and to Pulau Labuan, from where boats go to Sabah. With the exception of speedboats for Limbang, all international boats now depart from Muara, 25km northeast of Bandar Seri Begawan, where Brunei immigration formalities are also handled.

See p601 and p611 for more information and details on boat services.

Indonesia

The following are the main ferry routes between Indonesia and Malaysia:

- Medan, Sumatra to Penang (see p170)
- Dumai, Sumatra to Melaka (see p242)
- Tarakan, Kalimantan to Tawau (see p480)
- Batu Ampar and Tanjung Pinang, Sumatra to JB (p252).
- Tanjung Balai, Sumatra to Kukup (see p254)
- Tanjung Balai and Dumai, Sumatra to Pelabuhan Klang (see p131).

Philippines

Several companies run passenger ferries between Sandakan and Zamboanga (18 hours) in the Philippines.

See p466 for more information on ferry services in the region.

Singapore

Singapore has a number of ferry connections to Malaysia. Cruise trips in the region are also very popular with locals. For more details see p583.

Thailand

From Pulau Langkawi's Kuah jetty, Langkawi Ferry Services makes four daily runs to Satun on the Thai coast (RM25, one hour). From the port you can take a taxi to Satun town for connections to Hat Yai or Phuket. It is an unusual and rarely used entry/exit point by most travellers; make sure you get your passport stamped going in either direction.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

Airlines in Malaysia

Malaysia has two main domestic operators – **Malaysia Airlines** (☎ 1300 883 000; outside Malaysia ☎ 03-2161 0555; www.malaysia-airlines.com.my) and **Air Asia** (☎ 1300 889 933, outside Malaysia 603 8660 4343; www.airasia.com). Services are in the process of being reshuffled between the two operators – see opposite.

Tiny **Berjaya Air** (☎ 03-7847 8228; www.berjaya-air.com) operates flights between between KL, Pulau Tioman, Pulau Pangkor and Pulau Redang in Peninsular Malaysia, as well as Singapore and Koh Samui in Thailand.

Local flights in Malaysian Borneo are very much reliant on the vagaries of the weather. In the wet season (October to March in Sarawak and on Sabah's north-east coast; May to November on Sabah's west coast), places like Bario in Sarawak can be isolated for days at a time, so don't venture into this area if you have a very tight schedule. These flights are completely booked during school holidays. At other times it's easier to get a seat at a few days' notice, but always book as far in advance as possible.

The Malaysian Air Fares map (p504) details some of the main regional routes and the standard one-way fares in Malaysian ringgit.

DISCOUNTS & SPECIAL FLIGHTS

A variety of worthwhile discounts (typically between 25% and 50%) are available for flights around Malaysia on Malaysia Airlines, including for families and groups of three or more – it's worth inquiring when you book tickets in Malaysia.

Student discounts are available, but only for students enrolled in institutions that are in Malaysia. Air Asia also discounts ticket prices depending on how far in advance you book them yourself over the internet.

Malaysia Airlines also has special seven-day advance-purchase one-way tickets (YOX fares) and advance-purchase 30-day return tickets (YEE 30 fares) for the following flights from JB and KL:

Flight	Fare (RM) YOX/YEE30
JB-Kuching	169/305
JB-Kota Kinabalu	347/624
KL-Penang	270/483
KL-Kuching	262/425
KL-Kota Kinabalu	437/689
KL-Miri	422/679
KL-Labuan	437/656
KL-Sibu	320/510
Kuching-Penang	-/544

There are also a few economy night-flights between KL and Kota Kinabalu (one way RM306), Kuching (one way RM187), Alor Setar (one way RM112) and Penang (one

DOMESTIC AIR SERVICES RESHUFFLE

Malaysia Airlines' (MAS; www.malaysiaairlines.com) comprehensive but unprofitable network of domestic flights, including its rural air service, was completely overhauled in 2006, and the majority of routes in the region have been transferred to **Air Asia** (www.airasia.com) or Air Asia's new subsidiary **Fly Asian Xpress** (FAX; www.flyasianxpress.com).

Fares are expected to fluctuate and it remains to be seen which legs will survive in the long term.

We list the most up-to-date prices and routes at the time of going to press (August 2006); please check directly with the airlines for the latest situation.

way RM111), and between JB and Kota Kinabalu (one way RM260).

