

Getting Started

Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei have travel possibilities to suit all budgets. Getting around much of the region is a breeze thanks to its excellent transport infrastructure. You will only need to make more-detailed preparations for Malaysian Borneo because of the remoteness of certain locations and the cost and time involved in getting to these more remote locations.

WHEN TO GO

This being the tropics, year-round travel is possible. Rain falls fairly evenly throughout the year and the difference between the main October to April rainy season and the rest of the year is not that marked. The exception is the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia, which receives heavy rain from November to mid-February. During these months many east-coast resorts close and boat services dwindle or stop altogether. Travel along the west coast is not affected. The states of Sabah and Sarawak receive high rainfall throughout the year, but it is heaviest from October to March.

Note that the haze from fires in Indonesia (see p69) is at its worst in September and October, which could make a holiday across the region during this time a less than pleasant experience.

With such broad ethnic diversity, celebrations of one kind or another are held throughout the year. Bear in mind, though, that during the major public holidays (see p492, p578 and p610) many locals travel, putting pressure on transport and hotel vacancies. Chinese New Year, Hari Raya and Christmas are all especially busy. If you're in the country during these times it's best to wait until the holiday rush is over before travelling away from the major cities. The main beach and hill resorts also get crowded on Saturday and Sunday but are often deserted during the week.

The Muslim fasting month of Ramadan is generally not a problem for most travel. Some services in the region may be cut back, especially in the east-coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu in Malaysia, but most transport, hotels and accommodation, restaurants and many businesses function as normal.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Checking the visa situation (p496, p581 & p611). Those travelling on an Israeli passport cannot enter Malaysia or Brunei.
- Checking government travel advice (see p488).
- Proof of vaccination for yellow fever (see p613) if coming from infected areas of Africa or South America.
- A raincoat for those sudden showers.
- A torch or head lamp, a pair of binoculars, mosquito net and leech-proof socks – all essential gear for a jungle trek.
- A sweater or light jacket – but only if you're planning a trip to the cooler highlands (or going to the cinema in Singapore!).
- Sharp elbows – for battling with the locals over shopping bargains!

See Climate (p487) in the Directory chapter for more information.

COSTS & MONEY

Malaysia is inexpensive by world standards and caters well to all budgets. Singapore and Brunei are a bit pricier, but there are still bargains to be had if you look carefully.

Fleapit hotels where beds can be as cheap as US\$2 a night are plentiful, but new travellers' guesthouses are springing up in the tourist centres, offering dormitory beds from US\$3, as well as cheap rooms. The midrange is well catered for and hotel rooms with air-con and attached bathroom start at around US\$20. Luxury hotels often have bargain rates, especially in Malaysia. Food generally is inexpensive. The variety is best in the cities and you can usually get away with US\$3 for a full meal with a couple of drinks at a food centre or hawker stall – you'll pay even less if you're not that hungry. At the other end of the scale, fancy hotels and restaurants in the main cities offer international cuisine at international prices.

Alcoholic drinks are expensive, particularly in Singapore, the conservative areas of the east coast or on islands. Beer costs about US\$2 a can, almost double in isolated areas. Spirits are even more expensive – about 50% more than beer. With no alcohol available in Brunei at least you'll save money there.

Transportation is generally a bargain. There are plenty of reasonably priced taxis for local travel. Drivers are fairly honest and prices are either fixed or there are meters. For long-distance journeys, Malaysia has excellent buses, trains and long-distance taxis, all at very reasonable prices, and even flying need not be too costly.

Besides the travel essentials of food, accommodation and transport you'll find nonessentials and luxuries are moderately priced, even downright cheap.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Into the Heart of Borneo (1987) by Redmond O'Hanlon is a hilarious account of the author's, poet James Fenton's, journey into the Bornean interior in search of the fabled Sumatran rhinoceros. In a more serious vein are Eric Hansen's *Stranger in the Forest* (1988) and *Orchid Fever* (2001), proper adventure travel covering Hansen's walk from Sarawak to Kalimantan and back and his encounters as an orchid fanatic respectively.

