

Perak



Stretching from Selangor to the Thai border, Perak is a relatively large state with a rich history and varied landscape, although most of it remains largely unexplored by foreign travellers. The top attraction is, without doubt, the laid-back island of Pangkor, off the southwest coast, which has long been a popular port of call on the backpacker trail. Its tiny twin island, Pangkor Laut, meanwhile, is home to Malaysia's most exclusive luxury resort. The historic royal town of Kuala Kangsar – birthplace of the Malaysian rubber industry – and Taiping, with its lush gardens, colonial remnants and zoo, are also rewarding destinations, while the Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve on the northwest coast offers a fascinating introduction to Malaysia's rich ecological heritage.

The capital, Ipoh, is a sprawling, ramshackle city with some fine examples of colonial architecture and Buddhist cave temples, and makes an excellent base for forays into the surrounding countryside.

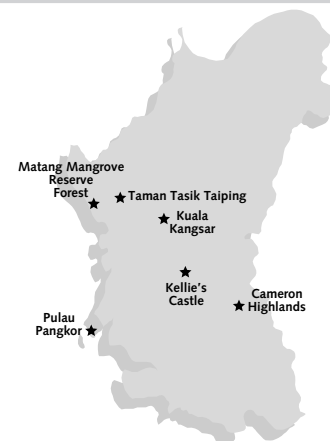
Perak is also the access point for the Cameron Highlands (in Pahang state), Malaysia's premier hill station and one of the country's most justifiably popular tourist destinations. For a quieter retreat, Malaysia's oldest hill station is peaceful Bukit Larut, near Taiping.

For centuries, Perak's fame and riches rested on its abundant tin mines. The ore even gave its name to the state - 'perak' means 'silver' in Malay. Perak, and more specifically Kuala Kangsar, was also the birthplace of the Malaysian rubber industry, which remains an important element of the local and national economy to this day.

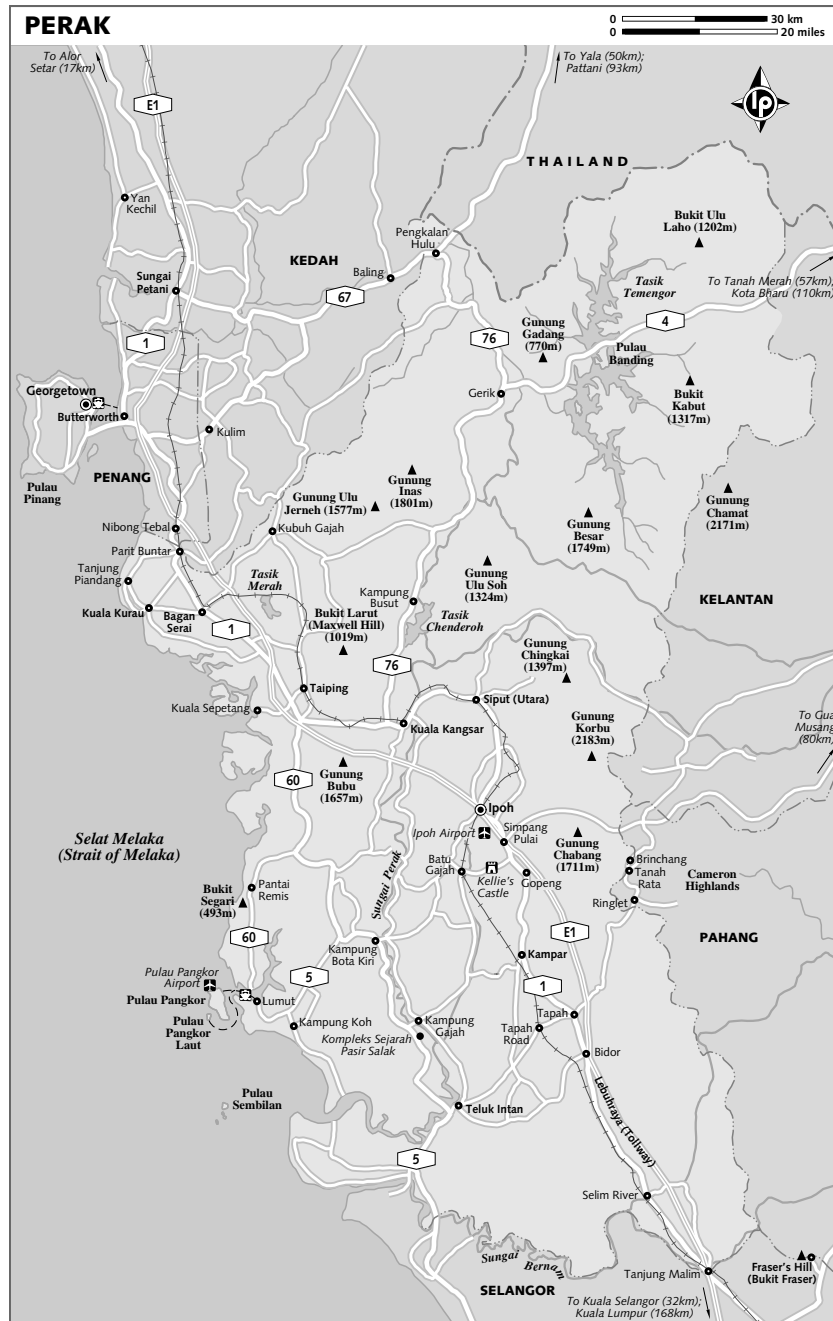
PERAK

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visiting one of the tea plantations and enjoying walks in the cool climate of the **Cameron Highlands** (p150)
- Exploring the eerie ruins of **Kellie's Castle** (p150) near Ipoh
- Lazing on one of the fine beaches on **Pulau Pangkor** (p140)
- Admiring the palaces, mosque and other sights of **Kuala Kangsar's** (p159) impressive old royal district
- Discovering the mangroves at **Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve** (p166)
- Going for a leisurely amble around the lush **Taman Tasik Taiping** (p162)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 05 ■ POPULATION: 2.05 MILLION ■ AREA: 21,005 SQ KM



History

Today's sultanate of Perak dates back to the early 16th century, when the eldest son of the last sultan of Melaka, Sultan Muzaffar Shah, established his own dynasty on the banks of Sungai Perak (Perak River). The state's rich tin deposits made it a target both for covetous neighbours and foreign forces.

Dutch efforts in the 17th century to monopolise the tin trade were unsuccessful, but remains of their forts can still be seen on Pulau Pangkor (Pangkor Island) and at the mouth of Perak River. In the 18th century the Bugis from the south and the Siamese to the north made concerted attempts to dominate Perak, but British intervention in the 1820s put an end to Siam's expansionist ambitions.

The British had remained reluctant to meddle in the peninsula's affairs, but growing investment from the Strait settlements, along with the rich tin mines of Perak, encouraged their interest. The mines also attracted a great influx of Chinese immigrants, who soon formed rival clan groups allied with local Malay chiefs, all of whom battled to control the mines.

The Perak sultanate was in disarray, and fighting among successors to the throne gave the British their opportunity to step in, making the first real colonial incursion on the peninsula in 1874. The governor, Sir Andrew Clarke, convened a meeting at Pulau Pangkor at which Sultan Abdullah was installed on the throne in preference to Sultan Ismail, the other major contender. The resultant Pangkor Treaty required that the sultan accept a British Resident, to be consulted on all issues other than those relating to religion or Malay custom.

Though the Resident had no executive authority, this foot in the door soon helped to consolidate British rule. In 1875, only one year after the Pangkor Treaty, Sultan Abdullah was forced, under threat of deposition, to accept administration by British officials on his behalf. Various Perak chiefs united against the overbearing Resident, James WW Birch, who was assassinated at Pasir Salak in November 1875.

Colonial troops were called in to fight what proved to be a short-lived war, Sultan Abdullah was exiled, and a new British-sanctioned sultan was installed. The next British Resident, Sir Hugh Low, was a very

different character. He had already gained administrative experience in Borneo, was fluent in Malay and was a noted botanist – he even had a pitcher plant (*Nepenthes Lowii*) named after him. He assumed control of taxes from the tin mines and practised greater intervention in state affairs. In 1877 he introduced the first rubber trees to Malaysia, and experimented with planting tea and coffee as well. The sultans, meanwhile, maintained their status but were increasingly effete figureheads, bought out with stipends.

The first railway in the state, from Taiping to Port Weld (now known as Kuala Sepetang), was built in 1885 to transport the wealth of tin; the result was rapid development in Taiping and Ipoh. In 1896 Perak, along with Selangor, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan, became part of the Federated Malay States. The Resident system persisted, however, even after the Japanese invasion and WWII, ending only when Perak became part of the Federation of Malaya in 1948. Perak joined the new independent state of Malaysia in 1957.

Climate

Perak has a tropical climate, and is hot and humid throughout the year; daily temperatures average between 21°C and 32°C, and humidity levels hover at a steady 90%. There are brief downpours and occasional lighter rain throughout the year, with June and July usually being the driest months. The Cameron Highlands are actually in Pahang state, and temperatures there are much cooler, rarely rising above 21°C. Rainfall is more frequent too.

Getting There & Away

Both the main rail line and the Lebuhraya (E1; North–South Hwy) run the length of the country, from Johor Bahru in the south to the Thai border in the north, giving easy access to the state capital, Ipoh, and other major towns. Ipoh is the transport hub of Perak, and there are bus connections to most major towns on the peninsula. Ipoh also has an airport, with regular flights to/from Kuala Lumpur (KL); see p149 for more information.

Getting Around

Almost everywhere in Perak is accessible by bus from Ipoh. Trains are infrequent, often

leave at inconvenient times and are not particularly useful for travelling within the state. Lumut is the departure point for ferries to Pulau Pangkor, and is well served by bus to other towns in Perak and beyond.

SOUTHERN PERAK

The road north from KL crosses the state border from Selangor into Perak at Tanjung Malim. If you have your own transport, you can get off the Lebuhraya (North–South Hwy) tollway at Tanjung Malim and take the old Hwy 1 through a number of small towns, although there is little to detain you for long. The first of these is Selim River, where British forces made an unsuccessful last-ditch attempt to halt the Japanese advance through the peninsula during WWII.

The first main town is Bidor, famous for its guava and odorous *petai* beans, where you can turn off for Teluk Intan, 42km to the southwest. **Kampung Pasir Salak**, 25km north of Teluk Intan, is a small village of some historical interest (see Kompleks Sejarah Pasir Salak, right). From this village, you can follow the valley of Sungai Perak to **Kampung Bota Kiri**. This river valley was the dotted home of the Perak sultanate and is dotted with royal graves. From **Kampung Bota Kiri**, you can take the road to Lumut on the coast or travel northeast through a series of *kampung* (villages) to Ipoh.

TELUK INTAN

☎ 05 / pop 62,320

This laid-back, ramshackle town at the junction of Sungai Perak and Sungai Bidor was once known as Teluk Anson, after the early colonial planner who developed it, but the name Teluk Intan was reinstated in the 1980s. There is no pressing reason to come here, other than to change buses, but it's a pleasant enough place to while away an afternoon.

The town's one over-hyped 'tourist attraction' is the leaning pagoda-style **jam besar** (clock tower; admission free; 11 8am–5pm Mon–Thu, 8am–12.15pm & 2.45–5pm Fri, 9am–6pm Sat & Sun) near the bus station, that appears to have eight storeys, though there are only three levels inside. The 25.5m-high tower was built in 1885 as a potable-water storage

tank. Despite the posted opening hours, it's often closed to visitors.

Teluk Intan also has a few fine colonial buildings and old Chinese temples and shop-houses, but, like the clock tower, most look to be on the verge of collapse. The **Istana Raja Muda Perak** is the crumbling palace of the next in line to the sultanate of Perak.

Sleeping & Eating

Kok Min Hotel (☎ 622 1529; 1065A Jln Sekolah; s/d RM20/25) Not far from the Hotel Anson, this budget option is a slightly grotty old wooden villa with shared bathrooms. It's just about OK for an overnight stop, if you don't mind lizards scampering up the walls.

Hotel Anson (☎ 622 6166; Jln Sekolah; s/d RM50/60; a) Located on the main road just south of the bus station, this reasonable hotel is probably the best place in town, which admittedly isn't saying much. Rooms have private bathrooms.

Day and night, hawker food stalls line the streets around the clock tower and bus station. The interesting, old-style covered market north of the clock tower has an endless selection of Malaysian, Indian and Chinese favourites.

Getting There & Away

The central bus station is just south of the clock tower. There are direct buses to/from Ipoh (RM5.80, three daily) and KL's Putrajaya bus station (RM10.90, three hours, every 30 minutes), as well as express buses to Lumut (RM6.20, five daily), Kota Bharu (RM34, one daily) and Johor Bahru (RM32, one daily). Local buses to Klang in Selangor (RM9, three daily) depart from the side street next to the post office, just west of the clock tower.

KOMPLEKS SEJARAH PASIR SALAK

In the sleepy riverside **Kampung Pasir Salak** stands the **Kompleks Sejarah Pasir Salak** (Pasir Salak Historical Complex; ☎ 631 1462; adult/child RM3/1; 11 10am–5pm Sat–Thu, 10am–noon & 2.45–5pm Fri), which is considered the birthplace of Malay nationalism. Pasir Salak was the site of the 1875 murder of James WW Birch, the first British Resident of Perak, and a memorial marks the exact spot of the assassination. Birch is widely portrayed as an intolerant man, insensitive to Malay customs; however, his murder was as much a reaction to the colonial government's

decision to assume direct control in Perak as it was to any shortcomings in Birch's personality. His killers, Maharaja Lela (a local chief), Dato' Sagor and Pandak Indut, were arrested by British troops and later hanged. They have since been enshrined as national heroes, and the memorial dedicated to them here is in the shape of the traditional *sundang* knife. Replicas of Maharaja Lela's fort and house are nearby.

There are several restored traditional houses in the complex, one of which is a museum dedicated to the events of 1875, with displays of paintings, swords and other old weapons. Another house has an exhibition on traditional Malay wedding customs, while the largest house has been transformed into a 'time tunnel' of historical dioramas depicting Perak from prehistoric times to independence.

Getting There & Away

Pasir Salak is 4km across Sungai Perak Bridge from the nearest town, **Kampung Gajah**. It's a remote and awkward place to get to, with no direct public transport links. A chartered taxi from Teluk Intan to Pasir Salak costs roughly RM50 return, though you'll need to negotiate if you want the driver to wait while you look around.

TAPAH

☎ 05

The small town of Tapah has no real attractions; the only reason to come here is for bus connections to the Cameron Highlands (see p150). The town is basically just a transport hub, consisting of one shabby street with a string of basic shops and a couple of hotels.

Sleeping & Eating

If you get stuck overnight here, Tapah has a couple of slightly grubby-looking budget hotels on Jln Stesyen; take the street directly opposite the bus station for two short blocks. Rooms at these hotels come with private bathrooms.

Hotel Utara (☎ 401 2299; 35 Jln Stesyen; r RM26–35; a) A small hotel with a few basic rooms; the slightly dearer air-con rooms are the best bet.

