

Pahang



Holding Peninsular Malaysia's grandest jungles and bordered by 209km of surfable sandy beaches and near-perfect tropical islands, Malaysia's largest state is home to some of the country's most accessible outdoor action. Just three hours from Kuala Lumpur you can reach the primordial national park of Taman Negara, with elusive elephants and tigers hidden in its tracts of virgin jungle. If you're coming from Singapore, the bottle-green peaks and blue waters of Pulau Tioman are only 4½ hours away. Those heading down the east coast from Terengganu shouldn't miss a stop at the super-laid-back surf-bum/artist's haven of Cherating.

In between these tourism starlets you'll find off-the-beaten-path gems offering similar experiences without the crowds. Kenong Rimba National Park sees a fraction of the tourists and is famous for its many waterfalls, while Tasik Chini – a lotus flower-filled lake encircled by small Orang Asli villages – is surrounded by pristine jungles filled with the same wildlife and flora that visitors flock to see at Taman Negara. Those looking for Malaysian culture and architectural treats should go to Kuala Lipis for its charming old gold rush-era Chinatown, or Pekan, the seat of the Pahang Sultanate, with its majestic royal palaces and mosque that contrast with the simple *kampung* (village) houses in the surrounding area.

HIGHLIGHTS

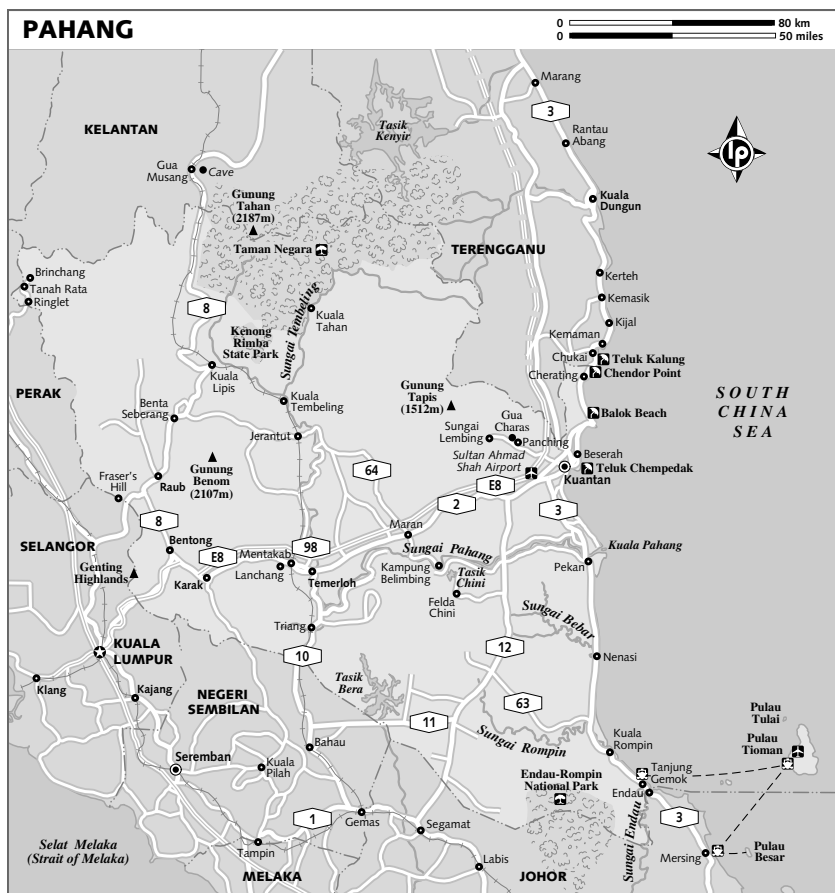
- Hopping from one perfect beach village to the next, diving and jungle trekking on **Pulau Tioman** (p274)
- Getting wet, muddy and covered in leeches, but loving every minute of it in deep, dark and undeniably adventurous **Taman Negara** (p294)
- Staying out half the night at a beach bar then curing the morning's hangover by surfing mellow waves in languorous **Cherating** (p289)
- Being stared at by curious **Pekan** (p283) locals, who find visitors as interesting as we find their regal architecture and quaint *kampung* houses
- Floating around the lakes with the lotus blossoms then trekking the buzzing untouched jungles around **Tasik Chini** (p288)
- Exploring the pint-sized Chinatown of **Kuala Lipis** (p302) before delving into the wild jungles of **Kenong Rimba State Park** (p303)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 09

■ POPULATION: 1.48 MILLION

■ AREA: 35,964 SQ KM



History

Pahang really emerged as a separate political entity when the Melaka sultanate launched an attack against the Siamese (who had held the region as a dependency since the 14th century) in the middle of the 15th century and installed Mohammad, the eldest son of the Melaka sultan, as ruler.

In the 16th century the state became a pawn in the four-way struggle for ascendancy between Johor, Aceh (in Indonesia), the Dutch and the Portuguese. In a period of 30 years it was sacked many times, with its rich, mineral-based economy ruined, its rulers killed or abducted and much of its population murdered or enslaved. After the decline of the Acehnese empire in the

mid-17th century, Pahang was ruled by Johor for 200 years.

From 1858 until 1863 Pahang suffered a civil war brought about by a leadership struggle between two brothers, Wan Ahmad and Mutahir. On the death of their father, the sultan, Wan Ahmad finally won, and in 1887 he became sultan. From then on his role was reduced to a largely symbolic position after the British forced him to sign a treaty bringing Pahang under the control of a British Resident.

In 1896 Pahang was one of the four states that became the Federated Malay States. These eventually formed the Federation of Malaya in February 1948 and finally the Federation of Malaysia, as it is today, in 1963. Kuantan replaced Kuala Lipis as state capital in 1957.

Climate

The temperature in Pahang ranges from 21°C to 32°C and average humidity exceeds 82%. There is rain throughout the year, but the wettest months are during the monsoon, from November to February.

National Parks

Taman Negara (p294), Peninsular Malaysia's greatest national park, overlaps with northern Pahang. Also in Pahang, the smaller 120-sq-km Kenong Rimba State Park (p303) can be accessed via Kuala Lipis.

Getting There & Away

There are airports at Kuantan and Pulau Tioman. The railway network in Pahang slices north-south through the centre of the state, but does not connect with the coast. Route 2 links the state capital Kuantan with Kuala Lumpur (KL). See the Getting There & Away sections in this chapter for details on air, bus and train transport to and from Pahang.

Getting Around

Transport in Pahang is largely by road and boat, as the rail network is limited. See individual destinations for details on bus and train transport within Pahang.

PULAU TIOMAN

09

Tioman Island has a near-Polynesian feel to it with its heavy-lidded hibiscus flowers, steep green peaks and turquoise, coral-rich waters. At 20km long and 11km wide the island is so spacious, and is home to so many secluded beaches, that your ideal holiday spot is surely here somewhere. But of course this is no secret: the island attracts around 190,000 visitors annually looking for their dream beach. Fortunately holidaymakers are absorbed subtly and the island retains a pristine feel within its plethora of authentic village smiles.

The permanent population on Tioman is small, with just a handful of small *kampung* dotted around the coast. These villagers have retained a wonderfully untainted vibe. Even after all the years of being descended on by hundreds of thousands of tourists, they still extend a warm welcome. The mountainous jungle of the interior is home to a spectacular array of flora and fauna (think

flying squirrels, monkeys and fruit bats), but no humans.

Tekek, the island's main hub, is where Tioman steps most wholeheartedly into the modern world. The island is a duty-free zone (cheap beer!) and unsightly duty-free shops selling mostly alcohol, chocolate and cigarettes clutter the town's streets. The airstrip is located here as well as 95% of the island's cars, the only bank and a marina that can hold 36 yachts. The rest of the island remains relatively off the technology radar and even finding a decent internet connection can be taxing.

And did we mention the diving? Many visitors come to Tioman just to dive and it's an economical place to get PADI certification. The underwater world around the island remains largely intact, offering some of the best easily accessible diving and snorkelling in Malaysia.

Bear in mind that everything stocked in shops on Tioman is shipped over from the mainland and tends to be expensive (except beer and tobacco), so stock up on essentials, such as mosquito repellent containing DEET (particularly for pesky sandflies), before you arrive.