The Consumption of Kuala Lumpur (2000) by Ziauddin Sardar is an evocative meditation on the sleepy capital evolving into a techno marvel. Lawyer and writer Karim Raslan's *Journeys Through Southeast Asia: Ceritalah 2* (2002) is worth searching out in the region's bookshops for his interesting views on contemporary Malaysia, as are *The Other Malaysia* (2005) and *From Majapahit to Putrajaya – Searching for the Other Malaysia* (2005) by Farish A Noor – both are collections of the local journalist's trenchant observations on the country.

Literary knight VS Naipaul travelled in Malaysia for both *Among the Believers* (1982) and *Beyond Belief* (1999), commenting on his experience of Islam in the region with his usual insight. For a more historical perspective, *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* by Isabella Bird was first published in 1883; it covers the doughty Victorian-era traveller wending her way through the Malaysian jungles of Selangor and Perak, and crossing the Bukit Genting pass on the back of an elephant.

Among the travel literature on Singapore, the standout is Nigel Barley's entertaining *In the Footsteps of Stamford Raffles* (1992), also titled *The Duke of Puddledock*. Julian Davison's *One For The Road* (2002) is a nostalgic collection of short stories drawn from the author's recollections of Singapore and Malaysia in the 1950s and 1960s.

HOW MUCH?

Midrange hotel double	RM100/US\$110/BS100
Cup of coffee	RM4/US\$4.50/BS4
Bowl of laksa	RM5/US\$4/BS4
Restaurant meal	RM20/US\$20/BS18
Newspaper	RM1.20/US\$1.20/BS0.80

LONELY PLANET INDEX

Litre of petrol	RM1.90/US\$1.25/BS0.56
Litre of bottled water	RM1.50/US\$1.50/BS1
Beer – large bottle of Tiger	RM10/US\$8
Souvenir T-shirt	RM20/US\$15/BS20
Street snack – satay stick	RM0.50/US\$0.40/BS0.25

TOP TENS

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Festivals and events happen throughout the year in the region – the following are the best around which to plan your travels.

- **Thaipusam**, across the region, January (p52)
- **Chinese New Year**, across the region, January (p490)
- **Singapore Arts Festival**, Singapore, May to June (p528)
- **Singapore Food Festival**, Singapore, July (p529)
- **Sultan of Brunei's Birthday Celebrations**, Brunei, 15 July (p610)
- **Rainforest World Music Festival**, Kuching, July or August (p345)
- **Malaysia's National Day (Hari Kebangsaan)**, Malaysia, 31 August (p492)
- **Thimithi**, Singapore, October/November (p529)
- **Deepavali**, across the region, October to November (p492)
- **Hari Raya Puasa**, across the region, December (p492)

EATING & DRINKING

Junk the diet and allow your appetite to lead you around the region – your travels will turn into a nonstop feast.

- **Join the locals** at one of Kuala Lumpur's ubiquitous *mamak* (Indian Muslim) stalls (p76) and night markets (p110)
- **Sample the classic Ipoh dishes** (p148) of *kway teow* (rice noodles)
- **Indulge in a traditional afternoon tea** amid the plantations of the Cameron Highlands (p158) or at Brunei's Empire Hotel (p603)
- **Slurp the classic spicy-sour *asam* laksa** (laksa with prawn paste and tamarind-flavoured gravy) of Penang (p184)
- **Discover blue rice, banana *murtabak*** (filled *roti canai*) and other local delicacies at Kota Bharu's fantastic night market (p326)
- **Sample Nonya cuisine**, a hybrid of traditional Chinese and Malay culinary styles, in Melaka (p239)
- **Get your fingers sticky** digging into chilli crab in Singapore (p554)
- **Hold your nose** and let your taste buds discover the reason for all the fuss about durian (p73)
- **Savour smoked wild boar and coconut pumpkin** on a trek through the rainforest around Bario (p418)
- **Toast your longhouse host** in Sarawak with *tuak*, the rice wine with an alcoholic punch (p374)

ACTIVITIES & COURSES

With so many ways to keep happily active in the region it's a good job there are plenty of gorgeous beaches on which to relax afterwards. These are our recommendations for the adventurous and inquisitive traveller.

