

Negeri Sembilan



One of Malaysia's most unique and tiniest states, Negeri Sembilan (Nine States) is the seat of the Minangkabau people, who originally settled here from Sumatra in the 15th century. To some extent, Minangkabau culture still incorporates *adat perpatih*, a traditional matrilineal system of inheritance and communal village administration unique to Negeri Sembilan, though the custom has weakened. Fortunately, the Minangkabau's fiery cooking style has lost little of its potency.

Negeri Sembilan is easily overlooked by travellers darting to Peninsular Malaysia's hot spots. The pedestrian state capital, Seremban, is a slow starter with few notable sights beyond the Taman Seni Budaya (Arts & Cultural Park). But within its orbit lie regions worth exploring for evidence of Minangkabau culture and its distinctive architecture. A short hop from Seremban, the tranquil old royal town of Sri Menanti is the home of the noble Istana Lama (Old Palace), a work of simply top-drawer craftsmanship.

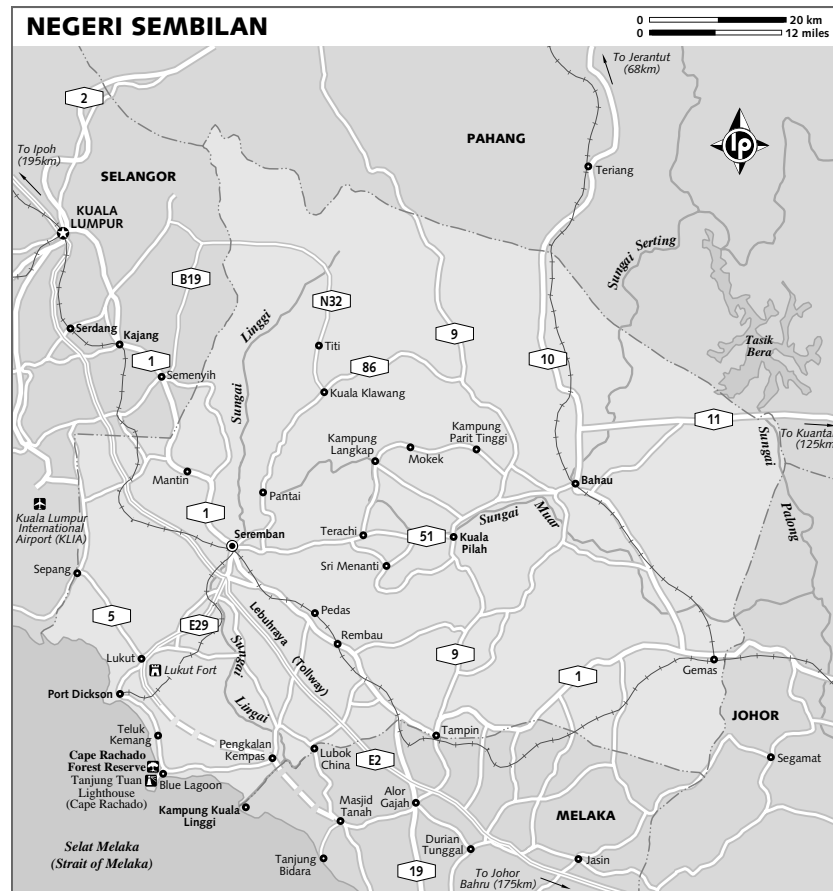
From Seremban, drift westwards to Port Dickson (PD), a long curve of sand, restaurants and hotels. It may not be Malaysia's premier stretch of shoreline, but PD is a pleasant refuge from congested Kuala Lumpur (KL) and its vistas are scenic enough for a day or two paddling in the shallows.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Admiring the distinctive culture and **architecture** (p220) of the Minangkabau people, around Seremban
- Ambling around sleepy Sri Menanti and marvelling at the impeccable woodwork of the grand **Istana Lama** (p223)
- Giving in to the unhurried charms of **Kuala Pilah** (p223)
- Paddling at Port Dickson and exploring the **Cape Rachado Forest Reserve** (p224), capped by the old **Tanjung Tuan lighthouse** (p224)
- Unwinding with a few lagoon-side nights at the **Corus Paradise Resort** (p225) in Port Dickson
- Chomping your way through the night market while chin-wagging with locals at **Kuala Pilah** (p223)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 06 ■ POPULATION: 980,678 ■ AREA: 6645 SQ KM



History

During the Melaka sultanate of the 15th century, many Minangkabau people from Sumatra settled here. They initially lived under the protection of the rulers of Melaka, but with the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese, the Minangkabau sought protection from the sultans of neighbouring Johor.

With the rising power of the Bugis (a seafaring group of warrior-like Malay settlers from Macassar – Ujung Padang – in Celebes) in Selangor, the Minangkabau felt increasingly insecure, so they turned back to the royal house of Sumatra for protection. Raja Melewar, a Minangkabau prince from Sumatra, was appointed the first *yang dipertuan besar* (head of state)

of Negeri Sembilan in 1773 by the *undang* (territorial chiefs). Out of this initial union emerged a loose confederation of nine *luak* (fiefdoms), although there is some debate about the confederation's exact make-up. The royal capital of Negeri Sembilan was established at Sri Menanti, and Raja Melewar, though essentially powerless, indulged himself here.

The state serves as a useful escape route into Peninsular Malaysia's supra-urban landscapes, where small communities carry on irrespective of Kuala Lumpur's (KL's) urban charisma to the north. Diminutive perhaps, but with that comes the opportunity to recharge, settle down to an unhurried agenda and adjust to the local tempo.

Like Selangor to the north, Negeri Sembilan was rich in tin, and so for much of the 19th century it suffered the unrest and political instability motivated by greed. After Raja Melewar's death, the title of *yang dipertuan* was taken on by a succession of Sumatran chiefs, until a series of protracted tin-related wars from 1824–32 led to the severance of political ties with Sumatra.

The civil disturbances and interstate rivalry continued into the second half of the 19th century, particularly in the northern state of Sungai Ujong. In the 1880s the British gradually intervened by increasing their influence in the area, and the territories of Sri Menanti, Tampin, Rembau and Jelebu were consolidated into a new confederacy controlled by a British Resident. In 1895 Sungai Ujong was added to the union, and these five districts now make up the bulk of the modern state of Negeri Sembilan, with an area of 6643 sq km. Becoming part of the Federation of Malaya in 1948, the largely agricultural state has increasingly diversified its economy, with special emphasis on developing its manufacturing base.

Climate

The temperature in Negeri Sembilan ranges from 21°C to 33°C and average humidity exceeds 82%. There is rain through the year, with September to November the wettest months.

Getting There & Away

The Lebuhraya (North–South Hwy), connecting Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur, is the major road through the state. To get to Negeri Sembilan from KL, see p222; for interstate buses see p222 and p226.

SEREMBAN

06

Easily overshoot en route elsewhere, Seremban is the low-key state capital, a mere 64km southeast of KL. Its crumbling colonial-era shophouses, some gutted and abandoned or green with moss and opportunistic vegetation, exude a decaying nobility, but there is little to lure visitors into long stays here, and most travellers take in the city in passing.

Poetically named Furong (Hibiscus) in Mandarin, Seremban has a pronounced

Chinese personality, from Canto-pop pounding from store speakers to the elegant Chinese characters garlanding shopfronts. Minangkabau-style buffalo-horn roofs may adorn many recent buildings, such as the city hall, but the only real access point to Minangkabau culture is at the Muzium Negeri, a component of the Taman Seni Budaya on the outskirts of town.

Heading east to the hills bordering the city centre, Seremban develops a different persona, with the Lake Gardens affording a low-key respite from the traffic.

Information

Cyber Café (Shop LG 25, ground fl, Terminal 1 Shopping Centre, Jln Lintang; per hr RM3)

HSBC (50–52 Jln Dato Bandar Tunggal) Has a 24-hour ATM.

Minas Computer Centre (1st fl, 6 Jln Dato Lee Fong Yee; per hr RM3.50)

Moneychanger (64 Jln Yam Tuan) Located north of the Catholic Church.

OCBC (cnr Jln Dato Lee Fong Yee & Jln Dato Bandar Tunggal) Has a 24-hour ATM.

Sembilan Internet Library (per hr RM3; 11–24hr) Noisy gaming hall; east of the Carlton Star Hotel (p222).

Sights

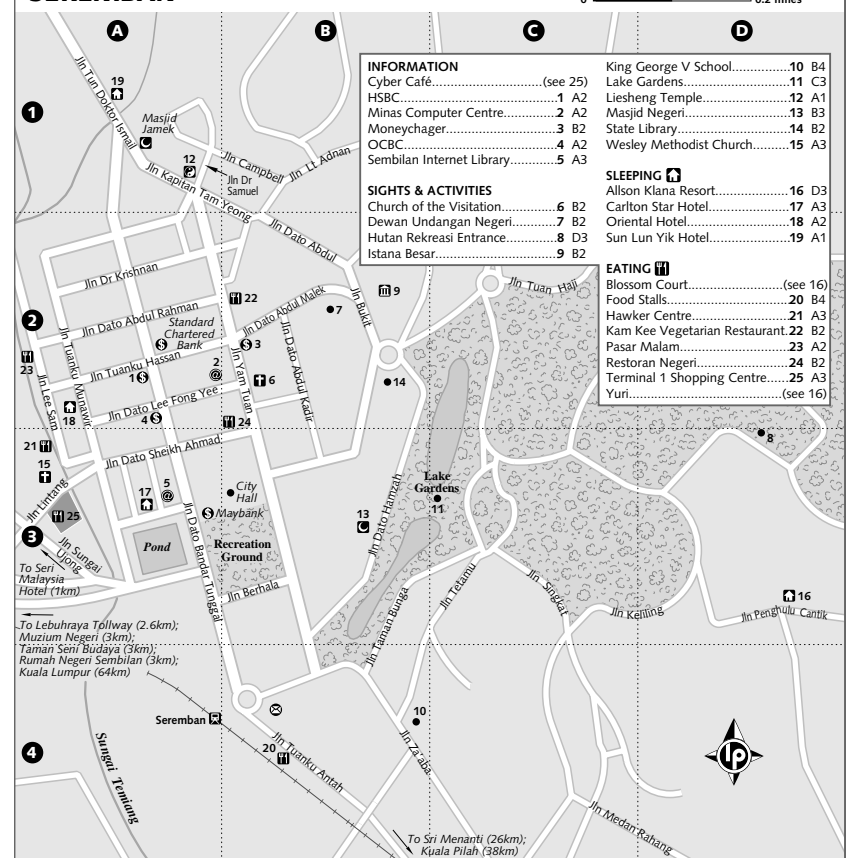
ARCHITECTURE

Its wonderful multiple roof-points a striking landmark for central Seremban, the **Dewan Undangan Negeri** (State Secretariat Bldg; btwn Jln Dato Abdul Kadir & Jln Dato Abdul Malek) is a fine melding of modern and traditional architecture opposite the **Istana Besar** (Jln Bukit; 11 closed to the public), home of the sultan of Negeri Sembilan. Directly south and once the offices of the colonial administration, the neoclassical (1912) **State Library** (off Jln Dato Hamzah), west of the Lake Gardens, is Seremban's most imposing colonial building.

Further south, the nine pillars of **Masjid Negeri** (State Mosque; Jln Dato Hamzah) represent the nine original states of Negeri Sembilan.

Seremban's central districts are sprinkled with colonial features. Flee from the heat into the cool, white interior of the **Catholic Church of the Visitation** (85a Jln Yam Tuan) where Mass in English is held on Sunday at 9am; or the more sober **Wesley Methodist Church** (Jln Dato Sheikh Ahmad), built in 1920. The premier colonial school for Seremban's elite, the **King George V School** (Jln Za'aba) still functions as a high school.

SEREMBAN



Its roof decorated with dragons, the main altar of the **Liesheng Temple** (Jln Dr Samuel; 11 daylight hr) is dedicated to three Taoist idols, chief among which is Guandi (the God of War). The Chinese characters above the altar mean 'Your needs will be answered'. An effigy of Guanyin (the Buddhist Goddess of Compassion) is also here, as well as some old drums.

LAKE GARDENS

The quaint Lake Gardens are a tame recreation reserve and the place where courting couples go in the evenings. The gardens are at the edge of the green and tranquil colonial district that now mostly houses government quarters.

MUZIUM NEGERI

The **Muzium Negeri** (State Museum; Jln Sungai Ujong; admission free; 11 10am–6pm Tue, Wed, Sat & Sun, 8.15am–1pm Thu, 10am–12.15pm & 2.45–6pm Fri), built in the style of a Minangkabau palace, displays handicrafts and historical exhibits. Displays cover the Emergency (see p37), complete with gruesome post-capture portraits of communist leaders. The museum is inside the **Taman Seni Budaya** (Arts & Cultural Park; Jln Sungai Ujong; admission free; 11 10am–6pm Tue, Wed, Sat & Sun, 8.15am–1pm Thu, 10am–12.15pm & 2.45–6pm Fri).