NH Hotel (☎ 401 7288; 24 Jln Stesyen; r RM50; a) Across the tiny lane from the Utara, this place offers a marginally higher standard of accommodation.

There are numerous simple Chinese and Indian restaurants scattered around town.

Getting There & Away

The bus station on Jln Raja is only 200m from the main road. Local buses make the corkscrewing journey to Tanah Rata in the Cameron Highlands roughly every hour from 8am to 6pm (RM5.70, two hours). Taxis to Tanah Rata (RM60) leave from the taxi station 100m further down Jln Raja, away from the main road.

From the bus station there are a few departures to KL and Penang, but most express long-distance buses leave from **Restoran Caspian** (9 Jln Besar). The owner of the restaurant runs a subagent, the Kah Mee Agency, directly opposite the bus station.

From various whistlstops around the Restoran Caspian, buses pick up passengers for Ipoh (RM5.50, two hours, hourly); Johor Bahru/Singapore (RM53/RM75, nine/10 hours, three daily); KL (RM13.50 to RM24, 2½ hours, hourly until 6.15pm); Kuala Terengganu (RM45, nine hours, 9pm); Kuantan (RM32, seven hours, 10am and 9pm); Lumut (RM13.50, three hours, 11am); Melaka (RM22, 3½ hours, 10am); and Penang (RM25 to RM28, five hours, five daily). All these buses can also be booked at **CS Travel & Tours** (☎ 491 1200; www.cstravel.com.my; 47 Jln Besar) in Tanah Rata.

The nearest train station, known as **Tapah Road** (☎ 418 1345), is 9km west of town, with one daily service in each direction to KL (RM15, three hours) and Butterworth (RM18, seven hours). A taxi to Tapah Road station from Tapah is around RM10.

LUMUT

☎ 05

Lumut is the departure point for Pulau Pangkor, and most visitors see little beyond the bus station and ferry terminal. If you do stay, the waterfront recreation park on the northern side of town, near the yacht club, is an agreeable spot for picnics and relaxing, and there are some decent out-of-town beaches, but not much else. Teluk Batik, around 7km out of town, is one of the more popular beaches. There is no bus service, but a taxi will cost you RM10 one way.

The Malaysian Navy has its principal base just outside town, and some 25,000 sailors

make up the overwhelming majority of the town's inhabitants. You'll see the huge apartment complexes of the naval quarters as you take the ferry to Pulau Pangkor.

Information

Maybank (Jln Sultan Idris Shah)

Moneychanger (Jln Sultan Idris Shah) Next door to the Tourism Malaysia office. It offers better rates than on Pulau Pangkor.

Tourism Malaysia office (☎ 683 4057; Jln Sultan Idris Shah; 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.45pm Sat) Midway between the jetty and the bus station.

Sleeping & Eating

If you get marooned on the way to Pangkor, Lumut has a few decent hotels and cafés.

Era Backpackers Hotel (☎ 013-598 3005; 7-9 Jln Raja Muda Musa; dm with shared bathroom from RM15, r with shared bathroom RM 25-50; a) Opposite the bus station, this hostel, sporting bright, spotless rooms, is Lumut's best budget choice.

Phin Lum Hooi Hotel (☎ 683 5641; 93 Jln Titi Panjang; r with shared bathroom RM25-40; a) This ageing but friendly hotel faces the waterfront park at the northern edge of town. It also has a good, cheap restaurant downstairs.

Swiss-Garden Resort & Spa Damai Laut (☎ 684 3333; www.damailaut.com; Jln Damai Laut; r/ste from RM230/575; a s) North of the centre, this is the top place to stay. It's surrounded by jungle beside the sea. The resort has 300 spacious and elegantly designed rooms, and superb facilities, including an 18-hole golf course, spa and tennis courts.

There's a basic food court at the bus station where you can grab a quick lunch, and more food stalls at the waterfront recreation park.

Activities

If you fancy a leisurely putt before taking the ferry to Pangkor, day visitors are welcome at the **Damai Laut Golf & Country Club** (☎ 685 9330; Hala Damai 2, Jln Damai Laut; 9/18 holes RM80/120) attached to the Swiss-Garden Resort & Spa Damai Laut. Golf lessons costing RM60 per hour are also available.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Lumut is 170km south of Butterworth and 83km southwest of Ipoh, the main turn-off for Lumut on the KL-Butterworth road. The bus station is right by the ferry jetty/terminal. On Pulau Pangkor, the bus agent

next to Pangkor Town's Chuan Full Hotel handles bookings for the express buses.

Lumut is well connected to other destinations on the peninsula and several bus companies operate from here. The most frequent buses take the highway to/from Ipoh (RM5.60, hourly). Direct buses run roughly hourly to/from KL (RM18.70). Other destinations include Butterworth (RM10.50, five daily), Johor Bahru/Singapore (RM38/RM42, six daily), Kuantan (RM28, three daily), Melaka (RM24, two daily) and Taiping (RM7, five daily).

TAXI

Long-distance taxis from Lumut can be scarce late in the day. Typical fares per car are Butterworth (RM200), Ipoh (RM120) and KL (RM250).

PULAU PANGKOR

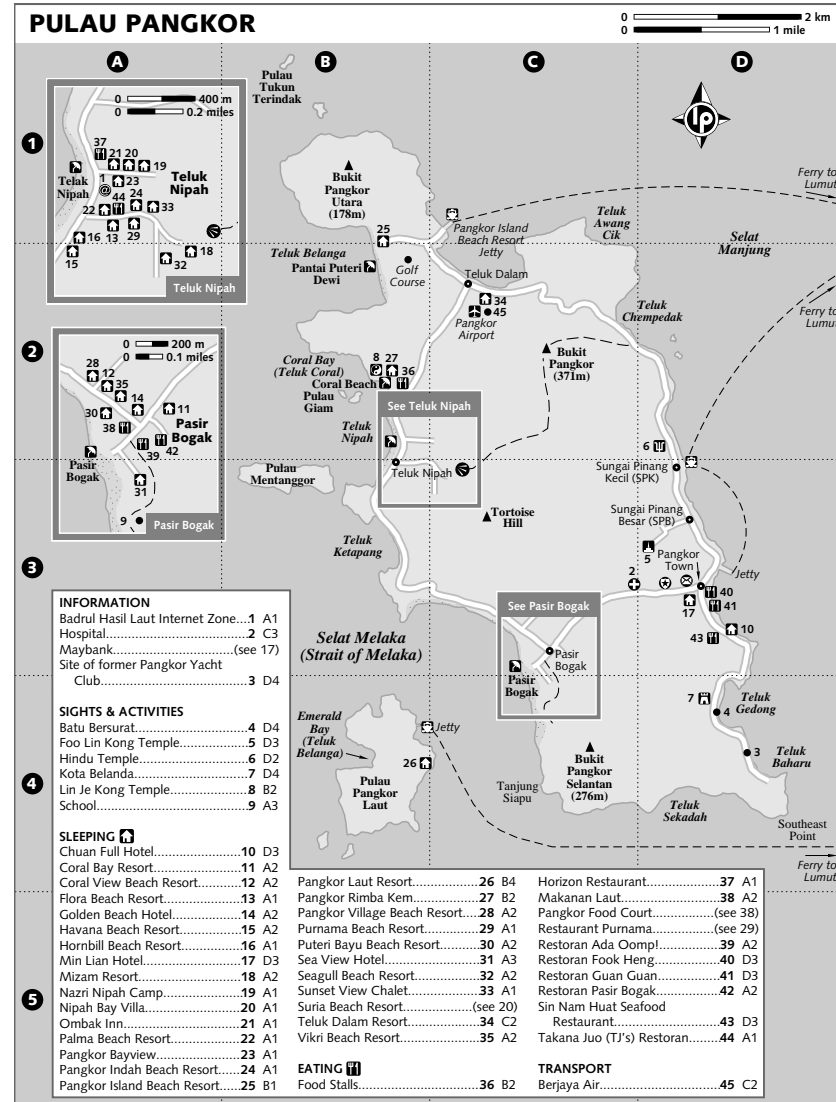
☎ 05 / pop 25,000

The island of Pangkor is just a 40-minute ferry ride from Lumut, which is easily accessible via Ipoh. It's a low-key resort island noted for its fine beaches. These can be visited via the road running around the island. The jungle-clad hills of the interior, though, are virtually untouched.

At 8 sq km, Pangkor is a small island, but that hasn't stopped the state government from trying to promote it as one of Malaysia's main tourist destinations. Fishing and dried fish products are still a major industry for the island, particularly on the east coast, with most tourist development confined to the west coast.

Pangkor was a bit-player in the battle to control trade in the Selat Melaka (Strait of Melaka). In earlier times, the island was a favourite refuge of fishermen, sailors, merchants and pirates. In the 17th century, the Dutch built a fort here in their bid to monopolise the Perak tin trade, but were driven out by a local ruler before returning briefly some 50 years later. In 1874 a contender to the Perak throne sought British backing and the Pangkor Treaty was signed. As a result, British Resident James WW Birch was installed in Perak and the colonial era on the peninsula began.

Pangkor is a popular local resort. It can get very crowded on weekends and holidays when prices are highest, but during the week the beaches are almost empty.



Orientation

The island's east coast is a continuous village strip, comprising Sungai Pinang Kecil (SPK), Sungai Pinang Besar (SPB) and Pangkor Town, the main centre of population.

The road that runs along the east coast turns west at Pangkor Town and runs directly across the island, which is only 2km

wide at this point, to Pasir Bogak. From there it runs north to the village of Teluk Nipah, where you'll find most of the budget accommodation. It then goes to the northern end of the island, past the airport, to Pangkor's luxury resorts. The road from there back to the eastern side of the island is winding and very steep in parts, but it's sealed all the way.

Information

The island's hospital and police station are just west of Pangkor Town, on the road towards Pasir Bogak.

Badrul Hasil Laut Internet Zone (Teluk Nipah; per hr RM6) Offers the quickest connections. Several of the budget hotels at Teluk Nipah also provide internet access.

Bus agent (Jln Besar, Pangkor Town) Next to Chuan Full Hotel, it handles bookings for express buses originating from Lumut on the mainland.

Maybank (Pangkor Town) In the same building as Min Lian Hotel, it's open the usual hours and has an ATM. For travellers cheques and cash, the moneychanger (see p138) in Lumut offers better rates.

www.pulau-pangkor.com For online information on the island.

Beaches

The beach at **Pasir Bogak** is a lovely, if rather narrow, stretch of sand. It's fine for swimming, but during holidays it can get crowded. To the north, **Teluk Nipah** has a wider, better beach, with more water-sport activities to hand.

The best beach on this side of the island is at **Coral Bay**, just north of Teluk Nipah. The water is a clear, emerald-green colour due to the presence of limestone, and usually the beach is quite clean and pretty.

In May, June and July turtles used to lay their eggs at night on **Teluk Ketapang** beach, north of Pasir Bogak. Increasing numbers of gawking tourists have seriously affected turtle numbers, and sightings are increasingly rare. For more information on turtles see p64.

At the northern end of the island at **Teluk Belanga**, **Pantai Puteri Dewi** (Golden Sands Beach) is pleasant, but access is restricted to Pangkor Beach Resort guests. Day-trippers have to pay a ridiculous RM50. In between, there are a number of virtually deserted beaches that you can reach by boat, motorcycle or on foot.

On nearby **Pulau Pangkor Laut**, **Emerald Bay** is a beautiful little horseshoe-shaped bay with clear water, fine coral and a gently sloping beach. You'll have to be a guest at the exclusive **Pangkor Laut Resort**, though, to enjoy it.

Exploring the Island

Pulau Pangkor lends itself well to exploration by motorcycle, bicycle or on foot. Spend a day doing a loop of the island, following

the sealed road all the way around. By motorcycle it takes about two hours with stops, around three or four hours by bicycle, or you could even walk it in a very long day. Be warned, though, that locals on motorcycles seem oblivious to any kind of road rules, and accidents are not uncommon. Only the road between Pangkor Town and Pasir Bogak has a pavement the whole way, while the road from Pasir Bogak to Teluk Nipah is hilly and has several blind corners, so be very careful if you decide to walk.

Along the western side are the main beaches of Pasir Bogak, Teluk Nipah and Coral Beach, and most of the tourist accommodation. On the northern edge of Coral Beach, look out for the small psychedelic **Lin Je Kong Temple**, adorned with numerous outsized statues, including a turtle, giant mushrooms, a mermaid and, of course, Donald Duck. From here, the road heads inland past Pangkor airport and, to the north, the Pangkor Island Beach Resort at Teluk Belanga. Continuing eastwards, the road skirts **Teluk Dalam**, with its luxury resort, and crosses over the headland. This is a steep and twisting road through some superb jungle. It's quite deserted and, though thankfully it's a very rare occurrence, travellers have been robbed here.

On the eastern side, from SPK it's a nearly continuous village strip on to grotty Pangkor Town. Suffused with the scent of drying fish, it's probably not somewhere you'd want to spend much time, though there are plenty of cafés and shops where you can pick up basic provisions. Nearby there's a colourful South Indian Hindu temple. In SPB, the **Foo Lin Kong temple**, on the side of the hill just west of the main road, is worth a quick look; there's a mini version of the Great Wall of China climbing up the hill behind.

At **Teluk Gedong**, 3km south of Pangkor Town, is the **Kota Belanda** (Dutch Fort), built in 1670. Despite frequent visits, the Dutch were kept away by hostile locals and were unable to maintain the site and rebuild the fort until 1743; only five years later they abandoned it for good after local warrior chiefs repeatedly attacked them. The old fort was totally swallowed by jungle until 1973, when it was reconstructed as far as the remaining bricks would allow, which wasn't much.

On the waterfront 100m beyond the fort, **Batu Bersurat** is a mammoth stone carved with the symbol of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; VOC) and other graffiti, including a faint depiction of a tiger stealing a child. This supposedly relates to an incident when the child of a local European dignitary disappeared while playing near the rock. The Dutch liked the idea of the tiger story; the more likely explanation is that the girl was abducted by disenchanting locals.

The road ends just past the fishing village of **Teluk Gedong** and the now defunct **Pangkor Yacht Club**.

Activities

Snorkel gear, boats and even jet skis can be hired at hotels or on the beach at Pasir Bogak and Teluk Nipah. A small boat to take you **snorkelling** at small nearby islands costs RM30, after negotiation. Boats can also be hired from both beaches to go to **Pulau Sembilan**, a group of nine islands with deserted white-sand beaches that are popular for **sports fishing**, about 1½ hours southwest of Pangkor.

The island offers some interesting walking opportunities. A four-hour jungle trail crosses the island from Teluk Nipah and comes out near the **Foo Lin Kong**; another trail goes from **Teluk Ketapang** to **Bukit Pangkor** before joining the east-coast road. Walking trails are often overgrown. Take a guide, *parang* (bush knife) and water, and protect yourself against leeches and ticks (see p620 and p621). Most guesthouses have lots of information and can organise a guide. Don't be deceived by the relatively small size of the island; several visitors have got lost after attempting to traverse the jungle alone.