- **Reach the summit of Mt Kinabalu** (p437), Malaysia's highest peak
- **Explore the giant caves of Niah National Park** (p394)
- **Go in search of Bigfoot** in the jungles of Johor (p260)
- **Take a boat trip down the river deep into Taman Negara** (p289), Malaysia's top national park
- **Accept the sweaty challenges of the Headhunters' Trail** and climbing to the Pinnacles in Gunung Mulu National Park (p408)
- **Dive at Pulau Redang** (p310), nine islands surrounded by coral reefs
- **Learn to make local dishes** at a cooking course (p532) in Singapore
- **Study the local language, Bahasa Malaysia** (p98) in Kuala Lumpur
- **Tee off at one of Malaysia's many golf courses**; try Penang's Bukit Jambul Country Club (p181), a course carved from the rocky jungle
- **Trek with the nomadic Penan** in the Kelabit Highlands (p415)

INTERNET RESOURCES

Cari (www.cari.com.my) *Cari* means 'find', and this great search engine is a good starting point for all things Malaysian.

Government of Brunei Darussalam (www.brunei.gov.bn) The official website has daily news updates, links to all the ministries, and brief background info on the country.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) The Lonely Planet site offers succinct summaries on travelling in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, the Thorn Tree bulletin board and much more.

Malaysiakini (www.malaysiakini.com) Find out what's really going on in the country at Malaysia's best online news site.

Singapore Tourism (www.visitsingapore.com) This is the official site for tourist information, with plenty of links to things to see and do.

Tourism Malaysia (www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my) The official government site for tourist information has events calendars, regional links, background information and listings of domestic and international tourist offices.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTE

THE GRAND TOUR Six Weeks / Kuala Lumpur to Bandar Seri Begawan
Start in Kuala Lumpur (KL; p82), for four days of sightseeing and acclimatisation. Next, cool off in the lush Cameron Highlands (p150), then warm up again on the beautiful beaches of Pulau Langkawi (p203).

The Grand Tour covers 5000km, taking in the key attractions of Malaysia with stopovers in Singapore and Brunei. A full two months would allow a more leisurely pace.

Cross the mountainous spine of the peninsula to Kota Bharu (p321), a great place to encounter traditional Malay culture. Island- and beach-hop down the east coast, pausing at Pulau Perhentian (p313), Cherating (p280) and Pulau Tioman (p265). Swing inland for a week to explore Taman Negara (p285), then return to the west coast to soak up the historic atmosphere of Melaka (p227).

Singapore (p512) can easily swallow up a week of shopping, museum viewing and world-class eating. From here you can fly to Kuching (p339) in Sarawak, a good base for a longhouse excursion or for arranging a trek in the Gunung Mulu National Park (p405). Your next challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to climb Mt Kinabalu (p437). Finish up in Bandar Seri Begawan (p590), the capital of oil-rich Brunei.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