ORIENTATION

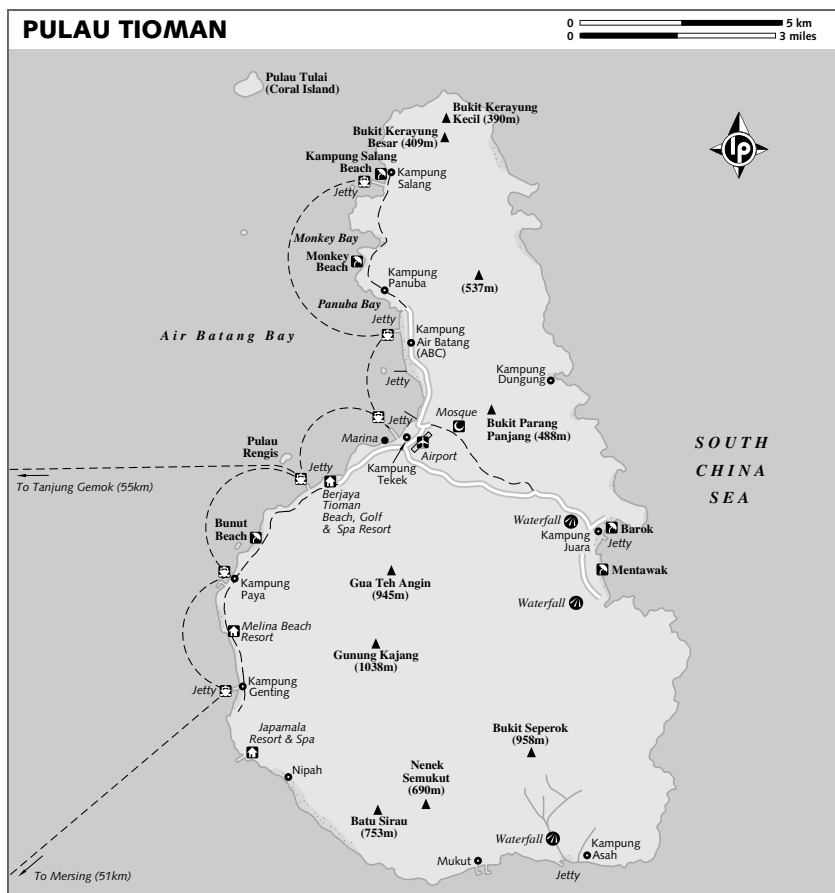
A short stretch of road runs along the western side of the island from Berjaya Tioman Beach, Golf & Spa Resort to the northern end of Tekek, where it is interrupted by steps before continuing as a path to the end of Air Batang (known as ABC). A 4WD road through the jungle links Tekek with the dozy east coast idyll of Juara.

Tekek is the island's largest village and its administrative centre. The airport is here, as well as well-stocked shops and some pleasant restaurants.

INFORMATION

It is advisable to get money in Mersing before coming to Tioman, although travellers cheques can be cashed at the Berjaya Tioman Beach, Golf & Spa Resort and there's a money-changer at the airport – but rates are poor. There's a small post office not far north of the Babura Seaview Resort in Tekek.

There are numerous public phones at Tekek, Air Batang (ABC) and Salang, but many are in disrepair. Only Telekom cards can be used for calls, on sale at shops around the island.



Bank Simpanan Nasional (Tekek; ☎ 6am-midnight) Has the island's only ATM, which takes Visa and MasterCard.
Poliklinik Komuniti Tekek (☎ 419 1880) For medical services.

Tioman Information Centre (☎ closed 1 Nov-28 Feb) Each beach has an information centre kiosk at the foot of its jetty, but these are rarely open. Even when open they only sell ferry and taxi boat tickets (at poor rates).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Diving & Snorkelling

Tioman is one of the most popular places for diving in Malaysia as it offers good visibility and a variety of marine life at easily accessible sites (about 20 around the island). It's also one of the few places in the country where you have a good chance of seeing pods of dolphins.

There is good snorkelling off the rocky points on the west coast of the island, particularly those just north of ABC, but the best snorkelling is around nearby Pulau Tulai, better known as Coral Island. Some wreck diving is available at the sites of the famous WWII HMS *Repulse* and HMS *Prince of Wales*. The sea, however, can be very rough during the high monsoon season (November and December).

There are so many dive centres on Tioman (with more opening all the time), it's impossible for us to list every operator. Snorkelling equipment for hire is easy to find (masks and snorkels are typically RM10 per day) at many places around the island. PADI courses are priced competitively (credit cards accepted

FRAGILE PARADISE

Tioman fascinates biologists because its relative isolation has generated flora and fauna that markedly deviate from mainland species. Most creatures are elusive, but you have a good chance of seeing monitor lizards, long-tailed macaques, giant black squirrels and sea eagles, and you may even spot some of the island's reclusive mouse deer.

The sea around Tioman is home to dolphins, occasional migrating whale sharks, shoals of exotic fish, and green and hawksbill turtles. A total of 233 species of fish and 183 species of coral flourish in the waters around Tioman.

Fortunately Tioman is a marine park, with strict rules protecting marine life. The island has, however, long been propelled down the road of commercialisation and the accompanying environmental degradation has been substantial. The huge new marina at Tekek has angered environmentalists who see it as an unnecessary luxury that threatens coral reefs and other marine life. It is also argued that the large visitor numbers can only further alter the personality of Tioman and overstretch its limited resources. However, the most noticeable impact on the island is that of global warming, which has affected the health of some of the corals.

at most) – expect to pay about RM1000 for a four-day PADI open-water course and RM100 for fun dives. It's easy to shop around. Note that some dive schools shut during the monsoon season. Some established centres: **B&J** (☎ 419 5555; www.divetioman.com) Has a diving pool in ABC.

DiveAsia (☎ 419 1654; www.diveasia.com.my) Tends to offer the lowest price open-water courses and fun dives; in Salang, Tekek and ABC.

Eco-Divers (☎ 419 1250; www.eco-divers.net)

Sunrise Dive Centre (☎ 419 3102; www.sunrisedivecentre.com) In Juara, it has easy access to the less-visited east coast sites.

Tioman Dive Centre (www.tioman-dive-centre.com) At Tekek, it has a stellar reputation.

For information and advice for safe and responsible diving, see p84. Other activities on Tioman include rock climbing; travellers can ask for more information at Sunrise Dive Centre.

Cross-Island Walk

By walking across the island from Tekek to Juara (around 7km), you can really get a feel for the richness of the spectacular interior. While not too strenuous, parts of the walk are steep, and hiking in tropical heat can be taxing. Carry plenty of water.

There are two ways to get across the island, via the paved 4WD track or on a jungle trail. The paved road begins just southwest of the airport and, though relatively shady, you won't see much besides trees and will have to watch out for vehicles. Much better for walking is the hiking trail that starts about 1km north of the main jetty in Tekek (or 200m south of the

second jetty) where a sign says 'Trek ke Kg. Juara 7km'. Follow the concrete path, passing the mosque on your left, and then around a weed-covered cyclone fence, veering to the right and onto a small footpath. Boulder steps continue intermittently for most of the way to the top. You'll cross streams, and go deep into an awesome jungle full of giant trees with buttressed root systems that nearly eat up the path, bright coloured butterflies and, less cheerfully, mosquitos and horse flies.

If you lose the trail, follow the power lines overhead. Near the top of the hill, you pass a small waterfall that's tapped for drinking water so you're not supposed to swim in it. Shortly after making it over the top of the hill, the trail merges with the concrete 4WD track that drops steeply into Juara. About 1km before Juara a small unmarked path on the right leads to another waterfall where you can take a dip. Just watch out for the terrapin – it bites!

You'll see more wildlife here than in most of Malaysia's national parks, including black giant squirrels, long-tailed macaques, brush-tailed porcupines and – if you're incredibly lucky and out at dawn or dusk (with a torch of course) – the endangered, nocturnal binturong (bear cat). Watch out for snakes: 25 species including the king cobra and reticulated pythons have been recorded on the island. The walk takes from 1½ to three hours. A car back from Juara will cost around RM90. If returning or setting out on foot, be wary of entering the jungle after around 4.30pm, as you can get lost in the dark. During the monsoon season, the path can be very slippery, so wear shoes with a good grip.

Other Walks

Much of the west coast is open to walking, but trails can be difficult to follow and are often very overgrown during the low season; again, take lots of water.

The easiest accessible jungle walk of reasonable distance (about 3.5km) is between ABC and Salang. This trail mostly runs inland from the coast (no sea views) and is not well marked so it's easy to get lost, but it does lead to some excellent empty beaches. Climb up to Bamboo Hill Chalets at the northern end of ABC bay for a 10-minute hike over the next headland to Panuba Bay. From there it's another 40 minutes through the rainforest to Monkey Beach, before the trail continues from the far end of the beach across the next headland to the white-sand beach at Monkey Bay. You could stop and turn back here, making it a good day walk, or continue on for the more brutal and long, steep climb over the headland to Salang. This trail should not be attempted during the monsoon season when it's miserably muddy and the trail becomes nearly impossible to follow. The whole route takes about three to four hours if you don't lose the trail.