Sleeping

Teluk Nipah has the best beach on the island, and the biggest choice of accommodation. It's still largely backpacker territory, though more midrange hotels are now challenging the dominance of the cheap and cheery hostels. To the south, **Pasir Bogak** has a string of bigger, pricier midrange resorts, a few restaurants and not much else. It's especially busy on weekends. The only other developments on Pangkor are luxury resorts on isolated beaches.

Rates at most places vary, often substantially, between peak (Friday and/or Saturday and Sunday, plus holidays) and off-peak seasons; the following prices quoted are 'off-peak', available from Monday to Friday (or Sunday to Thursday) and in the low season. Finding a bed at any price during major holidays, such as Chinese New Year, can be near impossible without advance reservations. Budget rooms have shared bathrooms unless stated otherwise, pricier places all have private bathrooms.

TELUK NIPAH

The most lively of Pangkor's beaches is **Teluk Nipah**. Note that hotels on the main road do experience a fair bit of noise from local youths racing their motorbikes, which often continues well into the wee hours.

Budget

Nazri Nipah Camp (☎ 685 2014; rozie1982@hotmail.com; dm/r from RM10/30) Very friendly place at the edge of the jungle, with a chilled-out reggae theme going on. Accommodation ranges from simple A-frames to more comfortable chalets with bathrooms. There's also a secluded beer garden and TV lounge.

Ombak Inn (☎ 685 5223; s & d from RM20-70, f from 100; a) Another quiet hotel with a variety of options, including battered A-frame huts and sparkling fan/air-con bungalows with attached bathrooms. Discounts are offered for longer stays.

Mizam Resort (☎ 685 3359; r RM30-50; a) Set well back from the beach, at the very edge of the jungle, there's not much action at Mizam, and staff speak little English, but it's a quiet place to rest up. Rooms all come with TVs and attached bathrooms.

Nipah Bay Villa (☎ 685 2198; www.pangkornipahbay.com; r RM40-95; a i) This place has an array of large, comfortable chalets which offer great value for the price. It has a restaurant and bar at the front, books for sale or rent and a laundry service.

Sunset View Chalet (☎ 685 5448; sunsetvu@tm.net.my; r from RM50; a) Sleepy collection of wooden bungalows set in pretty fern-filled gardens, all with their own bathrooms. Prices rise by 50% on weekends (Friday to Sunday) and may double on holidays.

Suria Beach Resort (☎ 685 3922; r from RM50; a) Despite the name, Suria isn't on the beach, but is set back on a dusty side street.

It has concrete hotel blocks which are looking a bit decrepit, though all rooms have balconies.

Seagull Beach Resort (% 685 2878; jenh@streamyx.com.my; r RM50-80; a i s) Set back from the beach, this guesthouse has a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, and the owner can arrange all kinds of trips and activities. The small, free-standing huts are pretty basic and the pricier upstairs rooms with air-con are far preferable. Watch out for the prowling cheeky monkeys though. There's a clubroom with table tennis, a dartboard and karaoke.

Midrange

Purnama Beach Resort (% 685 3530; www.purnama.com.my; r RM40-75; a i s) Spruce collection of chalets including fairly simple fan huts and neat, motel-style doubles. There's a good restaurant and a very small pool. Prices include breakfast.

Pangkor Indah Beach Resort (% /fax 685 2107; r from RM70; a) One of the newer establishments here, Indah Beach has regular, slightly musty hotel rooms in its main building and more attractive chalets at the back, which have queen-size beds, TVs and small cold-water bathrooms.

Palma Beach Resort (% 685 3693; r RM75-95; a) Reasonably priced midrange option, with attractive wooden chalets with TVs and bathrooms. Prices are negotiable, especially for longer stays.

Flora Beach Resort (% 685 3878; r RM75-95; a) Comfortable collection of clean wooden chalets set back from the road, all with attached bathrooms. Motorcycles (RM30) are available for rent.

Pangkor Bayview (% 685 3540; r from RM80; a) This more upmarket place has a wide assortment of accommodation at varying prices, and it certainly pays to look at a few rooms before deciding. Upstairs hotel rooms have balconies overlooking the lane, and there are chalets in the back garden. The cheaper ones are a bit battered and bare though.

Havana Beach Resort (% 685 3333; www.havana.com.my; s & d/tr/ste from RM110/150/250; a) Havana has a variety of clean rooms in a compound at the southern edge of the beach strip. They're a little overpriced, but all have TVs and hot showers. Cheaper accommodation with fans and shared bathrooms is also available (RM40).

Hornbill Beach Resort (% 685 2005; r from RM120; a) Spotless modern hotel facing the beach, with comfortable, well-equipped rooms, most with balconies. The rooms at the front have great views, but those at the back are quieter. Breakfast is RM6.50 extra.

PASIR BOGAK

The rest of Pangkor's accommodation possibilities are grouped at each end of the beach at Pasir Bogak. Most places are mid-range, and compared to Teluk Nipah it's a very sedate place, and fewer overseas travellers stay here. It's geared more to weekend-ing Malaysian families.

Pangkor Village Beach Resort (% 685 2227; dm/r from RM25/145; a) Located at the western end of the beach, this is a big place with varied accommodation, including tents (RM14) and a selection of comfortable chalets. There's also an attached water-sports centre, offering waterskiing, kayaking and fishing trips.

Coral View Beach Resort (% 685 2163; r from RM75; a s) One of Pasir Bogak's cheapest options, this is a dowdy and ageing place, though the simple chalet rooms aren't too bad for the price. They're set back from the beach, with views of the forested interior.

Vikri Beach Resort (% 685 4258; r RM90-150; a) Vikri has a dozen simple but cosy wooden and brick chalets located in scrappy gardens across the road from the beach. It's a peaceful, homely environment, with a kitchen serving up home-cooked Indian food.

Puteri Bayu Beach Resort (% 685 1929; www.puteribayu.com; r/ste from RM90/400; a s) This luxurious complex has a choice of standard hotel rooms and more appealing chalets set in landscaped gardens and on the beach, with prices starting at RM190. Prices rise substantially on weekends (Friday and Saturday).

Sea View Hotel (% 685 1605; svhotel@tm.net.my; r from RM92; a s) This beachfront place has an inviting, palm-fringed pool, though the spartan brick chalets have a somewhat institutional feel to them. Discounts may be available.

Coral Bay Resort (% 685 5111; www.pangkorcoralbay.com.my; r from RM130; a s) On the road to Pangkor Town is this huge white complex with equally gleaming rooms. It has saunas, Jacuzzis, a gym and a nightclub, but is overpriced considering it's not even on the beach.

Golden Beach Hotel (% 685 5888; www.pangkorresorts.com; r from RM150; a s) This is an attractive modern chain hotel opposite the beach, with some formal gardens and even its own mini arena for team sports. The comfy rooms have all the expected mod-cons, such as satellite TV and tea-making facilities. Weekend prices rise dramatically, but there are discounts for longer stays.

PANGKOR TOWN

As the main attraction of Pangkor is its beaches, there is little point in staying in Pangkor Town, but if you get stuck, there are a couple of very basic hotels.

Chuan Full Hotel (% 685 1123; 60 Jln Besar; r RM25-35; a) This creaky, old wooden hotel has dated but acceptable rooms, as well as a TV lounge and a veranda at the back overlooking the waterfront. The owner also books coach tickets. Note that the sign outside says 'Chuan Fu'.

Min Lian Hotel (% 685 1294; 2 Jln Besar; r RM40; a) Right above the Maybank is this tatty but welcoming hotel; staff speak little English.

ELSEWHERE ON THE ISLAND

Pangkor Rimba Kem (% 685 5523; r RM80-150) The only accommodation on Coral Beach is this small collection of standard chalets, which sleep up to four people. It also has tents (RM10), which again can accommodate four, or if you bring your own tent, you can pitch it here for RM6.

Teluk Dalam Resort (% 685 5000; www.tdr.com.my; r from RM230; a i s) Fronting a wide bay at the northern end of the island is this peaceful four-star resort. Its collection of rustic wooden chalets and bungalows are set in landscaped gardens overlooking the sea. It's a little isolated and the beach isn't great, but there's a tennis court and children's pool as well as organised trips and activities. Day visitors can use the hotel facilities for RM50.

Pangkor Island Beach Resort (% 685 1091; www.pangkorislandbeach.com; r/ste from RM480/900; a i s) This large, secluded resort is located on a private sandy bay at Teluk Belanga, on the northern end of the island. It has some 270 guestrooms and villas set among lush jungle, with those nearest the sea costing more. The traditionally styled 'sea villas' at RM1100 are the most luxurious option. Recreational facilities include

two pools, tennis courts, and a spa, and there are organised activities for children. Day-trippers can use the resort's facilities for RM50.

PANGKOR LAUT

The tiny, private island of Pangkor Laut, just opposite Pasir Bogak, is occupied by Malaysia's most exclusive tourist development.

Pangkor Laut Resort (% 699 1100; www.pangkorlautresort.com; r from RM920; a i s) The luxurious accommodation ranges from spacious hillside and seafront villas, with king-size beds, balconies and huge bathrooms, to private 'estates' (uniquely designed houses, with two to four bedrooms, private pools and gardens, on a secluded bay away from the main resort). Minimum three-night packages at these estates start at a staggering RM29,110. Every conceivable amenity is to hand, and the resort boasts several fine restaurants, tennis courts and a Spa Village, offering a wide choice of treatments. The island is a favourite getaway for the Italian tenor Pavarotti, and you can even stay in the Pavarotti Suite (RM2415), an elegant hilltop retreat with a large, open-roofed bathroom and decorated with paintings from the opera star's private collection.

Eating

TELUK NIPAH

Several of Teluk Nipah's guesthouses have restaurants, though these often close outside the high season. There are some basic food stalls along the beach.

Restaurant Purnama (mains from RM4; h breakfast, lunch & dinner) In the guesthouse of the same name, this restaurant offers a cheap menu of Malay standard fare, seafood and a few Western dishes, as well as set breakfasts.

Takana Joo (TJ's) Restoran (mains from RM6; h breakfast, lunch & dinner) A family-run Indonesian restaurant at the bungalows of the same name. TJ's serves delicious, cheap food, though the staff certainly take their time serving it. It's regularly full, so you'll need to get there early.

Horizon Restaurant (mains RM9-28; h breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place has sunset views, alfresco dining and a mix of Chinese and Malaysian seafood and curries. Prices are relatively high and opening times can be unpredictable.

PASIR BOGAK

All the hotels have restaurants and there are a few other places to eat. All are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, although usually only in the high season.

Opposite the Golden Beach Hotel, **Pangkor Food Court** (mains from RM7) offers cheaper snack food, while, next door, **Makanan Laut** (mains from RM10) is a popular restaurant specialising in fresh seafood.

Other options close by include **Restoran Ada Oomp!** (mains from RM7), which serves fish dishes, and **Restoran Pasir Bogak** (mains from RM8), a basic place for Chinese food.

PANGKOR TOWN

Pangkor Town has several cheap Chinese *kedai kopi* (coffee shops), some serving excellent seafood. **Restoran Guan Guan** (Jln Besar; mains from RM5; 1 lunch & dinner) is an old favourite for seafood and prices are posted on the wall-sized English menu. **Restoran Fook Heng** (% 685 1319; Jln Besar; mains from RM5; 1 lunch & dinner) is also popular. And opposite the Chuan Full Hotel, the friendly **Sin Nam Huat Seafood Restaurant** (% 685 2819; 51 Jln Besar; mains RM10-35; 1 lunch & dinner) is a good place for crab, lobster and prawn dishes. All three serve beer.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Berjaya Air (% 685 5828) has flights every day except Tuesday and Thursday between KL's Subang airport and Pangkor airport (one way RM275). Flights leave Pangkor at 10.30am.

BOAT

In the high season, **Pan Silver Ferry** (% 683 2188) runs between Lumut and Pangkor Town every 30 minutes from 7am to 7.30pm, while the **Duta Pangkor Ferry** (% 681 2566) does the same trip roughly every 30 to 45 minutes between 7am and 8pm. **Mesra Feri** (% 683 5800) is the newest operator, running boats every 45 minutes between 7am and 8.30pm. Many ferries from Lumut stop at SPK before reaching Pangkor Town, so don't hop off too soon. Return tickets (valid for one month) on all three boats cost RM10; just check which service is leaving first.

The Pangkor Island Beach Resort and Teluk Dalam Resort at the northern end

of the island are served by their own ferry service from Lumut, running seven times a day in both directions (RM16).

There are four, rather pricey, ferries daily between Lumut and Pangkor Laut (adult/child RM50/25), though these are only for the use of bona fide guests.

Getting Around

There are no public buses available to tourists, so you will be obliged to use Pangkor's candy-pink minibuses taxis, which operate between 6.30am and 9pm. Set-fare services for up to three people from the jetty in Pangkor Town include: **Pasir Bogak** (RM4), **Teluk Nipah** (RM10), **Pangkor Island Beach Resort** (RM18), the airport (RM18) and around the island (RM40). Travel between Teluk Nipah and Pasir Bogak will cost you RM10.

An ideal way to see the island is by motorcycle or bicycle (see Exploring the Island, p140). There are numerous places at Pangkor Town, Pasir Bogak and Teluk Nipah that rent motorcycles from around RM30 per day and bicycles for RM15 – look out for signs advertising bikes at the guest-houses in Teluk Nipah. Cars must be left on the mainland; there are a number of carparks in Lumut, all charging around RM10 per day.

IPOH

% 05 / pop 637,200

Ipoh, which takes its name from the poisonous ipoh tree (*Antiaris Toxicaria*) which once grew in profusion here, was established in the 1870s and quickly made its fortune from the rich tin mine of the Kinta valley; the city's elegant mansions testify to the success of many Chinese miners. Today, the 'Bougainvillea City', as it calls itself, is one of the largest cities in Malaysia, but it's not quite as bustling as its size might indicate, and has retained many of its historic buildings.

For the visitor, Ipoh is mainly a transit town, a place where you change buses if you're heading for Pulau Pangkor or the Cameron Highlands. However, the grand colonial architecture of the 'Old Town' west of the Sungai Kinta (Kinta River) is well worth exploring and gives a good impression of just how wealthy and important this city once was.

At the end of the 19th century, the city expanded east over the river into the 'New Town', which, with its chaotic traffic and mix of crumbling Chinese shophouses and ugly modern blocks, holds less appeal. This is a generally dingy part of town, with a notorious prostitution problem and no real attractions. However, for those who do decide to stay longer, Ipoh makes the perfect base for discovering outlying sights such as the Buddhist cave temples, the royal town of Kuala Kangsar and Kellie's Castle.

Orientation

The Old Town is where you'll find the bus and train stations, but otherwise this is a quiet and sometimes eerily deserted part of the city, dominated by colonial architecture, government buildings and banks. The traffic-clogged New Town east of the river is home to most of the hotels and restaurants.