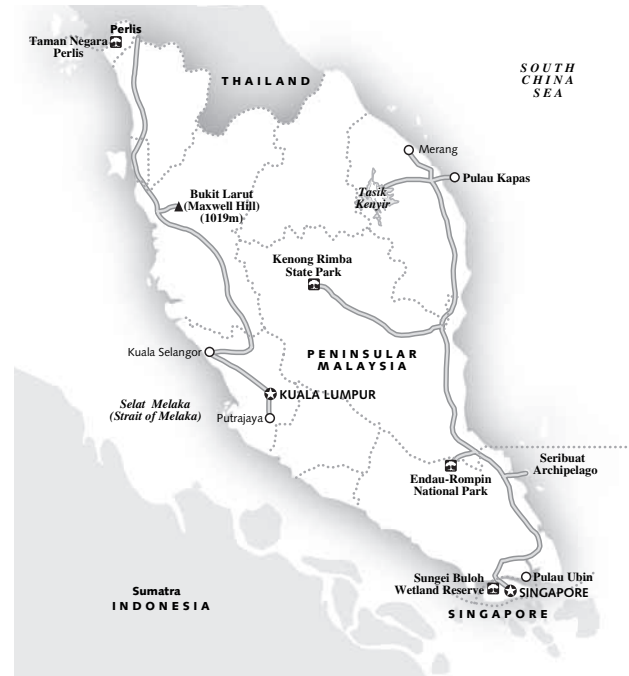
REDISCOVERING MALAYSIA & SINGAPORE

Three Weeks / Putrajaya to Singapore

From Kuala Lumpur International Airport go directly to Putrajaya (p128), the nation's fast-evolving administrative capital and a showcase of modern Malaysian architecture. Then head to the coast to the sleepy old royal capital of Kuala Selangor (p131), near to which you can observe the dazzling natural display of fireflies. In the tiny hill station of Bukit Larut (p164) there's only accommodation for around 70 visitors – but pack your mac, as it's one of the wettest places in Malaysia! The really ambitious could also cram the almost forgotten state of Perlis, on the Thai border, into their first week of travel; the highlight here is Taman Negara Perlis (p217).

In week two, if you're up for a rugged jungle experience, dive into either the Endau-Rompin National Park (p260) or Kenong Rimba State Park (p295). Or consider a leisurely tour up the east coast, favouring smaller coastal towns such as Merang (p310) or a quiet island such as Pulau Kapas (p308). Alternatively rent a houseboat to explore Tasik Kenyir (p304).

In week three do some more island-hopping in the Seribu Archipelago (p258) before crossing the causeway into Singapore (p512). You might think it impossible that this island state could have any unexplored corners but tourists are light on the ground in Pulau Ubin (p522), where cycling is the best way of getting around. Alternatively forgo shopping in favour of bird-spotting in the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve (p523).



On this 2800km alternative highlights tour of Malaysia and Singapore you'll cover both coasts of the peninsula, trek in the jungle interior and laze on lovely islands – and still avoid the crowds.

SARAWAK & BRUNEI COMBINED

Three Weeks / Kuching to Bandar Seri Begawan

To Whom It May Concern: to discover the very best of Borneo make Sarawak your destination. Spend your first few days in the state's pleasing riverine capital Kuching (p339), using it as a base for trips to various longhouse communities and to Bako National Park (p368), which includes some of the state's best beaches.

Next head to Sibü (p380) to commence your journey up the mighty Batang Rejang (p380). Go beyond Kapit (p384) towards the atmospheric interior settlement of Belaga (p387), around which are the longhouses of the Kenyah and Kayan. A round trip takes about four days.

Return to Sibü and on to Similajau National Park (p392), a little-visited coastal park with good beaches, to chill out for a day or two. Press on to the Gunung Mulu National Park (p405) – reached by a flight from the city of Miri (p397) – where you'll find not only fine caves, but also challenging hikes to the Pinnacles and along the Headhunters' Trail.

Miri is also the jumping-off point for Bario (p415), the lush valley settlement 1500m up in the Kelabit Highlands; the really adventurous could then tackle the four- to six-day trek to Long Lellang. Returning to Miri, head across the border into Brunei, spend a couple of days in the capital Bandar Seri Begawan (p593), then make a boat trip to the Temburong district where the highlight is the Ulu Temburong National Park (p608).

Travelling around Malaysian Borneo by road, river and sometimes air, you'll cover some 1900km, passing through a fascinating range of landscapes and encountering many of the island's native people. It's at least a three-week trip – a month would be better.

**SABAH SOLO**

Three Weeks / Kota Kinabalu to Semporna

The main reason people come to Sabah is to climb Mt Kinabalu (p437); assaults on Malaysia's highest peak can be launched from the state capital, Kota Kinabalu (KK; p423) – not the most attractive of state capitals, however, you'll be obliged to spend a day or two here during which time you can experience its lively nightlife. All up, a trip to the mountain and back, plus exploring the trails around the national park headquarters, will take you five to six days. KK is also the jumping-off point for the Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park (p434), a cluster of five lovely islands offering beautiful beaches.

A six-hour bus ride will take you east to characterful Sandakan (p461), the base for various wildlife-viewing activities, including a visit to the Sepilok Orang-Utan Rehabilitation Centre (p467) and Sungai Kinabatangan (p470), Sabah's longest river and one of the best places for a Southeast Asian wildlife safari.

From Sandakan head south towards the Danum Valley Conservation Area (p474), where you can enjoy various ecotourism activities – including a not-to-be-missed night drive safari – from the luxurious Borneo Rainforest Lodge. Finish up your trip in the stilt village of Semporna (p476), from where you can organise diving and snorkelling trips to the Tun Sakaran Marine Park (p477) including famous Pulau Sipadan, the tip of a limestone pinnacle that rises a sheer 600m from the sea-bed.



