

Johor



Linked to Singapore at the tip of the Asian continent, Johor is the southern gateway to Malaysia. While it's the most populous state in the country, tourism has taken a back seat to economic development (see the boxed text, p257) leaving the state with some great off-the-beaten-path destinations for those who are up to the challenge.

Some of Malaysia's most beautiful islands, within the Seribu Archipelago, lie off the state's east coast. They attract their fair share of Singaporean weekenders, but remain near empty during the week. Many of these islands are prime dive territory, with similar corals and fish that you'll find at popular Tioman Island (p274) but with fewer crowds. These islands are also blessed with some of the finest white-sand beaches in the country, which fringe flashy turquoise waters and wild jungles.

For more adventure head to Endau-Rompin National Park or climb the eponymous peak at Gunung Ledang National Park. These jungles offer the same rich flora, (very elusive) fauna and swashbuckling action that visitors flock to experience at Taman Negara in Pahang, but once again crowds are rare. Anywhere you go to in the state beyond the capital will involve some determination: either by chartering a boat or joining a tour. The effort, however, is well rewarded.

HIGHLIGHTS

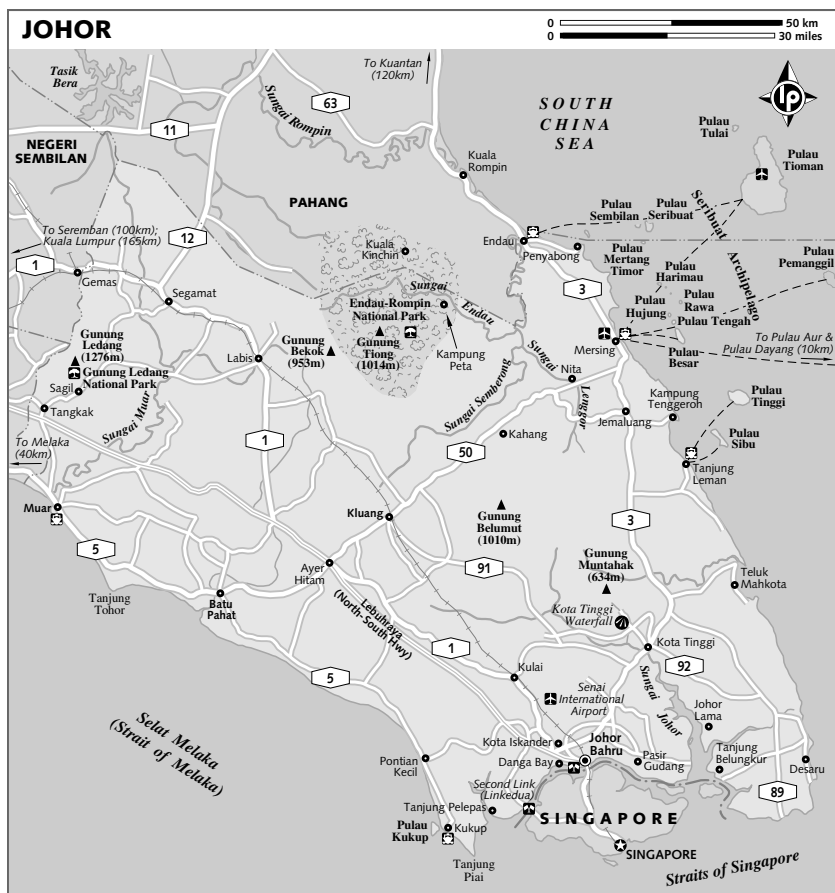
- Swimming, diving and beach bumming it to the max in the **Seribu Archipelago** (p266)
- Discovering the surprisingly charming waterfront and colonial backstreets of **Johor Bahru** (p257) and realising that the city is outgrowing its bad reputation
- Sweating your way up lofty **Gunung Ledang** (p263)
- Cooling off in the sensational waterfalls of **Endau-Rompin National Park** (p269) after hiking through dense jungle
- Admiring the sultans' treasures at the **Royal Abu Bakar Museum** (p259) in Johor Bahru
- Eating *ikan bakar* (grilled fish) at one of Johor Bahru's busy **hawker centres** (p261)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 06, 07

■ POPULATION: 3.17 MILLION

■ AREA: 19,984 SQ KM



History

With the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in the 16th century, Johor emerged as the pre-eminent Malay state, its rulers seen as the protectors of the western Malay states. The Portuguese soon attacked Johor, but were eventually content to allow its leaders to rule from their capital on Sungai Johor (Johor River), despite the sultans' impediment to trade in the area.

In 1819 Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles succeeded in gaining Singapore for the British and pensioning off the Malay sultans. Actual power went to the *temenggong* (Malay minister in charge of defence and justice) who continued to rule the state. The most notable among these was the

flamboyant Abu Bakar, who elevated himself to the position of Sultan of Johor in 1886. Through his contacts with influential people in London and Singapore, he resisted British attempts to bring Johor closer under its control. Abu Bakar also undertook an ambitious program of modernisation for the state, while continuing to live the high life. Today he is fondly remembered as the Father of Johor.

In 1914 Abu Bakar's successor and son, Ibrahim, was forced by the British to accept a 'general adviser' who had powers similar to those exercised by the British Residents in other states. Sultan Ibrahim was still the ruler of Johor when it became part of the Federation of Malaysia in 1948.

THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF ISKANDAR

Started in 2006 and expected to be completed in 2025, the Iskandar Development Region is a 221,634-hectare area that stretches from Johor Bahru to Senai/Kulai in the north, Tanjung Pelepas at the west and Pasir Gudang at the east. The aim is for the region (which is three times the size of Singapore) to become an international metropolis and liberal trade port not unlike China's Shenzhen and Hong Kong. A 'green theme' is being incorporated with hopes of simultaneously making the area attractive to tourists.

The administrative capital, Kota Iskandar, is literally being built from scratch (with a Moorish-Andalusian architectural theme) and was officially opened by the Sultan of Johor on April 16 2009, with ambitions of having all the administration in the region moved to the new city by the end of 2009.

While the world economic slump inevitably slowed down the development pace for Iskandar, it's still attracting sufficient investors and is moving remarkably well towards its goals. Despite this, the project is harshly criticised by ex-PM Mahathir Mohamad who has warned that the higher cost of living in the region, as well as the fact that most of the land is being sold to foreign investors (many Singaporean), will force out Malaysians. In the end, he prophesises, Iskandar will only be 'an extension of Singapore'.

The Iskandar project has been backed by PM Najib Razak, who believes that growth and foreign investment can only be beneficial for Malaysia and its people. The hopes are that the wealth of Iskandar will spill over to the rest of the country and bring the entire region up to potential.

Climate

The temperature in Johor ranges from 21°C to 32°C, with an average humidity exceeding 82%. Although there is rain through the year, the wettest months are from May to December.

National Parks

Johor's main national parks are Endau-Rompin (p269) and Gunung Ledang (p263). For details of other parks, contact the **Johor National Parks Corporation** (☎ 07-223 7471; www.johorparcs.com.my).

Getting There & Around

The Lebuhraya (North-South Hwy), connecting Johor Bahru (JB) and Kuala Lumpur, is the main transport artery to the north. Johor Bahru is also connected to Kuala Lumpur (KL) by rail and is accessed from Singapore by rail and road. There are also boat services to ports in Sumatra from Johor Bahru. The airport is 32km northwest of JB, in Senai. At Ayer Hitam on the Lebuhraya, Route 50 splits off east to Mersing. Route 3 in the east connects Mersing to Johor Bahru.

See transport sections in Johor Bahru (p261), Muar (p263) and Mersing (p266) for details of connections to destinations within Johor and to the rest of Peninsular Malaysia.