Information

HSBC Bank (Jln Tun Sambathan)

Internet Imax (3rd fl, Ipoh Parade Shopping Centre, Jln Sultan Abdul Jalil; per hr RM3; 1 10am-midnight Mon-Thu, 10am-2am Fri & Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun)

Ipoh Echo (www.ipohecho.com; 30 sen) Biweekly English-language newspaper, sometimes available free at the pricier hotels.

Ipoh Hospital (% 605 2533; www.hipoh.gov.my; Jln Hospital)

OCBC Bank (Jln Dato' Maharajah Lela)

Perak Tourist Newspaper Free monthly magazine with details of tourist attractions in the state, available from the tourist information centre and some hotels.

Tourist information centre (% 241 2959; Jln Tun Sambathan; 1 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

www.ipoh-online.com.my Useful resource for the city.

www.perak.gov.my Information on Perak.

Sights

COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

Ipoh's grand colonial architecture is found in the Old Town. Some structures look freshly whitewashed, but other buildings have fallen into disrepair. Known locally as the 'Taj Mahal', the **train station**, dating from 1915, is a blend of Moorish and Victorian architecture, known as the 'Raj' style. It houses the wonderfully old-fashioned **Majestic Station Hotel**. Directly opposite, the **Town Hall** (Dewan Bandaran; 1916) and the **Court House** (Mahkanah Tinggi; 1928)

are suitably impressive white neoclassical buildings of grand proportions. All three were built by the government architect AB Hubbock.

A short walk away on Jln Dato' Sagor, the **Birch Memorial Clock Tower** (1909) was erected in memory of James WW Birch, Perak's first British Resident, who was murdered at Pasir Salak. The friezes on the clock tower are meant to illustrate the growth of civilisation, featuring figures such as Moses, Buddha, Shakespeare and Charles Darwin. A figure representing Mohammed has since been erased. Birch was not a popular man locally. The road on which his memorial stands has been renamed in honour of one of his killers.

The mock-Tudor **Royal Ipoh Club** (1895) overlooks the playing fields of the *padang* (field or grassy area), and is still a centre of exclusivity. On the northern flank of the *padang*, **St Michael's Institution** is a neo-Gothic three-storey colonial school with arched verandas, founded by the Catholic La Salle brothers in 1927. Nearby, the green-and-white **Masjid India Muslim** (India Muslim Mosque; 1908) was built in the Mogul style for the local Indian population.

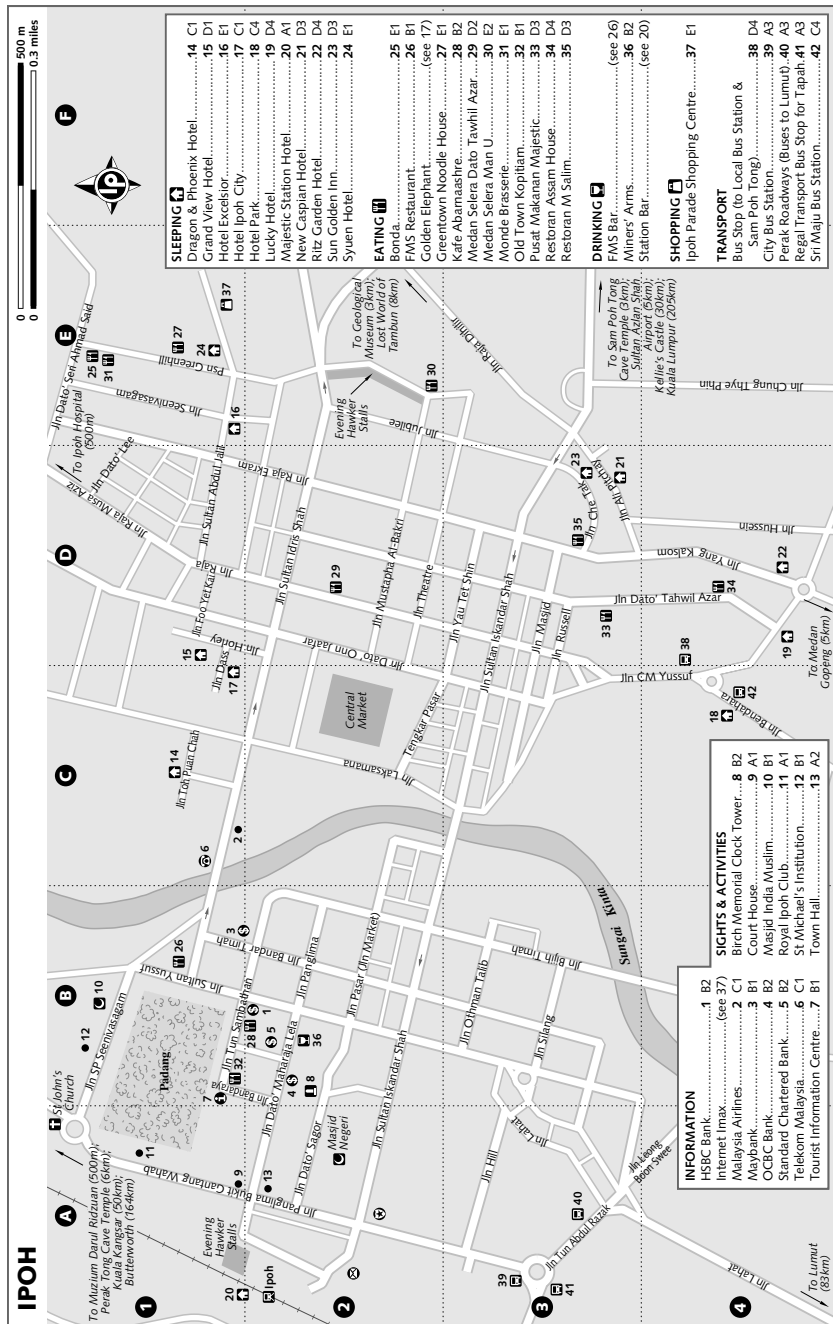
The Old Town also features many rows of rickety Chinese shophouses, though those in the New Town area east of the river are generally in better condition. After Georgetown, Ipoh has one of the most extensive areas of later shophouse architecture in Malaysia.

CAVE TEMPLES

Ipoh is set among jungle-clad limestone hills that spectacularly jut out from the valley. The hills are riddled with caves that are a great source of spiritual power, and over the years meditation grottoes have become large-scale temples. These colourful temples still attract significant numbers of worshippers, but tourists are also welcome to look around. Remember these caves are regarded as holy places by the local pilgrims so please behave respectfully.

Perak Tong

Founded in 1926 by a Buddhist priest, **Perak Tong** (% 546 5387; 1 8am-5pm) is a temple complex, consisting of an impressive complex of caverns and grottoes, with murals on the interior walls. There are several Buddha



figures in the main chamber, as well as a huge bell that is rung every time someone makes a donation.

The cave is located 6km north of Ipoh. From the city bus station, Reliance Bus 141 stops at Perak Tong and then continues on to Kuala Kangsar.

Sam Poh Tong

A temple complex a few kilometres to the south of Ipoh, Sam Poh Tong (9% 605 3120; 11 8am-5pm) is less popular than Perak Tong. The main attraction here is the turtle pond, where locals bring turtles to release, in the hope of attracting good luck.

Inside the temple there's a huge cavern with a small reclining Buddha, and various smaller caverns. The ornamental garden in front of the temple is quite scenic, and pomelo stalls line the highway.

It can be reached by Kinta bus 66 (bound for Kampar) or 73 from Ipoh's local bus station (70 sen).

Kek Look Tong

To get off the beaten path, you can visit the smaller, more serene Kek Look Tong (11 7.30am-7.30pm; donations requested). From Sam Poh Tong backtrack to the T-junction and turn right. Walk for 15 minutes, then turn right again before the first traffic light and follow the signs for Kek Look Tong. At the cave temple's entrance, climb up to the Three Sages in the central cavern. At the back of the cave is a fat Chinese Buddha of Future Happiness sitting in the company of three other Bodhisattvas. Behind the cave is an ornamental garden with ponds and pagodas.

MUSEUMS

North of the *padang*, the Muzium Darul Ridzuan (9% 253 1437; 2020 Jln Panglima Gantang; admission free; 11 9am-5pm) is housed in a 1926 villa built for a wealthy Chinese tin miner. The less than inspiring displays recount the history of tin mining (downstairs) and forestry (upstairs) in Perak. The occasional temporary exhibitions are more interesting. There are two concrete air-raid shelters in the garden, erected in 1941.

Rock enthusiasts might enjoy a visit to the Geological Museum (9% 545 7644; Jln Sultan Azlan Shah; admission free; 11 8am-5pm), 3km east of town, although you'll need to phone ahead to arrange a visit. Hundreds of mineral

samples and fossils are on display, including all the tin ore you could wish for. Take a Tanjung Rambutan bus from the city bus station, get off at the crossing of Jln Sultan Azlan Shah, then walk southeast for 10 minutes.

Sleeping

Most of Ipoh's hotels are to be found in the New Town on the eastern side of Sungai Kinta, with a few of the better budget options in the southeast of the city around Jln Che Tak and Jln Ali Pitchay. There are several modern and reliable midrange hotels catering to business travellers, but the city has more than its share of old and downright seedy establishments. Ipoh has an un-savoury reputation for prostitution; there are lots of dingy little 'hotels' around that are actually brothels, and even some outwardly smart establishments offer hourly rates and 'spa treatments'. Single travellers, especially women, may want to avoid these sleazy places.

All the options listed here have private bathrooms.

BUDGET

Hotel Park (9% 241 1333; 19 Jln Bendahara; s/d RM45/60; a) This old-fashioned detached villa has a few simple rooms right opposite the Sri Maju bus station. It's a little out of the way for anything else though.

Sun Golden Inn (9% 243 6255; 17 Jln Che Tak; r RM50; a) One of Ipoh's better budget choices, the Sun Golden Inn is a clean and friendly Chinese hotel, although there are a lot of stairs and the rooms are small.

New Caspian Hotel (9% 255 1221; 20-26 Jln Ali Pitchay; r RM55; a) Welcoming little budget hotel with adequate rooms, which all have TVs and refrigerators. Not to be confused with the less appealing hotel of the same name on Jln Jubilee.

Dragon & Phoenix Hotel (9% 253 4661; 23 Jln Toh Puan Chah; s & d/tw/ste from RM60/62/97; a) Friendly and quiet hotel set back from the main road. Rooms are a bit old and musty, but fine for a short stay. It's near the river, and handy for forays into the Old Town.

MIDRANGE

Grand View Hotel (9% 243 1488; 36 Jln Horley; s/d/f RM69/89/115; a) A good-value midrange place in a quiet area near the city centre. The

rooms are clean and brightly furnished, and have TVs and coffee-making facilities.

Majestic Station Hotel (☎ 255 4242; www.majesticstationhotel.com; Jln Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab; s & d/f from RM88/130; a) The venerable colonial Majestic Station Hotel in Ipoh's magnificently faded, Moorish-style train station has plenty of character. Rooms are furnished in contemporary style, and taking high tea on its long, tiled veranda is an experience in itself. Promotional rates are often available.

Hotel Ipoh City (☎ 241 8282; 18 Jln Dass; s & d/f from RM93/157; a) Dressed up in lurid orange-and-green livery, this noticeable modern high-rise has big, comfy rooms with TVs, minibridges and tea-making facilities. There's a good Thai restaurant attached (opposite).

Lucky Hotel (☎ 254 7777; luckyhot@tm.net.my; 79 Jln CM Yusuff; r from RM98; a) There's not a great deal of character to this city centre hotel, though rooms are comfortable enough and come with TVs and minibars. Noise may be a problem, especially with the adjoining karaoke lounge.

Ritz Garden Hotel (☎ 242 7777; www.ritzgardenhotel.com; 86 Jln Yang Kalsom; s/d/ste from RM120/160/360; a s) The Ritz Garden is one of Ipoh's better midrange choices, with a business centre, a restaurant, and free broadband access in every room. Only the priciest suites (starting at RM2000) have access to the tiny pool and sauna though. Discounts are frequently available.

TOP END

Hotel Excelsior (☎ 253 6666; www.hotelexcelsior.com.my; 43 Jln Sultan Abdul Jalil; s/d/ste from RM200/210/260; a) This towering city-centre monolith offers the usual comforts aimed at business travellers, including the regulation conservatively styled rooms, restaurants and gym. There's also a nightclub.

Syuen Hotel (☎ 253 8889; syuen@tm.net.my; 88 Jln Sultan Abdul Jalil; r/ste from RM300/600; a i s) The colossal four-star, 290-room Syuen Hotel is the city's top hotel, with all the requisite facilities, including a business centre, cocktail bar, restaurants and a rooftop tennis court and gym. However, the cheaper rooms look out onto internal air shafts and are consequently rather dark. Sizeable discounts on the published rates are available.

Eating

Ipoh is the home of the rice-noodle dish known as *kway teow*, reputedly still the best in Malaysia. You'll find it at most of the numerous cheap Chinese eateries located all over the city. More upscale fare can be found on Psn Greenhill to the northeast of the city centre, which is lined with a succession of restaurants serving up excellent Chinese, Thai and Malay food. Other tasty local specialities include pomelos – a football-sized citrus fruit – and Ipoh white coffee, made with palm-oil margarine and served with condensed milk. Instant powdered versions are also on the market.

Medan Selera Dato Tawhil Azar (Jln Raja Musa Aziz) Better-known as the Children's Playground, this large food centre has stalls arranged around a small square filled with slides and swings. It's a popular place for Malay food in the evening and is open late.

Medan Selera Man U (Jln Raja Ekram) At the western end of Jln Mustapha Al-Bakri, this is another bustling Chinese food centre which gets going in the evenings.

Pusat Makanan Majestic (Jln Dato Tahwil Azar) This crowded Chinese food court has a noisy, boisterous atmosphere, and is a good place for a couple of beers.

Kafe Abarnaashre (29 Jln Tun Sambathan; mains from RM2; h lunch & dinner) This simple halal Indian café facing the *padang* offers superb value. The menu, which includes lots of vegetarian dishes, is displayed on the wall, with roti and *dosa* starting from as little as RM1.

Restoran M Salim (☎ 255 5786; cnr Jln Che Tak & Jln Yang Kalsom; mains RM2.50-3; h breakfast, lunch & dinner, but closed 12.30-2pm Fri) Great-value place for cheap and filling Indian halal food, with various chicken, fish and rice combinations, roti and coffee.

Restoran Assam House (☎ 255 6861; 11 Jln Dato Tahwil Azar; mains from RM3; h lunch & dinner) As good a place as any to try the local speciality of *kway teow*, Assam House offers the usual broad range of Straits Chinese fare, including plenty of pork and rice.

Old Town Kopitiam (2 Jln Tun Sambathan; mains from RM3; h breakfast & lunch Mon, breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This more upmarket coffee house facing the *padang* seems to be forever crowded. Simple chicken rice dishes prevail.

Greentown Noodle House (☎ 241 5145; 58 Psn Greenhill; mains from RM4; h lunch & dinner) Reasonably priced noodle and rice dishes are the

order of the day at this bright little Straits Chinese restaurant, as well as lots of roast duck and pork options. Enticingly, fresh frog porridge is also available.