The 1300km you'll cover on this journey will seem like nothing once you've tramped the 18km up and down Mt Kinabalu, so relax and enjoy the fantastic variety, from idyllic islands to wildlife-packed jungles, of this three-week itinerary.

TAILORED TRIPS

COLONIAL FOOTSTEPS

Spend several days soaking up the enduring Portuguese and Dutch influence in Melaka (p227) before seeing how the British shaped Kuala Lumpur (p82) into command central for their adventures in Malaya. A fitting base would be Carcosa Seri Negara, where the British monarchs still stay when they're in town.

Near the one-time tin boom town of Ipoh is Kellie's Castle (p150), the eccentric (and unfinished) Indian-influenced mansion of a wealthy rubber plantation owner. Savour the mock-Tudor style of Ye Olde Smokehouse in the Cameron Highlands (p157) or Fraser's Hill (p127).

Kuala Kangsar (p159) was one of the first places the British established control on the peninsula. Georgetown (p173) on the island of Penang is the oldest British settlement in Malaysia.

When it comes to grand colonial relics you really shouldn't miss out on Raffles (p515) in Singapore; enjoy sinking a G&T in its Bar & Billiard room or taking high tea in the Tiffin Room.

Over in Borneo, Sarawak's capital Kuching (p339) is where you'll find Fort Margherita built by James Brooke, the state's first White Raja. And in Sabah you can relive the grand days of the Empire while dining in the restaurant car

pulled by a renovated Vulcan steam engine on the North Borneo Railway (p426) between Kota Kinabalu and Papar.

ISLANDS & BEACHES

From Kuala Lumpur (p82) start by making a day trip to the atmospheric fishing village of Pulau Ketam (p130) for tasty seafood. Moving north, Pulau Pangkor (p138) has good beaches; for something more exclusive, though, spend the night on the resort island of Pulau Pangkor Laut (p143), with access to Emerald Beach.

Pulau Langkawi (p203) is blessed with several lovely beaches including Pantai Cenang and Pantai Kok. You can also make boat trips to the nearby island of Pulau Dayang Bunting (p209) to swim in a freshwater lake.

Pulau Perhentian Besar (p313) is less crowded and just as gorgeous as its more popular twin, Pulau Perhentian Kecil. On gorgeous Pulau Tioman (p265) head over to Juara for some quiet relaxation. There are numerous other equally attractive – and far less touristed – islands off the east coast; try the Seribu Archipelago (p258).

In Sarawak, good beaches can be found in both Bako National Park (p368) and Similajau National Park (p392). For stretches of white sand head to the islands in Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park (p434). For underwater adventures don't miss out on the spectacular dive sites around the islands of the Tun Sakaran Marine Park, including the limestone pinnacle Pulau Sipadan (p477).



KIDS' MALAYSIA & SINGAPORE

In Kuala Lumpur (p82) keep the kids happy with visits to the Lake Gardens (p89) and to the Skybridge at the Petronas Towers (p88), where you'll also find the Petrosains interactive science discovery centre. Within day-trip distance of KL are the theme parks at Sunway Lagoon (p129) and Genting Highlands (p125), both of which are ideal places for all the family to cool down and revive.

A day trip from KL or as part of a trip into the jungle interior of the peninsula is a visit to the Kuala Gandah Elephant Conservation Centre (p296), where it's possible to feed the elephants and go for a swim with them. To further experience the wonders of the jungle, head to Taman Negara (p285). Even if a long hike in this premier national park is out the question, children can clamber across the canopy walkway or float down the river on an inner tube. Out of the beaches and islands of the east coast, you could choose Pulau Kapas (p308) or Cherating (p280), slightly more geared towards family holidays.

Singapore (p512) has tons of child-friendly diversions. You are just as likely as your little ones to enjoy the excellent zoo and night safari (p522). Monkeys can easily be spotted on walks around Bukit Timah Nature Reserve (p523) and the MacRitchie Reservoir (p523). It's fun pedalling around Pulau Ubin (p522) and you can hire bikes on Sentosa Island (p526), which also boasts a top-class aquarium, dolphin shows, an old fort and OK beaches.