It's an easy 30-minute walk south from Tekek to Berjaya Tioman Beach, Golf & Spa Resort, either by the road or by rock-hopping around the headland at low tide. From there you can walk through the golf course. Just before the telecommunications tower there is a trail to the deserted beach of Bunut. From the end of the beach, the occasionally faint trail continues over the headland to Paya, from where you can walk south to Genting – the trail is easy to follow and there are houses along the way where you can ask directions.

Heading north from Tekek, you can walk all the way to ABC, and boat transport to the beaches can be arranged at most of the guesthouses in ABC or Salang, if you don't want to walk back.

From Mukut in the south of the island (reached by boat from Genting), a popular trek leads to the waterfalls near Asah.

SLEEPING, EATING & DRINKING

Accommodation on Tioman is largely strung out on the easier-to-reach west coast, with most Western tourists flocking to Berjaya Tioman Beach, Golf & Spa Resort, Tekek, Salang and ABC. Paya and Genting have lots

of accommodation that is very popular with Singaporean weekenders, but they get little business during the week. All of the above are serviced by ferries from Mersing.

Trickier places to get to include Juara, a quiet beach community flung out on the east coast, while even more isolated bliss can be found at the luxurious Japamala Resort and Spa on the southwest coast. Budget options are strung out along the remote south and southwestern beaches.

The island is inundated with arrivals from June to August and during Chinese New Year, when accommodation becomes tight. For the rest of the year, it's a buyer's market and during the monsoon season (November to February) the island is almost deserted. You can generally find accommodation from January to February, although some places (especially the pricier options) shut up or undergo repairs for the entire monsoon season.

Budget accommodation largely comprises small wooden chalets and longhouse rooms (all in poor condition), typically with a bathroom, fan and a mosquito net. Air-con rooms with hot showers are more expensive. Most operations have larger family rooms for those with children, and many have restaurants.

Berjaya Tioman Beach, Golf & Spa Resort

This huge resort (☎ 419 1000; www.berjayaresorts.com; d RM330-710; 📶 🚶) has a vast number of rooms, ranging from chalets and blocks of fully furnished suites to entire villas, but retains enough charm to entice repeat visits. Most rooms are chalet-style with air-con, in-house movies and classically designed furnishings, but the facilities and activities are the standout attractions. These include a golf course, tennis courts, a dive centre, a football pitch, children's playground, donkey rides, amusement arcade, a delightful strip of beach (but the swimming dries up at low tide), two swimming pools (one with great water slides), four restaurants and a beach bar. Up to 50% discounts apply during slack months in the monsoon season (November to February). Look for deals in Mersing. This is the only big resort of this kind on the island.

Tekek

Tekek is Tioman's commercial and transport hub. While the central part of town, with its unsightly twin jetties, characterless marina

and shabby duty-free shops isn't scenic, the village is getting gussied up a bit with a large paved waterfront promenade bordered with coconut palms. The best part of Tekek, however, is the beach that runs wide and golden at the far south of town and is arguably one of the island's best.

All accommodation options lie close to each other on the excellent southern beach.

Babura Seaview Resort (☎ 419 1139; d incl breakfast RM60-100, chalets/sea-view d incl breakfast RM152/170; ♿) This very Chinese place offers ageing long-house fan rooms and a selection of newer, freshly painted rooms and chalets with air-con and hot-water bathrooms. Though right on a lovely stretch of beach, no effort has been made to take advantage of the sea view. The Tioman Reef Divers dive shop (www.tiomanreefdivers.com) is located here, as well as the recommended Babura Seaview Chinese Restaurant, which has fresh seafood (meals RM25) and chilled beer.

our pick Swiss Cottage Resort (☎ 419 1642; long-house d RM75-110, chalets RM78-140; ♿) The rooms to nab here are the seaview chalets (RM120) directly on the beach, which have breezy bamboo and wood interiors alongside colourfully painted walls and comfy deck furniture. Other options are nestled in a shady back garden, but all exude a beachy colonial style and are clean and great value. The on-site Tioman Dive Centre (www.tioman-dive-centre.com) has an excellent reputation.

Chinese Sarang Seafood (☎ 013-706 6484; meals RM20; ☺ lunch & dinner) Near Babura Seaview Resort, this spot does a particularly tasty sizzling hotplate bean curd (RM8) and serves beer.

Tioman Cabana (☺ cafe 9am-6pm, bar 8pm-2am) This hotchpotch beach bar at the north of the southern beach also acts as a cafe and tour operator offering bike rentals, internet and a slew of sports activities. Friendly Ray's Dive (☎ 019-330 8062) is right next door.

Ari's Café (☺ 9am-late) A reggae style bar tucked on the mountain side not far from the trailhead to ABC, this friendly place can prepare packed lunches (around RM6) for the trek over to Juara and has a chilled-out atmosphere.

Air Batang (ABC)

ABC is Tioman's main backpacker hang-out with a less flashy beach than at Salang, but with a more down-to-earth *kampung*

atmosphere. The beach here is usually best at the southern and northern ends, although the sands are constantly shifting so this is changeable. Most of the beachfront is rocky with little sand.

All the following chalets have attached cold-water bathrooms, fans and mosquito nets unless otherwise noted. Air-con is often available in pricier options.

Internet can be found at **Double Ace Shop** (per hr RM10; ☺ 9am-10.30pm) next to Nazri's II and at a few guesthouses.

Johan's Resort (☎ 419 1359; dm/chalets/f RM15/30/130) The two four-bed dorms here up the hillside are clean and good value, while the chalets are exactly the same as all the other cheapies on the beach. The advantage here is that some of the chalets face the sea and the good beachside restaurant is reliably open from about 8am to 10pm. It's north from the jetty right before Nazri's II.

My Friend's Place (☎ 419 1150; r RM25) Busy, social and priced a hair lower than the competition, this is a clean place with all rooms facing the garden. The restaurant is just as popular and serves good food. It's south of the jetty right before Mokhtar's Place.

South Pacific (☎ 419 1176; chalets RM30) Just north of the jetty, this simple, family-run and clean place offers laundry, shows films in the evening, and has a restaurant and a small library of secondhand books. The pricier chalets are by the sea and all come with a shower and mosquito net.

Mawar Beach Chalets (☎ 419 1153; chalets RM30) Just south of the jetty, the chalets here are the same as everywhere else, but run in a row facing the beach. The restaurant has tables on the sand.

Mokhtar's Place (d RM30-45, tr RM55; ♿ ♿) There's a very mellow family vibe going on at this quiet spot. Cheaper bungalows are set back from the beach under pleasant shady trees and all rooms are spacious and clean, though ageing. Internet is available (when it's working) for RM10 per hour.

our pick ABC Bungalows (☎ 419 1154; d chalets RM50-150; ♿) Swing on a hammock overlooking the sea and a lovely section of beach at the north end of ABC. With a couple of chalets almost on the beach, accommodation is spread over pleasant, well-tended grounds. Marked by a huge durian tree, a decent beachfront restaurant out the front rounds it off. The large, pricier air-con chalets come with hot

water, sea views, hot shower, freezer and tea- and coffee-making facilities.

ourpick Nazri's Place (☎ 419 1329; www.nazri'splace.com; d incl breakfast RM60-180, f incl breakfast RM250; ☼ ☼) At the far southern end of the beach, which has some of ABC's best sand, Nazri's has clean rooms and a wide range of accommodation, from budget rooms with air-con (cross a small river to the cheapies at the rear) to deluxe rooms and family rooms in the brick units. All options are a big step up in comfort from what's available elsewhere, with varnished wood floors and walls and tasteful furniture. The restaurant is right on the water and serves an excellent seafood barbecue at dinner time.

Bamboo Hill Chalets (☎ 419 1339; bamboosu@tm.net.my; chalets RM70-120; ☼) Perched on rocks overlooking the sea at the northern end of the beach, six well-kept chalets are in a stupendous location surrounded by bougainvillea and humming cicadas alongside a waterfall and pool. They are almost always full, so call ahead. There's no air-con, but the location benefits from cooling sea breezes. Visa and MasterCard are accepted and this place shuts from November to February.

Nazri's II (☎ 419 1375; d with fan/air-con RM80/140; ☼) Towards the north end of ABC, this place is set in a particularly well-tended garden that spreads up the hillside. The cheaper chalets are essentially the same as elsewhere (just with a higher price tag), but the higher-end options with air-con, hot water and spacious verandahs overlooking the sea are worth a look if you want more comfort. Its Hijau restaurant (below) is our favourite restaurant on Tioman.