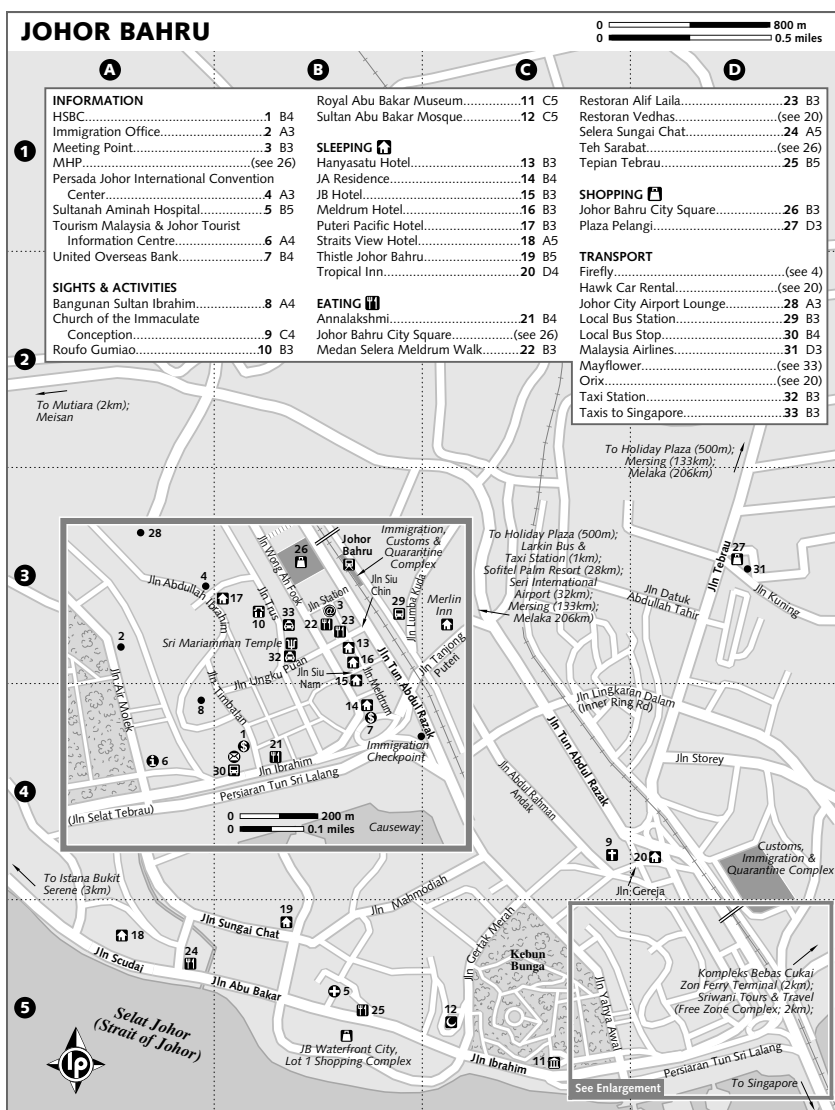
JOHOR BAHRU

☎ 07

After years of being criticised as a dirty, chaotic border town (and being compared with its glitzy neighbour Singapore), Johor's capital Johor Bahru has been repaved and replanted, has covered up its stinky sewers and is suddenly a really decent place to hang out. Grimy bus stops, ear-piercing traffic and desperate-looking people still congregate along Jln Tun Abdul Razak, but literally one block off this main drag you'll find an atmosphere of bustling food hawkers, interesting old architecture and wide, clean sidewalks. The city is still very edgy compared with most Malaysian towns, but the buzz keeps you on your toes and there are some surprisingly cosmopolitan corners to explore.

JB is connected to Singapore by road and rail across a 1038m-long causeway, across which Singaporeans flood for shopping and excitement on weekends and holidays. However, other than just for changing trains, planes or buses, few foreign travellers linger here. A spiralling crime rate (including bag-snatching and car theft), plus a government crackdown on prostitution, have sent male Singaporeans elsewhere for their paid pleasures.

As one of the five 'economic zones' of the Iskandar development project (see the boxed text above) that will radically change southern Malaysia over the next decade, JB is in for



more than a makeover. The gussied-up waterfront and building of the modern Customs, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) complex are just the beginning: Danga Bay is a 720-hectare area, 5km from the Causeway, that is poised to be a financial and commercial centre with the lofty hopes of being as scenic and enticing as Sydney's Darling Harbour.

Orientation

The road and railway across the Causeway drive straight into the heart of JB. The train station and CIQ complex are just east of the grid of streets that make up the centre of town. West of the Causeway, Jln Ibrahim stretches along JB's waterfront, leading you to the city's colonial district with its parkland, colonial

buildings and museum. The Second Link (Linkedua) between Johor and Singapore connects Tanjung Kupang in the southwest of Johor with Tuas in Singapore's west.

The Larkin long-distance bus and taxi station is 5km northwest of the train station. Senai International Airport is 32km northwest of the city centre, in Senai.

Information

Moneychangers infest Jln Wong Ah Fook, and rates are competitive.

HSBC (Jln Timbalan) Has a 24-hour ATM.

Immigration office (☎ 224 4255; 1st fl, Block B, Wisma Persekutuan, Jln Air Molek)

Meeting Point (59 Jln Meldrum; per hr RM3;

☎ 10.30am-10pm) Internet access. Just south of the Gateway Hotel.

MHP (☎ 221 9134; Level 3, Johor Bahru City Square, Jln Wong Ah Fook) Has the best selection of books in English.

Sultanah Aminah Hospital (☎ 223 1666; Jln Skudai)

Tourism Malaysia & Johor Tourist Information

Centre (☎ 223 4935; www.johortourism.com.my; 3rd fl, Jotic Bldg, 2 Jln Air Molek; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

United Overseas Bank (2 Jln Wong Ah Fook) Has a 24-hour ATM.

Dangers & Annoyances

Although travelling in JB is generally safe, visitors should be alert to motorcycle-riding bag-snatchers and, as in any city, avoid walking alone down dark alleyways. If you have any troubles call the **police hotline** (☎ 221 2999).

Sights

ROYAL ABU BAKAR MUSEUM

Once the Johor royal family's principal palace, the marvellous Istana Besar was built in Victorian style by Anglophile sultan Abu Bakar in 1866, and is open to the public as the **Muzium Diraja Abu Bakar** (☎ 223 0555; Jln Ibrahim; adult/child \$US7/3; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu, ticket counter closes 4pm). The admission fee is also payable in ringgit (at a bad exchange rate).

The finest museum of its kind in Malaysia, conveying the tremendous wealth and privilege of the sultan and housing his possessions, the museum is arranged much as it was when it served as the palace. The superb exhibits embrace Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Malay carved wooden pieces and a dazzling full-sized crystal-glass table and chairs from France. The hunting room has some bizarre exhibits from *pukka sahib* days when wildlife was there to be shot,

including elephant's-foot umbrella stands and antelope-leg ashtrays.

The 53-hectare palace grounds (free entry) are beautifully manicured and provide a great breathing space in this cramped and messy city.

OTHER SIGHTS

Wandering around the area between Jln Ibrahim and Jln Ungku Puan is a real highlight of JB. Walk past colourful, old shophouses filled with sari shops, barbers, Ayurvedic salons and old-style eateries.

Under construction from 1892 to 1900, the magnificent **Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque** (Jln Ibrahim) is a mixture of architectural styles (principally Victorian). Further out of town, **Istana Bukit Serene** (Jln Skudai) has a 32m stone tower and is the residence of the Sultan of Johor. The palace was built in 1932 and isn't open to the public – you can glimpse it on the waterfront, 5km west of the Abu Bakar museum.

Sitting magnificently atop Bukit Timbalan, designed by Palmer & Turner architects, the imposing **Bangunan Sultan Ibrahim** (State Secretariat Bldg; Bukit Timbalan) is a mighty mélange of colonial pomp, Islamic motifs and indigenous design. Completed in 1942, the city landmark was employed as a fortress by the Japanese as they prepared to attack Singapore.

The Catholic **Church of the Immaculate Conception** (☎ 224 3034; 9 Jln Gereja) provides refreshing relief from Johor's searing streets. Try to get here for the Tamil feast of **Pongal** in mid-January, when a colourful harvest festival service is held within the church.