LAND & SEA ADVENTURES

Top of the list is Taman Negara (p285), which includes Gunung Tahan, Peninsular Malaysia's highest peak. The far less tourist-frequented Endau-Rompin National Park (p260) has Malaysia's largest population of Sumatran rhinos, although don't count on spotting these elusive beasts.

Pulau Redang (p310) is a spectacular dive site – nine islands surrounded by fine coral reefs and clear water. An alternative dive destination is the much less visited gem of Pulau Lang Tengah (p312). The Seribu Archipelago (p258) offers super dive conditions less the crowds; the most accessible islands are Besar, Sibuan, and Rawa, but the best diving is around Pemanggil and Aur.

Malaysian Borneo has 23 national parks including marine reserves and the rarefied heights of Mt Kinabalu (p437); set aside three days to reach the summit. In Gunung Mulu National Park (p405) allow four days to tramp the Headhunters' Trail and climb to the jagged Pinnacles. A day is sufficient for Niah National Park (p393) with its giant caves. Give yourself two days in Bako National Park (p368) to hunt out exotic flora and fauna, and to enjoy walks along the rugged coastline.

Don't miss the spectacular Tun Sakaran Marine Park (p477) or Pulau Layang Layang (p437), part of the famous Borneo Banks, where shallow reefs and impressive drop-offs both play host to shoals of tuna, barracuda and hammerhead sharks. For adventurous trekking both the Danum Valley (p474) and the Crocker Range (p447) are recommended.



Snapshot

Let's face it. After 22 years of calling the shots, former Malaysian prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad was never going to shuffle quietly off into retirement. The 80-year-old held his tongue for a few years after Abdullah Badawi (popularly known as Pak Lah) assumed the top job in October 2003 and went on to a landslide election win for his party United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition government in 2004. But since then Abdullah's government has, in Mahathir's eyes, been steadily chipping away at his legacy of an economically strong and politically independent Malaysia. The government's decision in April 2006 to can one of Mahathir's pet projects – the so-called 'crooked bridge' across the Strait of Johor (see p249) – was the straw that broke the doctor's back.

The mainstream media that had so slavishly towed the Mahathir line during his premiership – surprise, surprise – sided with the government and largely ignored the former PM's outbursts against his successor and against a country that, in his frank opinion, no longer had any 'guts'. Mahathir turned to the internet to get his views across and raged against press censorship – which many found pretty rich given his own autocratic record while in power. At the same time the ever-outspoken Mahathir was finding himself at the sharp end of a lawsuit for defamation from Anwar Ibrahim, relating to the since-disproved charges of homosexuality against his former deputy (see p43). Despite all this, Mahathir retains much respect in Malaysia, and Abdullah – just getting back into his political stride following the death of his beloved wife Endon Mahmood Ambak from breast cancer in October 2005 – has reason to be concerned for his position.

In an effort to regain the political high ground in March 2006 Abdullah unveiled a new five-year plan for Malaysia, the ninth such economic and social agenda in the country's independent history, thus known by the shorthand '9MP'. Unlike Mahathir's previous plans – sometimes referred to as Wawasan 2020 (Vision 2020) – which focused on major construction and industry projects such as the Multimedia Super Corridor (a development of high-tech infrastructure, businesses and the cities of Cyberjaya and Putrajaya between Kuala Lumpur and the international airport), the 9MP seeks to tackle Malaysia's crisis in education. Not one of Malaysia's universities featured in a recent independent ranking of the top 200 universities around the world and many poorly educated Malaysian graduates are finding themselves jobless at the end of their degrees. Of the 9MP's RM200 billion (US\$54 billion) budget, a fifth will be spent on education. There are also plans to spend more on the poorest areas of the country, namely Borneo and on Peninsular Malaysia's east coast (not entirely coincidentally, areas where UMNO has typically fared badly with voters) and on bolstering the privileges that *bumiputra* (Malays and other indigenous races) enjoy, namely creating a RM2 billion fund to help them buy chunks of prime real estate.