Nearby and also on the museum grounds is the **Rumah Negeri Sembilan**, a less ornate traditional house with a shingle roof showing the hallmark curved-roof style based on the buffalo horn.

Sleeping

Although some visitors arriving at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) may consider staying here as the airport is only 20 minutes away, there is no real need to stay overnight in Seremban as KL, the beach at Port Dickson and even Melaka are only about an hour away by bus or train. Several of the cheap Chinese flophouses in the centre of town are sordid bordellos where wanton locals infest reception; we have charted around those. It's more advisable to aim for midrange and top-end accommodation if staying in Seremban.

Oriental Hotel (11 Jln Tuanku Munawir; s/tw RM35/45; a) Rooms are OK in this well-looked after and centrally located budget hotel. The downside is that it's above a restaurant and singles with fan come without shower (so opt for the pricier twins).

Sun Lun Yik Hotel (☎ 763 5735; 19 Jln Tun Dr Ismail; s/d RM50/60; a) With friendly Chinese owners, this modest hotel on the fringes of the town centre has satisfactory rooms, all with shower, TV and air-con (but note that some rooms don't have windows).

Carlton Star Hotel (☎ 762 5336; 47 Jln Dato Sheikh Ahmad; s/d RM84/110; a) Under renovation at the time of writing, this six-storey hotel is in the centre of town, and guests can avail themselves of the steam bath, sauna, massage and karaoke facilities.

Seri Malaysia (☎ 764 4181; Jln Sungai Ujong; r RM120; a) This nationwide chain is formulaic, but the Seri Malaysia provides standard midrange comfort and rooms are adequately furnished. The location, 1km west of the bus station on the road to Muzium Negeri, is inconvenient.

Allson Klana Resort (☎ 762 7888; Jln Penghulu Cantik; s/d RM340/360, poolside s/d RM360/380; a s) With Malaysia's largest lagoon-shaped pool, this prestigious four-star hotel is set on a hill to the east of the Lake Gardens. Ensclosed in vast grounds and broadly featuring the facilities of an international-class hotel, the resort has the reputable Blossom Court (Chinese) and Yuri (Japanese) restaurants and offers a host of adventure activities (from archery to wall-climbing and orienteering) and a children's playroom.

Eating

Minangkabau-style cooking is a fiery concoction, due in part to generous additions of

chili padi (a tiny firebomb of a chilli). Local dishes worth a try include *masak lemak* (fish, meat or vegetables cooked in coconut milk), *rendang* (thick, dry meat curry usually served with rice cooked in coconut milk) and *dendeng balado* (beef with chilli).

RESTAURANTS

Restoran Negeri (☎ 767 1190; 13 Jln Dato Sheikh Ahmad; meals RM8). Centrally located Muslim restaurant with a choice of filling roti and curries.

Kam Kee Vegetarian Restaurant (☎ 763 5593; 60 Jln Yam Tuan; meals RM10). One of several meat-free options in town, choose from the colossal veggie spring rolls (RM1), *doufu* (tofu) dishes, *shaomai* (a kind of meat or shrimp dumpling dim sum; three for RM1), mock meat and other wholesome Cantonese fare.

Blossom Court (☎ 762 8888 ext 3333; 1st fl, Allson Klana Resort, Jln Penghulu Cantik; meals RM30; h lunch Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2.30pm Sun) This celebrated Chinese restaurant serves popular dim sum meals (RM28) as well as other Cantonese dishes in smart, albeit rather uninspiring, surrounds.

Yuri (☎ 762 7888 ext 3555; Lobby level, Allson Klana Resort, Jln Penghulu Cantik; meals RM40). Four private tatami rooms, teppanyaki counter, sushi bar, Sunday buffet (RM43, from 11.30am to 2.30pm), with rather faded mid-'90s décor but recommended food.

QUICK EATS

Functional food stalls (generally open from morning to night), serving mostly Malay dishes (meals around RM8) and some spicy Minangkabau fare, can be found south of the train station (on Jln Tuanku Antah), and at the upstairs *hawker centre* (Jln Lee Sam). The bustling Saturday *pasar malam* (night market; Jln Lee Sam) has plenty of food stalls.

Plentiful fast-food and satay restaurants occupy the ground floor of the Terminal 1 Shopping Centre (Jln Lintang). Look out for vendors on the streets selling bags of delicious iced soya milk (RM1) – just pop in a straw.

Getting There & Away

Seremban lies on the main north-south rail line from KL to Singapore. KTM Komuter trains, part of KL's city rail network, depart frequently between KL Sentral and Seremban (RM7, last train around 10pm, 45 minutes).

Transnasional buses (☎ 763 8798) leaving from the bus terminal on Jln Sungai Ujong include departures to KL (RM4.70, 30 minutes, every 20 minutes), Singapore (RM22.20, five hours, two per day), Melaka (RM5.30, 1½ hours, every hour), Kuantan (RM25, six hours), Kuala Pilah (RM3.50, one hour, every 15 minutes) and Kuala Terengganu (RM30.50, six hours). Bus 67 runs to Port Dickson via Lukut (RM3, one hour). The terminal has a *left-luggage counter* (small/big bag per hr 80 sen/RM1.50; h 7.30am-9pm). Long-distance taxis muster upstairs for destinations, eg Port Dickson (RM35), KL (RM70), Melaka (RM90) and Sri Menanti (RM30).

To reach Seremban from KLIA, first take a bus from the airport to Nilai (RM2) and change to a KTM Komuter train to Seremban (RM2.10).

SEREMBAN TO KUALA PILAH

East from Seremban, the road meanders through the hills to the town of Kuala Pilah, penetrating the heartland of Minangkabau culture around the old royal town of Sri Menanti. Look out for *Minangkabau houses* along the main road, though the traditional thatch of buffalo-horn roofs has been replaced by more utilitarian corrugated iron. The village of Terachi, 27km from Seremban at the turn-off to Sri Menanti, has some particularly fine traditional houses, as do the villages further north, including Pantai, and Sri Menanti itself.

Sri Menanti

☎ 06

Tidy and placid Sri Menanti, 6km off the Seremban-Kuala Pilah road, is the old royal capital, first settled over 400 years ago by Minangkabau immigrants from Sumatra. Swathed in a silence only interrupted by bird song the sleepy, disengaged hamlet nestles in a highland valley surrounded by green jungle hills, fringed with simple dwellings and scampering chickens.

There's internet access at **Kuntum Indah Computer Internet** (per hr RM3; h 9am-11pm) next to the police station at the T-junction.

Just past Sri Menanti's own tiny Lake Gardens is *Istana Besar*, the impressive palace of the sultan of Negeri Sembilan (not open to the public). Originally built in the 1930s, the later addition features a blue-tiled Minangkabau roof.

Just beyond *Istana Besar* is the magnificent *Istana Lama* (Old Palace; admission free; h 10am-6pm Sat-Thu, 10am-12.15pm & 2.45-6pm Fri), now a museum; remove your shoes if going upstairs. Exuding regal poise and designed by master craftsmen, the beautiful black hardwood palace is the centrepiece of Sri Menanti. Arranged over four floors, the palace was fashioned without the use of nails in 1908 as a temporary replacement for an even older palace that was razed by British soldiers during the Sungai Ujong wars. The structure is raised off the ground on 99 pillars, many of them carved, each one representing the legendary 99 *luak* (clan) warriors. Inside you can see the king and queen's bedchambers, the children's playroom, a large dining room and huge dining table as well as kris weaponry and royal regalia. Climb to the top floor for views over the gardens.

Back towards the main road in the compound next to the mosque is the *Makam Di Raja* (Royal Cemetery), which has a distinctive Victorian/Moorish pavilion. The prominent grave of Tuanku Abdul Rahman, the first king of independent Malaysia, is immediately inside the gates.

The two-storey **Sri Menanti Resort** (☎ 497 0577; dm/d RM15/77, chalet RM108-126; a s), next to *Istana Lama*, has reasonably well-maintained rooms, including 14-bed dorms. Note that room prices rise by RM10 or so on Saturday and Sunday. Nonguests can avail themselves of the swimming pool for RM5.

To reach Sri Menanti from Seremban, take a bus to Kuala Pilah (RM3.50) and then a taxi (return around RM20).

Kuala Pilah

☎ 06

Kuala Pilah, a pleasant valley town 40km east of Seremban, is one of the main townships in this strongly Minangkabau region. Colourfully decorated with brightly painted shophouses, Kuala Pilah is more attractive and endowed with more personality than Seremban.

Internet access can be found at the **Computer Center** (73 Jln Lister; per hr RM3).

Its few temples of note include the **Kuil Sri Kanthaswamy** (Jln Melang; h main prayer hall 6.30-7pm), overflowing with colour and arrayed with deities. The intriguing **Sansheng Gong** (Sansheng Temple; Jln Dato Undang Johol) has a skilfully

GRAVE REMINDERS

About 23km east of Cape Rachado is the small town of **Pengkalan Kempas**, and just outside the town a 'Kompleks Sejarah Pengkalan Kempas' sign indicates the grave of **Sheikh Ahmad Majnun**, about 100m off the road. This local hero died in 1467 and beside his grave stand three 2m-high megalithic stones known as the 'sword', 'spoon' and 'rudder'. No-one is quite sure of their purpose, but similar pairs (not trios) of monoliths have been found elsewhere. Scholars think they were originally used as grave-markers, but many monoliths evolved into village shrines, worshipped by residents who believed the stones had the power to spontaneously grow taller.

The buses that run along the coast hourly between Port Dickson and Melaka travel via Pengkalan Kempas, and the gravesite is a short distance outside town, in the direction of Lubok China and Melaka.

carved boat, from the time of Qing emperor Guangxu, hanging just inside the door. The Chinese folk at the temple may offer you a cup of tea and take you on a small tour. The fierce-looking bearded idol in the centre is Guandi (God of War); there are marvelous carvings along the front of the temple and worn frescoes on the wall. A plaque on the outside wall commemorates an instruction from 1897 from the Resident that this plot could be used for the construction of a Chinese temple. Opposite the temple is an elaborate Chinese-style decorative archway dedicated to Martin Lister, the first British Resident (1889–97) of Negeri Sembilan.

There's no reason to get stranded here, but if you do, Kuala Pilah has several cheap Chinese hotels. The **Desa Inn** (☎ 481 8033; 745 Jln Dato Abdul Manap; d/f RM55/77; a s) offers clean and recently refurbished doubles with tiled floors, air-con, minute TVs, kettle, coffee and small balcony (but you may get woken by the sonorous 6am call to prayer). Plentiful signs around town lead to the hotel. The **Rest House Kuala Pilah** (☎ 481 4146; Jln Bukit; d/chalet RM50/95) has OK rooms but suffers from indifferent service.

For dinner, the lively **night market** (Jln Yam Tuan), near **Desa Inn**, kicks off at around 6pm daily when the air becomes heavy with the fragrance of satay (from 35 sen), burger *daging* (beef burgers; RM1.50), *banjo* (egg burgers; RM1) and a medley of Malay and Indian aromas.

There are regular buses from Seremban (RM3.50, one hour, every 15 minutes). In Kuala Pilah, the **bus station** (☎ 288 7207) is hidden away behind the archway opposite the Sansheng Gong. Buses depart for Johor Bahru (RM18.50), Kuantan (RM16.90) and Seremban (RM3.50). To reach Melaka, you

need to first take a bus to Tampin (RM3.20), 38km south, and transfer.

PORT DICKSON

☎ 06

Port Dickson (PD) is a small port town of little interest, but it's the gateway to the stretch of beach extending 16km south to Tanjung Tuan (Cape Rachado). KL residents descend on the beaches at weekends, housed in one of the many hotels along the shore.

For internet access, try **MDS Internet** (3A Km 6.5 Jln Pantai; per hr RM3), 400m south of the Seri Malaysia hotel. A useful moneychanger can be found at the bus station. The post office is opposite the bus station.

Sights & Activities

The beaches are very popular, but rank low on Malaysia's surf list. The water is disappointing and shallow for swimming, but the views are rewarding and some absorbing diversions can fill a few days.

Originally built by the Portuguese in the 16th century, the **Tanjung Tuan lighthouse** (Rumah Api) offers fine, long views. On a clear day you can see Sumatra, 38km away across Selat Melaka. The lighthouse – built in 1860 and Malaysia's oldest – concludes an enjoyable uphill walk through the **Cape Rachado Forest Reserve**, a jungle of towering trees including the mighty *shorea leprosula*. The reserve is a stopover for over 300,000 migratory birds every year, including Japanese Sparrowhawks and Grey-faced Buzzards. The turn-off to the lighthouse is near the Km 16 marker; head down the road for 2km and then through the forest reserve for another kilometre to the lighthouse. Nearby you'll find the small **Blue Lagoon**

(Tanjung Biru), with its pretty little beach and assorted marine life.