Tioman House (☎ 019-704 5096; chalets RM150; ☼) Between Johan's and Nazri's II, the setting of this place (in a sparse garden right off the main path) is nothing special, but the chalets are the most comfortable in ABC. Walls are painted a happy yellow, and the huge units have air-con, hot-water bathrooms, tea-making facilities and a classic modern hotel decor.

Sunset Corner (pizzas from RM18; ☼ 2pm-late) Right near Nazri's on the plush southern part of the beach, this is the ideal place to split a pizza and sip a cold beer while watching the sunset. Fresh fruit juices are also available for RM5. Happy hour is from 5pm to 7pm.

ourpick Hijau Restaurant (meals RM10; ☼ breakfast & dinner) This place rocks the tastebuds, serving everything from Indian specialities

including an outrageous vegetarian *aloo ghoibi* (potato and cauliflower dish) for RM10 and tandoori prawns for RM26, Chinese dishes (try the excellent ginger fish for RM8) and authentic Western dishes including good breakfasts. It's set on a hillside terrace perfect for sunsets over a bottle of wine (from RM40).

Hallo Café (☼ 5pm till late) This small beachfront watering hole has music and a 5pm to 7pm happy hour (three beers RM10). It's north of the jetty in front of Nazri's II.

Kampung Panuba

Panuba Inn Resort (☎ 419 1424; www.panubainn.com; d incl breakfast RM50-140, f incl breakfast RM170; ☼ ☼) Over the headland from ABC, the peaceful Panuba Inn has a pier and restaurant and 30 chalets built on a hill overlooking the bay. Rooms all face the sea, ranging from simple fan affairs to chalets with hot shower, air-con and plenty of mod-cons. Bali Hai Divers operates from here.

Salang

The small bay at Salang is jam-packed with accommodation, restaurants, tourists of every creed and touts trying to sell taxi-boat tickets and tours. There's more of a party vibe here than elsewhere on the island, as well as plenty of internet cafes, minimarts and anything else a traveller might need. A very wide and inviting white-sand beach is just south of the jetty and is good for swimming, although there's a lot of boat traffic. For many, Salang's star attraction is the monstrous monitor lizards that lurk in the inky river than runs through the village centre.

Salang Indah Resort (☎ 419 5015; www.salangindah.com; d RM30, longhouse tw RM60, hillside/sea-view chalets RM80/90, q RM120; ☼ ☼) An expanse of chalets seemingly sprawls forever here, north of the jetty. Most rooms aren't in tip-top condition, but if you look at several you'll probably find one to your liking. The most interesting are the Popeye-like chalets on stilts over the sea (RM120), although the bathrooms in some of these are in such bad shape, they're almost unusable. The mosque-like restaurant acts as a hub of sorts and serves everything from cheeseburgers to cheap local-style seafood (dishes around RM8). There's also a bar, shop and internet access (RM10 per hour).

Ella's Place (☎ 419 5004; chalets RM40-100; ☼) There's usually a lounge-able patch of sand at this cute-as-a-button family-run place at

the quiet northern end of the beach. There are 10 clean chalets (some with air-con) and a small cafe.

Pak Long Island Chalet (☎ 419 5000; enquiry@paklongislandchalet.com.my; chalets with fan/air-con RM50/60; 🚰 📶) Pak Long has wooden chalets with peeling plastic flooring and OK verandahs, the more expensive of which face the sea. What sets this place apart is the family-run atmosphere that makes it feel like its own mini-village.

Salang Sayang (☎ 419 5020; www.salangsayangresort.com; chalets RM70, sea-view chalets RM80-250, q RM220; 🚰) Also called Zaid's Place, this place spreads along the luscious knuckle of beach south of the jetty before trickling up the hill (meaning a handful of the chalets have excellent bay views). The setting is the best on Salang, but unfortunately there were no staff around to show us the interior of the bungalows when we passed (and we passed several times).

Khalid's Place (☎ 419 5317; salangpusaka@yahoo.com; d chalets with fan RM80, with air-con RM90-110; 🚰) South of the jetty, behind the Salang Complex and across a festering section of Sungai Salang, this place has 47 cleanish chalets set in a large grassy area. Accommodation is set back from the beach; air-con chalets come with fridge and hot shower.

A few bars and cafes inject vitality into the community: **Four S Cafe** (Tiger/Guinness RM5/6; ☎ 6pm-1am) is north of the jetty, as is **Ng Café**, an odd shack that sells nothing but take-away cans of Tsing Tao beer (four for RM10).

Juara

A world of its own, Juara is the sole place to stay on the east coast of the island and hovers in a constant sleepy state of remote-hideaway bliss. There are two long stretches of wide white sandy beach here (separated by a small hill and boulder outcrop). The northern half of the beach (called Barok) is where most accommodation is found, while the southern strip (known as Mentawak) is near-deserted and kicks up some of the country's best surfing waves during the monsoon (see the boxed text, p291). While the Tekek-Juara road has technically made Juara easily accessible, the exorbitant prices for the half-hour 4WD trip (RM90 to RM120 per vehicle each way, depending on how hard you bargain) has kept the beach relatively secluded. The Mersing ferry might stop here if there are four or more people who want to visit, and a taxi boat to

ABC costs RM150. Another option is to walk from Tekek (see p276).

Turtles nest on both beaches and the area has been proclaimed a 'green zone' by the Sultan of Johor. This means it is protected from development, including the building of any big new resorts. All the places to stay in Juara hover right over magnificent beach and a few places hire out kayaks (RM15 per hour), surfboards (RM20 per hour) and fishing rods (RM15 per hour).

ourpick Beach Hut (☎ 012-696 1093; camp sites with tent for 2 RM15, dm/chalets RM20/40) This is a bona fide surf shack (on the southern bay) run by a surf pioneer Australian/Malay couple. Chalets have heaps of character via shell mobiles, strategically placed driftwood and even some Bollywood fabrics and fake flowers. Budget warriors can get a tent (which comes with sleeping bags) next to the beach – the site is sublime. After your surf lesson (RM60 per hour) chill out in the social, lounge-able Tube Café for sandwiches, a meal or a cold beer. Dorms were in the works when we passed, but weren't yet completed.

Paradise Point (☎ 419 3145; r incl breakfast RM35) North of the jetty and with a homey vibe, this place offers simple, unnoteworthy rooms in a longhouse and has a small restaurant on the beach.

Mizani's Place (☎ 419 3157; chalets RM40) On the southern section of beach, Mizani's is directly next door to Beach Hut and has simple, old but clean bungalows with fan, mosquito nets and attached bathrooms.

Mutiara Resort (☎ 419 3159; chalets RM40-100; 🚰) This is Juara's largest establishment, just south of the jetty, with lots of options that all have relatively high standards. Best are the bungalows right on the beach that are equipped with air-con, tiled hot-water bathrooms, good beds and fresh paint. The two brand-new beachside fan-cooled bungalows with hot water (for RM50) are the best bargain in Juara. Check out the bats hanging from the coconut trees along the beach here.

Bushman (☎ 419 3109; matbushman@hotmail.com; chalets RM50) Nabbing one of Bushman's three new varnished wood chalets with particularly inviting wicker furniture on their terraces is like winning the Juara lottery – reserve in advance! The location is right up against the boulder outcrop and a small river that marks the end of the northern beach. The little cafe is a wondrously languorous place to chill out.

Rainbow Chalets (☎ 419 3140; d RM50, tw RM60-70) Super-friendly and fittingly colourful, the seven beachfront chalets (all with shower) have an excellent reputation and thus are always full. It's right before Bushman at the southern end of the northern bay. Its Sunrise Café serves some of the best grub on the beach.

Juara Beach (☎ 013-771 1137; www.island.com.my; s/d/tr RM70/80/120; 🏠) All the rooms here have air-con, wood floors and hot-water bathrooms and face a grassy garden studded with coconut palms. It doesn't have much character, but service is friendly and there's a good restaurant on stilts over the beach.

Juara Lagoon (☎ 419 3153; www.turtlesanctuary.com; chalets & longhouse q RM100) At the very far end of the southern bay, the Juara enjoys sensational views of the entire sweep of the bay. The establishment runs its own turtle sanctuary and you can hang out with Jo, a three-year-old deaf and blind green turtle that the centre cares for. The fan-cooled chalets seem a little pricey for their simplicity, but the location and friendly welcome make up for this.

ourpick Riverview (☎ 419 3168; d RM150) Run by the same crew as Juara Lagoon, Riverview nabs another prime location at the north end of the northern bay. Relatively chic and vaguely Tudor-style A-frame huts have balconies directly over a lazy jungle river that winds its way to the sea. The large flat area of beach on the restaurant side has an inviting volleyball pitch and the rest of the grounds are covered in soft Japanese grass (go barefoot!).