Bonda (☎ 255 7100; 1 Psn Greenhill; mains from RM8; h lunch & dinner) Self-styled 'retro' restaurant with a vaguely '60s/'70s décor scheme, including orange plastic chairs and Lonely Planet covers on the walls. Chicken and chips-style dishes are served, alongside the usual rice and noodle options, and there are piles of English magazines to flick through.

Monde Brasserie (☎ 255 5884; 3 Psn Greenhill; mains from RM10; h lunch & dinner) This upmarket Western-style restaurant, with its white linen and fussy waiters, serves reasonably authentic pasta dishes, steaks, fish dishes and so on. It also has a pricey wine list.

FMS Restaurant (☎ 253 7678; 2a Jln Sultan Idris Shah; mains from RM15; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Upstairs from the FMS Bar, though under separate management, this is a popular Chinese restaurant in an old colonial building adorned with antique prints, porcelain, and a large portrait of the young Queen Elizabeth II. Seafood and beancurd dishes are particularly good, but prices are high. Wave away the 'complimentary' peanuts if you don't want them added to your bill. You'll also be charged for your paper napkin.

Golden Elephant (☎ 243 1668; 18 Jln Dass; mains RM15-30; h breakfast, lunch & dinner) This classy Thai restaurant is attached to the Hotel Ipoh City. Seafood, including lots of crab and prawn dishes, takes up a large part of the menu, though there are also vegetarian choices.

You'll find some smarter restaurants and a food court in the **Ipoh Parade Shopping Centre** (Jln Sultan Abdul Adil).

Drinking

Chinese coffee shops and food centres all across town serve beer and stout.

FMS Bar (☎ 254 0591; 2 Jln Sultan Idris Shah; h noon-9.30pm) An Ipoh institution, the Federated Malay States bar has been going since 1906, and was the favoured haunt of colonial planters and miners. It still attracts a gaggle of colourful local characters and expats, while 'Nephew' the barman has been serving the beers here for 60 years.

Miners' Arms (☎ 243 4531; 8 Jln Dato Maharajah Lela) A popular British-style pub, which also serves fish and chips, and steak dinners.

There's live music on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Station Bar (Jln Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab; h noon-midnight) On the ground floor of the Majestic Station Hotel, this quiet bar is a rather murky, gloomy place, but it has a kind of rough-edged charm, if you like that kind of thing.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Malaysia Airlines (☎ 312 2460; Jln Sultan Idris Shah) has daily departures to KL (RM126).

BUS

Ipoh is on the main KL–Butterworth road; 205km north of the capital and 164km south of Butterworth. The long-distance bus station is at **Medan Gopeng** (☎ 254 0124; Jln Raja Dr Nazrin Shah), 5km south of the city centre and linked by frequent shuttle buses to the city bus station (RM1). Numerous bus companies operate from this station.

Destinations and standard fares include Alor Setar (RM17), Butterworth (RM10.70), Hat Yai in Thailand (RM35), Johor Bahru (RM37), Kota Bharu (RM25.40), KL (RM13.40), Lumut (RM6) and Melaka (RM22.70).

The city bus station is off a roundabout south of the train station. Buses depart from here for destinations in Perak, such as Batu Gajah (RM1.80), Gopeng (RM1.50; for Kellie's Castle), Kuala Kangsar (RM4.75), Taiping (RM6) and Teluk Intan (RM5.80), as well as Tanah Rata in the Cameron Highlands (RM7.90). Note that buses to Tapah (RM4.70), operated by Regal Transport, depart from a stop across the road from the bus station.

Perak Roadways has a separate terminus on Jln Tun Abdul Razak, with regular buses to Lumut (RM5.60, 1¼ hours).

The private **Sri Maju bus company** (☎ 253 8898) has its own bus station on Jln Bendahara from where it runs 'luxury' buses to KL (RM16, every 45 minutes), Butterworth (RM13.50, nine daily) and Singapore (RM48, six to eight daily).

TAXI

Long-distance taxis depart from in front of the long-distance bus station, and there is another stand at the city bus station. Whole-taxi fares include: Butterworth (RM150),

Cameron Highlands (RM100), Ipoh airport (RM12), Kuala Kangsar (RM45), KL (RM160), Lumut (RM70), Taiping (RM70) and Tapah (RM60). Taxis from Medan Gopeng into the town centre cost RM10.

TRAIN

Ipoh's train station (% 254 0481; Jln Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab) is on the main Singapore–Butterworth line. There are daily trains to both KL (RM18, 4½ hours) and Butterworth (RM17, five hours), the latter continuing to Hat Yai in Thailand (RM30, 10 hours).

Upgrading work on the track between Rawang and Ipoh is finally due for completion in 2007, and a rapid intercity service will then link Ipoh with KL. There will be 16 trains a day plying this route – eventually rising to 32 – travelling at 160km/h. Check the KTM website (www.ktmb.com.my) for updates.

AROUND IPOH Lost World of Tambun

At the base of forested limestone cliffs 8km northeast of Ipoh, the Lost World of Tambun (% 542 8888; www.sunway.com.my/lostworldoftambun; 1 Psn Lagun Sunway 1; adult/child RM21/16; h 11am–6pm Mon & Wed–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun) is a huge water park, especially popular with local families at weekends. There are various pools, waterslides, wave generators and the like, as well as natural hot springs, artificial 'ruins' to explore, and a tiger enclosure.

Regular buses from Ipoh's city bus station to Tanjung Rambutan (RM1.50) pass the Lost World.

Kellie's Castle

A striking colonial relic set beside a stream about 30km south of Ipoh, Kellie's Castle (% 605 3668; adult/child RM5/2; h 8.30am–6pm) is a huge, unfinished mansion, which would have been a truly magnificent residence if it had ever been completed. Wealthy British rubber-plantation owner William Kellie Smith, who already lived in another grand house in the area, commissioned the building – which was to be the home of his son – in what was then a remote jungle area. Hindu artisans were brought from Madras to work on the mansion, but when Smith died in 1926, the house was abandoned. Today, the still imposing six-storey structure is a well-tended tourist site,

set in a pleasant park that also includes a deer enclosure and a small aviary. The best-preserved rooms are the guest bedrooms, adorned with fine figurative plasterwork, and there are splendid views of the surrounding countryside from the roof terrace. Dubious tales of secret passageways and ghosts have added to the air of mystery that surrounds this place.

About 500m from the castle is a Hindu temple, built for the artisans by Smith when a mysterious illness decimated the workforce and the remaining workers believed that the gods needed to be appeased. To show their gratitude to Smith, the workers placed a figure of him, dressed in a white suit and pith helmet, among the Hindu deities on the temple roof. The temple is now semi-derelict but still in use. The resident priest will point out the statue of Smith.

Kellie's Castle is inconvenient to reach without your own transport. From Ipoh's city bus station you can take either the frequent bus 66 to Gopeng (RM1.50) or buses 36 and 37 to Batu Gajah, which leave every 20 minutes (RM1.80). Bus 67 runs approximately every hour in either direction between Batu Gajah and Gopeng, passing in front of Kellie's Castle. You can also charter a taxi from Ipoh (RM40 return); a taxi from Batu Gajah costs RM5.

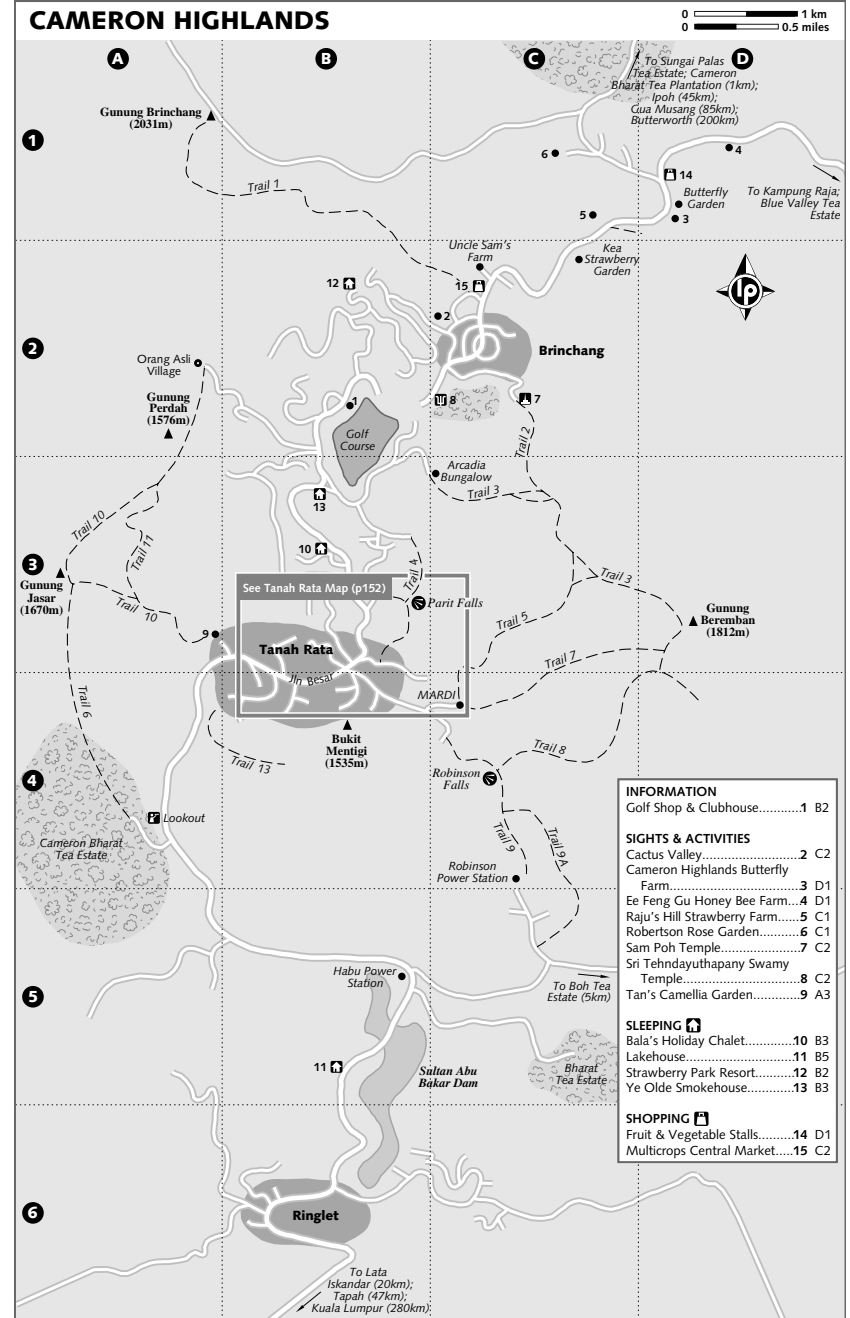
CAMERON HIGHLANDS

% 05

Malaysia's most extensive hill station, about 60km off the main KL–Ipoh–Butterworth road at Tapah, is at an altitude of 1300m to 1829m. The Cameron Highlands is a vast area of rolling green hills, tea plantations and forests stretching along the road from the town of Ringlet, then through the main towns of Tanah Rata, Brinchang and beyond. The Highlands are inside the state borders of Pahang, but easiest access is via Tapah in Perak.

The Cameron Highlands takes its name from William Cameron, the surveyor who mapped the area in 1885. He was soon followed by tea planters, Chinese vegetable farmers and wealthy colonialists seeking a cool escape from the heat of the lowlands.

The temperature in the Highlands rarely drops below 10°C or climbs above 21°C, and in this fertile area vegetables grow in profusion, flowers are cultivated for sale



of the Iris House Hotel. The nearby **Sri Tehndayuthapany Swamy Temple** (Map p151) is an equally colourful Hindu place of worship – the bright sculptures were created by artists brought from India.

Ee Feng Gu Honey Bee Farm (Map p151: % 496 1951; www.eefenggu.com; admission free; 7 8am–7pm) is usually included on bus-tour routes. It's a working apiary, with pleasant, flower-filled gardens to walk around, and honey to buy.

Cameron Highlands Butterfly Farm (Map p151: % 019-564 0738; Kea Farm; adult/child RM5/2; 7 8am–6pm) is home to a fluttering collection of tropical butterflies, including the majestic Raja Brooke. Beetles, scorpions, stick insects and birds are also on show. Watch where you step – the butterflies here are everywhere.

Raju's Hill Strawberry Farm (Map p151; % 491 4649; Kea Farm, Brinchang; admission free), situated opposite the Equatorial Resort, is another regular stopover on local minibus tours. Those with a keen interest in hydroponic strawberry cultivation might find it diverting, but the main reason for visiting is for the slightly overpriced strawberry jam and ice cream.

At **Cactus Valley** (Map p151; % 491 5640; Pekan Lama, Brinchang; adult/child RM4/2; 7 8am–6pm) you can wander along tiered terraces filled with various local flowers, fruits and vegetables, as well as cacti. There are potted plants for sale too.

Activities

HIKING

One of the big attractions of the Highlands is its variety of scenic walks, many leading to waterfalls and mountain peaks. The starting points of the trails are marked with large yellow-and-black signboards that are sometimes obscured. Unfortunately there are no high-quality, up-to-date contour maps available; the best you can get is the *Cameron Highlands Discovery Map* (RM3.50), sold pretty much everywhere, though it's not completely accurate, and has no scale.

The popular tracks are reasonably well maintained and periodically cleared, but they can become quickly overgrown again. There is little or no signposting of side trails, and you occasionally come across false trails that go nowhere. It has also been

claimed that some irresponsible unofficial guides have been deliberately destroying signposts in order to drum up business for themselves. Guesthouses in Tanah Rata can arrange reliable guides. Inexperienced hikers would be well advised to employ their services on longer trails; in recent years, several people (including a team of local policemen on a training exercise) have become lost, sometimes for days. However, for your own safety and enjoyment, you should ensure that your guide is fully trained and officially licensed; genuine guides will wear an official license bearing their photograph.

The trails generally pass through relatively unspoiled jungle, and the cool weather makes hiking a pleasure. Travellers should take care to always carry water, some food, and rain gear for the unpredictable weather. Trails 4 and 9A (as far as Robinson Falls) are easy hikes taking an hour or less, while a combination of trails 10, 11 and 12 is a more challenging hike. The rest may be tough going, depending on your level of fitness.

Trail 13 starts from behind the Cameroonian Inn, but it stops at the concrete construction pylons.

Although hikes around the Highlands are all relatively short, there is obviously the potential for longer hikes. A glance at the Perak map (p134) will indicate what a short, steep distance it is from the Highlands down to Ipoh or the main road. For any hike outside the immediate area, however, the local authorities have to be notified and a guide is necessary; contact the tourist office for details.