It's a curious fact, though, that despite such positive discrimination policies being in place now for over 30 years, the position of *bumiputra* in the economy remains more or less the same. A handful of well-connected Malays have certainly benefited but the vast majority remain poor. The only politician openly advocating the scrapping of the *bumiputra* policy is Anwar Ibrahim, who since his release from prison in 2004 has been steadily rebuilding his political platform in the country. Anwar is barred

from running for political office until 2008 and for this reason – as well as to capitalise on the inevitable feel-good factor following the 50th anniversary celebrations of Malaysia's Independence (Merdeka) in August 2007 – it's widely suspected that Abdullah will call an election towards the end of 2007, even though he doesn't actually have to until 2009.

Elections come and go in Singapore (the latest being in May 2006) but it's never really in doubt what the outcome will be. The People's Action Party (PAP) has held on to power by all means fair and foul since Lee Kuan Yew led it to victory in 1959. Lee may have retired as prime minister in 1990, but he still keeps a watchful eye on government in his role as the island state's 'Minister Mentor'. To ensure his will is followed through his eldest son Lee Hsien Loong has been in the top job since 2004. Lee Jr hasn't dropped the ball, steering Singapore out of an early-2000s slump, maintaining a practically corruption-free environment and a per-capita GDP to match the big boys of Western Europe.

Meanwhile the nanny state continues to loosen its paternalistic grip, actively promoting Singapore as an arts hub, relaxing liquor licensing laws, allowing a casino to operate, and generally letting its good citizens enjoy the spoils of 40 years' hard work. There has been no relaxation, though, of its zero tolerance stance on drugs, as the execution of Nguyen Tuong Van, an Australian and convicted heroin smuggler, illustrated in December 2005. Nguyen's hanging caused such a furore both in Australia and Singapore that, in a rare break with the government line, Singapore's *Straits Times* ran an article discussing the mandatory death penalty and the possibility that it should be revised.

Executing drug smugglers is one of the few areas where Singapore and Malaysia see eye to eye. The saga over the replacement of the causeway linking the two countries is only the latest in a series of ongoing battles that have raged between the two since 1965, when Singapore was unceremoniously kicked out of its short-lived union with Malaysia. The bridge negotiations faltered over Singapore's preconditions that Malaysia provide it with sand for reclamation projects and that Singaporean military jets have access to Malaysian airspace. Other squabbles continue over territorial claims to small islands in the Singapore Strait, payment for water (Singapore gets 40% of its water from Malaysia but plans to make itself self-sufficient by 2061, when the current agreement runs out), and Malaysian Railway land-holdings in Singapore.

While relations between Malaysia and Singapore are likely to remain touchy for the foreseeable future, those between Malaysia and Brunei are far more cordial. The two countries may have minor disputes over the rights to possible offshore gas and oil exploration sites and over the land border around Limbang, but they share Islam as a common faith and further goodwill was forged in August 2005 when Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, aged 58, took 26-year-old former TV journalist Azrinaz Mazhar Hakim, a Malaysian, as his second wife. Love must be in the air in Brunei because in 2004 the 30-year-old Crown Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah Bolkiah married a 17-year-old half-Swiss commoner, Sarah Salleh.

Change is gradually creeping into the world's longest-running absolute monarchy. There are growing indications that Brunei is moving towards some degree of political reform: the legislative council has been restored for the first time in 20 years and an opposition political party has been allowed to form. The emphasis on Muslim culture has relaxed slightly, with the education minister losing his job for pushing unpopular and obscure Islamic studies. The government is also trying to move beyond the oil- and gas-rich nation's habitual economic reliance on hydrocarbons.

FAST FACTS: MALAYSIA

GDP per person:
US\$10,400

Life expectancy:
72.5 years

Inflation: 2.9%

Unemployment: 3.6%

Number of mobile phone
users: 14.6 million

FAST FACTS: SINGAPORE

GDP per person:
US\$27,800

Life expectancy: 81 years

Inflation: 1%

Unemployment: 3.3%

Fine for littering: up
to \$S2000 for repeat
offenders

FAST FACTS: BRUNEI

GDP per person:
US\$24,000

Life expectancy: 75 years

Inflation: 2.7%

Unemployment: 4.9%

Daily oil production:
203,000 barrels

The Authors



SIMON RICHMOND

Coordinating Author, Kuala Lumpur

This is the second time Simon has filled the coordinating author role on this title and it was by far one of his most interesting trips to Malaysia and Singapore, of which there have been many over the last decade and a half. Over those years Simon has travelled through most of both countries – from the sun-kissed beaches of Langkawi to the deepest jungles of Sarawak. When not knocking about the region in the selfless pursuit of the next great meal or adventure activity, Simon can be found either in London, Sydney or Boston, writing and enjoying his nontravelling life.

My Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei

I love train travel and while Lonely Planet's budget doesn't quite stretch to the plush Eastern & Oriental Express, I did have the good fortune to be a passenger on the now-defunct but equally luxurious Peninsula Line service from Tampin near Melaka (p229) to Singapore (p512) back in 1996. My most memorable Malaysian train trip, though, was riding the 'jungle railway' from Wakaf Bharu near the fascinating east-coast town of Kota Bharu (p321) to Jerantut, the gateway to the premier national park Taman Negara (p285). It's decidedly nonluxury and very slow, but acts like a local bus in an area of Malaysia where roads are rare, thus providing a wonderful insight into the daily life of the country's interior.



DAMIAN HARPER

Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor, Pahang

Born in London, Damian fled the UK book trade to secure a degree in modern and classical Chinese from the School of Oriental and African Studies, a journey that bundled him from the Big Smoke to Hong Kong, Singapore, Beijing and on to the even bigger smoke of Shanghai. A contributor to a dozen guidebooks for Lonely Planet, Damian has an affectionate interest in overseas Chinese communities in Malaysia, other Southeast Asian nations and Europe.



TOM PARKINSON

Sarawak, Sabah & Brunei

Tom has worked for Lonely Planet since 2002, covering a variety of far-flung destinations, but Borneo has been a dream assignment ever since he read Redmond O'Hanlon and Kinky Friedman back in his youth. Luckily he didn't actually have to kill to land the gig, and even got to tack Brunei on as a bonus. In the course of researching this edition Tom sprained his foot, cut himself on a rusty machete and got a malaria tablet stuck up his nose – and he still aims to come back as soon as humanly possible for more wild boar, Bario pineapple, secret skull caves, karaoke and longhouse jungle treks.



CHARLES RAWLINGS-WAY

Singapore

Charles' earliest memories of Singapore involve being awestruck by air-conditioners and attempting to drown his father in the Hilton pool when he was seven. He's not as easily impressed or murderous these days, but Singapore still lures him back for regular pitstops. A lapsed architect, shameless chilli addict and laksa aficionado, Charles worked in Lonely Planet's Melbourne office for many years before making a break for the open road in 2005. Singapore, with its lapsed architecture and chilli-laden laksas, made him feel right at home. A freelance travel writer, Charles keeps one eye on the next adventure and the other on fellow LP wordsmith Meg Worby.



RICHARD WATKINS

Perak, Penang, Kedah & Perlis, Terengganu, Kelantan

After studying ancient history at Oxford, Richard embarked on a brief career teaching English as a foreign language, and soon ended up in Singapore. Although he enjoyed his first taste of the not-so-mysterious Orient, teaching grammar points to tired businessmen in the evenings was less appealing, and at the end of his contract he went travelling through Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Richard has written for other guidebooks, newspapers and more than a dozen Lonely Planet titles, including *Italy*, *Bulgaria* and the previous edition of *Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei*.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Dr Trish Batchelor wrote the Health chapter (p613). Dr Batchelor is a general practitioner and travel medicine specialist who works at the CIWEC Clinic in Kathmandu, Nepal, and is a medical advisor to the Travel Doctor New Zealand clinics. She has travelled extensively through Southeast and East Asia.

Alan D'Cruz contributed to the History chapter (p30). Alan is a Malaysian writer and documentary film maker. He directed the acclaimed *Guardians of the Forest* (2001) about Malaysia's indigenous people.

Su-Lyn Tan contributed to the Food & Drink chapter (p70). Su-Lyn is a freelance food writer based in Singapore and was the managing editor of *Wine & Dine* magazine, the most established food publication in the region. She is also the author of Lonely Planet's *World Food Malaysia & Singapore*.