Santai Bistro (meals around RM10; ☎ 9am-11pm) Smack next to the jetty, this bar/restaurant plays classic rock and serves up everything from sambal prawns (RM18) to mixed vegetable salads (RM6). The beers are cold and the views are hypnotising.

Just north of the jetty there's a modern looking building that houses a handful of local-style restaurants that serve some of the best value food on this beach, with everything from Western breakfasts to *roti canai* and seafood dinner barbecues.

Kampung Paya

Swarming with happy Singaporeans, the short, wide, white-sand beach here is jam-packed with two resorts and a few restaurants and food shacks. The rocky and shallow water makes this a poor choice for swimming.

Paya Resort (☎ in Mersing 07-799 1432; www.paya.beach.com; dm incl breakfast RM40, chalets incl breakfast RM200-480; 🏠 🚿) is the best place to stay at Paya, with most of the spacious modern chalets linked together by wooden bridges over a lily pond. There are also tidy, air-con four-bed dorm rooms (with attached shower), and a restaurant, full spa, dive centre, lounge and a range of activities.

Melina

ourpick Melina Beach Resort (☎ 419 7080; www.tioman-melinabeach.com; chalets for 4/5/6/8 people incl breakfast RM140/240/400/650; 🏠) is the only place to stay at this remote beach of photogenic boulders and white sand. Each sleeping option is unique and creatively designed from wood, thatch and plexiglass to create a certain Crusoe chic – the most interesting is a tree house that hovers right over the beach. The owners have set up a successful turtle hatchery and the laid-back atmosphere attracts lots of families. Meals are served at the resort or you can walk for 20 minutes to Genting and try the restaurants there. Plenty of activities are organised to keep folks entertained.

Genting

Genting is the most built-up beach and caters mostly to the weekend Singapore and KL crowd, but its surrounding local village gives it more authenticity than the others. During the week there are rarely more than a handful of tourists, but you might come across local people practising music for an upcoming ceremony, or you can chat with fishermen about their catch. The long, white beach would be lovely were it not for the unsightly cement breakwater decaying in the sand.

Sun Beach Resort (☎ 419 7069; www.sunbeachresort.com.my; tw RM50-90, tr RM70-100, f RM90-110; 🏠) The biggest place in Genting, it has plenty of beachfront chalets.

Golden Dish Café (dishes from RM6; ☎ 10am-midnight) This might be the only place on Tioman serving their own home-grown organic vegetables. There are also plenty of authentic Chinese seafood specialities and healing herbal drinks.

Japamala Resort & Spa

ourpick Japamala Resort & Spa (☎ 419 6001; www.japamalaresorts.com; tree-top chalets incl breakfast RM390-680, sea-cliff chalets incl breakfast RM480-890; 🏠 🚿) is the only Relais & Chateau hotel in Malaysia

(only 475 'outstanding properties with a truly unique character' around the world have this exclusive membership) and it's as decadent as that entails. The powdery beach is in small patches between rocky outcrops and everything from the over-the-water bar to the spa are draped in fabric, and look like they've come straight off the pages of the *Vogue* travel section. This is a whole lot of luxurious bang for your buck.

Nipah

A great choice for backpackers wanting to bliss out in isolation, Nipah Beach is a long strip of white with an unusual stripe of black sand running through it. A river mouth at the southern end creates an outrageous deep blue swimming hole that's bordered on one side with a large, flat knuckle of sand with a volleyball pitch. There are plenty of walking opportunities from here to small, empty beaches and a jungle waterfall.

You can stay at either **The Nipah Beach Tioman** (☎ 019-735 7853; chalets from RM70), which is run by young and friendly Abbas and offers some rustic chalets on the beach, or at **Bersatu Nipah Chalets** (☎ 07-797 0091; bersatunipah_tiomana@yahoo.com; r with fan/air-con RM60/90; ♿), which has clean beachfront longhouse rooms, great service and an excellent riverside restaurant.

Both places can arrange pick up from the ferry stop in Genting for RM20 each way.

Mukut

On the southern tip of Tioman, Mukut is another secluded and tranquil spot with a lovely beach.

Mukut Coral Resort (☎ 07-799 2535/2612; r/chalets RM25/88; ♿) Traditional village-style chalets (all with air-con and hot water, some with TV) are set in a marvellous location. The resort has a sea-view restaurant serving Chinese and Western food.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Berjaya Air (☎ 419 1303, in KL 03-7846 8228, in Singapore ☎ 02-6481 6302), with offices at Berjaya Tioman Beach, Golf & Spa Resort and at the airstrip, has one daily flight to/from KL (RM228) and Singapore (RM296) from the **airport** (☎ 419 1309) at Tekek.

Boat

Mersing in Johor is the main access port for Tioman. **Bluwater** (☎ 799 2535) runs the

regular ferries to the island and departure times vary with the tide – usually the first ferry leaves in the morning and the last mid-afternoon. Ferries (one way RM35, two to three hours) leave from the main jetty and stop at Genting, Paya, Berjaya Tioman, Tekek, ABC and Salang, in that order, picking up from those jetties in the reverse order on the return trip. Decide where you want to get off and tell the ticket inspector. Purchase tickets from one of the many tour operators around Mersing or at the jetty just before departure. For the return trip from Tioman, ask at the place you're staying for the next day's sailing times. There is a car park at the jetty in Mersing where you can leave your vehicle (RM7.50 per day). On weekends and holidays it's a good idea to buy your tickets in advance since the boats fill quickly.

Boat departures during the monsoon season (November to February) can be erratic (and dangerous), although sailings become more regular during the low monsoon months (January and February).

You can also charter a speedboat from the jetty at Mersing with **Seafrest** (07-799 8990; round trip RM1200).

Ferries also depart from Tioman from the **Tanjung Gemok ferry terminal** (☎ 413 1997; one way RM35), 35km north of Mersing near Endau (opposite). Departure times are 9am, noon and 4pm, returning from Tioman at 10am, noon and 4pm. This route is useful if coming from the north and is faster, taking only 1½ hours to the Berjaya Tioman Beach, Golf & Spa Resort, but call ahead and make sure the ferries are running before you arrive. Ferry services dry up between November and April.

GETTING AROUND

In 2009 there was no longer a sea bus, so the only way to beach hop is by sea taxi. Typical sea taxi fares from Telek are: Salang (RM30), ABC/Panuba (RM25), Paya Beach (RM30), Genting (RM30), Nipah (RM75) and Juara (RM105). Most chalets can arrange boat charter, but it is expensive (RM300 to RM400 per day).

If you have the time, you can explore some of the island on foot. Bicycles can be hired at guesthouses on all the main beaches (RM5 per hour).

A lift in a 4WD from Tekek to Juara or from Juara to Tekek costs around RM90 to RM120 (bargain hard) for up to four people.

THE COAST

ENDAU

☎ 09

There's little of interest in Endau, but fast boats speed to Pulau Tioman from nearby **Tanjung Gemok**, which functions as an alternative to Mersing in Johor for reaching Pulau Tioman (see opposite).

Hotel Seri Malaysia (☎ 413 2723; smrom@serimalaysia.com.my; d incl breakfast RM120; ♿ ♿), just across Sungai Endau in Tanjung Gemok, has clean air-con rooms with shower. Also near the jetty in Tanjung Gemok are numerous other small, cheap hotels and restaurants, and a couple of internet cafes – but honestly, it's a much better option to take the ferry to/from more interesting Mersing if you need to spend the night.

PEKAN

☎ 09

The seat of the Pahang Sultanate, Pekan has a regal air and is uncommonly scenic with its wide clean streets, spacious *padang* (city square) and many grand buildings surrounded by expansive pristine lawns. There is also a collection of old Chinese shophouses along a shady river (which is unfortunately filled with rubbish), friendly giggling locals unused to seeing tourists, and some great accommodation at the Chief's Rest House. Around the town centre are acres of traditional *kampung* houses surrounded by livestock and veggie gardens.

Information

There's internet access at **10 Net Cyber Café** (Jln Sultan Abu Bakar; per hr RM3; ☎ 10am-7pm). **CIMB Islamic Bank** (Jln Rompin Lama) has an ATM that accepts foreign cards.

Sights

The stately **Museum Sultan Abu Bakar** (Jln Sultan Ahmad; admission RM1; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5pm Fri) is housed in a wonderful building constructed by the British in 1929 for the local Resident. Exhibits are largely about the Pahang royal family, such as the sultan's car and his polo achievements, but there are also weapons, pottery (including Chinese porcelain and Arab ceramics unearthed on Pulau Tioman) and exhibits on wildlife in Pahang.

On the river island facing the museum is a display of traditional Malaysian watercraft

in **Galeri Pengangkutan Air** (☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun, 9am-12.15pm & 2.45-5pm Fri). Look out for the fabulously carved craft with the head of a mythical beast. Both museums were under renovation in 2009.