Trail 1

This trail officially starts at white stone marker 1/5 on the summit of Gunung Brinchang (2031m), but this is a steep, muddy, overgrown trail (often closed for repairs) and it is not advisable to make this descent. Instead, start your walk at the end point of the trail, at white stone marker 1/48 just north of Cactus Valley and ascend to the top of Gunung Brinchang. This walk should take around 3½ hours to complete. From the summit take the 7km sealed road back to Brinchang through the tea plantations – a pleasant and relatively easy walk of about two hours.

Trail 2

Starting just before Sam Poh Temple outside Brinchang, this steep, strenuous hike follows a thin, slippery track for 1½ hours before it eventually joins Trail 3.

Trail 3

This starts at Arcadia Bungalow southeast of the golf course and climbs towards Gunung Beremban (1812m), getting steeper near the summit. It is a strenuous three-hour hike all the way to the mountain, or an easier hike if you only go as far as Trail 5 and take that back to the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi); this too, though, is a steep path. Trail 3 continues, to meet Trails 7 and 8.

Trail 4

This trail starts next to the river, just past the Century Pines Resort in Tanah Rata. It leads to Parit Falls, but unfortunately garbage from the nearby village finds its way here, and it's not the most bucolic of spots. The falls can also be reached from the road around the southern end of the golf course. Both hikes are about half a kilometre.

Trail 5

Starting at Mardi, take the road inside the complex and follow the sign around to the left. It's a very steep 1½-hour hike though open country and forest, easier if done downhill from Trail 3.

Trail 6

Trail 6 is prone to neglect, and the path is unclear in places. It goes from the end of the road at the Cameron Bharat Tea Estate and merges with Trail 10 at the summit of Gunung Jasar (1670m). It's a difficult 2½-hour uphill hike – take a guide.

Trail 7

This one also starts inside Mardi. The beginning can be tough to find, and you should allow all day – it's at least a steady three-hour uphill hike, with a very steep final climb to the summit of Gunung Beremban.

Trail 8

This trail branches off Trail 9 just before Robinson Falls and is another steep three-hour approach to Gunung Beremban.

Although a slightly easier hike, it's still a strenuous 2½ hours if done in reverse from the mountain.

Trails 9 & 9A

Trail 9 starts 1.5km from the main road in Tanah Rata. Take the road past Mardi and follow it all the way around to the right, where it ends at a footbridge. From here the trail leads downhill past Robinson Falls to a metal gate, about 15 minutes away. Trail 9, which is not recommended, goes through the gate and follows the water pipeline down a very steep, slippery incline through the jungle to the power station. We recommend taking Trail 9A, which branches off to the left before the metal gate and in about an hour arrives at Boh Rd. Follow this to the main road, where you can either head east to Boh Tea Estate or west to Habu Power Station for buses back to Tanah Rata.

Trails 10, 11 & 12

Gunung Jasar is a fairly strenuous hike via Trail 10, starting behind the Oly Apartments in Tanah Rata. Go through Tan's Camellia Garden and uphill to the left. After reaching the summit, you can continue on towards Gunung Perdah (1576m), but you must bypass it and return by Trail 11, which joins up with Trail 10 halfway back to Tanah Rata. Both these paths are unclear; take a guide. Trail 12 continues from Gunung Perdah towards the weather station, but it is not well marked or maintained.

Tours

CS Travel & Tours (Map p152; % 491 1200; www.cstravel.com.my; 47 Jln Besar, Tanah Rata) sells tickets for popular half-day 'countryside tours' of the Highlands, leaving around 8.45am and 1.45pm (RM20/10 per adult/child). It will pick you up from your guesthouse. This is a good way of seeing the various attractions, which are spread out and difficult to reach by public transport. Places visited include a tea estate, a strawberry farm, the Sam Poh Temple, an apiary, and a butterfly farm (entry fees not included). Longer tours such as the full-day 'discovery tour' (RM80/60 per adult/child) are offered, taking in Gunung Brinchang and an Orang Asli village. The village may only be visited

JIM THOMPSON

The Cameron Highlands' most famous jungle trekker was a man who never came back from his walk. American Jim Thompson is credited with having founded the Thai silk industry after WWII. He subsequently made a fortune, and his beautiful, antique-packed house beside a canal in Bangkok is a major tourist attraction today. On 26 March 1967, while holidaying in the Highlands, Jim Thompson left his villa for a predinner stroll – never to be seen again. Despite extensive searches, the mystery of his disappearance has never been explained. Kidnapped? Murdered? Or simply a planned disappearance or suicide? Nobody knows for sure. Today, you can follow his trail on a guided walking tour (below).

in the company of an official guide, who will have made a prior appointment. You will be able to meet the tribesmen and participate in traditional activities such as archery, but remember this is a living community, not a staged tourist attraction, so please remember that you are a guest – ask before taking photographs and listen to the advice of your guide. Guides for the hiking trails can also be arranged.

Fathers Guest House (Map p152; % 491 2484; off Jln Gereja) has a resident licensed guide who leads informative nature tours of the Highlands, including a visit to the Orang Asli village (RM50), available to nonguests. Contact Gerard (% 012-518 5454).

Golden Highlands Adventure Holidays (Map p152; % 490 1880; goldenh@tm.net.my; Jln Besar, Tanah Rata), located at the main bus station in Tanah Rata, offers excursions, including jungle treks (adult half-/full day RM40/80; child half-/full day RM20/50), plus as a walk following the trail of the ill-fated Jim Thompson (RM68/45 per adult/child). See the boxed text, above. Also available: full-board three-day, two-night trips to Taman Negara (RM400).

Titivangsa Tours (% 491 1452; www.titivangsa.com; 36 Jln Besar, Brinchang) runs a few coach trips including the half-day Agro Delight tour (adult/child RM65/55), touring the local flower nurseries, organic farms and orchards. Entrance fees and dinner are included.

Sleeping

The Highlands are at their busiest during the school holidays, in April, August and December. During these times you should book accommodation in advance. Tanah Rata is a favourite stopover for backpackers, and most of the accommodation here is of the budget variety.

Hostel touts will usually meet new arrivals at the bus station. If you don't see the tout for the guesthouse you're headed to, ring them and most will pick you up free of charge. Don't believe touts who try to pressure you by saying that their hostel has the last couple of rooms available – this is extremely unlikely. If you choose to walk, it's no more than 20 minutes to any place in town.

Midrange options are limited, while the big luxury resorts are mostly located outside town. Note that many hotels raise their prices on weekends (Friday, Saturday and/or Sunday).

The smaller town of Brinchang also has some hotels, but prices are higher, there's little atmosphere and it's an awkward place to stay if you're dependent on public transport. The following places have shared bathrooms unless otherwise stated.

TANAH RATA**Budget**

Daniel's Lodge (Map p152; % 491 5823; daniel'slodge@hotmail.com; 9 Lg Perdah; dm/r from RM7/16; i) Also known as 'Kang Travellers Lodge', this is a popular, laid-back party hostel in a scruffy area just off the main road. There's a TV room, late bar, pool table and garden, and some saggy sofas out the front.

Cameronian Inn (Map p152; % 491 1327; 16 Jln Mentigi; dm/s/d from RM8/20/40; i) This bungalow-style hostel has a variety of reasonably sized rooms. Those with private bathrooms cost more. There are TV and reading lounges, and a pleasant garden, but note that reception shuts up around 11pm, so take your room key with you if you're going to be out late.

Father's Guest House (Map p152; % 491 2484; off Jln Gereja; http://fathers.cameronhighlands.com; dm/s/d from RM9/18/22; i) Very sociable place on a hill at the western edge of town. The old bunker-style British army Nissen huts are very basic but clean and cosy, with between eight and 12 closely packed single beds.

There are also rooms with private showers in the nearby house (from RM60), a big garden and a TV lounge. Access is via a long, steep flight of steps.

Papillon Guest House (Map p152; % 013-301 8535; 8 Jln Mentigi; dm/r/f from RM12/25/80; i) This friendly little hostel is tucked away in a quiet corner south of the town centre. The clean rooms all come with 'aromatherapy diffusers', and there's one eight-bed dorm. Rooms with showers are priced a little higher. There's a cosy TV lounge with a fireplace, and the owners offer free reiki sessions.

Camlodge Hotel (Map p152; % 491 4549; 3rd fl, 55C Psn Camellia 3; s/d/tr RM35/45/55) Above Pusat Computer, in the modern shopping complex at the western end of town. The Camlodge is a small guesthouse with neat, clean rooms but not much atmosphere. All rooms have attached bathrooms.

Kavy Hotel (Map p152; % 491 5652; 44 Jln Besar s & d/tr from RM35/55) The Kavy is a dated hotel above the noisy Ranch Pub in the town centre, though the prices are very reasonable.

Midrange

Hillview Inn (Map p152; % 491 2915; hillview_inn@hotmail.com; 17 Jln Mentigi; r RM55-140; i) This three-storey villa has large but drafty rooms, all with balconies overlooking a derelict construction site. You'll pay more for a private bathroom, though the communal showers are superior.

Jurina Hill Lodge (Map p152; % 491 5522; jurina@tm.net.my; 819 Jln Mentigi; r from RM70) The Jurina Hill Lodge is a cosy, modern guesthouse in a quiet area directly behind the Hillview Inn. It offers spacious hillside bungalows and apartments with between three and eight rooms, including kitchens.

Cool Point Hotel (Map p152; % 491 4914; hotelcph@tm.net.my; 891 Psn Dayang Endah; s & d/tr from RM75/100) This large mock-Tudor block has a very quiet, clinical atmosphere, and the rooms are a little plain. However, they get plenty of natural light and all have TVs and tea-making facilities. Prices rise by around 25% at weekends (Friday and Saturday).

Bala's Holiday Chalet (Map p151; % 491 1660; www.balaschalet.com; r/ste from RM120/220; i) Charming mock-Tudor style guesthouse, originally built as a boarding school in 1934. It is set in pretty English-style gardens about 1.5km out of Tanah Rata, on the road

to Brinchang. The colonial ambience has been preserved but rooms are small.

Top End

Century Pines Resort (Map p152; % 491 5115; www.thongsin.com; 42 Jln Masjid; r/ste from RM228/389) Set in landscaped gardens at the eastern edge of town, this stylish hotel has some beautifully furnished rooms with a light, contemporary touch. There's a gym, pub and restaurant, and a pleasant outdoor seating area.

Ye Olde Smokehouse (Map p151; % 491 1215; r from RM350) This characterful old house near the golf course on the outskirts of town looks as if it's been lifted straight from deepest Surrey, complete with red British phone box outside. Indoors, the exposed beams, open fireplaces and chintzy décor complete the picture. The restaurant serves traditional English food. Prices rise by a third on weekends.

Lakehouse (Map p151; % 495 6152; www.lakehouse- Cameron.com; r/ste from RM528/616) Overlooking the lake 2km north of Ringlet, this English country house-style hotel has just 18 rooms, all with four-poster beds and antique furnishings. The restaurant serves traditional British cuisine, and there's also a cosy pub and reading rooms. It's a little isolated, and you'll need your own transport to stay here.

BRINCHANG**Budget**

Hotel Chua Gin (% 491 1801; 11 Jln Besar; r from RM35) This simple hotel offers good value for the price, and is just about the only real budget option here. A good bet if you're counting the pennies.

Midrange

Hill Garden Lodge (% 491 2988; 15-16 Jln Besar; r from RM68) Neat enough little hotel in the town centre, with small, cosy rooms. It gets busy on Saturday and Sunday, but discounts are often available at other times.

Hotel Green Garden (% /fax 491 5824; 13 Jln Besar; r from RM78) The Green Garden is a clean and comfortable small hotel, offering good-sized rooms with TVs. Prices rise on weekends.

Iris House Hotel (% 491 1818; 56 Jln Kuari; r from RM110) Big, modern hotel on the edge of town. The rooms are unremarkable, but this is probably among the better midrange options. It's at the turn-off to Sam Poh Temple.

Top End

Strawberry Park Resort (Map p151; ☎ 491 1166; www.strawberryparkresorts.com; r/stg from RM350/550; S) Sprawling 'neo-Tudor' resort in the hills west of town, popular with package tour groups. It has squash and tennis courts, saunas, a nightclub and other top-end facilities. Breakfast is RM26 extra.

Star Regency Hotel (☎ 491 5133; www.star-regency.com.my; 39 Jln Besar; stg from RM368) At the northern end of town, this is a towering all-suite hotel, offering spacious, homely apartments with kitchens, dining rooms and between two and four bedrooms. Rates for single and double occupancy are available on request.

Eating**TANAH RATA**

The cheapest food in Tanah Rata is found at the rows of mainly Malay food stalls stretching down Jln Besar towards the bus and taxi stations. Other places offer Chinese food and all the usual Malay dishes.

Restoran Sri Brinchang (Map p152; ☎ 491 5982; 25 Jln Besar; mains from RM3; ₪ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This bright place serves a range of simple Indian fare, including tandoori chicken set meals, fish-head curry and vegetarian dishes.

Roselane Coffee Shop (Map p152; ☎ 491 1419; 44 Jln Besar; mains RM5-18; ₪ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This sleepy café offers reasonably priced set breakfasts (from RM5.50) and set lunches and dinners (RM12 to RM14). Western dishes, such as fish and chips, and Chinese stir-fries and seafood are on the menu.

T-Café (Map p152; ☎ 019-572 2883; 4 Jln Besar; mains from RM6; ₪ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This friendly café serves cheap and tasty Western food, such as pasta, veggieburgers, steaks and sandwiches. It's also a cosy place to sit out one of the frequent downpours with a coffee and meet up with other travellers.

Restaurant Bunga Suria (Map p152; ☎ 491 4666; 66A Psn Camellia 3; set meals RM5-9; ₪ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Serving up the best value in town, this is a great place for delicious South Indian food. The banana-leaf set meals, either meat or vegetarian, are especially good, and there's a wide range of samosas and curries.

Hong Kong Restaurant (Map p152; ☎ 491 1406; 27 Jln Besar; mains from RM8; ₪ lunch & dinner) Cheap Chinese fare is on the menu at this busy restaurant, including the usual pork, chicken and beancurd concoctions.

Schwarbing Haus (Map p152; ☎ 491 5667; 59B Psn Camellia 3; mains RM18-30; ₪ lunch & dinner) Satisfy your yearning for Swiss German food at this upstairs restaurant. On offer is a meaty menu of bratwurst, schnitzel, pork knuckles and sauerkraut, all imported directly from Europe, hence the relatively high prices.

BRINCHANG

Brinchang has a good night market, which sets up in the central square on late Saturday afternoons. A permanent food-stall centre livens up the southern end of the square.

Jew May Yen (☎ 491 4020; 6 Jln Besar; mains from RM5; ₪ lunch & dinner) Further along from Palm Leaf Garden, this typical Chinese restaurant offers a wide range of dishes, including steamboat and vegetarian food.

Palm Leaf Garden (☎ 491 4208; 3 Bandar Baru; mains from RM10; ₪ lunch & dinner) This smart little restaurant serves good Thai and Malay cuisine. It also offers steamboat and some Western dishes.

Shopping

The best place to pick up local produce is the **Multicrops Central Market** (☎ 491 5188; 1 Arkid Peladang Sungai Burung, Brinchang; ₪ 9am-6pm), which sells teas, fruits, strawberry jam, honey, potted plants and numerous other things.