If you are flying to Sarawak or Sabah, you can save quite a few ringgit by flying from JB rather than KL or Singapore. The regular economy fare is RM169 from JB to Kuching against RM262 from KL. To Kota Kinabalu, the respective fares are RM347 and RM437.

Air Passes

Malaysia Airlines' Discover Malaysia pass costs US\$199 and travellers can take five flights anywhere in Malaysia within a 28-day period. It also has a US\$99 pass for five flights with any one province. You must have flown into Malaysia on a Malaysia Airlines flight to qualify for this pass, though.

For flying around the region the Asean Air Pass needs to be bought at the same time as a ticket from your home country to the region on one of the following airlines: Singapore Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Thai, Garuda, Silk Air, Philippine Airlines, Air Vietnam, Laos Airlines and Myanmar Airlines. You can buy a minimum of three coupons (US\$390) covering three flights, up to a maximum of six coupons (US\$780).

For more details on these and a host of other air passes that are useful for travellers covering the region at speed, check out www.airtimetable.com/airpass_asia.htm.

BICYCLE

Bicycle touring around Malaysia and neighbouring countries is an increasingly popular activity. The main road system is well engineered with good surfaces, but the secondary road system is limited. Road conditions are good enough for touring bikes in most places, but mountain bikes are recommended for forays off the beaten track.

KL has plenty of bicycle shops. Top-quality bicycles and components can be bought in major cities, but generally 10-speed (or higher) bikes and fittings are hard to find. Bringing your own is the best bet. Bicycles can be transported on most international flights; check with the airline about extra charges and shipment specifications.

KL Bike Hash (www.bikehash.freesevers.com) has a whole load of useful information and links to other cycling-connected sites in Malaysia.

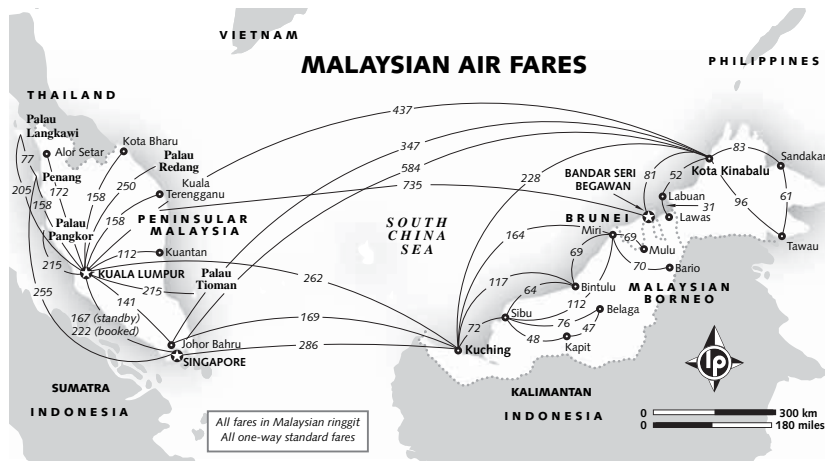
BOAT

There are no services connecting Peninsular Malaysia with Malaysian Borneo. On a local level, there are boats and ferries between the peninsula and offshore islands, and along the rivers of Sabah and Sarawak – check the relevant chapters for details. Note that some ferry operators are notoriously lax about observing safety rules and local authorities are often nonexistent. If a boat looks overloaded or otherwise unsafe, *do not board it* – no-one else will look out for your safety.

BUS

Bus travel in Malaysia is economical, generally comfortable and seats can be reserved. It's also fast – sometimes too fast. In a bid to pack in as many trips as possible, some bus drivers speed recklessly, resulting in frequent, often fatal, accidents. A bus that crashed at high speed in Negeri Sembilan in 2003, killing three and hospitalising 16, had previously been booked for 59 traffic offences!

Transnasional Express (☎ 03-4047 7878; www.nadi.com.my/transportation_home.asp) is Malaysia's largest bus operator; its services tend to be slower than rivals. Unfortunately this doesn't seem to make them that much safer as their buses have also been involved in



several major accidents. They have competition from a variety of privately operated buses on the longer domestic routes including **Plusliner** (www.plusliner.com) and **Aeroline** (www.aeroline.com.my). There are so many buses on major runs that you can often turn up and get a seat on the next bus.

On main routes most private buses have air-con and cost only a few ringgit more than regular buses. However, take note of one traveller's warning: 'Malaysian air-conditioned buses are really meat lockers on wheels with just two settings: cold and suspended animation'.