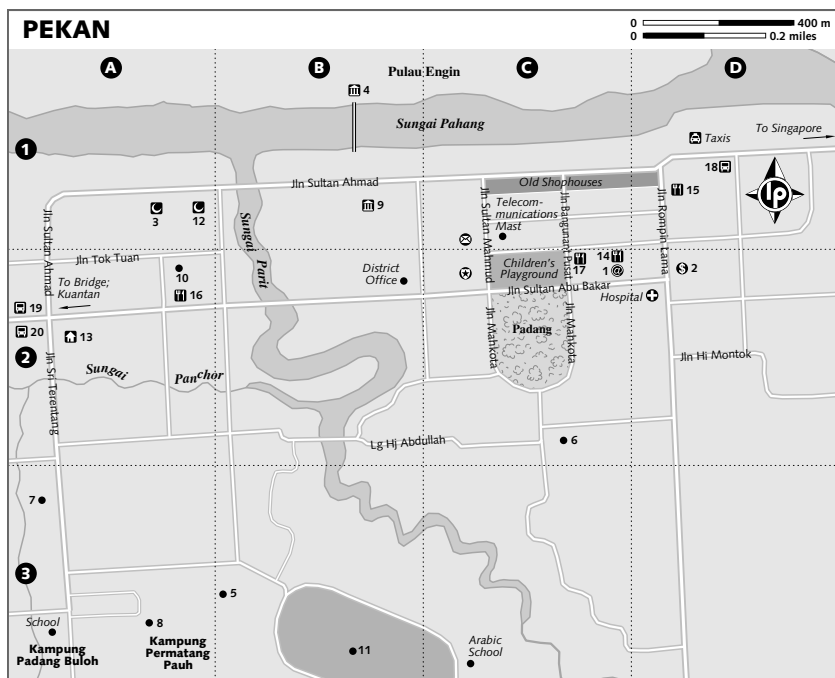
To the west of the Museum Sultan Abu Bakar along the river is the blue-domed **Sultan Abdullah Mosque** (Jln Sultan Ahmad), a large, slightly mouldering creation with blue domes dating back to 1932. Behind the mosque stands the old **Pekan Lama**, fashioned from wood and stone. The active **Abu Bakar Mosque** (Jln Sultan Ahmad) is further west, crowned with gold domes.

Walk to the end of the road (Jln Sultan Ahmad), turn the corner and head along the road away from the river, through the memorial archway fashioned like huge tusks, passing the Chief's Rest House (see p284) on your left. Keep walking past the blue-painted **Istana Mangga Tunggal** with its red-tile roof on your right, before continuing to the rural setting of **Kampung Permatang Pauh** and **Kampung Padang Buloh**, where splendid single *kampung* houses line the roads, and cows ruminant by the wayside.

The focus of the litter-free, palm-lined roads of the royal quarter of Pekan is the Regent of Pahang's palace, **Istana Permai**, and further on, the sultan's palace, the **Istana Abu Bakar**, set in vast grounds of cow grass and adjacent to the verdant polo field of the **Royal Pahang Polo Club**. It's worth completing a lazy circuit of the road around the field (Prince Charles reputedly played here) as it's a very well-tended area; sitting on a section of track within the grounds of the polo field is an old steam engine.

TIOMAN SCAMS

For literally years now, the less savoury of Mersing's entrepreneurs have been coming up with a variety of techniques for getting Tioman-bound tourists into their offices. Here they try to sell you ferry tickets (at the going price, no loss to the traveller there) and get you to reserve a Tioman hotel – sometimes at double the real price. Outside of holidays and high season, and particularly for budget chalets, it's best to shop around for a place to stay once you reach your beach. If you want to reserve accommodation in Tioman in advance, call or email the place yourself!



North of the polo field (back towards the river) are attractively coloured, traditional *kampung* houses on stilts. North of the main shopping district and the *padang*, the **Istana Leban Tunggal**, within Kampung Leban Tunggal, is a fine old red-tiled, two-storey building, in need of a lick of paint, with two buff-coloured domes.

Returning to the river, wander past the old shophouses, a row of old family shops, Chinese guildhalls, barbers and restaurants. **Sungai Pahang**, which can be crossed at this town via a lengthy bridge, is the longest river in Malaysia and was the last east-coast river to be bridged.

Sleeping & Eating

Staying a night in Pekan is a great way to shift into the low gear of small-town Malaysia. A few restaurants, food vendors and fruit stalls can be found in the grid of streets in-between the Padang and Sungai Pahang and along the riverfront Jln Sultan Ahmad. Also, a handful of *ikan bakar* and *tom yam* (spicy Thai-style) seafood restaurants open for dinner along Jln Sultan Abu Bakar.

Chief's Rest House (☎ 422 6941; Jln Istana Permai; d RM55-70; ♿) Exuding atmosphere and style, this wooden building (dating from 1929), with a wide verandah, is reason enough to stop in Pekan. All the rooms have wood floors, towering ceilings, TV and air-con. It's nearly 1km from the bus terminal, so let the driver know that you want to get off near the rest house. Alternatively, walk (shadeless and hot) or take a taxi (RM6) from the main bus station.

Umi Café (22 Jln Banguanang Pusat; meals RM5-10; ☎ 7.30am-9pm) Right across from the shady *padang* this is the most airy and pleasant place to eat in town. There's a Chinese-Malay buffet at lunch and delicious curry *pao* (RM1; steamed bun filled with meat) all day.

Getting There & Away

Regular local buses run to/from Kuantan (RM5.30, one hour), Kuala Rompin (RM6.50, two hours) and to Chini Village (RM5, 1½ hours). Long-distance buses run to Kuala Terengganu (RM22.10) and to KL (RM25).

The taxi station is at the bus station. A taxi to/from Kuantan costs RM40; to Tasik Chini it's RM60.

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KUANTAN

09

The second-biggest port in Malaysia and the capital of Pahang, most travellers only stop in busy Kuantan to break up long bus trips. Until recently there wasn't much to do besides get out of town and out to the nearby beach of Teluk Chempedak, but a few new activities, including a river cruise and walking tour, make stopping in this city for the day a bit more interesting.

Information

Lots of banks (many with 24-hour ATMs) are on or near the aptly named Jln Bank. You'll find wi-fi in most hotels, plus internet cafes at the Berjaya Megamall and East Coast Mall.

Hamid Bros Books (516 2119; 23-25 Jln Mahkota; 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun) A licensed mon-eychanger; also sells some English-language books.

Mega Tech (2nd fl, Lg Pasar Baru 3; per hr RM2;

9am-midnight) Next to the long-distance bus station.

Post office (Jln Haji Abdul Aziz) On the continuation of Jln Mahkota, near the soaring Masjid Negeri.

Tourist information centre (516 1007; Jln Mahkota; 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Thu, 8am-12.45pm & 2.45-5pm Fri) Has particularly helpful staff and a range of useful leaflets.

Sights & Activities

Kuantan's major attraction is the beach, Teluk Chempedak (see p287), outside town. The **Masjid Negeri** (State Mosque; Jln Mahkota) is the east

coast's most impressive mosque, which precedes regally over the *padang*. At night it's a magical sight with its spires and lit turrets.

Ninety-minute **river cruises** (adult/child RM15/8; 9am, 11am, 2pm & 4pm) run from the jetty to the Sungai Kuantan river mouth, then upriver again through mangroves at the edge of town. You can also take a 90-minute **guided heritage walk** (012-267 0098; ravee_tg@yahoo.com.au; per person RM40) that explores Kuantan's small collection of colonial architecture, as well as sites of local interest, with tour guide Ravendran.

If you happen to be in town on a Saturday afternoon and want to do something completely out of the ordinary, go check out the **horse races** (Indrah Makota Indo Stadium) where you can sit in the air-con and watch locals go into a betting frenzy.

Sleeping

Budget choices in Kuantan (except one) are grim, so do yourself a favour and splurge on something midrange or better.

Sungai Wang Utama Hotel (514 8273; 16 Jln Penjara; r RM15-35;) The vibe is a little sleazy but it's cleanish and cheap.

Hotel Makmur (514 1363; 1st & 2nd fl, B 14 & 16 Lg Pasar Baru 1; r RM30-70;) Totally boring and functional but clean, this is the only cheapy in town we feel absolutely OK about recommending. Reception is friendly and it's very near to the long-distance bus station.

Classic Hotel (516 4599; chotel@tm.net.my; 7 Jln Besar; d incl breakfast RM90;) An excellent choice, all rooms here (ask for a river view) are spacious and clean, with large bathrooms, free filtered water, tea-making facilities, TVs and air-con. Add the central location, ample Malay-style breakfast and considerate staff and there's no point staying anywhere else.