When your children tire of the sand, the **Port Dickson Ostrich Farm** (☎ 662 7496; Km 14.5 Jln Pantai; adult/child RM8/4; h 9am–5.30pm) has ostrich races (11am and 3.30pm on weekends only) – the birds reach speeds of up to 70kph – ostrich rides and a small farm teeming with crocodiles, goats, peacocks, rabbits and other furry friends.

There's not much to see in Port Dickson itself, although you can delve into the smoky interior of the **Taoist Fengshan Si** (Fengshan Temple; Jln Lama). It's back-to-back with the vibrantly painted **Sri Maha Mariamman Temple** on your left as you head out on the road down to the beach. At the festival of **Navarathiri** (September or October), the Goddess Sri Maha Mariamman is conveyed at night on a chariot procession around Port Dickson. The goddess performs a similar journey during the **Anniversary Prayers procession** (June or July). Built in 1847 and 7km from town, **Lukut Fort** was established to protect the local tin trade.

Sleeping

Hotels, servicing every conceivable budget, are slung out along the long stretch of beach all the way to Tanjung Tuan. Weekends and holiday periods see room prices rising and hotels full (except for hostels), but on weekdays hefty discounts drop luxury room rates well within reach.

Rotary Sunshine Camp Holiday Hostel (☎ 647 3798; Km 5 Jln Pantai; dm/r RM7/25) Clean, cheap and run by friendly staff, this hostel is excellent value, despite the absence of air-con. Look for the blue painted shacks set back slightly from the road up the slope along Jln Pantai. Shower and cooking facilities are shared and on weekdays, things are tranquil.

Seri Malaysia (☎ 647 6070; Km 6; d Sun–Thu RM120, Fri & Sat RM140; a s) The swimming pool isn't much bigger than a beach towel, but this hotel from the nationwide chain offers reasonable value.

Corus Paradise Resort (☎ 647 7600; www.corusparadisepd.com; Km 3.5 Jln Pantai; standard/deluxe ocean-view r RM230/260, Laguna deluxe r RM280; a s) Equipped with a fantastic pool with water slides and good shallow and paddling sections, the child-friendly Corus has alluring views over the bay. Activities include

jungle-trekking, crab-hunting and water sports. The restaurants are good and the hotel's own palm-fringed lagoon that fills at high tide is a trump card. Rooms are comfortable and fully equipped. There's bike rental for RM2 per hour and also a children's centre.

Avillion Village Resort (☎ 647 6688; res@avillion.com.my; Km 5; d RM380; a s) Beautifully designed and lushly planted with trees and greenery, there's a water-sports centre, a huge pool with slides, a tennis court, and a large variety of accommodation options, including water chalets (on the sea), styled in wood, equipped with four-post beds and open-air bathrooms. Also at hand are several good restaurants, an open-air bar and a gym.

Ilham Resort (☎ 662 6800; www.ilhamresort.com; Tanjung Biru, Km 16 Jln Pantai; 3-/4-bedroom apt RM400/500; a s) Next to Cape Rachado Forest Reserve, Ilham has spacious gardens, swimming pool and paddling pool, a children's play area and a small stretch of beach. This well-equipped resort offers quality apartment accommodation.

Guoman Port Dickson Resort (☎ 662 7878; www.guomanhotels.com; Km 16 Jln Pantai, Teluk Kemang; d RM400; a s) This is an exclusive hotel, set in huge landscaped grounds with manicured lawns, with a private golf course, floodlit tennis courts, a magnificent pool, beautiful views, five-a-side football pitch and a breezy, open foyer.

Also recommended:

Kong Ming (Guangming) Hotel (☎ 662 5683; Km 13 Telok Kemang; d Sun–Thu RM30, Fri & Sat RM40) Cheap, and right on the beach. Fan rooms are large, with pricier rooms facing the sea. Beer is served (per can RM6.50).

Lido Hotel (☎ 662 5273; Km 13 Jln Pantai; d RM45–66; a) Beachfront; rooms are large and OK. Check-out time is at 1pm. Just along from the Kong Ming Hotel.

Selesa Resort (☎ 647 4090; Km 8; superior/deluxe r RM220/280; a s) Minangkabau-style resort with pool and sea-facing rooms, all with small balcony and rather old-style furniture. Coffee house is open 24 hours.

Eating

El Cactus (☎ 012-646 3772; Km 4, Lot 2674, Jln Pantai; meals RM25; h 5.30pm–midnight) South of the Corus, this is one of PD's few nonhotel bars (bottle of beer RM10.50), and a welcoming spot for dinner or a nightcap or two, with outside seating, a music system creatively mounted atop half a Fiat 500 Bambino,

lounge area, pool table, Latin music and menu (boneless chicken fajitas RM15), live sports TV plus a relaxed atmosphere.

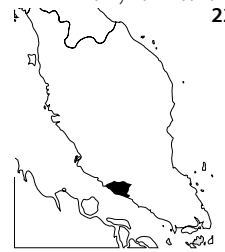
Dickson's Coffee House ☎ 647 7600; Corus Paradise Resort; meals RM30) Alfresco views over the bay and a wide-ranging menu – Malaysian favourites like *nasi lemak* (rice boiled in coconut milk), Chinese dishes such as *loh hon chai* (a Chinese dish of assorted cooked vegetables) and international dishes (the excellent salmon steak) – make this a pleasant restaurant, although staff seem reluctant to serve. Drinks include the house wine (per bottle RM95) and Tiger beer (RM18).

Getting There & Around

Six buses a day go to KL (RM6.50, two hours) and hourly buses depart for Seremban (RM2.80, one hour). There are also departures for Ipoh (RM17.45, 8.45am) and Lumut (RM22). For Melaka, at the time of writing you have to first go via Seremban. The taxi station is next to the bus station in the centre of town; taxi fares include Melaka (RM80), Seremban (RM30) and KL (RM120).

From Port Dickson town, local buses will drop you off wherever you like along the beach.

Melaka



One of Malaysia's most eagerly sought-after destinations, the small city-state of Melaka (Malacca) lures droves of visitors to its namesake historic port city, where they are quickly steeped in an intoxicating multicultural world of heritage architecture and the alluring aromas of distinctive local cooking.

Under the Melaka sultanates, the city was a wealthy centre for trade with China, India, Siam (Thailand) and Indonesia, owing to its strategic position on the Selat Melaka (Strait of Melaka). The Melaka sultanates were the basis for Malaysia as it appears today, and it is sometimes said that this city is where you'll glimpse the soul of the nation.

Modern Melaka was swept up in the sudden economic boom that blew across Malaysia in the 1990s. Massive land-reclamation projects, which tapered off during the ensuing economic downturn, pushed the historic waterfront so far inland, however, that it endangered the traditional livelihood of the Portuguese fishing community. Malacca has a rich seam of heritage, but many argue that this is under threat from those twin fruits of development: commercialisation and modernisation. Nevertheless, Melaka remains one of Malaysia's most rewarding tourist experiences. Proud of its multicultural heritage, plentiful museums and assorted cultural attractions, Melaka is a tourist habitat *par excellence*.

Beyond the city, there are worthwhile beach excursions to Pulau Besar and Tanjung Bidara, plus the wildlife and theme-park attractions of Ayer Keroh.

HIGHLIGHTS

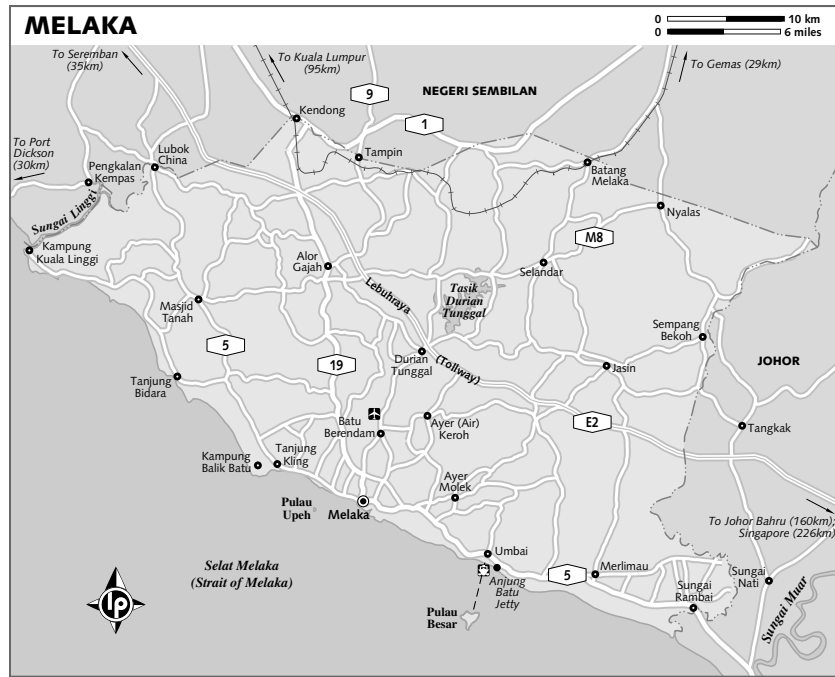
- Wandering Melaka's **historic town centre** (p235), exploring its medley of Portuguese, Dutch, Islamic and Chinese architecture
- Sightseeing, shopping and delving into the busy streets of **Chinatown** (p235)
- Sampling Melaka's famed cuisine (p239), from Nonya delicacies to Portuguese Eurasian dishes and Buddhist vegetarian
- Exploring the captivating **Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum** (p233), with delightful displays set up in a traditional Peranakan house
- Exploring the white sands of **Pulau Besar** (p243) or the rocky headlands of **Tanjung Bidara** (p244)
- Scaling the modest heights of Bukit St Paul and surveying the ruins of **St Paul's Church** (p232)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 06

■ POPULATION: 705, 390

■ AREA: 1652 SQ KM



History

In the 14th century, Melaka was just another fishing village – until it attracted the attention of Parameswara, a Hindu prince from Sumatra. Parameswara had thrown off allegiance to the Majapahit empire and fled to Temasek (modern-day Singapore), where his piracy and other exploits provoked a Siamese attack in 1398, forcing him to flee once more to Melaka, where he established his new headquarters.

Under Parameswara, Melaka soon became a favoured port for waiting out monsoons and resupplying trading ships plying the strategic Selat Melaka. Halfway between China and India, and with easy access to the spice islands of Indonesia, Melaka attracted merchants from all over the East.

In 1405 the Chinese Muslim Admiral Cheng Ho (see p234), the ‘three-jewelled eunuch prince’, arrived in Melaka bearing gifts from the Ming emperor and the promise of protection from Siamese enemies. Chinese settlers followed, who intermarried with local Malays and came to be known as the Baba-Nonya (also called Straits Chinese

or Peranakan). The longest-settled Chinese people in Malaysia, they grafted many Malay customs to their own heritage. Despite internal squabbles and intrigues, by the time of Parameswara’s death in 1414, Melaka was a powerful trading state. Its position was consolidated by the state’s adoption of Islam in the mid-15th century (see p31).

In 1509 the Portuguese came seeking the wealth of the spice and China trades, but after an initially friendly reception, the Malaccans attacked the Portuguese fleet and took a number of prisoners. This prompted an outright assault by the Portuguese, and in 1511 Alfonso de Albuquerque took the city, forcing the sultan to flee to Johor, where he re-established his kingdom. Under the Portuguese, the fortress of A’Famosa was constructed, and missionaries like St Francis Xavier strove to implant Catholicism. While Portuguese cannons could easily conquer Melaka, they could not force Muslim merchants from Arabia and India to continue trading there, and other ports in the area, such as Islamic Demak on Java, grew to overshadow Melaka.

The period of Portuguese strength in the East was shortlived, as Melaka suffered harrying attacks from the rulers of neighbouring Johor and Negeri Sembilan, as well as from the Islamic power of Aceh in Sumatra. Melaka declined further as Dutch influence in Indonesia grew and Batavia (modern-day Jakarta) developed as the key European port of the region. Melaka passed into Dutch hands after an eight-month siege in 1641. The Dutch ruled Melaka for only about 150 years. Melaka again became the centre for peninsular trade, but the Dutch directed more energy into their possessions in Indonesia. In Melaka they built fine public buildings and churches, which remain the most solid suggestions of European presence, while Medan Portugis is still home to Portuguese Eurasians, many of whom are practising Catholics and speak Kristang (Cristao), a creole littered with archaic Portuguese (see p235).