In larger towns there may be a number of bus stations; local/regional buses often operate from one station and long-distance buses from another; in other cases, KL for example, bus stations are differentiated by the destinations they serve.

Getting off the beaten track is only marginally more difficult. Small towns and *kampung* (villages) all over the country are serviced by public buses, usually non-air-conditioned rattlers. Unfortunately, they are often poorly signed and sometimes the only way for you to find your bus is to ask a local. These buses are invariably dirt cheap and are great for sampling rural life. In most towns there are no ticket offices, so buy your ticket from the conductor after you board.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Driving in Malaysia is fantastic compared with most Asian countries. There has been a lot of investment in the country's roads, which are generally of a high quality. New cars for hire are commonly available and fuel is inexpensive (around RM1.90 per litre).

It's not all good news. Driving in the cities, particularly KL, can be a nightmare, due to traffic and confusing one-way systems. Malaysian drivers are not always the safest when it comes to obeying road rules – they might not be as reckless as those you might encounter elsewhere in Southeast Asia, but they still take risks. For example, hardly any of the drivers keep to the official 110km/hour speed limit on the main highways and tailgating is a common problem.

The Lebuhraya (North-South Hwy) is a six-lane expressway that runs for 966km

along the length of the peninsula from the Thai border in the north to JB in the south. There are toll charges for using the expressway and these vary according to the distance travelled. It's not all that cheap, and as a result the normal highways remain crowded while traffic on the expressway is light. Many other highways are in excellent condition and many are under construction.

You can join the **Automobile Association of Malaysia** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 03-2162 5777; www.aam.org.my; 7-4 Megan Ave 1, 189 Jln Tun Razak, 50400 Kuala Lumpur) if you have a letter of introduction from your own automobile association.

Bring Your Own Vehicle

It's possible to bring your vehicle into Malaysia, but the cost and hassle of shipping it here makes it an unrealistic proposition for all but the most determined.

Driving Licence

A valid overseas licence is needed to rent a car. An International Driving Permit is usually not required by local car-hire companies but it is recommended that you bring one.

Hire

Rent-a-car operations are well established in Malaysia. Major rental companies include **Avis** (www.avis.com.my), **Hertz** (www.hertz.com.my), **Mayflower** (www.mayflower.com.my/html/car.htm), and **Orix** (www.orixcarrentals.com.my); there are many others, though, including local operators only found in one city. Unlimited distance rates for a 1.3L Proton Saga, the cheapest and most popular car in Malaysia, are posted at around RM150/900 per day/week, including insurance and collision-damage waiver. The Proton Wira is a step up in standard and a bit more expensive. The Proton is basically a Mitsubishi assembled under licence in Malaysia. Charges for a Ford Laser are around RM200/1200 per day/week.

These are the standard rates from the major car-hire companies but you can often get better deals, either through smaller local companies or when the major companies offer special deals. Rates drop substantially for longer rentals and if you shop around by phone you can get a Proton Saga for as little as RM2000 per month,

ROAD DISTANCES FOR PENINSULAR MALAYSIA (KM)

Alor Setar	---																			
Fraser's Hill	443	---																		
Butterworth	93	350	---																	
Ipoh	257	186	164	---																
Johor Bahru	830	467	737	573	---															
Klang	495	132	400	236	401	---														
Kota Bharu	409	406	386	391	689	507	---													
Kuala Lumpur	462	99	369	205	368	33	474	---												
Kuala Terengganu	521	453	498	503	521	488	168	455	---											
Kuantan	684	253	591	427	325	292	371	259	209	---										
Melaka	606	243	513	349	224	177	607	144	508	292	---									
Mersing	815	436	722	558	134	386	568	353	401	191	255	---								
Pelabuhan Klang	503	140	410	246	409	8	515	41	496	300	185	394	---							
Port Dickson	552	189	459	295	318	115	564	90	503	291	94	321	123	---						
Seremban	526	163	433	269	304	97	538	64	471	259	80	289	105	32	---					
Taiping	183	272	90	86	659	322	369	291	481	513	435	644	332	387	355	---				
Alor Setar																				
Fraser's Hill																				
Butterworth																				
Ipoh																				
Johor Bahru																				
Klang																				
Kota Bharu																				
Kuala Lumpur																				
Kuala Terengganu																				
Kuantan																				
Melaka																				
Mersing																				
Pelabuhan Klang																				
Port Dickson																				
Seremban																				
Taiping																				

including unlimited kilometres and insurance. The advantage of dealing with a large company is that it has offices all over the country, giving better backup if something goes wrong and allowing you to pick up in one city and drop off in another (typically for a RM50 surcharge). Mayflower is one local company with offices all over and some competitive rates.