The Chinese **Roufo Gumiao** (Roufo Temple; Jln Trus), near the centre of town, is a shrine dedicated to Hongxian Dadi, Yuantian Shangdi and Weitian Dadi, all Taoist characters whose effigies adorn the temple interior.

Sleeping

Hotel rooms mentioned here include private shower or bath, unless stated otherwise.

BUDGET

The main zone of cheap and low-bracket midrange hotels clusters on and around the relatively ambient Jln Meldrum, in the centre of town. Budget price tags are high for Malaysia, and most places ask for a room deposit of around RM30 that's returned to you when you check out.

Meldrum Hotel (☎ 227 8988; www.meldrumhotel.com; 1 Jln Siu Nam; dm/s/d RM32/64/76) All options here are air-conditioned, clean, spacious and freshly painted, and the rooms have TVs, free drinking water and kettles. It's worth upgrading to a RM88 standard room with attached bathrooms – these are downright plush.

JB Hotel (☎ 223 4989; 80A Jln Wong Ah Fook; r RM70; 📶) Small air-con rooms come with TV, tiled floor and sinks, but bathrooms are shared. It's family-run, helpful and very clean.

Manyasatu Hotel (☎ 228 8811; hotelhanya1@yahoo.com; 29 Jln Meldrum; s/d RM70/80; 📶 📺) This place is a touch more stylish than the competition thanks to some bold coloured walls and new tiled floors, but rooms are all small and some lack windows. There's a good internet cafe on site.

MIDRANGE

Hotels in this price bracket inflate prices on Friday, Saturday and Sunday by about 10%.

Straits View Hotel (☎ 224 1400; straitsvhjccg@po.jaring.my; 1-D Jln Scudai; tw/d RM110/135; 📶) Perched facing the Strait of Johor, service here can be rather slack. The ground-floor bar is noisy, but rooms are well furnished and spacious with coffee- and tea-making facilities and TVs. The restaurant here, Marina Seafood Restaurant, is recommended.

Tropical Inn (☎ 224 7888; 15 Jln Gereja; s/d incl breakfast RM130-175; 📶) Standard rooms at the Tropical are slightly tatty, but good value, with coffee- and tea-making facilities, cold water in the fridge, clean bathrooms with long, deep bathtubs, and powerful air-con. Views are excellent.

JA Residence (☎ 221 3000; www.javh.com.my; 18 Jln Wong Ah Fook; r RM130-250; 📶 📺) Right in the heart of JB, this is a comfortable, clean and modern high-rise hotel offering good value for money. It's getting slightly frayed at the edges, despite the fact that it was recently remodelled, but its cream coloured paint and polished wood interiors do have some design flair. Angle for a room on the upper floors that have views over the causeway.

TOP END

Thistle Johor Bahru (☎ 222 9234; www.thistle.com.my; Jln Sungai Chat; r from RM220; 📶 📺 📺 📶) At the time of research, the five-star British hotel chain Thistle was refurbishing and rebranding the already excellent old Hyatt Regency. Overlooking the Straits of Johor, the hotel

promises to become the poshest option this side of the Causeway. Quirky extras include rooms designed especially for travelling executive women who can opt to lodge with a pet, which is supplied by the hotel.

Puteri Pacific Hotel (☎ 223 3333; www.puteripacific.com; Jln Abdullah Ibrahim; r incl breakfast from RM250; 📶 📺 📶) This centrally located hotel has polite staff, a range of fine restaurants and facilities such as tennis and squash courts. Rooms are well kept and have light green carpets with blond wood furniture. It's quite classy for the price.

Mutiara (☎ 332 3800; www.mutiarahotels.com; Jln Dato Sulaiman; r RM420-1000, incl breakfast; 📶 📺 📺) Located 2km north of the city centre, rooms here are just as comfortable as you'd hope for the price tag. Junior Club Suites are a great choice for families as they're equipped with toys, PlayStation and board games. The hotel's Chinese restaurant, Meisan (opposite), is recommended and there's live music in the Polo Lounge.

Sofitel Palm Resort (☎ 599 6000; www.sofitel.com; Jln Persiaran Golf; r from €47; 📶 📺 📺) Only a three-minute drive from Senai International Airport (28km from Central JB) this resort is a far cry from the city's hubbub. Alongside the very elegant accommodation there are nearly unlimited activities available from very inexpensive golf to paintball, an Olympic-sized pool and ATV trails. Afterwards chill out at the on-site Mandara Spa.

Eating

Whatever you think of JB, you can't complain about the food. The streets here sizzle with some of the country's best seafood, as well as local specialities including a local, curry-heavy version of *laksa*.

RESTAURANTS

Annalakshmi (☎ 227 7400; 39 Jln Ibrahim; buffet meals by donation; 🕒 11am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) An authentic vegetarian Indian buffet run by volunteers of the Temple of Fine Arts, the motto here is 'eat what you want and give as you feel'. There's also an Annalakshmi in Singapore (see p540); donate generously.

Ther Sarabat (Johor Bahru City Square; meals from RM3; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Good for those wanting to sample street food in more sterile surroundings, this place at the mall serves up sophisticated versions of all the local favourites at prices similar to those at grittier food

stalls. The well-stuffed *masala tosei* (RM3) is fantastic, as is the *Sarabat rojak* (RM5.90).

Restoran Alif Laila (☎ 226 0445; 57 Jln Meldrum; meals RM7; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) With all its food on display so you can see what you are getting, this cheap and friendly outfit offers very good value in its range of roti and curries, and is popular with locals.

Restoran Vedhas (1 Jln Gereja; meals RM10; ☺ lunch & dinner) Reasonably priced southern and northern Indian meals – biryani dishes, dhal curry and tandoori chicken, as well as a selection of meat-free dishes and naan (bread baked in a clay oven).

Meisan (☎ 332 3800; Mutiara Hotel, Jln Dato Sulaiman; meals RM45-50; ☺ lunch & dinner) Meals at this fine Sichuan restaurant are rather expensive, but authentically spicy and full of flavour. Set meals are available for those eager to avoid the pricier à la carte dishes.

HAWKER CENTRES & FOOD COURTS

The shopping malls about town are littered with food courts. The basement of **Johor Bahru City Square** (108 Jln Wong Ah Fook) has good Chinese, Japanese and Western restaurants and cafes; for coffee, Starbucks (wi-fi zone) and Coffee Bean are on the ground floor.

Street food is the highlight of a stay in JB and hawker centres are the best place to let your tastebuds go wild.

Medan Selera Meldrum Walk (meals from RM3; ☺ dinner) Every late afternoon, the little food stalls crammed along this alley (that runs parallel to Jln Meldrum) start frying up everything from *ikan bakar* to the local curry *laksa*. Wash down your meal with fresh sugar-cane juice or a Chinese herbal jelly drink.

our pick Tepian Tebrau (Jln Abu Bakar; meals RM7; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This food centre is celebrated for its excellent *ikan bakar*, other seafood and stalls serving up a catch-all of Malaysian food. It has views overlooking the Straits of Johor.

Selera Sungai Chat (Jln Abu Bakar; meals RM20) One kilometre west of Tepian Tebrau is this other well-patronised seafood centre specialising in *ikan bakar*.

Shopping

JB promotes itself as a major shopping destination. Singaporeans do come across for shopping – petrol and groceries – but for most goods Singapore has better prices and

a far better range. Branches of Jusco and Carrefour are in the north of town.

Some major shopping centres:

Holiday Plaza (Jln Dato Sulaiman) Go here for DVDs, mobile phones, music and computer software.

Johor Bahru City Square (Jln Wong Ah Fook) A flashy mall with affordable designer shops and a great food court.

Plaza Pelangi (Jln Tebrau) A mishmash of everything and very popular.

Zon (Kompleks Bebas Cukai; 88 Jln Ibrahim Sultan, Stulang Laut) A five-level duty-free centre catering to Singaporeans. Sells booze, cigarettes, leather and more. The complex also incorporates a ferry terminal (see below).