Seasons Boutique Hotel (516 3131; seasonsboutiquehotel@gmail.com; 2-8 Jln Besar; r from RM98;) Bright coloured walls and Zen-style furniture makes this the most chic choice in town, but rooms are small and many are window-less. There's a spa offering reflexology and a big restaurant serving Malay and Western food.

Mega View Hotel (517 1888; Lot 567, Jln Besar; r RM150-350;) This high-rise has a bit more atmosphere than the other hotels in town thanks to its direct riverfront position and lots of natural light in the lobby areas, the Alfresco Bar (see p287) and in the rooms. Opt for a standard executive to get

from the walls, jazz issues from the speakers, and the menu – pastas, cooling salads, sizzling steaks, noodles and desserts – is trendy. How weird that it's in Kuantan.

Alfresco Bar (Mega View Hotel, Lot 567, Jln Besar) At the rear of the Mega View Hotel (p285), this sits right next to the river, with a huge TV screen for live sports events. Coupled with ambient music, it's a very relaxing venue.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Malaysia Airlines (☎ 515 6030; Ground fl, Wisma Persatuan Bolasepak Pahang, Jln Gambut) has daily direct flights to KLIA with plenty of onward connections from there. **Firefly** (☎ 03-7845 4543) also has two daily flights to/from Subang Airport in KL and four weekly flights to Singapore. The airport is 15km away from the city – take a taxi (RM15).

BUS

Long-distance buses leave from the station on Jln Stadium. The ticket offices and information counter, as well as a food court, are on the 2nd floor of the building.

There are services to/from the following cities: Kuala Lumpur (RM22, four hours), Singapore (RM26, six hours), Jerantut (RM16, 3½ hours), Mersing (RM16.10, three hours), Kuala Lipis (RM24, six hours), Melaka (RM27, six hours), Seremban (RM22, five hours), Temerloh (RM10, two hours), Butterworth (RM48, eight to nine hours), Kuala Terengganu (RM15, four hours) and Kota Bharu (RM29, six hours).

Buses for Pekan (RM5.30), Balok (RM3), Beserah (RM3) and Cherating (bus 27; RM4) depart from the local bus station on Jln Besar.

CAR

Some car rental offices in Kuantan:

Hawk (☎ 538 5055; www.hawkrentacar.com.my; Sultan Ahmad Shah Airport, Kuantan)

Mayflower (☎ 538 4490; www.mayflowercarrental.com; Lot 1, Terminal Bldg, Sultan Ahmad Shah Airport, Kuantan)

TAXI

The long-distance taxi stand is in front of the long-distance bus station on Jln Stadium. Destinations and costs (per car): Pekan (RM50), Mersing (RM180), Johor

Bahru (RM350), Cherating (RM50), Kuala Terengganu (RM180), Jerantut (RM190) and KL (RM230).

AROUND KUANTAN Teluk Chempedak

A quality slice of white beach blankets this strip of coast, 6km east of Kuantan. Light waves crash on the shore while several **walking tracks** wind along the park jungle area on the rocky promontory from the northern end of the shoreline. From November to around February the beach break here becomes surfable, but there's not much in the way of surfboard rental – try the hut renting kayaks near the Hyatt Regency.

One half of the beach is occupied by a big seafood food court (as well as a beachfront McDonald's heartbreaker) while the other side is taken entirely over by the luxurious Hyatt Regency. A road leading back out to the main road is cluttered with trinket shops (many selling kites since there's often a good wind blowing through) and cheap hotels. In all, Teluk Chempedak is the ideal locale for having alfresco chats over sizzling seafood dinners after a day of frolicking in the surf or hiking the coast.

The **Hyatt Regency Kuantan** (☎ 566 1234; http://kuantan.regency.hyatt.com; rRM420; ♿ ♿) is a spacious, breezy and effortlessly luxurious place, with amenable staff, lovely views and a solid list of amenities (including two pools, two very good restaurants, three tennis courts, squash courts, a spa, a children's play area and a water sports centre). Rooms are sumptuous and a whole bevy of activities is on offer, including walks along the cliffs to Methodist Bay.

About 200m from the beach just beyond the McDonald's, the **Pine Beach Hotel** (☎ 940 4458; s/d/f RM50/60/120; ♿) is unremarkable but clean; its newish rooms all have air-con, TVs and hot-water showers. Ground floor rooms are windowless. Prices rise by around RM10 at weekends.

Traipse the sand and dive into one of the beachfront restaurants and food stalls for a bite to eat, but note that the fiercest drinks served at some places are mocktails (as ever in Malaysia, aim for Chinese-owned restaurants, or the Hyatt Regency if you want beer).

At the time of research there was no public bus service between Kuantan and Teluk Chempedak. A taxi between the two towns costs RM12.

Beserah & Balok Beach

Beserah is a long stretch of *kampung* sandwiched between the beach and the road, the best part being Balok Beach 15km north of Kuantan. The beach at Balok is long and pleasant, and beachfront accommodation – largely resort-style – is easy to find, as the length of the beach is littered with a variety of lodging options. The **Natural Batik Factory** (☎ 551 0113; www.batikfactory.com; Lot 4898, Jln Kemaman, Lg Chengal Lempong, Balok; ☎ 10am–7pm) offers batik-making lessons for children and adults, and has a wide selection of batik products. The **Swiss Garden Resort & Spa** (☎ 544 7333; www.swissgardenkuantan.com; 2656–2657 Mukim Sungai Karang, Balok Beach, Beserah; d RM276–351, f RM500; ♿ ♻️ 🚰 📶) is the top pick, boasting a huge pool and a superb restaurant (the Garden Terrace) that serves up fantastic pizza.

Regular buses run from Beserah into Kuantan (RM2).

Gua Charas

Twenty-six kilometres north of Kuantan at Panching, the limestone karst containing **Gua Charas** (Charas Caves/Charah Caves; RM1) towers high above the surrounding palm plantations. The caves owe their fame to a Thai Buddhist monk who came to meditate here about 50 years ago.

It's a steep climb up a stairway to the caves' entrance – be careful. The colossal **Sleeping Buddha Cave** (Wofu Dong) is decorated with small altars to Guanyin, Puxian, other Bodhisattvas and Buddhist idols leading to the sleeping Buddha, a rather modest cement effort at the rear of the cavern.

Take the Sungai Lembing–bound bus 48 (RM2.50, one hour) from the local bus station in Kuantan and get off at the small village of **Panching**, just past the sign reading 'Gua Charas 4km'. From the bus stop in town it's a hot 4km walk each way, but you may be able to get someone in Panching to give you a lift on the back of a motorcycle for around RM2. A taxi from Kuantan to the caves costs RM40. You can also see the caves on tours run from Cherating (opposite).

TASIK CHINI

☎ 09

So hard to get to and yet so worth it, Tasik Chini (Lake Chini) is a series of 12 lakes linked by vegetation-clogged channels. Its

shores are inhabited by the Jakun people, an Orang Asli tribe of Melayu Asli origin. The surrounding waves of jungle hills are some of the least-visited trekking areas in the country and still hide tigers and elephants, as well as glorious waterfalls and caves. Locals believe the lake is home to a serpent known as Naga Seri Gumum, sometimes translated in tourist literature as a 'Loch Ness Monster'. The best time to visit the lakes is from June to September when the lotuses are in bloom.

Sleeping

Tasik Chini Resort (☎ 477 8000; tasikchini@hotmail.com; camp site RM3, dm/d RM15/80) Under renovation in 2009, this place on the southern shore has little cottages strewn across a grassy slope right at the lake's edge. There's a restaurant, and you can arrange boat trips, canoeing, night treks, fishing, an overnight climb up Gunung Chini and other activities.

Rajan Jones Guest House (☎ 017-913 5089; r per person incl breakfast & dinner RM25) Nestled in flower-filled Kampung Gumum, the rustic but clean longhouse rooms (with fan, mosquito nets and shared bathrooms) are the base camp for host Rajan's excellent jungle and lake adventures. Breakfast, afternoon tea and dinner are served on the lakeside and you can also get lunch for an extra RM5. Rajan speaks perfect English, is close with the Orang Asli, has been leading treks for over 20 years, knows all about local flora and fauna, and can arrange a spectrum of activities from jungle trekking (five-hour trips, RM50 per person), night hikes (RM35), longer treks (RM80 per day) waterfall trips (RM80) and lake trips (RM50 to RM100).