The best place to look for car hire is KL (p117), though Penang is also good (p171). In Sabah and Sarawak there is less competition and rates are higher, partly because of road conditions.

Most rental companies also require that drivers are at least 23 years old.

Insurance

Rental companies will provide insurance when you hire a car, but always check what the extent of your coverage will be, particularly if you're involved in an accident. You might want to take out your own insurance or pay the rental company an extra premium for an insurance excess reduction.

Road Rules

Driving in Malaysia follows much the same rules as in Britain and Australia – cars are right-hand drive, and you drive on the left side of the road. The only additional precaution you need to take is to be aware of possible road hazards: stray animals and the large number of motorcyclists. And take it easy on the *kampung* back roads.

Wearing safety belts *is* compulsory, although they are fitted to the front seats only.

Although most drivers in Malaysia are relatively sane, safe and slow, there are also a fair few who specialise in overtaking on blind corners and otherwise trusting to divine intervention. Malaysian drivers also use a curious signalling system, where a flashing left indicator means 'you are safe to overtake', or 'I'm about to turn off', or 'I've forgotten to turn my indicator off', or 'look out, I'm about to do something totally unpredictable'. Giving a quick blast of the horn when you're overtaking a slower vehicle is common practice and helps alert otherwise sleepy drivers to your presence.

HITCHING

Keep in mind that hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch, particularly single women, should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

This said, Malaysia has long had a reputation for being an excellent place for hitchhiking and it's generally still true, though with inexpensive bus travel most travellers don't bother.

On the west coast of Malaysia, hitching is generally quite easy but it's not possible on the main Lebuh raya expressway.

On the east coast, traffic is lighter and there may be long waits between rides. The same applies to hitching in Malaysian Borneo.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Local transport varies widely from place to place. Large cities in Malaysia have local taxis (as opposed to long-distance taxis, see right). These taxis usually have meters but there are exceptions to this rule (usually in smaller towns like Kuantan in Pahang). For metered taxis, rates are as follows: flagfall (first 2km) is RM2; 10 sen for each 200m or 45 seconds thereafter; 20 sen for each additional passenger over two passengers; RM1 for each piece of luggage in the boot (trunk); plus 50% of everything between midnight and 6am. Drivers are legally required to use meters if they exist – you can try insisting that they do so, but sometimes you'll just have to negotiate the fare before you get in.

In major cities there are also buses, which are extremely cheap and convenient, provided you can figure out which one is going your way. KL also has commuter trains, and a Light Rail Transit (LRT) and monorail system; see p118.

Bicycle rickshaws (trishaws) have died out in KL, but they still exist in such places like Georgetown and Melaka, and are definitely handy ways of getting around the older parts of town with convoluted and narrow streets.

In the bigger cities across Malaysian Borneo, such as Kuching and Kota Kinabalu,

you will find taxis, buses and minibuses. Once you're out of the big cities, though, you're basically on your own and must either walk or hitch. If you're really in the bush, of course, riverboats and aeroplanes are the only alternatives to lengthy jungle treks.

Long-Distance Taxi

Long-distance taxis make Malaysian travel, already easy and convenient even by the best Asian standards, a real breeze. In almost every town there will be a 'teksi' stand where the cars are lined up and ready to go to their various destinations.

Taxis are ideal for groups of four, and are also available on a share basis. As soon as a full complement of four passengers turns up, off you go.

Between major towns you have a reasonable chance of finding other passengers to share without having to wait too long, but otherwise you will have to charter a whole taxi, which is four times the single-fare rate (in this book we generally quote the rate for a whole taxi).

As Malaysia becomes increasingly wealthy, and people can afford to hire a whole taxi, the share system is becoming less reliable. Early morning is generally the best time to find people to share a taxi, but you can inquire at the taxi stand the day before to see when is the best time.

Taxi rates to specific destinations are fixed by the government and are posted at the taxi stands; usually the whole-taxi rate is listed. Air-con taxis cost a few more ringgit than non-air-con, and fares are generally about twice the comparable bus fares. If you want to charter a taxi to an obscure destination, or by the hour, you'll probably have to do some negotiating. As a rule of thumb, you should pay around 50 sen per kilometre.