Getting There & Away

AIR

JB is served by the **Senai International Airport** (☎ 599 4500; www.senaiairport.com) in Senai, 32km northwest of JB.

Airline Offices

AirAsia (☎ 1300 889 933; www.airasia.com) Has low-cost flights to KL, Penang, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Sibul and Miri, as well as Bangkok, Jakarta and Surabaya.

Firefly (☎ 603 7845 4543; mezzanine fl, Persada Johor International Convention Centre, Jln Abdullah Ibrahim) Flies twice daily to Kuala Lumpur's Subang Airport.

Malaysia Airlines (☎ 334 1011/331 0036; 1st fl, Menara Pelangi Bldg, Jln Kuning, Taman Pelangi) Flights to Kuching and Kuala Lumpur with easy connections to a variety of destinations. Prices are much lower than from Singapore.

BOAT

Ferries leave from the Zon Ferry Terminal, about 2km east of the Causeway. **Sriwani Tours & Travel** (☎ 221 1677; Zon Ferry Terminal, Stulang Laut) handles tickets to most destinations.

There are several daily departures to the Indonesian islands of Batam (one way RM69, 1½ hours) and Bintan (one way RM86, 2½ hours). Additional boats depart from Kukup (p263), southwest of JB, to Tanjung Balai in Sumatra.

BUS

Frequent buses run between Singapore's Queen St bus terminal and JB's Larkin bus station, inconveniently located 5km north of the city (a taxi to/from the Causeway should cost RM10). Most convenient is the Singapore-Johor Bahru Express (from JB/Singapore RM2.40/\$2.10, 6.30am to midnight, every 10 minutes). Another option is the regular SBS (city bus) 170 that runs between Larkin and Ban San terminal (RM1.70/\$1.30) in

Singapore every 10 minutes between 5.21am and 12.44am, departing from stand 13 in Larkin – tickets can be purchased on the bus. If you are going to Singapore from central JB, board any bus after clearing Malaysian immigration just before the Causeway – you can buy a ticket on the bus or at the agents facing the train station on Jln Tun Abul Razak. For any bus, disembark with your luggage as you may not board the same bus after clearing immigration; hang on to your ticket, too, to avoid having to pay for another one.

At Larkin bus station – a frantic sprawl of hawker stalls, restaurants, clothes shops and other outlets – numerous bus companies run services to Melaka (RM19, 2½ hours), KL (RM31.20, four hours, nonstop), Ipoh (RM49, eight hours), Seremban (RM26, 3½ hours), Mersing (RM11.70, two hours), Pekan (RM3.40, 2½ hours), Kuantan (RM31.20, five hours) and Kuala Terengganu (RM27.30, eight hours).

There is a **left-luggage counter** (per bag RM2; ☎ 7am-11pm) at Larkin bus station.

ON FOOT

Walking across the 2km Causeway technically hasn't been allowed since the opening of the new CIQ complex in 2008, but you'll see lots of people doing it anyway. At the time of research plans were being made to open a legal pedestrian route.

TAXI

JB's main **long-distance taxi station** (☎ 223 4494) is at the Larkin bus station (5km north of town); a handier terminal is on Jln Wong Ah Fook near the Sri Mariamman Temple. Regular taxi destinations and costs (share taxi with four passengers) include Desaru (RM160), Kukup (RM80), Melaka (RM250), KL (RM340), Kuantan (RM320) and Mersing (RM150).

Registered taxis to Singapore depart from the **Plaza Seni Taxi Terminal** (Jln Trus) in the centre of town, with taxis to Orchard Rd or Queen St terminal costing around RM40. Local city taxis cannot cross the Causeway.

TRAIN

The sparkling **JB Sentral** (☎ 223 4727; www.ktmb.com.my; ☎ booking office 8.30am-9pm) train station is in the CIQ complex where you can clear immigration and take a bus or train across the Causeway to Singapore. There's a foot-bridge that links the station to Johor Bahru

City Square shopping mall – the easiest route on foot if you're heading to Central JB. Three daily express trains run to KL (8.28am, 2.49pm and 11.08pm). The line passes through Tampin (for Melaka), Seremban, KL Sentral, Tapah Rd (for Cameron Highlands), Ipoh, Taiping and Butterworth. The line bifurcates at Gemas so you can board the 'jungle train' for Jerantut (for Taman Negara), Kuala Lipis and Kota Bharu.

KTM trains also run to Singapore (RM2.90, 55 minutes) on a separate lane so are immune to traffic jams, but are still usually slower than the bus – they run infrequently (about six per day). You have to get out and clear customs at Woodlands on the Singapore side.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

JB's **Senai International Airport** (☎ 599 4500; www.senaiairport.com), 32km northwest of town, is linked to the city centre by regular shuttle buses (RM8, 45 minutes) that run from the new **City Airport Lounge** (Kotaraya II terminal, Jln Trus). A taxi from the City Airport Lounge to central Singapore costs around RM40; alternatively jump on the Causeway Link Yellow Bus from City Lounge to Kranji MRT (RM1) or the SBS (city bus) 170 from City Lounge to Queen Street or Woodlands Rd in Singapore (RM1.70).

A taxi between the airport and JB is RM45, taking 30 to 45 minutes, depending on traffic.

BUS

Local buses operate from several stops around town, the most convenient being the stop in front of the post office on Jln Ibrahim. From Larkin bus station bus 39 goes into Central JB (RM1.70).

CAR

Car hire in JB is considerably cheaper than in Singapore, but check that the hire firm allows cars to enter Singapore. Car hire prices begin at around RM138 per day (RM3070 per month) for a Proton Wira 1.5L automatic; prices are inclusive of insurance and tax. Many more international rental companies hire cars from Senai International Airport.

Hawk Car Rental (☎ 224 2849; Suite 221, 2nd fl, PanGlobal Plaza, Jln Wong Ah Fook)

Mayflower (☎ 224 1357; www.mayflowercarrental.com.my; Level 2A, Plaza Seni, Jln Trus)

Orix (☎ 224 1215; G9, Tropical Inn, 15 Jln Gereja)

TAXI

Taxis in JB have meters, and drivers are legally required to use them. Flagfall is RM2.50, with an average trip costing RM8. Taxis can be hired at around RM30 per hour for sightseeing.

AROUND JOHOR BAHRU**Kukup**

☎ 07

About 40km southwest of JB, on the Strait of Melaka, the fishing village of Kukup is known for its seafood (most notably prawns and chilli crab), which are consumed in open-air restaurants set on stilts over the water. Singaporeans, fired up by the prospect of seafood munchies, arrive en masse at weekends. The food is good, but it's no secluded idyll and the golf course draws a stratum of business types.

To reach Kukup, take bus 3 from JB to Pontian Kecil (RM6, 2½ hours), and then take a taxi (RM12). A chartered taxi (for four persons) all the way to/from JB costs RM70.

JOHOR BAHRU TO MELAKA

Roads north to Melaka run through a productive region of palm oil, rubber and pineapple plantations. The coast road is fairly scenic and passes a series of quaint *kampung* (villages).

Muar

☎ 06

A lethargic riverside town, languorously Malaysian in mood and with the feel of a bustling Chinatown, Muar was historically an important commercial centre but today it's a very sleepy backwater. It makes for an off-the-beaten-path (though not very action-packed) stop between Melaka and Johor Bahru.

There is a HSBC branch with a 24-hour ATM on Jln Maharani, which runs along the Muar Sungai, near the bus station.

The graceful **colonial district** by the river turns up several buildings of note. Walk around the area and look out for the customs house, the courthouse, the high school (built in 1914) and Masjid Jamek, a Victorian fantasy in much the same style as JB's Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque.

SLEEPING & EATING

Muar is known for its Nonya-style *otak-otak* (fish cakes) and satay breakfasts. You'll find hawkers stalls on Jln Haji Abu just off Jln Ali.