Fresh locally grown vegetables and fruit – including Cameronian apples, oranges and passion fruit – can also be purchased from the market stalls beside the Butterfly Garden in Brinchang.

Back in Tanah Rata, **Yung Seng Souvenir Shop** (Map p152; ☎ 491 2223; 29-30 Jln Besar) has a good, if rather expensive, selection of Orang Asli woodcarvings, as well as lots of cheaper artworks from elsewhere in Asia.

Getting There & Away**BUS**

The recently completed 'new road' linking Ipoh and Tanah Rata, via Simpang Pulai, provides the quickest and most direct route to the Highlands, although landslides continue to be a problem here, especially after heavy rainfall; check what the current status is before you travel. The 'old road', as it's now known, is a long and winding climb from Tapah, and the hundreds of bends can make it an uncomfortable journey. The road passes a number of Orang Asli villages and roadside shacks, where their produce is sold.

There are four daily buses from Ipoh to Tanah Rata between 8am and 6pm (RM7.90, three to 3½ hours) operated by Kinta Omnibus. From Tanah Rata, the first and last buses to Ipoh leave at 8am and 6pm.

From Tapah, there are eight daily buses to Tanah Rata also operating between 8am and 6pm (RM4.20, two hours). From Tanah Rata, the first and last buses down to Tapah once more leave at 8am and 6pm.

CS Travel & Tours (p155) runs minibuses to Kuala Tahan (Taman Negara), via Gua Musang (RM85, eight to nine hours, 10am).

Several direct long-distance services originate from the Tanah Rata bus station for KL (RM20 to RM24, five hours, six daily), Penang (RM25 to RM28, six hours, five daily) and Singapore (RM90, 10 hours, one daily). See also *Getting There & Away* p137.

TAXI

The taxi station in Tanah Rata is just east of the bus station on Jln Besar. Full-taxi fares are RM60 to Tapah, RM80 to Ipoh, RM200 to KL and RM250 to Penang, but are open to negotiation.

Getting Around**BUS**

Regal Transport operates the Tapah–Tanah Rata route and as well as local buses in the Highlands. Getting between Tanah Rata and Brinchang is not a problem between 6.30am and 6.30pm, as buses run every hour or so. There are scheduled buses every hour from Tanah Rata to Kampung Raja, 23km away across the Highlands, but it's more like two or three hours until the next one happens by. It's quite a scenic trip, and you can hop off at various fruit and vegetable farms along the way. These buses also pass the turn-off to Gunung Brinchang and the Sungai Palas Tea Estate.

TAXI

Taxi services from Tanah Rata include Ringlet (per car RM15), Brinchang (RM6), Sungai Palas Estate (RM20) and Boh Tea Estate (RM25). For touring around, a taxi costs about RM25 per hour, or you can go up to Gunung Brinchang and back for RM70.

NORTHERN PERAK

KUALA KANGSAR**☎ 05**

Beside the highway, northwest of Ipoh, Kuala Kangsar has been the royal town of Perak state since the sultan moved his capital here in the 18th century. It was also the first foothold for the British, who moved to control the peninsula by installing Residents at the royal courts in the 1870s. Kuala Kangsar was the birthplace of Malaysia's great rubber industry – see the boxed text, p161. By the 1890s, the rapid growth of the tin towns of Ipoh and Taiping overshadowed Kuala Kangsar, and the town remains a quiet backwater steeped in Malay tradition.

The small town centre is the usual scruffy jumble, but to the southeast, overlooking Sungai Perak, the royal district is spacious and quiet – this is the most attractive of all Malaysia's royal cities. Kuala Kangsar's main sights are few, but they're quite impressive and can easily be explored on a day trip from Taiping or Ipoh.

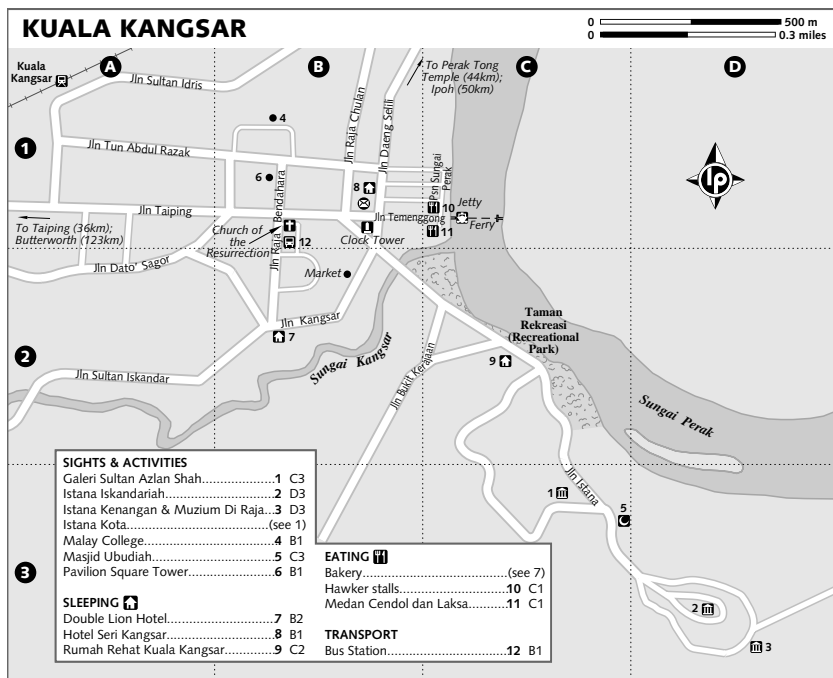
Information

The town's bank, bus station and post office are northwest of the royal district, off the road towards Taiping and Butterworth.

Sights

Heading out on Jln Istana beside the wide Sungai Perak, the first striking example of the wealth of the sultanate is the small but magnificent **Masjid Ubudiah** (Ubudiah Mosque), designed by AB Hubbock, the architect of many of Ipoh's colonial edifices. The mosque, with its huge golden onion-dome, was begun in 1913 but, due to wartime delays and the smashing of imported Italian marble by rampaging elephants, it wasn't completed until 1917. The caretaker will show you around the outside of the building for a small donation, but non-Muslims are not allowed inside.

Overlooking the river, **Istana Iskandariah**, the official residence of the sultan of Perak, is a suitably opulent palace built in 1933, and set in perfectly manicured grounds. The original palace, which mixes Art Deco with Islamic motifs, is best viewed from the river-side. The palace is not open to visitors.



Further east is a slightly earlier palace, Istana Kenangan (Palace of Memories), made entirely of wood and woven bamboo, without the use of a single nail. It was built in 1931 and served as the temporary royal quarters until the Istana Iskandariah was completed. It now houses the Muzium Di Raja (Royal Museum; 11 9.30am-5.30pm, closed 12.15-2.45pm Fri), with displays on the state's history and the Perak royal family. Admission is by small donation.

Closer to town on Jln Istana near the Masjid Ubudiah, Istana Kota, also known as Istana Hula, is a beautifully restored former royal palace, incorporating Renaissance and neoclassical elements. Built in 1903, it now hosts the Galeri Sultan Azlan Shah (9 777 5362; adult/child RM4/1; 11 10am-5pm Sat-Thu, 10am-noon & 2.45-5pm Fri), with an exhibition honouring the life of the current sultan of Perak, Sultan Azlan Shah. Decorations awarded to the sultan by foreign states are displayed along with his personal collection of sunglasses, as well as his passport, driving licence, university gown and shoes. Upstairs you can marvel at the sultan's golf balls, briefcases

and foreign gifts, while a separate building in the grounds holds his four Rolls Royces, Louis Vuitton luggage and yet more official state gifts. It's a tough life, clearly.

The Malay College to the north of town is the most impressive colonial building in Kuala Kangsar. Established in 1905, it was the first Malay school to provide English education for the Malay elite destined for the civil service. It not only provided clerical workers for the British administration but also the nationalist leaders of the conservative 'Malaya for Malays' faction. In the 1950s Anthony Burgess wrote his first book while teaching here.

Opposite the Malay College, the Pavilion Square Tower is a delightful folly overlooking the surrounding parkland and playing fields. Built in 1930, this small three-storey sports pavilion of Malay and colonial design allowed royalty and VIPs to view polo matches in comfort.

Sleeping & Eating

Kuala Kangsar is an easy day trip from either Ipoh or Taiping, but there are a few cheap

hotels if you decide to stay. Rooms have private bathrooms unless otherwise stated.

Double Lion Hotel (9 776 1010; 74 Jln Kangsar; s/d from RM25/30; a) Conveniently close to the bus station. In addition to the rooms with fans, there are more comfortable air-con rooms available for RM70. There's a busy bar and bakery downstairs.

Hotel Seri Kangsar (9 777 7301; 33 Jln Daeng Se-lili; r RM59; a) This place has a collection of clean but pretty nondescript rooms above a restaurant of the same name. All have TVs and hot showers.

Rumah Rehat Kuala Kangsar (9 776 4262; www.mpkpkp.gov.my in Malay; Jln Bukit Kerajaan; r/ste from RM70/150; a) The best place in town is this modernised resthouse situated in a quiet parkland area southeast of the centre. Many of the simple yet spacious rooms overlook the river, and it's worth paying the little bit extra for a room with a balcony. There's also a Malay restaurant with a river terrace.

On the riverbank near the jetty, there's a string of hawker stalls selling a variety of traditional Malay snack food, as well as a modern food court, Medan Cendol dan Laksa, which, as the name suggests, is entirely devoted to various laksa dishes (around RM2), *cendol* and soft drinks. There are numerous coffee shops and fast-food outlets around the town centre.

Getting There & Away

Kuala Kangsar is located 50km northwest of Ipoh, just off the main KL-Butterworth road. It is 123km south of Butterworth and 255km north of KL.

Bus connections include Butterworth (RM7.50, two hours, two daily); Ipoh (RM4.75, one hour, roughly hourly); Kota Bharu (RM22.40, six hours, two daily); KL (RM16.70; 3½ to four hours, eight daily); Lumut (RM7.40, 3½ hours, three daily); and Taiping (RM2, 40 minutes, every 20 to 40 minutes).

Taxis leave from next to the bus station for Butterworth (RM65); Ipoh (RM35); KL (RM150); and Taiping (RM30).

The train station (9 776 1095) is located less conveniently to the northwest of town. All KL-Butterworth trains stop here. There is one daily train to KL (RM12, 5½ hours) and one to Butterworth (RM8, four hours).

RUBBERY FACTS

In the late 1870s, a number of rubber trees were planted by British Resident Sir Hugh Low in his gardens in Kuala Kangsar, from seed stock allegedly smuggled out of Brazil or taken from London's Kew Gardens. However, it was not until the invention of the pneumatic tyre in 1888, and then the popularity of the motorcar at the start of the 20th century, that rubber suddenly came into demand and rubber plantations sprang up across the country. Almost all of the trees in the new plantations were descended from Low's original rubber trees or from the Singapore Botanic Gardens. You can still see one of those first trees in Kuala Kangsar's District Office (Jln Raja Chulan) compound.

TAIPING

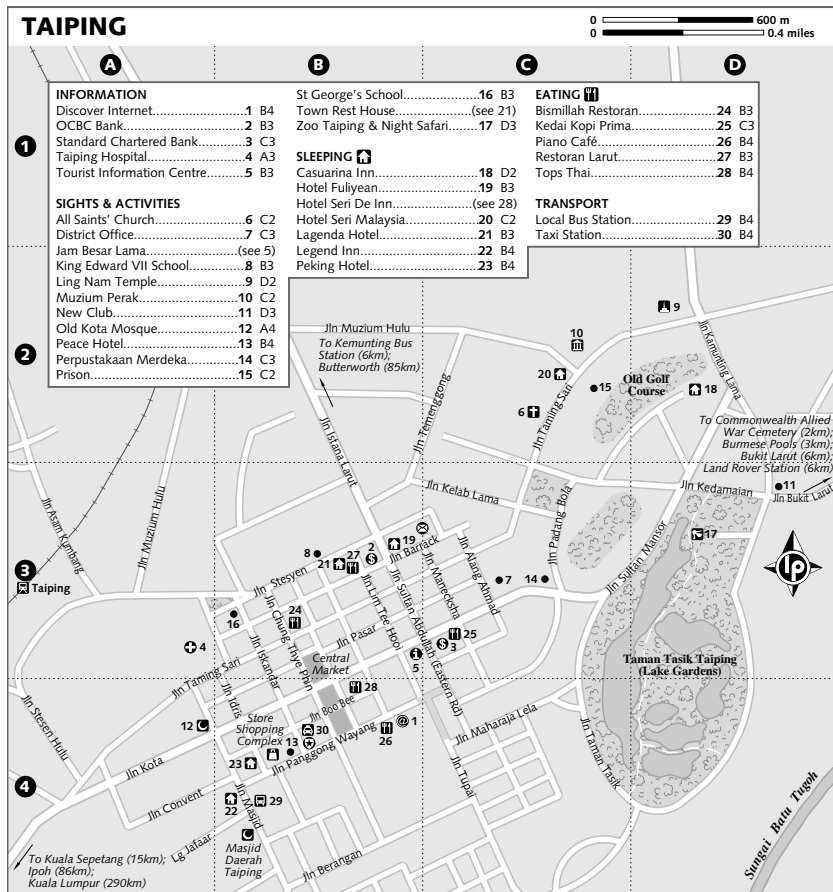
9 05 / pop 200,300

The 'Town of Everlasting Peace', once known as Larut, was the state capital in the 19th century, and a rough and raucous tin-mining centre. Bitter feuds, known as the 'Larut Wars', broke out four times between rival Chinese secret societies, with injury and killings taking place on all sides.

When colonial administrators finally brought the bloody mayhem under control in 1874, they took the prudent step of renaming the town. Taiping remained an edgy place though. In the early 1880s, the travel writer Isabella Bird recorded that '...the Chinese still need to be kept in check, for they are not allowed to go out at night without passes and lanterns.' By 1890, Ipoh and the Kinta Valley had begun to overshadow Taiping as the centre of the tin industry, and the state capital was finally moved in 1935 to Ipoh.

Though Taiping has lost its former status, the tourist brochures still boast of the town's '31 Firsts' for Malaysia, including the first museum; the first railway; the first newspapers in English, Malay and Tamil; and the country's first zoo.

Modern Taiping is an unassuming but pleasant enough town, with a lively café scene and an impressive old colonial district centred on the town's famous green and tranquil Taman Tasik Taiping (Lake Gardens). The hill station of Bukit Larut (Maxwell Hill) to the east is another draw.



Information

Discover Internet (☎ 806 9487; 3 Jln Panggong Wayang; per hr RM2)

OCBC Bank (Jln Barrack)

Standard Chartered Bank (Jln Kota)

Taiping Hospital (☎ 808 3333; Jln Taming Sari)

Taiping Peace Initiative (www.everlastingpeace.net) The Taiping Peace Initiative promotes peace through workshops and through the annual Taiping Peace Awards. Contact the tourist information centre for volunteering opportunities.