When the French occupied Holland in 1795, the British – Dutch allies – temporarily assumed administration of the Dutch colonies. The British administrators, essentially traders, were opposed to the Dutch policy of trade monopoly and saw the potential for fierce rivalry in Malaysia between themselves and the Dutch. Accordingly, in 1807 they began demolishing A’Famosa fortress and forcibly removing Melaka’s Dutch population to Penang to prevent Melaka rivalling British Malayan centres in the event of Dutch control being restored. Fortunately Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the far-sighted founder of Singapore, stepped in before these destructive policies went too far, and in 1824 Melaka was permanently ceded to the British in exchange for the Sumatran port of Bencoolen (Bengkulu today).

Melaka, together with Penang and Singapore, formed the Straits settlements, the three British territories that were the centres for later expansion into the peninsula. However, under British rule Melaka was eclipsed by other Straits settlements and quickly superseded by the rapidly growing commercial importance of Singapore. Apart from a brief upturn in the early 20th century when rubber was an important crop, Melaka returned again to being a quiet backwater, quietly awaiting its renaissance as a tourist drawcard.

Climate

The temperature in Melaka ranges from 21°C to 33°C and average humidity exceeds 82%. There is rain throughout the year, with September to November the wettest months.

Getting There & Away

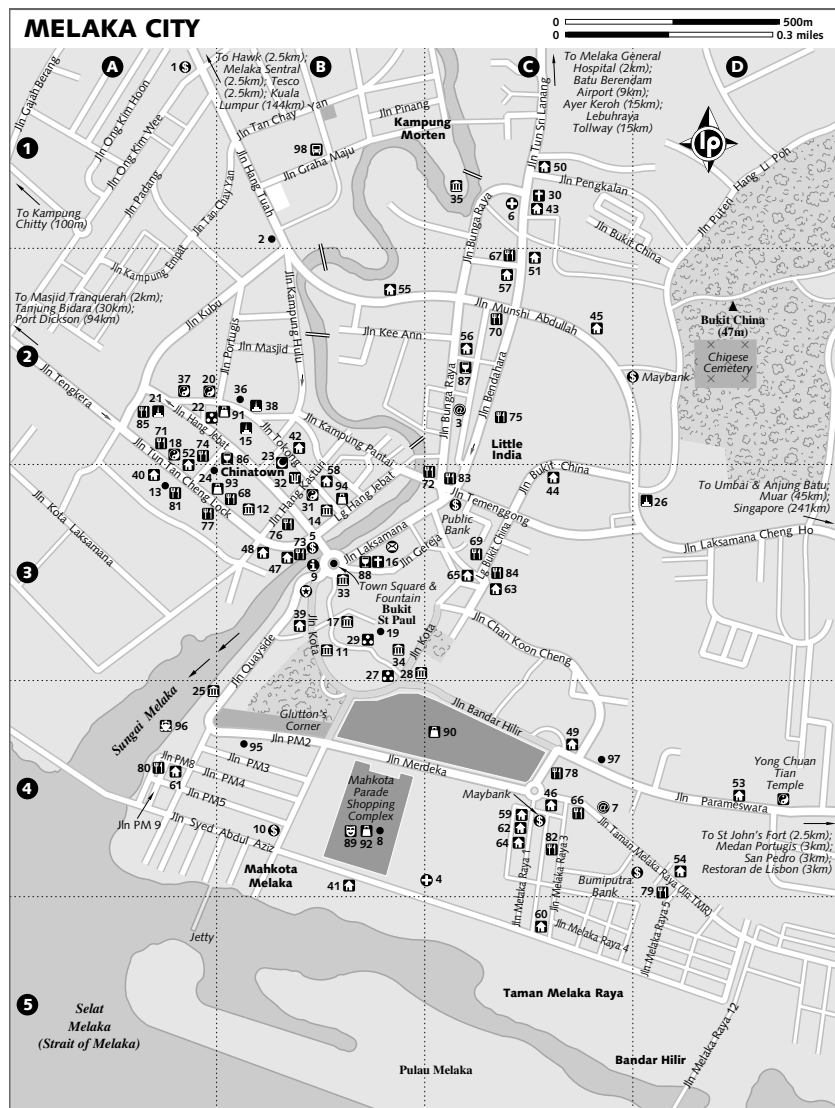
The Lebuhraya (North-South Highway), linking Johor Bahru and Kuala Lumpur, is the main route through the state. Most travellers arrive and depart from Melaka overland, as the airport outside town does not handle domestic flights. Express buses to KL and Singapore are plentiful and bus connections link with other peninsular destinations. Trains do not stop at Melaka but at Tampin, 38km north of town. Daily boats connect with Dumai in Sumatra. For detailed information on transport to/from the city of Melaka, as well as transport options around town, see p242 and p243.

MELAKA

06

One of the country’s top-drawer destinations and historical treasures, the state capital Melaka is a picturesque tableau and snapshot of the fecund multicultural traditions of Malaysia. Delightful Chinatown is Melaka’s most traveller-trammelled area, and even though over-commercialisation of the district is compromising its traditional charms (see the boxed text, p233), peer beneath the skin and you will be rewarded with rich seams of genuine character and history.

Its strategic position on Selat Melaka guaranteed Melaka an enviable prestige and prosperity, and by the 15th century the city had become the greatest trading port in Southeast Asia, attracting waves of conquering Europeans, each adding their own cultural overlay. Melaka’s importance may have long since waned, but its distinctive history has crystallised in a rich medley of Chinese, Islamic, Indian and European culture. The city’s unique personality draws from its rare compendium of Peranakan shophouses, Portuguese and Dutch architecture, Victorian vestiges, Buddhist, Taoist and Indian temples and Islamic mosques. Melaka’s multifaith culture is deeply evident everywhere, not least in the Muslim



call to prayer that travels sonorously over Chinese worshippers offering incense to smiling *bodhisattvas* in Chinatown's temples.

Having sampled Melaka's sights, food lovers can proceed to some of Malaysia's finest cuisine. From characteristic Peranakan dishes to Portuguese cooking, restaura-

nt aromas citywide add further colour to the cultural mosaic that makes Melaka such an astonishing experience.

ORIENTATION

Melaka is a medium-sized town that's easy to navigate and compact enough to explore on foot, bicycle or trishaw.

INFORMATION

HSBC.....	1 A1
Immigration Office.....	2 B1
Internet Centre.....	3 C2
Mahkota Medical Centre.....	4 C4
MPH Bookstores..... (see 92)	
OCBC Bank.....	5 B3
Southern Hospital.....	6 C1
Surf Zone.....	7 C4
Syarikat Buku Thai Kuang.....	8 B4
Tourist Office.....	9 B3
United Overseas Bank.....	10 B4

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Architecture Museum of Malaysia.....	11 B3
Baba-Nyonya Heritage Museum.....	12 B3
Chee Mansion.....	13 A3
Cheng Ho Cultural Museum.....	14 B3
Cheng Hoon Teng Temple.....	15 B2
Christ Church.....	16 B3
Democratic Government Museum.....	17 B3
Eng Choon (Yong Chun) Association.....	18 A2
Governor's House.....	19 B3
Guangfu Temple.....	20 A2
Guanyin Temple.....	21 A2
Hang Kasturi's Tomb.....	22 A2
History & Ethnography Museum..... (see 33)	
Kampung Kling Mosque.....	23 B2
Leong San Thong.....	24 A3
Literature Museum..... (see 33)	
Maritime Museum.....	25 A4
Naval Museum..... (see 25)	
Poh San Teng Temple.....	26 D3
Porta de Santiago.....	27 B3
Proclamation of Independence Memorial.....	28 B3
Putuo TCM Therapy Centre..... (see 22)	
St Paul's Church.....	29 B3
St Peter's Church.....	30 C1
Sanduo Temple.....	31 B3

Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple.....	32 B3
Stadthuys.....	33 B3
Sultanate Palace.....	34 B3
Sultan's Well..... (see 26)	
Villa Sentosa.....	35 C1
Wah Aik.....	36 B2
Wah Teck Kiong Temple.....	37 A2
Xianglin Temple.....	38 B2

SLEEPING

Aldy Hotel.....	39 B3
Baba House.....	40 A3
Century Mahkota Hotel.....	41 B4
Chong Hoe Hotel.....	42 B2
City Bayview Hotel.....	43 C1
Eastern Heritage Guest House.....	44 C3
Emperor Hotel.....	45 C2
Fenix Inn.....	46 C4
Heeren House.....	47 B3
Heeren Inn.....	48 B3
Hotel Equatorial.....	49 C4
Hotel Grand Continental.....	50 C1
Hotel Orkid.....	51 C2
Hotel Puri.....	52 A3
Kancil Guest House.....	53 D4

DRINKING

Geographér Café.....	86 B2
Kia Kee Liquor Shop.....	87 C2
X-Tracts.....	88 B3

ENTERTAINMENT

Golden Screen Cinemas.....	89 B4
Sound & Light Show..... (see 27)	

SHOPPING

Dataran Pahlawan.....	90 C4
Lim Trading.....	91 B2
Mahkota Parade Shopping Complex.....	92 B4
Malaqa House.....	93 B3
Orangutan House.....	94 B3

TRANSPORT

Dumai Ferry Service.....	95 B4
Ferries to Dumai.....	96 A4
Jin Fu Shin.....	97 C4
Local Bus Station.....	98 B1
Luxury buses to Singapore..... (see 41)	
Malaysia Airlines..... (see 41)	

Centrepont Food Court.....	70 C2
Coconut House.....	71 A2
Discovery Cafe.....	72 C3
Harper's.....	73 B3
Heeren House..... (see 47)	
Howard's.....	74 A2
Indian Hawker Stalls.....	75 C2
Jonkers Melaka Restoran.....	76 B3
Limau-Limau Café.....	77 A3
Malay Food Stalls.....	78 C4
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Ole Sayang.....	79 D4
Restoran Amitufooh.....	80 A4
Restoran Peranakan.....	81 A3
Restoran Wuguzhan.....	82 C4
Selvam.....	83 C3
Cart & Tart Bakery..... (see 14)	
UE Tea House.....	84 C3
Vegan Salad & Herbs House.....	85 A2

DRINKING

Geographér Café.....	86 B2
Kia Kee Liquor Shop.....	87 C2
X-Tracts.....	88 B3

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Golden Screen Cinemas.....	89 B4
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Malaysia Airlines..... (see 41)	

The colonial areas of Melaka are mainly on the eastern side of the river, focussed around Town Sq (which is also known as Dutch Sq) where the old Stadthuys (Town Hall) and Christ Church are standout reminders of the presence of the Dutch.

Bukit St Paul (St Paul's Hill), the site of the original Portuguese fort of A'Famosa, rises above Town Sq. The ruins of St Paul's Church and the Porta de Santiago are the only architectural remains of the Portuguese presence. Located further north is Melaka's tiny Little India, with its nighttime hawker stalls and sari shops. Chinatown to the west is lined with Chinese Peranakan shophouses and antique shops, atmospheric Buddhist temples and ancient mosques.

South of Melaka's old historical quarter are Mahkota Melaka and Taman Melaka Raya, which are two completely new areas built on reclaimed land; also in this area is Dataran Pahlawan, a new shopping/restaurant complex and mall under construction at the time of writing. Plaza Mahkota is a commercial area in the southwest of Melaka.

INFORMATION Bookshops

MPH Bookstores (☎ 283 3050; G73B, Ground fl, Mahkota Parade, Jln Merdeka; ☎ 9am-10pm) Reasonable selection of English-language titles.

Syarikat Buku Thai Kuang (☎ 282 0511; F59 & 60, 1st fl, Mahkota Parade, Jln Merdeka; ☎ 10am-10pm) Good range of titles.

Emergency

Melaka Police Hotline (☎ 285 1999)

Immigration Office

Immigration office (☎ 282 4958; 2nd fl, Wisma Persekutuan, Jln Hang Tuah)

Internet Access

Geographér Café (☎ 281 6813; 83 Jln Hang Jebat; per 30min RM3) See also p242.

Internet Centre (54 Jln Bunga Raya; per hr RM3.50)

Surf Zone (120 Jln TMR; per hr RM2.50)

Medical Services

Mahkota Medical Centre (appointments ☎ 281 4426/4427, emergency 281 4068/4071; www.mahkota.medical.com; No 3, Mahkota Melaka, Jln Merdeka)

Melaka General Hospital (☎ 282 2344; Jln Pringgiti)

Southern Hospital (☎ 283 5888; 169 Jln Bendahara)

Money

Moneychangers are scattered about, mainly in Chinatown and near the bus stations.

HSBC (Jln Hang Tuah) Has a 24-hour ATMs (MasterCard, Visa, Maestro, Cirrus and Plus).

OCBC Bank (Lg Hang Jebat) This branch just over the bridge in Chinatown has a 24-hour ATM that takes Visa/Plus.

United Overseas Bank (Jln PM5) MasterCard, Visa, Maestro, Cirrus and Plus at its 24-hour ATM.