Hotel Leewah (☎ 952 1605; 44 Jln Ali; d without/with air-con & bathroom RM35/45; ♿) At this clean family-

run hotel, the air-con rooms are much brighter than those with fan.

Muar Trader's Hotel (☎ 953 8100; www.muartradershotel.com; 16 Jln Petrie; r RM95-450; ♿ ♻️ 📺) Muar's newest high-rise has monster-sized, blandly decorated rooms with terraces and refrigerators. Ask for a room with a view – the panorama across the Sungai Muar and over the mosque is stunning.

Hotel Classic (☎ 953 3888; 69 Jln Ali; r RM125-250; ♿ ♻️) Classy rooms here have complimentary newspaper, coffee- and tea-making facilities and satellite TV, and are the best in town.

Kampung Nyonya (☎ 954 0088; 39 Jln Sayang; dishes RM3-6; 🕒 10.30am-3pm & 5.30-10pm) This clean place is the snazziest place in town and serves a range of seafood and Nonya favourites, including Nonya *chap chai* (mixed vegetables) and *tomato telor* (tomato and egg).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular buses to JB (RM15.20, 2½ hours) and KL (RM16, 2½ hours) depart from the Muar long-distance bus station by the river. Less-frequent buses run to Seremban (RM13, two hours), Kuantan (RM23, six hours), Penang (RM17.50, eight hours) and Singapore (RM16, three hours). Buses to/from Melaka (RM5.20, one hour), and Gunung Ledang/Segamat (RM4, one hour) operate from the local bus station. The taxi station is just to the right of the bus station.

Gunung Ledang National Park

According to legend, the highest mountain in Johor, Gunung Ledang (also called Mt Ophir; 1276m), is the fabled home of Puteri Gunung Ledang, a mythical princess whose presence is said to still permeate the jungle slopes. Many visitors climb part-way up the mountain to admire the falls, but a very demanding two-day return trip can take trekkers to the summit. This climb is a good introduction to tropical mountaineering and is recommended for those travellers who don't have time for longer treks in Taman Negara. There's a park entrance fee of RM5 and an additional hiking fee of RM5.

There's a camp site at the base of Gunung Ledang, as well as several along the way up the mountain. Sites are RM10 per night and you'll be asked to show all your food and equipment at the Ranger's Office – you get checked again on the way out to ensure you've packed in your rubbish.

The **Gunung Ledang Resort** (☎ 06-977 2888; www.ledang.com; sales office BT 28, Jln Segamat, Sagil, Tangkak; cabins RM50, standard/deluxe tw RM150/200; 🚗 🚚) at the base of the mountain has accommodation and good facilities, and organises expeditions and programs relating to the mountain, as well as guides.

To get there from Muar, take Segamat-bound bus 65 (RM4, 30 minutes) and ask to be let off at Gunung Ledang (there's a large 'Gunung Ledang' sign near the bus stop). It's a 1km walk in from the main road to the start of the falls. From elsewhere, take a bus or train to Segamat then hop on a local bus to Segil (RM5, 45 minutes), ask to get off at Gunung Ledang and follow the same directions as above.

If staying at the Gunung Ledang Resort you can take the train to Segamat and the resort can arrange transfer from there.

MERSING

☎ 07

Once just a peripheral fishing village on the east coast of Johor, Mersing would be an inconsequential blip on the road to Kuantan were it not the hopping-off point for boats to Pulau Tioman and other islands of the Seribuat Archipelago. Nowadays it's a busy, compact town with everything that travellers passing through on their way to the islands might need: cheap internet, good sleeping options, grocery stores, cold beer and a pharmacy. The river is clogged with colourful fishing boats, but beyond the riverfront there's not much to explore.

Information

Eddy Internet Café (Jln Abu Bakar; per hr RM1.50;

🕒 9am-midnight)

Maybank (Jln Ismail) Can cash travellers cheques.

Mersing Tourist Information Centre (☎ 799 5212; Jln Abu Bakar) Rarely open and no set hours.

Police (☎ 799 2222; Jln Sultanah)

Post office (Jln Abu Bakar)

Public Bank (21-22 Jln Sulaiman) Has a 24-hour ATM that accepts MasterCard, Maestro, Cirrus, Visa and Plus.

Pure Value Travel & Tours (☎ 799 6811; 7 Jln Abu Bakar) Opposite the jetty.

Sights

There is little to see in Mersing itself. At the rear of the 95-year-old Taoist and Buddhist

Hock Soon Temple (Fushun Temple) is a splendid, gilded statue of Guanyin (Goddess of Compassion). To the right of the goddess stands Tianhou (Queen of Heaven) herself, worshipped by fishing folk and those whose lives are connected with the sea. Women hoping for children entreat the effigy of Zhusheng Niangniang, placed to the left of Guanyin.

Tours

Several places around the port work as booking offices for islands in the Seribuat Archipelago and Tioman Island, and can also arrange packages.

Omar's (☎ 799 5096, 019-774 4268; Jln Abu Bakar) at Omar's Backpacker's Hostel (below) is the best option for backpackers. Day-long island-hopping speedboat tours (RM60 per person; minimum four people) take you to several islands of the Seribuat Archipelago and include transport and snorkelling equipment. Omar's Overland Tour (per person RM110; minimum four people) is a day tour to Endau-Rompin National Park, complete with transport, guide, insurance, permit, food and accommodation. Omar also runs a RM60 local trek through jungle with stops at palm oil and rubber plantations.

Sleeping

You may end up spending a night or two in Mersing waiting for ferries (due to weather or the tides).

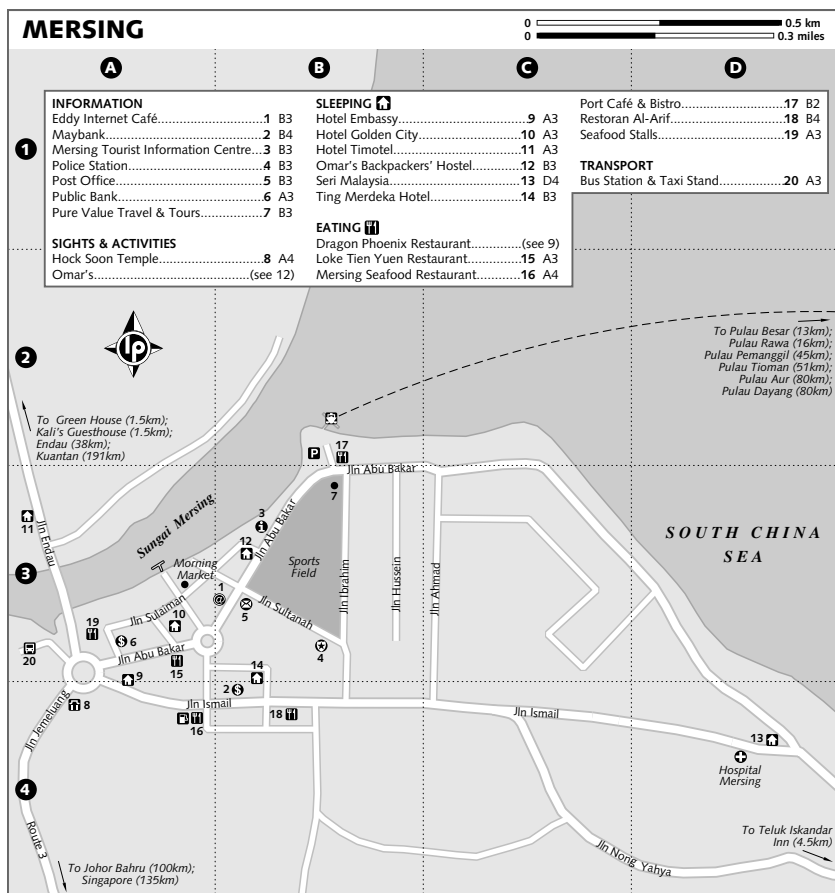
BUDGET

Omar's Backpackers' Hostel (☎ 799 5096, 019-774 4268; Jln Abu Bakar; dm/d RM10/25) A tiny, clean and social backpacker's pad very near the jetty, Omar's is just as well known for the owner's tours (above). Reservations are recommended during the peak season.