Tourist information centre (☎ 805 3245; Menara Jam, 355 Jln Kota; 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Fri, 8.30am-3pm Sat) Located in the Jam Besar. The tourist information centre sells the useful *Taiping Pocket Guide* (RM3) and *Old Taiping* (RM20), a brief history of the town.

Sights

TAMAN TASIK TAIPING

Taiping is renowned for its beautiful 62-hectare Taman Tasik Taiping (Lake Gardens), built in 1880 on the site of an abandoned tin mine. The gardens owe their lush greenery to the fact that Taiping's annual rainfall is one of the highest in Peninsular Malaysia. In the hills that rise above the gardens is Bukit Larut, the oldest hill station in Malaysia.

The Lake Gardens also host the **Zoo Taiping & Night Safari** (☎ 808 6577; www.zootaiping.gov.my; adult/child RM5/3; 8.30am-6pm), where, if they're not snoozing in the midday heat, you can see all manner of creatures, including elephants, tigers, Malayan sun bears and tapirs. Feeding time is 10am to noon.

The zoo opens again in the evening for what's billed as Malaysia's first night safari (adult/child RM10/6; 8-11pm), when you have a better chance of seeing the nocturnal animals beginning to stir, such as the fishing bats, slow loris and big cats. It's an eerily atmospheric experience, especially if there are few other visitors.

MUZIUM PERAK

Northwest of the gardens, the **Muzium Perak** (State Museum; ☎ 807 2057; Jln Taming Sari; admission free; 9am-5pm, closed 12.15-2.45pm Fri) is housed in an impressive colonial building. It's the oldest museum in Malaysia, opening in 1883, and doesn't seem to have changed much since. Exhibits include traditional kris (daggers), Orang Asli carvings, regional costumes and stuffed animals. Outside, you can cast an eye over a few outsized exhibits such as an old British fighter jet.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

A stroll around town will reveal reminders of Taiping's former glory. The neoclassical District Office is on Jln Alang Ahmad. Just around the corner is the Perpustakaan Merdeka (Independence Library; 1882). Closer to town on Jln Kota, the Jam Besar Lama (Old Clock Tower; 1890) once functioned as Taiping's fire station. It now houses the tourist information centre.

Taiping was the starting point for Malaysia's first railway line, now defunct. Opened in 1885, it ran 13.5km to Port Weld (Kuala Sepetang). The original train station is a few steps west of gracious, colonial King Edward VII School (1905), the classrooms of which were used as torture chambers by the Japanese during WWII. Also on Jln Štesyen are St George's School (1915) and the Town Rest House (1894), formerly the governor's residence and now the **Legenda Hotel**. Another colonial-era landmark is the whitewashed **New Club** building on Jln Bukit Larut, also dating from 1894.

At the western end of town, the **Old Kota Mosque** (1897) is the oldest in Taiping. It's mainly of note for its hexagonal design.

Taiping has a number of fine old shophouses, such as the **Peace Hotel** on Jln Iskandar. The Peranakan architecture has stucco tiles, stained glass, and beautifully carved bird and flower designs on the upper-wall dividers inside. The coffee shop

downstairs is a good spot for a beer, but the scruffy hotel upstairs is to be avoided. Opposite the Muzium Perak, the prison, built in 1879 to house lawless miners, was used by the Japanese during WWII and later as a rehabilitation centre for captured Communists during the Emergency.

Just southwest of the museum and the prison, **All Saints' Church** (1886) is one of the oldest Anglican churches in Malaysia. The cemetery contains the graves of early colonial settlers, most of whom died of tropical diseases or failed to achieve the colonial pension needed to return home to Britain or Australia.

To the north of Muzium Perak, the colourful, gaudy **Ling Nam Temple** is the oldest Chinese temple in Perak. The temple has been recently renovated, and there's not much of the old temple left apart from a boat figure dedicated to the emperor who built China's first canal.

OTHER SIGHTS

Taiping's **Commonwealth Allied War Cemetery** is just east of the Lake Gardens, with row upon row of headstones for the British, Australian and Indian troops killed during WWII. Further on, down a side road, the **Burmese Pools** are a popular bathing spot by the river.

Sleeping

Taiping has an excellent selection of moderately priced accommodation. Most of the cheap hotels are scattered around the central market, the liveliest (but noisiest) part of town. The better choices are a few streets away. Prices include private bathrooms unless otherwise stated.

Peking Hotel (☎ 807 2975; 2 Jln Idris; r RM35-50; a) This attractive old colonial building has lots of character – it was even used as a military police station by the Japanese during WWII. These days it offers fairly basic rooms, which are comfortable enough for the price.

Hotel Seri De Inn (☎ 808 6269; 14 Jln Boo Bee; r RM35; a) This is a simple set of rooms with private bathrooms above the **Tops Thai** restaurant, and under the same management.

Casuarina Inn (☎ 804 1339; 1 Jln Sultan Mansor Shah; r from RM69; a) Near the Lake Gardens, this rather ugly, modern building is approached through the pillars of what was

once the British Resident's house. Rooms are OK, but nothing special, and breakfast costs extra.

Lagenda Hotel (☎ 805 3333; 101 Jln Stesyen; r RM70; a s) This fine colonial building, once used as the governor's residence, has been tastefully restored, with all the modern comforts. Rooms are all on ground level, and have wooden shutters instead of glass windows, so you can't have both privacy and natural light. There's a tiny kids' pool in the central courtyard.

Hotel Fuliyeen (☎ 806 8648; www.hotelfuliyeen.com.my; 14 Jln Barrack; r from RM80; a) Very clean, modern hotel, with dazzling tilework everywhere. It is on a busy road, though, so noise is inevitable. Discounts are often available on the published prices.

Legend Inn (☎ 806 0000; www.legendinn.com; 2 Jln Lg Jafaar; r/st RM98/150; a) Located across a busy road from the bus station, this modern block has all the requisite midrange amenities, and the rooms are large and brightly furnished. It has a good restaurant downstairs too.

Hotel Seri Malaysia (☎ 806 9502; www.serimalaysia.com.my; Jln Taming Sair; r RM120; a s) Spotless chain hotel near the Lake Gardens and, less appealingly, right opposite the prison. It's a grand, and extensive, pink villa complex, offering the usual high standards of comfort and service.

Eating

Kedai Kopi Prima (cnr Jln Kota & Jln Manecksha; mains from RM3; h breakfast, lunch & dinner) This big, busy Chinese coffee shop spills out onto the street in the evenings, which it shares with the near-identical Tang Chen right opposite. Big-screen TVs in the road, music and endless crowds make for a lively atmosphere.

Bismillah Restoran (138 Jln Taming Sari; mains from RM3; h lunch & dinner) One of the oldest, and most decrepit-looking, coffee shops, Bismillah is a simple but welcoming place noted for its roti and biryani.

Restoran Larut (☎ 805 9243; 36 Jln Barrack; mains from RM4; h lunch & dinner Sat-Thu) Halal Indian food is on the menu at this restaurant, with the usual chicken-and-rice-type dishes represented.

Tops Thai (☎ 808 6296; 14 Jln Boo Bee; mains from RM5; h lunch & dinner) Serves excellent Thai and Chinese food, including lots of sea-

food and curries. There are hotel rooms upstairs (p163).

Piano Café (☎ 807 9007; 7 Jln Panggong Wayang; mains from RM8; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Smart café serving Western dishes of the fish and chips variety, along with lots of fruit juices but no alcohol. There's occasional live music in the evenings.

Getting There & Away

Taiping is several kilometres off the main KL–Butterworth road. It's 99km south of Butterworth and 291km north of KL. The express-bus station is 7km north of the town centre, at Kemunting. Frequent buses go to Butterworth (RM5.90), Ipoh (RM5.45) and KL (RM19), with less-frequent connections to other destinations like Kota Bharu (RM20.75), Johor Bahru/Singapore (RM48), Kuantan (RM33) and Kuala Terengganu (RM45).

There are no hotels nearby, nor any reason to stay in Kemunting – hop on bus 8 (RM1) or take a taxi (RM6) to the town centre. The local bus station is in the centre of Taiping, near the central market. From here, buses depart every 15 minutes for Kuala Kangsar (RM3, one hour). There are also buses to Lumut (RM7.90, two hours, three daily) and Gerik (RM12.35, 2½ hours, one daily), as well as services to outlying villages of little interest to travellers.

Taiping's train station (☎ 807 5584) is 1km west of the town centre, on the KL–Butterworth line. There is one daily train to KL (RM24, seven hours) and one to Butterworth (RM8, three hours).

Regular long-distance taxis operate from the taxi station near the central market to Butterworth or Ipoh for about RM100 and to Kuala Kangsar for RM30.

BUKIT LARUT

☎ 05

The oldest hill station in Malaysia, Bukit Larut (Maxwell Hill) is 7km from Taiping, at an altitude of 1019m. It was formerly a tea estate named for the first assistant British Resident in Perak, who 'opened' the hill, and this quiet little station is simply a cool and peaceful place to visit, with no attractions other than the lush scenery. Few people visit Bukit Larut – in fact, bungalows here only accommodate around 70 visitors. During the school holidays, all are full.

Even if you don't stay, Bukit Larut can be an excellent day trip. Getting up to the hill station is half the fun, and once there, you've got fine views over Taiping and the Lake Gardens far below.

Sights & Activities

Most visitors go up and back by Land Rover (RM4.50 return), though the hill is also a favourite with locals who walk up in three to four hours. The walk along the road through the jungle is pleasant but taxing. You can also choose to take a Land Rover up and walk down.

The first stop is at the crumbling Tea Gardens checkpoint at the Km 5.5 marker, where a ramshackle guesthouse and a few exotic trees are the only reminder of the former tea estate. Next up, at the KM 9.5 marker, you'll find the Bukit Larut Guesthouse, Bungalow Beringin and a canteen for meals. The Land Rovers stop at the main administration office, where you book for the return journey if you haven't already – very advisable on weekends. There are some tame strolls through the nearby gardens from here.

The Land Rovers usually continue 2km up the hill to Gunung Hijau Rest House. Nearby are the Tempinis and Sri Kanangan bungalows, as well as the Cendana nursery, where tulips are grown. From here it's a 30-minute walk along the road, noted for its profusion of butterflies, to the Telekom transmitter station at the top of the hill.

The jungle on the hill is superb, but the only real trail for exploring leads off the main road from between the two transmission towers. (It's best to do all your walking in the morning, as afternoon rains cause dangerous, gigantic sparks – large enough to hit your head – along the transmission lines.) The trail follows a practically abandoned path to Gunung Hijau (1448m). You can usually only follow the leech-ridden path for about 15 minutes to an old pumping station (now, curiously, functioning as a small Shiva shrine), but even on this short walk there's a good chance of seeing monkeys and numerous birds. Beyond the shrine the trail is periodically cleared but quickly becomes overgrown; it's advisable to take a guide with you.

Walking back down the road, it takes half an hour from Gunung Hijau Rest House to

the main post at Bukit Larut Guesthouse, another hour to the Tea Gardens checkpoint, then another 1½ hours to get to the Land Rover station at the bottom of the hill, near the Taiping Lake Gardens.

Sleeping & Eating

You can book space in one of the bungalows by ringing ☎ 807 7241, or by writing to the Officer in Charge, Bukit Larut Hill Resort, Taiping. If you haven't booked earlier, you can ring from the Land Rover station at the bottom of the hill.

Bukit Larut Guesthouse (1036m) and Gunung Hijau Rest House (1113m) each has four double rooms costing between RM50 to RM60. The bungalows Beringin (RM150) at 1036m and Tempinis (RM150) at 1143m are equipped with kitchens, so you need to bring provisions. Beringin can accommodate up to eight people; Tempinis up to 10. You pay for the whole bungalow, regardless of how many people are in your party. Meals are available from the caretakers at the bungalows, but they need advance notice.

There is a basic camping ground (per person RM2) below the main resthouse near the Tempinis bungalow.

Next to the upper Land Rover office, the Bukit Larut Guesthouse is usually open for meals and has impressive views. Simple rice and noodle dishes are the main menu items.

Getting There & Away

Prior to WWII, you had the choice of walking, riding a pony or being carried up in a sedan chair, as there was no road to the station. Japanese POWs were put to work building a road at the close of the war, and it was opened in 1948.

Private cars are not allowed on the road – it's only open to government Land Rovers, which run a regular service from the station at the foot of the hill, just above the Taiping Lake Gardens. They operate every hour on the hour from 9am to 5pm (until 4pm in the low season), and the trip takes about 40 minutes.

The winding road negotiates 72 hairpin bends on the steep ascent, and there are superb views through the trees on the way up. The Land Rovers going up and those going down pass each other midway at the Tea Gardens. Fares are paid at the bottom

of the hill – it's RM2 to the administration office and RM2.50 to Gunung Hijau Rest House. Alternatively, you can walk to the top in three or four hours.

To book a seat on a Land Rover (which is advisable), ring the station (☎ 807 7241) at the bottom of the hill. A taxi from central Taiping to this station, about 2km east of the Lake Gardens, should cost RM6.

KUALA SEPETANG

☎ 05

Around 15km west of Taiping, Kuala Sepetang – still shown on some maps under its old name of Port Weld – is a small, scruffy Chinese town of minimal appeal, though the main reason for coming out this way is to visit the **Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve** (☎ 858 1762; admission free; ⌚ 8am-7pm). The forest, which stretches from here up the coast of Perak towards Seberang Perai (Penang), represents almost half of all Malaysia's gazetted mangrove cover, and is one of the country's most significant nature reserves.

The entrance to the reserve is about 500m outside the town; ask the driver to let you off when you see the big gateway and sign on your right reading 'Pejabat Hutan Kecil Paya Laut'. Here, a raised wooden walkway winds its way through a small section of the reserve, allowing you to explore this fascinating ecosystem without getting your feet damp. There are several signs along the route explaining, in English, what plants you are looking at and how it all works.

Smooth otters, leopard cats and macaques are just some of the creatures who inhabit this landscape, though you're unlikely to see much more than the odd bird and scampering lizard unless you're here in the early morning or evening.

If you wish to stay, there are some large **A-frame huts** (RM30-50; a) perched on stilts at the water's edge which sleep between four and eight people. Only one has air-con, and there are shared bathroom blocks. There are also **shared tents** (RM30), and you can pitch your own here too for around RM10, but make enquiries first as space is limited.

You can explore the mangroves further by charter boat, although it can get quite expensive. The reserve office recommends Mr Lee Miang Hiau (☎ 012-505 1175). Expect to pay around RM200 to RM300 for the day.

It may be possible to arrange meals, but there are several basic Chinese restaurants just down the road in Kuala Sepetang. There is also a bank and post office on the main road (Trump Rd), as well as fruit and vegetable stalls and a surprising number of snooker halls, but that's about it.

Getting There & Away

Blue Omnibus 77 runs every 40 minutes from 6.05am to 7pm between Taiping's local bus station and Kuala Sepetang (RM1.80, 30 minutes), with a couple of later departures after that.