Post

Post office (Jln Laksamana) This is a small post office off the Town Sq.

Tourist Information

Tourist Office (☎ 281 4803, 1800-889 483; www.melaka.gov.my; Jln Kota; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm) Free maps of Melaka and other bumf. Diagonally across the square from Christ Church.

Tourist Police (☎ 281 4803; Jln Kota; ☎ 8am-11pm)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Note that most of the central sights in Melaka are taken in on the walking tour, p235.

Stadthuys

The imposing red town hall and governor's residence, the **Stadthuys** (Town Sq; ☎ 282 6526; admission adult/child RM5/2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5.30pm Fri), was built between 1641 and 1660 and is believed to be the oldest Dutch building in the East. With substantial solid doors and louvered windows,

it is typical of Dutch colonial architecture and its port-red theme extends to the other buildings around the Town Sq and the old clock tower. Housed here is the informative **History & Ethnography Museum** (☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5.30pm Fri), which has guided tours available 10.30am and 2.30pm Saturday and Sunday. Up the hill is the mildly interesting **Literature Museum** (☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5.30pm Fri), focusing on Malaysian writers. Admission to the History & Ethnography and Literature Museums, as well as to the **Governor's House** (☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5.30pm Fri) and the **Democratic Government Museum** (☎ 9am-5.30pm Sat-Thu, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5.30pm Fri), is included in the admission price to Stadthuys.

St Paul's Church

Originally built by a Portuguese captain in 1521 as the small Our Lady of the Hill chapel, **St Paul's Church** (Bukit St Paul) is a sublime testament to Catholicism in East Asia and offers fine, breezy views over Melaka from the summit of Bukit St Paul. The church was regularly visited by St Francis Xavier, and following his death in China, the saint's body was temporarily interred here (a marble statue of the saint commemorates the occasion) for nine months before being transferred to Goa, where it remains today.

In 1556 St Paul's Church was enlarged to two storeys, and a tower was added to the front in 1590. The church was renamed following the Dutch takeover, but when the Dutch completed their own Christ Church at the base of the hill, it fell into disuse. Under the British the church lost the tower, although a lighthouse was built, and the church eventually ended up as a storehouse for gunpowder. The church has been in ruins for more than 150 years, but the setting is beautiful, the walls are imposing and fine old tombstones stand around the interior.

Sultanate Palace

Housing a cultural museum, this wooden replica of a Melaka sultan's **palace** (Jln Kota; admission RM2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Wed-Mon) is based on descriptions, from the *Malay Annals*, of the original 15th-century palace, built entirely without nails.

VOICES FROM THE STREET

We began by listening to the voices of ordinary Malaccans. We listened to the city's streets, as we searched out hidden corners and abandoned alleyways. Listened to houses and temples, ruins and cemeteries. Even to the murmurs and whispers of empty spaces. We listened at every turn, at every step. To the living and the dead. The past and the present. In the hope that the story of an extraordinary place and its people would be told. And we heard them speak.

Extract from *Malacca: Voices from the Street* © Lim Huck Chin and Fernando Jorge (2005).

Lim Huck Chin and Fernando Jorge are architects who worked on the restoration of a Dutch-period shophouse (No 8 Heeren St) and have since produced *Malacca: Voices From The Street*, a gorgeous book of photos and stories about the town. You can learn about their work by visiting the website www.malaccavoices.com.

Lim and Jorge's words and pictures capture the magic of Melaka that many residents fear is under threat in the rush to paint heritage buildings garish colours in the name of conservation.

Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum

Set in a traditional Peranakan townhouse in Chinatown, this captivating **museum** (☎ 283 1273; 48-50 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; adult/child RM8/4; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Wed-Mon) is arranged to look like a typical 19th-century Baba-Nonya residence. Furniture consists of Chinese hardwoods fashioned in Chinese, Victorian and Dutch designs with mother-of-pearl inlay. Displays of 'Nonya ware', multicoloured ceramic designs from Jiāngxī and Guǎngdōng provinces in China, made specifically for the Straits Chinese, add to the presentation. The admission fee includes a guided tour.

Cheng Hoon Teng Temple

Notable for its carved woodwork, the **Cheng Hoon Teng Temple** (Qing Yun Ting; Green Clouds Temple; 25 Jln Tokong; ☎ 7am-7pm), Chinatown's most famous temple, is dedicated to Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy. Dating to 1646, this is Malaysia's oldest Chinese temple, with all building materials imported from China, along with the artisans involved in its construction. A robed effigy of Guanyin can be found within the main temple hall, itself an explosion of black, gold and red. Worshippers also pray to the altar of Tianhou, goddess of seafarers, placed to the left of Guanyin. Despite the temple's fame, it cannot compare with much larger temples in China, but it remains both a venerable and sacred site.

Villa Sentosa

While not an official museum, this 1920s Malay *kampung* (village) house called **Villa**

Sentosa (Peaceful Villa; ☎ 282 3988; www.travel.to/villasentosa; entry by donation; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat-Thu, 2.45-5pm Fri), on the Melaka River in Kampung Morten, is well worth a visit. A member of the family will show you around the house, which is accessed via a bridge. There's a varied collection of objects, including Ming dynasty ceramics, a 100-year-old copy of the Quran and a certificate of honour awarded by King George V to the late Tuan Haji Hashim Bin Dato Demang Haji Abdul Ghani (who lived here). Most of all, it's an opportunity to wander through a genuine *kampung* house. You can also add to the visitors' book, copious volumes of which record congratulatory remarks from legions of visitors, some well-known. Afterwards, stroll around Kampung Morten with even more traditional *kampung* houses.

St Peter's Church

The oldest functioning Catholic church in Malaysia, **St Peter's Church** (Jln Bendahara) was built in 1710 by descendants of early Portuguese settlers. The church has stained-glass windows, the Latin words Tu es Petrus (You are the Rock) above the altar and a bell cast in Goa (India) in 1608. On Good Friday the church comes alive when the Malaccans flock here, many of them making it the occasion for a trip home from far-flung parts of the country.

Bukit China

In the middle of the 15th century the sultan of Melaka's ambassador to China returned with the Ming emperor's daughter

as a bride for the sultan, to seal relations between the two countries. She brought with her a vast retinue, including 500 handmaidens, and **Bukit China** (China Hill) was established as their residence. It has been a Chinese area ever since and, together with two adjoining hills, forms what is said to be the largest Chinese cemetery in the world outside China – totalling more than 12,000 graves and covering 25 hectares. Some ornate graves date back to the Ming dynasty, but most are now in a sorry state. Chinese graveyards are often built on hillsides to maximise positive feng shui. At the foot of Bukit China, called San Bao Shan (Three Treasures Mount) in Mandarin, **Poh San Teng Temple** was built in 1795 and contains images of the Taoist entity Dabo Gong, and Guanyin. To the right of the temple is the **Sultan's Well**, a 15th-century well built by Sultan Mansor Shah for his Chinese wife, Princess Hang Li Poh. It was an important source of water for Melaka and a prime target for opposition forces wanting to take the city.

Maritime Museum & Naval Museum

The first part of the **Maritime Museum** (admission RM2; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) is housed in a huge re-creation of the *Flora de la Mar*, a Portuguese ship that sank off the coast of Melaka while trying to transport Malaysian treasures back to Europe. Clamber up for a detailed examination of Melaka's history picked out by rather faded and dated

props. The Naval Museum continues in the building next door with more absorbing exhibits featuring local vessels, including the striking 'Kepala Burung' (a boat carved like a feathered bird), plus an assortment of nautical devices.

Cheng Ho Cultural Museum

A lengthy paeon to Ming Admiral Cheng Ho (Zhenghe), this extensive **museum** (☎ 283 1135; 51 Lg Hang Jebat; adult/child RM20/10; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-7pm Fri-Sun) charts the tremendous voyages of the intrepid Chinese-Muslim seafarer. Photographs of Chinese descendants in Africa are intriguing while the puppet show is entertaining (despite its gruesome side). The ticket price includes a 15-minute film presentation on Cheng Ho.

Medan Portugis

Roughly 3km east of the city centre, on the coast, is **Medan Portugis** (Portuguese Sq). The small *kampung* centred on the square is the heart of Melaka's Eurasian community, descended from marriages between the colonial Portuguese and Malays 400 years ago, many of whom speak Kristang (see opposite). A French missionary first proposed the settlement to the British colonial government in the 1920s, but the square, styled after a typical Portuguese *mercado* (market) and lending the settlement a cultural focus, wasn't completed until the late 1980s.

In the open square area, the Portuguese community office bulletin board displays advertisements for cultural events and news articles, some relating to how Melaka's land reclamation has damaged local family-run fisheries.

The *kampung* is unexceptional, however, and the square often empty, except on Saturday evenings when cultural events are staged. But the sea breeze is lovely while enjoying a relaxing beer or meal at the many restaurants in and around the square. Town bus 17 from the local bus station will get you here.

St John's Fort

Although the British demolished the small of Porta de Santiago, they spared the most Dutch **St John's Fort** (Bukit Senjuang, off Jln Bukit Senjuang). Originally a Portuguese chapel dedicated to St John the Baptist (until the Dutch rebuilt it in the 18th century), it

KRISTANG

The creole language of Kristang (also called Papiah Kristang, Cristão or Cristan – derived from the word Christian) has survived in Melacca for half a millennium. Spoken by descendants of the Portuguese who first came to Melaka, Kristang employs a grammatical structure similar to Malay although its vocabulary is largely extracted from archaic Portuguese, making it partially comprehensible to visitors from Portugal. Most speakers of the creole live in Melaka, but small populations lie scattered in Singapore and elsewhere in Malaysia. Its shrinking population of speakers and an increasing preference for English among the younger generations is endangering the language, but many speakers of Kristang are fighting for its preservation. Some Kristang expressions include *bong pamiang* (good morning), *mutu merseh* (thank you) and *teng bong?* (how are you?). For further information on the Kristang language, click on www.joanmarbeck.net.

stands on a hilltop to the east of town just before the turn-off to Medan Portugis. Only a few walls and cannon emplacements of the fort remain, but there are fine views from the hilltop.

Masjid Tranquerah

Of typical Sumatran design, featuring a square, multitiered roof, the 150-year-old **Masjid Tranquerah** (Masjid Tengkerah; Jln Tengkerah) is 2km towards Port Dickson. In its graveyard is the tomb of Sultan Hussein of Johor, who signed over the island of Singapore to Stamford Raffles in 1819. The sultan later retired to Melaka, where he died in 1853.

TOURS

Boat Trips

Parameswara Tours (☎ 286 5468) has daily riverboat cruises along the Melaka River (RM10, 40 minutes, minimum eight people) from the quay behind the tourist office on Jln Kota. The boat travels to Kampung Morten, where Villa Sentosa is located, past old *godown* (river warehouses). You can also charter 10-person boats to Pulau Besar (7am to midnight return ticket RM100, 1am to 6am RM120), with departure times depending on the tide. For scheduled ferries to Pulau Besar see p243.

Bike Tours

For something different and to explore the fascinating landscape around Melaka, contact Alias to join his popular **Eco Bike Tour** (☎ 019-652 5029; aliasbiketour@hotmail.com; per person RM40, min 2 people), a three-hour bike ride through palm-oil and rubber-tree plantations and delightful *kampung* communities surrounding town. Pick up is from the Travellers' Lodge (p238).

WALKING TOUR

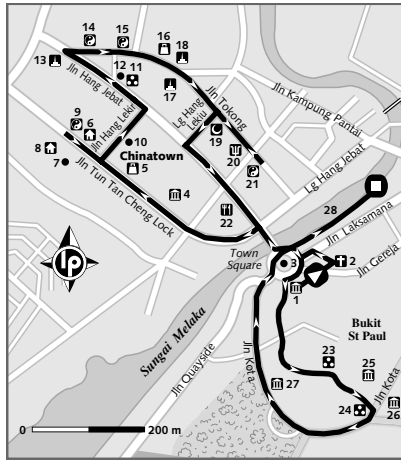
Start at the delightful Town Sq, Melaka's historic hub. The most imposing relic of the Dutch period in Melaka is the **Stadthuys** (1; p232). Exit the Stadthuys and contemplate **Christ Church** (2; cnr Jln Gereja & Jln Laksamana), constructed from pink bricks brought from Zeeland in Holland and faced with local red laterite when constructed in 1753. Dutch and Armenian tombstones still lie in the floor of the church's interior, while the massive 15m-long ceiling beams overhead were each cut from a single tree. Sit down and admire the marvellous **fountain** (3) in the Town Sq, emblazoned with four bas-relief images of Queen Victoria's face in profile, and affixed with an inscribed plaque reading: 'Victoria Regina 1837–1901. Erected by the people of Malacca in memory of a Great Queen 1904'.