Hotel Golden City (☎ 799 5028; 23 Jln Abu Bakar; s RM15, d RM35-45; 🚗) Rudimentary rooms here have cement floors and saggy mattresses, but it's passably clean and good value. Singles have shared bathrooms and only the most expensive options have air-conditioning.

Ting Merdeka Hotel (☎ 799 3506; 27-A Jln Ismail; r RM35; 🚗) On two floors, the Chinese-run Ting Merdeka is a very basic choice, but the owners are pleasant.

Kali's Guesthouse (☎ 799 3613; Kampung Sri Lalang 12E; d/f RM35/85; 🚗) In a garden setting and near the beach, accommodation here is in



chalets on stilts and bungalows (some neglected and in disrepair). It's 1.5km north of town (reached by taking an Endau-bound bus).

Hotel Embassy (☎ 799 3545; 2 Jln Ismail; d/tr/q RM45/55/65; 🚽) This is a fabulously posh-feeling choice compared with the other cheapies in town, and is a great place to clean up and get back to reality after bumming it on island beaches. All rooms are huge, bright, have cable TV, air-con and attached bathrooms.

MIDRANGE

Avoid arriving in Mersing during the Chinese New Year and other holiday periods, as mid-range hotels can be booked solid.

Teluk Iskandar Inn (☎ 799 6037; www.iskandarinn.com; 1456 Jln Sekapak; r incl breakfast RM110-140; 🚽 🍽) With a lovely garden sloping all the way down to the beach, this well-groomed spot is quiet and secluded, 4.5km south of town. The two-person rooms are large and airy. The owners can prepare Malay meals by arrangement. The hotel is on the left side of the road as you head away from Mersing.

Seri Malaysia (☎ 799 1876; smsg@serimalaysia.com.my; Lot TT8, 641 Jln Ismail; d RM130-150; 🚽 🍽) An average branch of the Seri Malaysia chain, this has a small kidney-shaped pool, karaoke and a shuttle bus service to the jetty, but it's stranded in the east of town.

Hotel Timotel (☎ 799 5888; www.timotel.com.my; 839 Jln Endau; s & d incl breakfast from RM150; 🚽 🍽)

Just across the bridge over the river, this is a quality hotel with excellent service. Doubles are clean, well furnished, spacious and have satellite TV. The hotel can arrange early breakfasts if you have an early boat. Promotional rates from RM88 make this place a steal.

Eating

Seafood stalls open up nightly near the bus station along the river.

Restoran Al-Arif (44 Jln Ismail; mains around RM6; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Serving up *roti canai* (flaky, flat bread; 60 sen), *roti telur* (roti with an egg; RM1.40) and nasi goreng (fried rice; RM3), there's not much selection but the food is good and vegetarian options are available.

Mersing Seafood Restaurant (56 Jln Ismail; mains RM8; ☺ lunch & dinner) One of several Chinese restaurants specialising in seafood, this place offers good-value dishes, including fish slice and vegetable soup, prawns with coconut sauce, and spicy Sichuan dishes.

Port Café & Bistro (Jln Abu Bakar; mains RM8-25; ☺ lunch & dinner) A surprisingly hip little open-air bar and eatery right at the jetty, service and food here are excellent. Western grub like pizzas (from RM22) and grilled chicken salads with balsamic dressing (RM10) are delicious, as are the gourmet Malay specialities like a dolled-up *nasi lemak* (RM9). The bar serves beer, wine and cocktails and there's live music some nights.

For Chinese fare similar to Mersing Seafood Restaurant:

Dragon Phoenix Restaurant (2 Jln Ismail; mains RM10; ☺ lunch & dinner)

Loke Tien Yuen Restaurant (55 Jln Abu Bakar; mains RM10; ☺ lunch & dinner) Mersing's oldest Chinese restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Long-distance and local buses as well as long-distance taxis all depart from the bus station near the bridge over the river. Destinations include KL (RM37.70, 5½ hours, four a day), Singapore (RM13.70, three hours, twice daily), Johor Bahru (RM11.70, 2½ hours, two a day), Kuantan (RM16.10, three hours, twice daily), Melaka (RM22.80), Kota Bharu (RM48, 10 hours, twice daily) and Kuala Terengganu (RM34, seven hours, two a day). For buses to Cherating, travel first to Kuantan.

Taxi destinations and costs (per car) include Johor Bahru (RM160), Kuantan (RM200),

Endau (RM24) and Pekan (RM140). Local buses run to Endau (RM4, 45 minutes). For boats to Sibu Island, take a taxi to Tanjung Leman (RM60).

For ferry information to Tioman Island see p282. For the Seribuat Archipelago, see the individual island entries.

SERIBUAT ARCHIPELAGO



A cluster of 64 islands scattered off the east coast of Johor, the Seribuat Archipelago is a constellation of some of Malaysia's most beautiful islands. Most people only know of Pulau Tioman (see p274), the starlet and largest of the group, which is actually a part of Pahang. This leaves the rest of the archipelago (covered in this section) as far less-visited dots of tranquillity.

Divers can expect to see excellent coral and a startling array of marine life, from butterfly fish and parrot fish to young barracudas, giant clams, giant cockles and more. The waters around the archipelago are frequently whipped into foam during the monsoon from November to February, so ferry services can be patchy, especially during the high monsoon (November and December).

In addition to the islands listed below, there are other islands in the archipelago that are harder to reach and subsequently less visited. If you want to see as many islands as possible, join Omar's island hopping tour (p264) in Mersing.

Visitors to the Seribuat Archipelago (and Pulau Tioman) should purchase a **Marine Parks entry ticket** (adult/child RM5/2) at the jetty in Mersing.

Pulau Besar



Easy to get to and perfect for a day or two of serious beach lounging, Pulau Besar's long white-sand beach is fronted by a veritable swimming pool when the sea is calm. If you tire of vegging out, there are trails to more hidden beaches and plenty of dense jungle to explore. That said, the coral isn't great here and there is no dive operator on the island, so you'll have to spend your water time frolicking in the sandy-bottomed turquoise water or snorkelling along the scattered bits of reef. The island is only 4km long and 1km wide and was once known as Pulau Babi Besar (Big Boar Island), but

SURVIVING EXPEDITION ROBINSON

It will seem a little ironic while you're sipping your cocktail on a white sand beach, but other visitors to your island paradise might be crunching bugs and scrounging for water. This is because the Seribu Archipelago is the location of *Expedition Robinson*, the original reality TV show that inspired the popular American version *Survivor*. The program first aired in 1997 and the sets now host several groups (for different versions of the show) from countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and South Africa.

Base camp is on Pulau Besar, while many of the rougher 'survivor' locations are on the smaller, more remote islands. The Robinson TV crew begins setting up around April and filming takes place around June and July. During these two months it can be hard to find a room, especially on Pulau Besar, so book in advance!

the wild swine that used to snort and crash through its jungle have vanished.

You can visit Pulau Besar on a day trip by hopping on the resort's shuttle boats or by going with **Seafarest** (☎ 799 8990; Mersing jetty; one way RM45), which makes the trip two to three times a day, with departure times depending on the tides.

SLEEPING & EATING

The island's four resorts are all situated along the beach on the west of the island. All have restaurants and provide transfers to/from Mersing for guests for around RM95 return.

Nirwana Resort (☎ 799 5979/29; r from RM50) Ageing wood shacks are kept very clean and are in a stunning setting just steps from the beach.

our pick **Mirage Island Resort** (☎ 799 2334; mirageislandresort@gmail.com; chalets RM165-345) Cheaper digs are in stylish A-frames while the more expensive options are in huge, louvered wood chalets. All exude a tropical-colonial charm, the staff is young and fun and there's a bar and pool table in the restaurant area.