Taxi drivers often drive at frighteningly high speeds. They don't have as many head-on collisions as you might expect, but closing your eyes at times of high stress certainly helps! You also have the option of demanding that the driver slow down, but this is met with varying degrees of hostility. Another tactic is to look for ageing taxis and taxi drivers – they must be doing something right to have made it this far!

TOURS

Reliable tours of both Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo are run regularly by international operators including **Exodus** (www.exodus.co.uk), **Explore Worldwide** (www.explore.co.uk), **Peregrine Adventures** (www.peregrine.net.au) and **Intrepid Travel** (www.intrepidtravel.com).

Such tours are often a good way to see the best of Malaysian Borneo in a short period of time and without having to worry about possibly problematic transport connections.

In contrast, getting around the peninsula under your own steam is rarely difficult, making a tour less necessary.

Also see the destination chapters for listings of local tour operators.

TRAIN

Malaysia's privatised national railway company is **Keretapi Tanah Melayu** (KTM; ☎ 03-2267 1200; www.ktmb.com.my). It runs a modern, comfortable and economical railway service, although there are basically only two lines and for the most part services are slow.

One line runs up the west coast from Singapore, through KL, Butterworth and on into Thailand. The other branches off from this line at Gemas and runs through Kuala Lipis up to the northeastern corner of the country near Kota Bharu in Kelantan. Often referred to as the 'jungle train', this line is properly known as the 'east-coast line'.

In Sabah the North Borneo Railway is a small narrow-gauge line running through the Sungai Padas gorge from Tenom to Beaufort. The trip is scenic, but can be very slow. The train crawls along, stopping at stations along the way and delays are common during heavy rains because of obstructions on the track. See p433 for more details. Tourist day trips also run along the line from Kota Kinabalu (see p426).

Services & Classes

There are two main types of rail services: express and local trains. Express trains are air-conditioned and have 'premier' (1st class), 'superior' (2nd class) and sometimes 'economy' seats (3rd class). Similarly on overnight trains you'll find 'premier night deluxe' cabins (upper/lower berth RM50/70 extra), 'premier night standard' cabins (upper/lower berth RM18/26), and 'standard night' cabins (upper/lower berth RM12/17). Local trains are usually economy class only, but some have superior seats.

Express trains stop only at main stations, while local services, which operate mostly on the east-coast line, stop everywhere, including the middle of the jungle, to let passengers and their goods on and off. Consequently local services take more than twice as long as the express trains and run to erratic schedules, but if you're in no hurry they provide a colourful experience and are good for short journeys.

THE EVOLUTION OF MALAYSIA'S RAILWAY

Malaysia's first railway line was a 13km route from Taiping to Port Weld that was laid in 1884, but it's no longer in use. By 1903 you could travel all the way from Johor Bahru to near Butterworth; the line was extended to the Thai border in 1918 and across the Causeway to Singapore in 1923. In 1931 the east-coast line was completed, effectively bringing the railway system to its present state.

Keppel Railway Station in Singapore, built in 1932, is actually still part of Malaysia, as is land on which the tracks run up to the Causeway. This was part of the deal done at the time of federation and it's one that Singapore, with its hungry eye on the local development possibilities of this corridor of Malaysian land through Singaporean territory, is keen to have revised.

The success of the high-speed rail link between KL and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport has encouraged Keretapi Tanah Melayu to increase its investment in extending this rapid and modern system.

New tracks are being laid between KL and Ipoh for a service scheduled to come on line by the end of 2007, on which there will ultimately be 32 trains daily taking two hours to link the two cities. The KTM Komuter service between Seremban and Rawang is also being extended to Tanjung Malim.

Train schedules are reviewed biannually, so check on KTM's website for the latest situation before you make detailed plans.

Train Passes

KTM offers a Tourist Railpass for five days (adult/child US\$35/18); 10 days (adult/child US\$55/28); and 15 days (adult/child

US\$70/35). This pass entitles the holder to unlimited travel on any class of train but does not include sleeping-berth charges on night express services.

Railpasses are available only to foreigners and can be purchased at Sentral KL, JB, Butterworth, Port Klang, Padang Besar, Wakaf Baharu and Penang train stations, as well as at Singapore station.