Walk west across the bridge over the Melaka River. On the far shore, turn left (past Harper's restaurant) and stroll along Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock, but watch out for racing traffic. Formerly called Heeren St, this narrow thoroughfare was the preferred address for wealthy Baba (Straits-born Chinese) traders who were most active during the short-lived rubber boom of the early 20th century. These typical Peranakan houses, with their intricate tiles and plasterwork, fuse Chinese, Dutch and British influences in a style that has been described as Chinese Palladian and Chinese Baroque. The interiors open into airy courtyards that admit sun and rain – similar to Chinese courtyard houses.

An intriguing insight into the local vernacular can be gleaned from the **Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum** (4; p233). Pop into **Malaqa House** (5; p242) and pick over its horde of

KAMPUNG CHITTY

As well as the Baba-Nonya, Melaka also has a small community of Chitty – Straits-born Indians, offspring of the Indian traders who intermarried with Malay women. Their area of town, known as Kampung Chitty, lies west of Jln Gajah Berang, about a kilometre northwest of Chinatown; look for the archway with elephant sculptures beside the **Mutamariman Temple**. Like Kampung Morten, it's a pretty district in which to wander and see traditional Malay-style houses. The best time to visit is during the **Mariamman Festival** (also called Pesta Datuk Char-char) in May, a Hindu celebration when you might also be fortunate enough to witness a traditional Indian wedding ceremony.



WALK FACTS

Start Town Sq
Finish Melaka River
Distance 2.5km
Duration Three hours

antiques before continuing to the elegant **Hotel Puri** (6; p239); the Chinese characters emblazoned on the door literally mean 'Longevity Mountain, Fortuitous Sea'. The impressive classical-style building set back from the street opposite is the **Chee Mansion** (7; 115-117 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock), a Chinese family shrine not open to the public.

Another traditional house now serving as a hotel, **Baba House** (8; p238), is just ahead. The **Eng Choon (Yong Chun) Association** (9; 122 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock) is an impressively well-kept Chinese guildhall, containing a small shrine to two Taoist deities. Admire the painted gods on the doors and the carved dragons adorning the stone pillars. Chinese characters written on the building mean 'Peace to the country and the people' – which you see elsewhere in Chinatown.

Backtrack along Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock and walk north up Jln Hang Lekir (Third Cross St), past a string of restaurants and antique shops. Opposite Howard's restaurant is the dignified **Leong San Thong** (10; Dragon Hill Hall; 8 Jln Lekir), built in 1928. At the junction, turn left onto Jln Hang Jebat, formerly known as Jonkers St (or Junk St Melaka), famed for its

antique and craft shops (browse at will, but bargains can be elusive). On Saturday and Sunday the street is for pedestrians only and is transformed into a market of stalls called the Jonker Walk.

Continuing west, you will approach the all-white **Hang Kasturi's Tomb** (11) on your right, beyond which is the tempting **Putuo TCM Therapy Centre** (12; 134 Jln Hang Jebat) specialising in traditional Chinese medicine – which happens to be just the spot for a revitalising foot massage (per hour RM38) and doses of reflexology. Further along on your left is the small, modern and pink **Guanyin Temple** (13; Guanyin Tang) dedicated to the Buddhist Goddess of Compassion. Seated in the second hall is the Taoist Jade Emperor, flanked by two attendants. The central effigy of Guanyin is a modern Qianshou (1000-arm) version.

Hang a right here and head up Jln Tokong (Temple Street) and past a couple of small Chinese shrines, the **Wah Teck Kiong Temple** (14) and the **Guangfu Temple** (15; Guangfu Gong). Ahead is the **Wah Aik** (16; 56 Jln Tokong) shoemaker's shop on your left – a specialist manufacturer who crafts doll-like shoes for bound feet, once the height of gruesome fashion for well-to-do Chinese women in Melaka.

Chinatown's most elaborate and celebrated Chinese temple, the **Cheng Hoon Teng Temple** (17; p233) is opposite the more recently constructed **Xianglin Temple** (18; Fragrant Forest Temple), which endeavours to follow the layout of a traditional Chinese Buddhist temple. Adding splashes of colour to Jln Tokong are the Chinese shops selling red and gold lanterns, paper money and funerary preparations. The street used to be famed for its goldsmiths, but most have moved to other areas.

Continue east to the **Kampung Kling Mosque** (19). This hoary mosque has a multitiered *meru* roof (stacked form similar to that seen in Balinese Hindu architecture), which owes its inspiration to Hindu temples, and a Moorish watchtower minaret typical of early mosques in Sumatra. Further along is the **Sri Poyyatha Vinayagar Moorthi Temple** (20), dating from 1781 and dedicated to the Hindu deity Vinayagar. Slightly further ahead is the **Sanduo Temple** (21; Sanduo Miao), another Chinese shrine encapsulating effigies of Dabo Gong, Jinhua Niang-

niang (who women entreat for children) and Guanyin.

Backtrack and hang a left along the exterior wall of the mosque back along Lorong Hang Lekiu (Fourth Cross St) to Jln Hang Jebat. Stroll back to Lorong Hang Jebat (First Cross St) and the bridge, noting the decorative touches along the way – mosaics, tiling, inlaid coloured stones, carvings, Western-style balustrades, balconies, shutters and ornamentations. The **Jonkers Melaka Restoran** (22; p241) is a noteworthy old Nonya building.

Traverse the bridge, cross the Town Sq back to the Stadthuys and clamber up the steps leading to the top of Bukit St Paul, topped by the fabulous ruins of **St Paul's Church** (23; p232).

There are steps from St Paul's Church down the hill to **Porta de Santiago** (24), once the main gate – and all that remains – of the Portuguese fortress A'Famosa, originally constructed by Alfonso de Albuquerque in 1512. Stamford Raffles may have stepped in before the complete destruction of the old fortress, but it was a close call. Curiously, this sole surviving relic of the fort bears the Dutch East India Company's coat of arms as this was part of the fort used by the Dutch after their takeover in 1670.

To the east at the base of Bukit St Paul is the **Sultanate Palace** (25; p232). Dating from 1911, housed in a British villa across the way, the **Proclamation of Independence Memorial** (26; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Sat-Thu, 9am-12pm & 3-6pm Fri) is a museum charting the history of Malaysia's progression to independence. There's too much to read and perhaps not enough to look at (although the Japanese officer's sword from occupation days is noteworthy). Ironically, this grand building topped by Mogul-inspired domes was once the Melaka Club, a bastion of colonialism.

Follow Jln Kota around the base of Bukit St Paul and head back to the Town Sq. The **Architecture Museum of Malaysia** (27; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm) has a range of excellent models of local building techniques and styles. Conclude your walk by ambling along the short **brick promenade** (28) on the eastern bank of the Melaka River (parallel with Jln Laksamana), and take in riverine views, bars, the occasional barber and walls of distinctive Dutch bricks.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Melaka celebrates all the major Malaysian holidays, including Chinese New Year, Thaipusam and National Day (see p489).

Easter Good Friday and Easter Sunday processions are held outside at St Peter's Church. In March/April.

Festa San Pedro Honouring the patron saint of the Portuguese fishing community, celebrations take place at St Peter's Church and normally include a float procession from the Porta de Santiago to Medan Portugis, with cooking, fishing, handicraft and carnival festivities; in late June.

Festa San Juan (Festival of St John) Just before the Festa San Pedro, this festival is celebrated by Melaka's Eurasian community in late June by the lighting of candles in the Portuguese Settlement.

Dragon Boat Festival This June/July Chinese festival, marked by a dragon-boat race in the Strait of Melaka, commemorates the death, by drowning, of 3rd-century BC Chinese poet and statesman Qu Yuan.

Festa Santa Cruz This festival finishes with a candlelight procession of Malaccan and Singaporean Catholics to Malim chapel, in mid-September.

SLEEPING

Melaka's growing band of budget accommodation varies in quality, but competition keeps prices quite static. Some midrange and top-end hotels raise their tariff at the weekends; the weekday rate is quoted below. Generally rooms have showers and dorms will have shared bathrooms, unless otherwise stated.

Budget

Malacca Town Holiday Lodge 1 (☎ 284 8830; 149B Jln TMR; s RM16-25, d RM18-30) It may not have dorms or a decorated common room like most other hostels, but this is an OK choice. Take bus 17 from Melaka Sentral.

Eastern Heritage Guest House (☎ 283 3026; 8 Jln Bukit China; dm RM8, s RM18-22, d RM20-26, with breakfast; 📶) This well-located guesthouse does its business from a superb old building (dating from 1918) with Peranakan tiling and impressive carved panelling. There's a dipping pool, a downstairs common room and reception doubles as a bar. Angle for the RM26 double with balcony.

our pick **Sama-Sama Guest House** (☎ 012-305 1980; www.sama-sama-guesthouse.com; 26 Jl Tukang Besi; dm RM10, d RM15-30) Relax and make yourself at home at this easy-going Chinatown haunt in serious siesta mode. The rear courtyard is a delightful jungle of greenery, rooms (all with shared shower) are good, the house is a

chunk of heritage and prices are quite elastic. Quirks extend to a brace of fighting fish in bottles in the toilet. Take bus 17 to the Town Sq from Melaka Sentral.

Samudra Inn (☎ 282 7441; samudrainn@hotmail.com; 348B Jln Melaka Raya 3; dm RM12, s RM18-35, d RM24-45; 🏠) It may not be located in the historic centre of Melaka, but travellers enthuse about this popular and comfy guesthouse south of Jln TMR (Jln Taman Melaka Raya). Clean, quiet and run by very friendly and helpful owners (both ex-teachers), the Samudra Inn offers comfort, value and security. There's laundry service and kitchen facilities. Pricier rooms come with shower and balcony.

Tony's Guesthouse (☎ 688 0119; 24 Lg Banda Kaba; d/tr RM20/27) Backpacker-friendly, with some long-stayers clinging to cheap rooms (all rooms with fan), Tony's has been nurtured to popularity by its travel-minded namesake owner. The lobby, hung with images of Che Guevara, Marilyn Monroe and Elvis, has a café.

Shirah's Guest House (☎ 286 1041; shirahgh@tm.ent.my; 207-209, 2nd fl, Jln Melaka Raya 1; dm RM12, d RM23-45; 🏠) Here there is a cosy common room and informative bulletin boards, as well as bike hire, internet access and kitchen facilities. Some rooms (one with a four-post bed) have balconies and high ceilings. As well, Shirah's offers a rooftop terrace, small library, kitchen and free movies.

Samudera Backpacker's Hostel (☎ 283 4231; 205b Jln Melaka Raya 1; s RM15-30, d RM25-35, tr RM55; 🏠) Very clean and well-looked-after hostel with two dozen spacious rooms (no TV or phone).

Travellers' Lodge (☎ 226 5709; 214B Jln Melaka Raya 1; d RM26-46; 🏠) All rooms are clean and have windows and tiled floors, but no TV; pricier air-con rooms have shower. Common areas are well maintained, and there's a tidy common room. The sheltered roof terrace up the vertigo-inducing steps is a boon, dotted with flowers and plants. The lodge runs an alcohol-free café on the premises. Take bus 17 from Melaka Sentral.

Kancil Guesthouse (☎ 281 4044; www.machinta.com.sg/kancil; 177 Jln Parameswara; s/tw/d RM18/28/30; 🏠) West of the small Taoist Yong Chuan Tian Temple, this pleasant guesthouse offers spacious, secure lodgings (all with fan) along a road studded with picturesque Malaccan houses. The road itself is lethal

with traffic, but the house is lovely and deep, with a gorgeous garden out back. The owners are pleasant and helpful. There's also bike rental (per day RM10) and internet access (per hour RM3.50). Take bus 17 from Melaka Sentral.

Yellow Mansion Hotel (☎ 283 8885; www.yellowmansion.com; 45 Jln Banda Kaba; s/tw/tr/f RM50/60/90/130; 🏠) A new Malay-run hotel, this is very clean, with polite staff. Some doubles (all with shower) are windowless, so check first. The family room offers tremendous space.

Also recommended:

Chong Hoe Hotel (☎ 282 6102; 26 Jln Tukang Emas; s RM25, d RM25-43; 🏠) Small, simple and clean. Fine location.

May Chiang Hotel (☎ 282 2101; 59 Jln Munshi Abdullah; s RM30-35, d/tr RM40/45; 🏠) Well-run, clean and friendly place with only eight (rather shabbily furnished) rooms, all with shower and most with air-con.

Midrange

Heeren Inn (☎ 288 3600; heerenin@streamyx.com; 23 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; d RM68-88; 🏠) Housed in an attractive and deep Chinatown building that seemingly goes on forever, this fresh, well-managed hotel offers budget midrange rooms, all well-maintained (no phones). The sinks are little bigger than soap dishes, but shower rooms are otherwise new and clean. The family-run atmosphere throughout is comforting.