Aseania Resort (☎ 019-736 1277; www.aseaniaresortsgroup.com.my; chalets RM180-225; ♿ ♿) Rooms are big, clean and have dark-wood interiors, while the service is stellar and the jungle pool, surrounded by a stylish wood deck, is a shady alternative to the beach.

D'Coconut Island Resort (☎ 603-4252 6686; www.dcoconut.com; chalets RM200; ♿ ♿) Paint-chipped exteriors and faded carpet interiors will have you lusting after the rooms at neighbouring resorts.

Pulau Sibü

☎ 07

Apart from Tioman Island, this cluster of several islands (**Pulau Sibü Besar**, **Pulau Sibü**

Kukus, **Pulau Sibü Tengah** and **Pulau Sibü Hujung**) is the most popular destination in the archipelago. Pulau Sibü Besar is where the bulk of the accommodation is found. Around 7km and 1km wide, the main reasons to visit is for the good diving and even better beaches. Tiny Pulau Sibü Tengah, which was once a Vietnamese refugee camp, is now home to sea turtles that crawl ashore in July to lay their eggs. The island has some superb coral on its northern side.

Ferries for Pulau Sibü do not depart from Mersing, but from the jetty at Tanjung Leman around 30km south of town. Since there are no public boats you'll have to organise transport with your resort (usually about RM75 return).

SLEEPING & EATING

Sea Gypsy Village Resort & Backpackers (☎ 799 3124; www.siburesort.com; A-frames s/d/t RM50/90/120; chalets incl full board per person RM210) D deservedly popular Sea Gypsy also has a backpacker's section with six fan-cooled A-frames right on the beach. The rest of the resort is also well run, with solid wooden chalets that are a favourite for families. The restaurant serves good food and caters to children and those with special dietary needs.

Twin Beach Resort (☎ 019-700 3769; www.twinbeach.com; chalets incl full board per person RM200; ♿ ♿) Beach shacks with gussied-up kitsch interiors are a good base for a range of activities from windsurfing to deep-sea fishing. Prices include boat transfer.

Rimba Resort (☎ 010-714 7495; www.malaysiaislandresort.com; s/d chalets incl full board RM225/350; ♿) Rimba has 19 ageing cottages with verandahs looking out over a small beach. There's no dive centre, but snorkelling and fishing trips are available.

Sibu Island Cabanas (☎ 331 7216; www.sibuiscabanas.com; s/d chalets incl full board RM245/400; 🍷 🍷) The 'cabanas' here have particularly large terraces and real Malaysian style. There's a PADI dive centre, kayaks and massages are available – plus the resort keeps its beach clean and its beers cold.

Sibu Island Resort (☎ 223 1188; www.sibuiscabanas.com.my; 2-night packages per person from RM580; 🍷 🍷 🍷) On Pulau Sibu Tengah this plush resort has all the mod-cons and you get a night free if it rains more than five hours in one day! There's a full spa, dive centre, tennis courts and anything else you could possibly need/want on holiday.

Pulau Rawa

☎ 07

Edged by a fine white-sand beach, and luring bands of sunseekers, surfers and snorkellers, the tiny island of Rawa pokes out of the sea 16km from Mersing.

Rawa Safaris Island Resort (☎ 799 1204; www.rawasfr.com; 1-night packages incl full board & boat transfers per person from RM310; 🍷) is the island's main resort and has a variety of accommodation scattered over the hillsides and on the beachfront, including a longhouse and chalets. There's a restaurant, dive centre and a wide range of facilities and activities.

More rustic and a favourite with surfers, **Le Club Rawa** (chalets RM180-200) isn't as well liked by other visitors, who complain that the huts are overpriced. Meal prices at both resorts are hefty – count on RM25 or more per meal. Note also that neither resort supplies drinking water (and the well water can get pretty salty) so stock up in Mersing.

Both resorts arrange transport, but you can also get to Rawa with the Tioman Island ferry (RM45) if there are four people or more that need to stop there.

Pulau Tinggi

☎ 07

Thirty-seven kilometres southeast of Mersing, jungle-clad Tinggi is an impressive sight when seen from a distance – it's an extinct volcano (*tinggi* means 'tall').

The island supports three village populations: Kampung Tanjung Balang, Kampung Pasir Panjang and Kampung Sebirah Besar. Accommodation is largely resort-style, although some locals may supply budget accommodation. **Dreamz Tinggi Island**

(☎ in Singapore 65-8103 1319; www.dreamztinggiisland.com; 2-day/1-night packages incl full board per person from S\$165; 🍷) has good-quality chalets and bungalows, a jacuzzi and a restaurant. It's next to a turtle hatchery, and boat transfers from Tanjung Leman are included in the package rate.

Pulau Aur & Pulau Dayang

☎ 07

Eighty kilometres from the mainland, Pulau Aur has crystal-clear azure water and excellent coral. With sunken wrecks off its coast, the island boasts good open-water dive sites, including Rayner's Rock, Pulau Pinang and the Pinnacles. Accommodation is almost exclusively Singaporean owned and on the weekends and Singaporean holidays these islands swarm with dive students and seasoned divers from the island city.

On Pulau Aur, several chalet and resort operations include the **Diver's Lodge** (☎ 65-6557 0016; 3-day/2-night dive packages from S\$340), which is probably the island's best value on a fantastic beach in Kampung Berhala. A cross-island walk (approximately one hour) takes you to the far side of Pulau Aur.

About 300 beds are available on Pulau Dayang, across the channel from Pulau Aur, at the scenic beach at **Dayang Blues Resort** (1-night packages from S\$380) in Kampung Pasir Putih. All prices include boat transfers from Mersing (about 1½ hours). You can also charter a boat from **Seafarest** (☎ 799 8990) at the Mersing jetty for around RM1000 for a day trip.

Pulau Pemanggil

Forty-five kilometres east of Mersing – or around five hours by boat – and capped by the distinctive peak of Batu Buau, beautiful Pulau Pemanggil supports a sparse population divided between three small villages: Kampung Buau, Kampung Pak Kelah and Kampung Pontianak (the last named after a female vampire who feasts on the blood of newborn children). Needless to say, the water is beautiful, enticing snorkellers and sightseers alike.

Pak Mazlan's Chalet (☎ 799 1649; r RM45) offers simple longhouse lodgings (fan and attached shower) at Kampung Pak Kelah. Near Kampung Pak Kelah, **Lanting Resort** (☎ 799 3793; www.lantingresort.com.my; 3-day/2-night package RM268) has a variety of chalet, longhouse and suite accommodation, and offers lots of fishing adventures. At Kampung Buau, **Dagang Chalets** (dm RM10) has cheap longhouse beds.

ENDAU-ROMPIN NATIONAL PARK

Straddling the Johor–Pahang border, the 260-million-year-old, 870-sq-km Endau-Rompin National Park is the second-largest park on the peninsula after Taman Negara. The park's lowland forests are among the last in Peninsular Malaysia and have been identified as harbouring unique varieties of plant life. Of these are enormous umbrella palms, with their characteristic fan-shaped leaves, and *Livistona endanensis*, a species of palm with serrated circular leaves.

The park is also Malaysia's last refuge of the Sumatran rhinoceros, although they roam only within the park's remote areas. Endau-Rompin is also a tiger habitat, but they are rarely spotted. Among birds that you are likely to see or hear are the red jungle fowl, the black hornbill and the grey wagtail.

Exploring Endau-Rompin National Park

The majority of travellers arrive on tours arranged by private operators. It is possible to make an independent visit, provided you have your own camping gear, but it won't necessarily work out any cheaper and the isolated location can make transport to the park inconvenient to arrange.

Most visitors explore the park along the banks of Sungai Endau and one of its tributaries, Sungai Jasin. Trips to the park usually involve treks along the banks of these rivers, with stops at two impressive waterfalls along the way and the four-hour return trip up to the Janing Barat plateau, near the Kuala

Jasin base camp. Treks from Lubuk Tapah base camp in the west of the park follow the Sungai Selai to explore waterfalls along the river. It's worth noting there is no way of traversing the forest between Lubuk Tapah base camp or the Selai Entry point and the Kuala Jasin base camp, so you either enter Endau-Rompin at Kampung Peta in the east or at Selai in the west, and stick to the sights in each respective area.

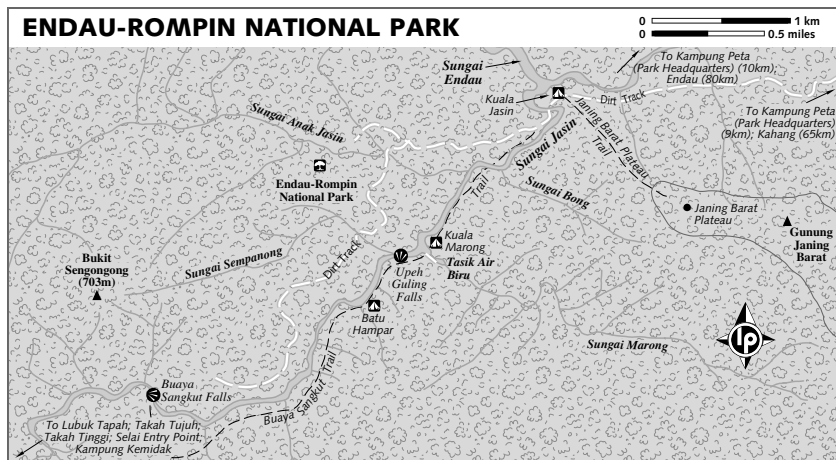
Officials of the **Johor National Parks Corporation** (☎ 07-788 2812; www.johorparcs.com.my) generally require that you hire a guide to explore the park. Guides can be hired for RM50 per day at the park headquarters at Kampung Peta, or at its **Selai office** (☎ 07-922 2875) in Kampung Kemidak (which is about a 40-minute drive from Bekok). A park entry permit (RM10) is also required. Further charges include fishing-rod permit (RM20), hiking permit (RM10) and further (daily) permits to travel within the park to destinations including the Buaya Sangkut and Upeh Guling waterfalls, and the Janing Barat plateau.

The park is shut during the rainy monsoon season (November to February). See the boxed text, p86, for advice on preparing yourself for a trek.

Walks

JANING BARAT PLATEAU

The Janing Barat plateau is a 500m-high sandstone plateau southeast of **Kuala Jasin base camp**. The trail starts at the dirt track behind



ON THE TRAIL OF JOHOR'S SNAGGLE-TOOTHED GHOST

Johor's famed *hantu jarang gigi* (Snaggle-toothed Ghost) is a tall, hairy, camera-shy biped that's possibly stuck in the same evolutionary cul-de-sac as the Yeti or Sasquatch. The last major sighting was in 2005 near a river in the jungle around Kota Tinggi, when an entire family of primates was reportedly glimpsed by labourers.

The primate has been tracked unsuccessfully for decades, with regular Orang Asli sightings of the 3m-tall brown-haired 'missing link' – as well as discoveries of oversized footprints. Zoologists have placed motion-sensitive cameras deep within the jungle of Johor and Pahang, but so far expeditions to uncover the woolly hominid have returned empty-handed. Even into 2009 wildlife experts, film crews and adventurers continued to search. There is enough concrete evidence to keep the buzz going.

Frequent sightings have been made on the slopes of Gunung Panti, Gunung Sisek and Gunung Muntaha, while claims by a zoologist that a Bigfoot was shot dead around Taman Negara's Gunung Tahan in 2001 (its remains inconveniently destroyed by loggers) have further fuelled feverish hopes.

So note: if you encounter a fugitive Yeti-like creature stumbling from the bushes, have your camera ready – and *no sudden movements*.

the camp; look for it heading into the woods opposite the path to the camp.

The trail climbs gently for the first 100m or so, then steepens into a challenging uphill slog. Soon after starting the climb, the first *Livinstona endanensis* are visible on either side of the trail. Once on the plateau, the terrain levels out and becomes marshy; keep an eye out for pitcher plants around the forest floor. There is nothing to mark the high point of the trail; simply walk across the plateau for a few hundred metres and then turn around.

TRAIL TO BUAYA SANGKUT FALLS

The main walk in the park follows the Sungai Jasin from Kuala Jasin base camp. Those with time for three nights in the park can usually reach the highest waterfall on the river, Buaya Sangkut; those with time for only two nights must usually turn around at Batu Hampar rocks or the falls at Upeh Guling.

After a night at **Kuala Jasin base camp**, the first day's hike crosses Sungai Jasin to follow the level terrain along the river bank through jungle for two hours to **Kuala Marong** (also known as Lembah Marong), a camp site at the confluence of Sungai Jasin and the much smaller Sungai Marong. The impressive falls at **Upeh Guling** are a further 10-minute hike up Sungai Jasin. From Upeh Guling, it's a gentle 40-minute hike to the flat rocks and camp site of **Batu Hampar**. Along the way you'll see some huge umbrella palms and dipterocarp trees. If you reach Batu Hampar before noon and are

very fit, it's possible to continue on to Buaya Sangkut and return all the way to Kuala Jasin in one day. Otherwise, camp at Batu Hampar or at Buaya Sangkut. Note that it is at least 4km from Batu Hampar to the falls at Buaya Sangkut. Because the path is quite faint, only attempt this hike with a guide.

The hike from Batu Hampar to **Buaya Sangkut** is a challenging three-hour slog over several ridges to the top of the spectacular 40m drop of the main falls. You can work your way down the side of the falls for a better view, but use extreme caution as the rocks can be treacherous. There is room to camp in the clearing above the falls. Your guide may know a way to the bottom of the falls other than the one described here. From the falls, retrace your steps to return to the base camp at Kuala Jasin.

Sleeping

You can camp at Kuala Jasin, Kuala Marong, Batu Hampar and at Upeh Guling for RM5 per night per person. Of these, Buaya Sangkut is the nicest and has the most remote location. A lightweight tent is the preferred option, but you can spread a ground sheet under the covered picnic platforms at Kuala Jasin and Kuala Marong – just be sure to bring some mosquito coils.

There are fan dorms and chalets, in good condition, available in Kampung Peta (dorm bed RM10, chalet RM60 to RM120) and simple A-frames at Kuala Jasin. At Selai, simple chalet accommodation is available at Lubuk

Tapah base camp, with a camping site at Lubuk Mereekek.

Getting There & Away

The main entry point to Endau-Rompin from Johor is along Route 50 in Johor to a turn-off 5km east of the small town of Kahang (the turn-off is at mile marker 26 – ‘Batu 26’ in Bahasa Malaysia – from where it’s a 56km drive over rough roads (4WD is advisable) to Kampung Peta, the park’s visitor centre. At Kampung Peta, you can hire a boat (RM22 per person for five people or more, RM120 per boat for under five people, 45 minutes) to take you the final 10km upriver to the base camp at Kuala Jasin, or you can walk the 15km (around three hours).

For visitors coming from the west, it is possible to enter a different region of the park via the Selai entry point. Take a train to Kampung Bekok station, followed by transport to the **park office** (☎ 07-922 2875) for registration at

Kampung Kemidak, before entering the park at Selai, in the foothills of Gunung Tioing.

If driving, take the exit at Yong Peng on the Lebuhraya (North–South Hwy) and drive to Kampung Bekok via Chaah. From Bekok you can drive onto Selai, but if you want to take your vehicle to the park camp sites at Lubuk Mereekek and the base camp at Lubok Tapah, you will need a 4WD.

The park is also accessible from Kuala Rompin in Pahang along a paved road to Seladang, and then by following a 26km dirt track to Kuala Kinchin on the park boundary.

Because of the difficulties in arranging your own transport into the park, most travellers go on a tour. Mersing is the best place to arrange this; **Omar’s Backpackers’ Hostel** (☎ 07-799 5096, 019-774 4268) can arrange tours (see p264) and permits. Prices per person for all-inclusive two-night trips are around RM400; three-night trips cost around RM500.

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