Baba House (☎ 281 1216; thebabahouse@pd.jaring.my; 125-127 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; s/d RM85/95; 🏠) In a row of restored Peranakan shophouses, this elegant Baba building is beautifully arranged with tilework, carved panels and a cool, interior courtyard. Rooms, many windowless, are getting a bit drab and worn.

Mimosa Hotel (☎ 282 1113; www.mimosahotel.com; 108 Jln Bunga Raya; r with breakfast RM98; 🏠) Somewhat bland and functional, this hotel has clean, modern, fully equipped rooms and enjoys a great location in a bustling Chinese area. Good discounts on rates.

Aldy Hotel (☎ 283 3232; www.aldyhotel.com.my; 27 Jln Kota; standard d RM110; 🏠) Standing out like a red, sore thumb atop a bistro opposite the foot of Bukit St Paul, this boutique-style hotel has excellent, new satellite TV equipped rooms with spotless shower rooms; common areas are less impressive. There's wi-fi, a rooftop Jacuzzi and barbecues Thursday nights.

Hotel Puri (☎ 282 5588; www.hotelpuri.com; 118 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; d/f with breakfast RM110/305; 🏠) Chinatown has some fine buildings, and Hotel Puri is one of them. This elegant creation is a superb renovated Peranakan manor house, its elaborate lobby decked out with beautiful old cane and inlaid furniture, and opening onto a gorgeous courtyard garden (both wi-fi areas). Standard rooms have become slightly tired but have satellite TV, wi-fi and shuttered windows.

Fenix Inn (☎ 281 5511; www.fenixinn.com; 156 Jln TMR; d RM128; 🏠) Very new and spotless place with polite management. There's drinking water on each floor and clean, comfortable rooms (most with window), and a good crop of terminals for internet access (per hour RM2.50). Discounts offered; good choice.

our pick Heeren House (☎ 281 4241; www.melaka.net/heerenhouse; 1 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; d with breakfast RM139; 🏠) Lodging here positions you right in the heart of Chinatown, on the waterfront and within range of top local restaurants and sights. The airy, clean and lovely rooms (six in all) in this former *godown* largely overlook the river, with polished floorboards, traditional furniture (some with four-post beds) and clean showers. A popular café of the same name is in the foyer (see p241).

Seri Costa Hotel (☎ 281 6666; Jln PM 8, Plaza Mahkota; r RM145; 🏠) A modern, clean and smart three-star hotel southwest of Jln Merdeka catering mainly to Malay guests. Rooms are fully equipped with satellite TV, coffee- and tea-making facilities, and come with beds and other furniture made of teakwood. Good promotional rates are offered.

Century Mahkota Hotel (☎ 281 2828; www.centurymahkota.com.my; Jln Merdeka; 1-bed apt Sun-Thu RM168, Fri & Sat RM188; 🏠) Occupying a huge section of reclaimed waterfront south of the Mahkota Parade shopping complex, this resort-style hotel has a range of suites and apartments, plus an ample range of facilities including two large swimming pools, restaurants and bars, and tennis and squash courts. Apartment prices rise during holiday periods.

Hotel Orkid (☎ 282 5555; www.hotelorkidmelaka.com; 138 Jln Bendahara; r with breakfast RM250; 🏠) Centrally located modern high-rise hotel. All rooms have inhouse video, coffee- and tea-making facilities and minibar. There's also a health spa, restaurant and lounge with live music.

Emperor Hotel (☎ 284 0777; tehmc@tm.net.my; 123 Jln Munshi Abdullah; r with buffet breakfast RM250; 🏠) Excellent promotional rates (doubles around RM80 to RM100) make this smart establishment a great option – despite the deserted carbuncular extension eyeshot attached. Upper floors have good views and all rooms come with bath, fridge and TV with inhouse video. There's a fitness centre and restaurants.

Top End

Hotel Grand Continental (☎ 284 0088; www.ghihotels.com.my; 20 Jln Tun Sri Lanang; d with breakfast RM210; 🏠) It's in the characterless north and there's a lack of charm, but promotional rates make it good value.

City Bayview Hotel (☎ 283 9888; www.bayviewintl.com; Jln Bendahara; r with breakfast RM398; 🏠) Renovated in 2006, this hotel has a fresh and invigorating edge, with sports bar, smallish kidney-shaped pool and dance club. A gratuitous extra is the grating computerised speaking lift. Fish for promotional prices.

Hotel Equatorial (☎ 282 8333; www.equatorial.com; Jln Parameswara; d RM410-490; 🏠) Good discounts make this an attractive and quite elegant choice (weekday and promotional rates usually start at around RM218). The staff is well-mannered and the overall hotel presentation is crisp. There's a swimming pool, ladies-only pool, a quality fitness centre, tennis court and wi-fi access.

our pick Renaissance Melaka Hotel (☎ 284 8888; infomkz@po.jaring.my; Jl Bendahara; d RM470; 🏠) Plush and well managed, the elegant high-rise Renaissance offers spacious, tastefully decorated and furnished rooms equipped with comfy Renaissance beds, long views over Melaka and five-star service. Relax in the tasteful Famosa Lounge (open 11am to midnight) off the lobby, build up a sweat in the squash courts or sink a drink in the pub (which has regular live music).

EATING

Melaka's food mirrors the city's eclectic, multicultural DNA. Peranakan cuisine (Nonya; prepared here with a salty Indonesian influence) is a celebrated school of cooking; the classic Nonya dish of Melaka – laksa – is the best in Malaysia. Melaka is also the home of Portuguese Eurasian food; hunt down Portuguese-influenced Kristang cuisine at Restoran de Lisbon (p240) in

Medan Portugis – it's mostly seafood and rice, but the fiery 'devil curry' is worth an encounter.

Restaurants

Restoran Amitufooh (☎ 292 6426; 2-20 Jl PM9, Plaza Mahkota, Bandar Hilir; by voluntary donation; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Conventional wisdom dictates that there's no such thing as a free meal. This Buddhist vegetarian restaurant – the gift of a Chinese philanthropist – generously breaks the rules by providing food on the house. You may make a contribution if you wish, otherwise there are few conditions (you must wash your own plates and cutlery and taking food away is not permitted).

Selvam (☎ 281 9223; 3 Jln Temenggong; meals RM8; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Kept busy by its loyal band of local patrons ordering tasty and cheap curries, *roti canai* (flaky, flat unleavened bread), tandoori chicken set meals (RM5.50) plus Friday afternoon vegetarian specials with 10 varieties of veg (RM5).

Vegan Salad & Herbs House (☎ 282 9466; 22 Jln Kubu; meals RM10; ☺ 10am-4pm Fri-Wed) Around the corner from the Buddhist Guanyin Temple in Chinatown, this health-conscious spot offers a range of healthy uncooked, crisp vegetables, brown-rice set lunches and wholemeal bread buns.

Ole Sayang (☎ 283 1966; 198 Jln TMR; ☺ lunch & dinner; meals RM13) Famed Nonya restaurant serving a variety of Nonya dishes at decent prices and reliable standards.

Restoran Wuguzhan (☎ 282 1918; 256-257 Jln Melaka Raya 3; meals RM15; ☺ lunch & dinner) This Chinese vegetarian health food eatery delivers carrion-free calories if you're searching for inexpensive Chinese-style organic veggie dishes and clean surrounds. Handy for the local guesthouses, the menu runs to sweet and sour 'veggie chicken' (RM8), seaweed wholemeal bread roll (RM3), veggie duck la mee soup (vegetable duck in noodle soup; RM4) and more.

Bayonya (☎ 292 2192; 164 Jln TMR; meals RM15; ☺ 10am-10pm Wed-Mon) This authentic eatery has a great reputation for its excellent and inexpensive home-cooked Peranakan cuisine.

Restoran Peranakan (☎ 284 5001; 107 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; meals RM18; ☺ lunch & dinner) Book a table at this spacious and airy Chinatown Peranakan restaurant and soak up its charms. The deeply set interior is in-

troduced by a gorgeous lobby. Set lunches (Monday to Sunday RM35) and set dinners (Saturday and Sunday RM35) are popular. There's a large range of chicken and fish dishes on the menu.

Restoran de Lisbon (☎ 284 8067; Medan Portugis; meals RM50; ☺ lunch & dinner) On Friday and Saturday evenings take a trip out to Medan Portugis and sample Malay-Portuguese dishes at outdoor tables at this restaurant. Try the chilli crabs (RM20) or the devil curry (RM10).

San Pedro (☎ 284 5734; 4 Jln D'Aranjo; ☺ dinner) This place has a cosy, local atmosphere has Malay-Portuguese meals (like Restoran de Lisbon). It's on the street immediately behind Medan Portugis.

Coconut House (☎ 282 9128; 128 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; meals RM30; ☺ 2pm-midnight Mon-Thu, 2pm-1am Fri, 11am-midnight Sat & Sun) It's a cheesy name, sounding like a Chering guesthouse, but there's oodles of inviting space and atmosphere upstairs and down at this bar-cum-restaurant. The menu boasts a popular pizza selection, rosemary roast chicken (RM22), slow-roasted shoulder of pork (RM25) and other tasty offerings. The namesake coconut tree rises proudly into the sunlight from an interior courtyard.

Howard's (☎ 286 8727; 5 Jln Hang Lekir; meals RM40; ☺ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon) Uncreased linen, elegant furniture, black-and-white-check tiled floor, flavoursome international cuisine (lobster bisque, roast rack of lamb) and unobtrusive service all contribute to a finely crafted ambience. Howard's is a thoroughly unhurried and intimate experience and a top romantic dining choice. Impressive wine list.

Harper's (☎ 282 8800; 2 & 4 Lg Hang Jebat; meals RM45; ☺ lunch & dinner) Enjoying a glorious *godown* perch overlooking the Melaka River, dining at Harper's is a matter of both history and style. Strong on character and atmosphere, it's ideal for romantic meals, with overhead fans battling the heat. Sit at a linen-draped table, measure up the high ceiling and peruse the excellent menu. Harper's (no relation to the author) has hit the nail on the head with a tantalising choice of food, from Nonya specials through to a large array of Chinese dishes, seafood and an international selection. The colonial prawn chowder (RM15) is pregnant with prawns, broccoli and cauliflower steeped in

a rich mushroom-scented soup, all served in a hollowed-out bun. For Nonya dishes, aim for the fish *gerang asam* (snapper cooked in tamarind sauce and local spices; RM17) or the Nonya *chap choy* (mixed vegetables; RM15).

Cafés

Limau-Limau Café (☎ 698 4917; 89 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; cappuccino RM6.90; ☺) Decorated with dark-coloured ceramics and an arty twist, this quiet café extends through several rooms and a pleasant interior courtyard. Take a seat for salads, sandwiches (RM3.90 to RM6.90), fruit juices (RM4 to RM5), milk shakes (RM6.50 to RM7.50) or internet access (per half-hour RM3).

Heeren House (☎ 281 4241; 1 Jl Tun Tan Cheng Lock; breakfast RM6; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) In the hotel of the same name, make this a breakfast slot for the RM6 set tea/coffee with apple-crumble pie and ice cream (or chocolate brownie). The café is more staid than other trendy arrivals, but the apple crumble is delectable and the rich Aik Chong coffee delivers powerful, hand-shaking bursts of caffeine. Also on the menu are Peranakan and Portuguese food and set lunches. At the time this book went to press we heard the restaurant here may be closed.

Capitol Satay (☎ 283 5508; 41 Lg Bukit China; meals RM8) Usually packed to the gills and one of the cheapest outfits in town, Capitol Satay serves up very moreish meat- and veg-kebabs (and that elusive speciality *satay celup*: a satay stick laden with raw meat and vegetables which you cook by dipping into scorching satay sauce). Dining here is great fun and a chance for some gregarious feasting.

Cafe 1511 (☎ 286 0151; www.cafe1511.com; 52 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; meals RM8; ☺ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue) Next to the Baba-Nonya Heritage Museum is this high-ceilinged Peranakan café, with original tiles along the wall, lovely carved screens, a mishmash of decorative objects from Southeast Asia and a Nonya menu.

Tart & Tart Bakery (☎ 282 1181; 45 Lg Hang Jebat; snacks from RM2.50; ☺ 8.30am-5.30pm) This simple, relaxing Malay-run Chinatown snack shop does a small range of bite-size snacks, from blueberry and cheese tarts (RM2.50), pineapple pies (RM3.50), apple pies (RM3.50) and *kaya* (coconut-cream jam spread on bread; RM2.50).

Bulldog Café (145 Jln Bendahara; meals RM10; ☺ lunch & dinner) Nonya, Chinese, Thai and Western dishes. For cheap snacks, sample the Nonya *popiah* (lettuce, bean sprouts, egg and chilli paste in a soft sleeve; RM2) or the *pai tee* (crispy cone-shaped morsels of rice-flour, stuffed with vegetables; RM3).

Discovery Café (3 Jln Bunga Raya; meals RM10; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☺) The staff take things at a serious stroll and the food is mediocre, but the location near the Melaka River, late closing and outside seating maintain a somewhat shaky allure.

Jonkers Melaka Restoran (☎ 283 5578; 17 Jln Hang Jebat; meals RM20; ☺ noon-5pm) A café in a craft shop in an old Nonya building, the Jonkers Melaka is highly recommended for the setting and terrific homemade food served in its cool, central courtyard. A different Nonya specials menu (RM20) appears every week, supplemented with international dishes and veggie options (vegetarian platter RM17) for those on a bloodless diet.

Also recommended:
Nancy's Kitchen (15 Jln Hang Lekir; meals RM8; ☺ lunch) Serves cheap Nonya set lunches.

UE Tea House (20 Lg Bukit China; meals RM8; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Simple Chinese coffee shop specialising in steamed dumplings.

Quick Eats

Eats on the streets include *youtiao* (fried bread sticks; 40 sen), *rougan* (dried meat strips; 250gm RM26) and Nonya pineapple tarts. For drinks, quaff sugar-cane juice (RM1), soya milk (RM1) or stop by Chinese street vendors for sweet water-chestnut tea (RM1); hot or cold, it's a real thirst quencher. Also look out for Chinese pharmacies such as **Teck Ann Pharmacy** (58 Jln Bunga Raya) serving tall glasses of chrysanthemum tea (RM1).

Outdoor hawker venues include the daytime **Centrepoint food court** (Jln Munshi Abdullah); the night-time **Indian hawker stalls** (Jln Bendahara) in Little India, and the busy **Malay stalls** (near Jln TMR roundabout).

The Mahkota Parade shopping complex down the road is mostly a centre for Western fast food, though the food court on the 1st floor has the usual Malaysian hawker favourites. Under construction at the time of writing (due to open August 2006), the colossal Dataran Pahlawan on Jln Merdeka will rate as Melaka's largest mall, and include cafés and restaurants.

DRINKING

Geographér Café (☎ 281 6813; www.geographer.com.my; 83 Jln Hang Jebat; large Tiger beer RM17.20; ☎ 10am-1am Wed-Sun) This ventilated, breezy bar with outside seating and late hours, in a pre-war corner shophouse, is a godsend. Seat yourself with a beer amid the throngs and applaud resident artist-musician Mr Burns as he eases through gnarled classics from Chuck Berry to JJ Cale. A tasty choice of local and Western dishes (meals around RM8) and laid-back, but professional, service round it all off. Internet access is RM3 per 30 minutes.

X-Tracts (☎ 284 3271; Jln Laksamana; Carlsberg RM8) Large, smart bar in an old colonial building by the Melaka River.

Kia Kee Liquor Shop (82 Jln Bunga Raya; ☎ 10.30am-7pm) This is an atmospheric, quaint old take-away Chinese shop flogging everything from tequila to Thunderbird (a potent kind of peach wine).

ENTERTAINMENT

Sound & Light Show (Son et Lumiere; adult/child RM10/2; ☎ shows 8.30-9.15pm) Held near the Porta de Santiago, this is Melaka's most popular form of evening tourist entertainment. The sound system booms and the ruins are lit up to present Melaka's history from a strongly nationalistic angle; nevertheless, it's quite good theatre. The English version is generally either at 8.30pm or 9pm. Take mosquito repellent.

Golden Screen Cinemas (☎ 281 0018; 2nd fl Mahkota Parade, Jln Merdeka; tickets RM6) has four screens.

SHOPPING

Take time strolling through the many antique shops along Jln Hang Jebat (Jonkers St) and Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock in Chinatown. Prices are high and haggling is essential. Shops are stocked with an impressive range of antique furniture, porcelain, old lamps, coins, *songket* (silk woven with gold threads), assorted bric-a-brac and crafts.

Malaqa House (☎ 281 4770; 70 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lock; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun) A huge shop in an elegant building stuffed to the gills with antiques and replicas – it's not cheap, but it's bursting with character.

Orangutan House (59 Lg Hang Jebat; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue) These bright and colourful shops sell art and T-shirts. Branches all stock work by local artist Charles Cham, including

printed T-shirts (RM30) with light-hearted captions. Other branches are at 96 Jln Tun Tan Cheng Lok (closed Tuesday) and 12 Jln Hang Jebat (closed Thursday).

Lim Trading (☎ 292 6812; 63 Jln Tokong) Busy Mr Lim is a second-generation craftsman (his apprenticeship began at the age of six) who fashions gorgeous handmade Nonya beaded slippers for women, ranging in price from RM180 to RM2000.

Under construction at the time of writing (scheduled to open late August 2006), the colossal Dataran Pahlawan on Jln Merdeka will rate as Melaka's largest mall: a vast complex of shops, salons, cafés and restaurants and entertainment and cultural facilities, as well as a *padang* for sporting events.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Melaka is 144km from Kuala Lumpur, 224km from Johor Bahru and just 94km from Port Dickson.

Air

There are currently no domestic flights to/from Melaka, although **Malaysia Airlines** (☎ 282 9597; Jln Merdeka) has an office in the Century Mahkota Hotel.

Boat

High-speed **ferries** (☎ 281 6766) make the trip from Melaka to Dumai in Sumatra twice daily at 9am and 3pm (one way/return RM80/150, 1½ hours). Boats return from Dumai at 10.30am and 1pm. Dumai is a visa-free entry port into Indonesia for citizens of most countries. Ferries also run to Pekan Baru (one way/return RM120/210, six hours) in Sumatra. Tickets are available at the **Dumai Ferry Service** (☎ 286 1811; 635 Jln PM2, Plaza Mahkota) and other ticket offices near the wharf. Same-day tickets are on sale after 8.30am, but it's best to book the day before.

Bus

Melaka Sentral, the huge, well-designed modern long-distance bus station is inconveniently located opposite a huge branch of Tesco on Jln Cempaka, off Jln Tun Razak, in the north of town. A taxi into town should cost around RM15, or you can take bus 17 to Chinatown. Frequent buses head to Singapore (RM16, 4½ hours, departures approximately hourly), KL (RM9.40, two hours), Johor Bahru (RM14.60, 3½ hours), Ipoh

(RM25, six hours) and Seremban (RM5.50, 1½ hours). There are also less frequent departures for Butterworth (RM33.35, two hours), Jerantut (RM16.70, five hours), Mersing (RM14.50, 4½ hours), Kuantan (RM21, six hours), Kota Bharu (RM39.40, 10 hours), Kuala Terengganu (RM33, eight hours) and Muar (RM3.90, one hour). Luggage deposit at Melaka Sentral is RM2 per bag. There is also an accommodation reservation counter for hotels in Melaka, a money changer and restaurants. **Luxury buses** (☎ 645 3218) also depart daily to Singapore (RM20, 4½ hours, 1.45pm) from the Century Mahkota Hotel (see p239).

From Singapore, buses to Melaka can be booked at the Lavender St bus station in Singapore or from an agent operating out of the Lavender MRT station (see p584).

Car

Car-hire prices begin at around RM168 per day (per month RM1900) for a Proton Wira 1.5L automatic; prices are inclusive of insurance and tax. If driving, Melaka's one-way traffic system requires patience. Try **Hawk** (☎ 283 7878; 52 Jln Cempaka, Taman Seri Cempaka, Peringkat Jaya).

Taxi

Taxis leave from the long-distance bus station. Whole-taxi rates: Port Dickson (RM100), Johor Bahru (RM200), Seremban (RM90), Mersing (RM200), KL (RM130) and Kuala Lumpur International Aiport (KLIA; RM120).

Train

The nearest **train station** (☎ 441 1034) is 38km north of Melaka at Tampin on the main north-south line from KL to Singapore. Taxis from Melaka cost around RM40.

GETTING AROUND

Melaka's airport is at Batu Berendam, 9km north of the town centre. Melaka is easily explored on foot, but a useful service is town bus 17, running every 15 minutes from Melaka Sentral to the centre of town, past the huge Mahkota Parade shopping complex, to Taman Melaka Raya (40 sen) and on to Medan Portugis (80 sen).

Bicycles can be hired at some guest-houses and hotels for around RM10 a day; there are also a few bike-hire outfits around

town, including **Jin Fu Shin** (55 Jln Parameswara; per day RM6; ☎ 9.30am-7pm).

Taking to Melaka's streets by trishaw is a popular tourist option. Competition among the old drivers is keen and their vehicles are becoming increasingly kitsch, festooned with flashing lights, plastic garlands of flowers, gaudy parasols and bells – a bit like ageing mods. By the hour they should cost about RM30, or RM10 for any one-way trip within the town, but you'll have to bargain.

Taxis should cost around RM10 for a trip anywhere around town with a 50% surcharge between 1am and 6am.

AROUND MELAKA

AYER KEROH

☎ 06

About 15km northeast of Melaka, Ayer Keroh (also spelled Air Keroh) has several contrived tourist attractions, largely deserted on weekdays. Sights include the lushly landscaped **Melaka Zoo** (☎ 233 2239; adult/child RM7/4; ☎ 9am-6pm) and the **Butterfly and Reptile Sanctuary** (☎ 232 0033; adult/child RM5/3; ☎ 9am-6pm). The main attraction is the **Taman Mini Malaysia/Asean** (☎ 232 1350; adult/child RM4/2; ☎ 9am-6pm), a large theme park that has examples of traditional houses from all 13 Malaysian states, as well as those of neighbouring Asean countries. Also here is **Hutan Rekreasi Air Keroh** (Air Keroh Recreational Forest; admission free), part secondary jungle and part landscaped park with paved trails, a 250m canopy walk, picnic areas and a forestry museum. Ayer Keroh can be reached on town bus 19 from Melaka (RM1, 30 minutes), or a taxi will cost around RM20.

PULAU BESAR

☎ 06

The small island of Pulau Besar, southeast of Melaka and 5km off the coast, is a popular weekend getaway, with a few historic graves and reminders of the Japanese occupation during WWII, but the main reason to come here is for the clean white-sand beaches. The water is a little clearer than on the mainland and the hilly island is cloaked in greenery with jungle walks.

At the time of writing, the only accommodation functioning on the island was the **Chandek Kura Resort** (☎ 295 5899; chalet d/tr

RM118/138; 🚿 🚿), with good air-con chalets and a van ferrying guests to the resort from the jetty.

Boats (adult/child RM12/9, 25 minutes) depart from the **Anjung Batu jetty** (☎ 261 0492) at 8am, 10am, 12pm, 2.30pm, 5pm and 6.30pm (last boat returns at 7pm). The jetty is several kilometres past the old pier at Umbai, southeast of Melaka.

Pulau Besar can also be reached by chartering a boat from **Parameswara Tours** (☎ 286 5468), from the jetty behind the tourist office on Jln Kota in Melaka. From Umbai you'll need to charter a boat from enterprises such as **Azrin Boat Services** (☎ 019-3077775; return RM100; ⏱ 24hr).

You can reach either jetty in less than an hour by local bus 2 from Melaka.

ALOR GAJAH

On the road to Kuala Pilah, 24km north of Melaka, the hub of the small and picturesque town of Alor Gajah is the charming and grassy **Alor Gajah Square**, bordered by a colourful array of gaily painted shophouses. The square is also the site of the **Museum of Custom and Tradition** (RM1; ⏱ 9am-5.30pm Wed, Thu, Sat & Sun, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5.30pm Fri), which exhibits a modest collection of Malay wedding customs, bridal gifts and ceremonial rites. Ask in the museum about the tombs

of British soldiers killed in 1832, which are situated in the primary school just off the square; someone may escort you over for a quick inspection.

There are several buses daily from the Alor Gajah bus station to Melaka. Take the Tai Lye bus 26 (RM2.30), which travels between Tampin and Melaka, via Alor Gajah.

TANJUNG BIDARA

🚿 06

Tanjung Bidara, about 30km northwest of Melaka on the way to Port Dickson, is a pleasant beach. It's well away from the main highway, requiring you to take back roads through rice paddies and farms to get to the beach.

The main beach area is at **Tanjung Bidara Beach Resort** (☎ 384 2990; tw Sun-Thu RM70, Fri & Sat RM100, chalets Sun-Thu RM130, Fri & Sat RM150; 🚿 🚿), a quiet and relaxing resort with a small swimming pool and restaurant.

There is budget accommodation strung out several kilometres along the beach. In the colourful, friendly Malay village of **Kampung Balik Batu** are several simple beachside chalet guesthouses.

Buses 42 and 47 from Melaka go to Masjid Tanah, from where a taxi to Tanjung Bidara Beach Resort or Kampung Balik Batu costs RM6.