Getting There & Away

Buses run to Kampung Chini four times per day from Kuantan's local bus station (RM5, two hours) and twice a day from Pekan (RM4, 1½ hours). To get to Kampung Gumum ask to be let off at the Chini 2 bus stop. From here you'll have to ask around for a private car to take you the remaining 7.5km – this should cost about RM20. You can also call Rajan Jones and ask him to help arrange a private car. A taxi all the way to Kampung Gumum from Pekan/Kuantan should cost RM70/80. Lake Chini Resort arranges transport for its guests – call them for details.

CHERATING

☎ 09

There is something special about Cherating, but not everyone who visits here gets it – or wants to. Though beautiful, the sweeping white beach bordered by coconut palms doesn't compare to those on the islands and the village itself is just a half-dead strip of guesthouses and shops with more monkeys, monitor lizards and cats walking around than humans. And yet many travellers end up extending their stays here for days, months or even years. There is a lot to do (surfing, horse riding, tours etc) but it's the people that draw the travellers in. This unusual resident band of hipster Malay surfers, musicians, artists

and *kampung* folk who shun big city life genuinely want to hang out with you over a beer and share in the holiday spirit. With all these new friends, it's hard to hit the lonely road again.

Information

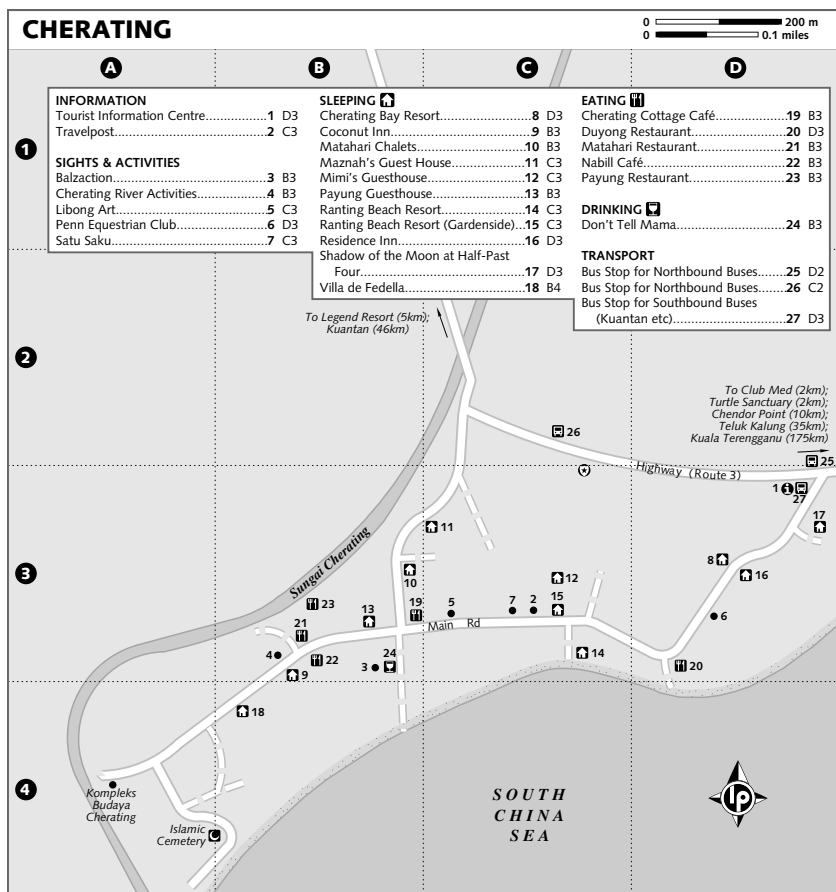
There are no banks in Cherating, but Travelpost will exchange cash and traveller's checks at poor rates.

Tourist Information Centre (cnr Hwy 3 & Main Rd)

A flashy new building with plenty of hand-outs, but it's understaffed and rarely open.

Travelpost (☎ 581 9796; ☎ 9am-11pm) Can organise bus tickets to just about anywhere (takes a commission).

There's also a book exchange, bike hire (per hour RM3), internet access (per hour RM4) and tourist information.



Sights & Activities

Cherating is just as great for lazing around on the beach and hanging out with the friendly locals as it is for its many activities.

WATER SPORTS

Some of Malaysia's best surfing waves pound the beach at Cherating and other surf spots to the north. Several places in town rent out surfboards for around RM20 per hour and you can get surf lessons at **Satu Saku** (Main Rd; ☎ November-March). Right on the beach, **Balzaction** (☎ 9.30am-11pm) rents out windsurfing and kite-surfing equipment from around RM50 per hour and offers classes.

The Cherating beach isn't great for snorkelling but places all around town offer half-day **snorkelling tours** (RM50) to the aptly named Coral Island. There are also **fishing tours** (prices on demand) and you can rent **kayaks** (sea or river, per hr RM20) to cruise around on your own.

WILDLIFE VIEWING

Night-time firefly boat tours along the mangroves upriver are a Cherating activity *par excellence*. The best tours are led by Hafiz, a long-time firefly enthusiast and self-made expert at **Cherating River Activities** (☎ 013-939 9256; Main Rd; tours per person RM20). Several places around town run river mangrove tours (to see monkeys and snakes), turtle-watching (April to September), walks and other activities. Enquire at one of the places listed under Information or ask at the Payung Guesthouse (right).

The **turtle sanctuary** (entry by donation; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) next to Club Med (opposite) has a few basins with baby and rehabilitating sea turtles, and can offer information about the laying and hatching periods.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Batik-making is another Cherating speciality. Matahari Chalets (right) and **Limbong Art** (Main Rd) both offer courses (from RM25) where you can make your own batik handkerchief or sarong.

If all this isn't enough to do, Travelpost (p289) and several other places around town arrange a plethora of tours from day trips to Tasik Chini (RM178), to visits to the Thursday Kemaman night market (RM50). You can also take riding lessons, either in the paddock or trotting along the beach, at

the well-kept **Penn Equestrian Club** (☎ 292 9265; Main St; per hr RM100).

Sleeping BUDGET

Budget digs tend to fill up during the monsoon surf season from November through January, so book in advance.

Shadow of the Moon at Half-Past Four (☎ 016-794 0144; dm/d/tr RM20/35/55) OK, this place is getting pretty rundown and is not for everyone, but it exudes so much shadowy jungle character that we have to keep it in the book. If you don't stay in the ageing bungalows or dark dorms, at least stop by for a stiff drink or a meal of wild boar while listening to tales of the owner's hunting adventures and the squawks of wild nocturnal monkeys outside.

Maznah's Guest House (☎ 581 9072; chalets incl breakfast RM20-35) Spirited kids happily chase chickens around the collection of sturdy wooden bungalows here. The owners speak little English and *nasi lemak* is served for breakfast making this a great, friendly place to go local.

Matahari Chalets (☎ 581 9835; small/large chalets RM25/35) Chalets have shared showers but are clean and equipped with a fridge, windows, mosquito nets and spacious verandahs. The atmosphere is relaxed with a TV common room and a kitchen for guests. Batik courses are also held (T-shirt/sarong RM30/40).

Payung Guesthouse (☎ 581 9658; s/d chalets RM30/35, f with kitchen RM50) This excellent, friendly and helpful choice is run by an Edinburgh woman. It backs onto the river, with neat rows of ordinary chalets in the garden. The attached tour office offers everything from bike and surfboard rentals to mangrove or snorkelling tours.

Coconut Inn (☎ 581 9299; chalets RM30-80) Backed by a dark jungle river, this place has an eclectic ensemble of wooden chalets (priced by size) in a garden of tall trees and hanging potted plants. The RM50 chalets with a terrace on the river and their own sitting areas are wonderfully rustic-chic and the other options are nearly as interesting.

Mimi's Guest House (☎ 012-939 7309; chalets RM40-60; ☎) A surfer favourite with some long-term residents clinging onto a bungalow or two, Mimi's has a charming selection of small wood bungalows, all with TVs and fridges. Ani and her husband – who runs the Don't Tell Mama bar (p292) really make the place feel like home.

SURFING INSIDER: ARIL ZAINAL

Who'd have thought there was surf in Malaysia? But fun waves break along the East Coast during the monsoon months (from around October to April).

Why Cherating? Cherating is a surf hub with accommodation, food, transportation and lots of board rentals. The Cherating point left-hander starts breaking with a 1ft swell, can hold up to 5ft and has a sand bottom good for beginners. Sometimes during low tide it can get really hollow. There are lots of breaks near Cherating, like Chendor point on the Terengganu-Pahang border that was a secret point for us, but now lots of people know it. It can hold up to a solid 5ft swell and is really hollow. It's about 10-minute drive from Cherating and you have to drive a bit off road – a bit tricky. Teluk Kalung is about a 30-minute drive from Cherating. Lots of people surf this beach break, especially beginners.

Beyond Cherating? Juara on Tioman Island in Pahang (p274) has lots of breaks, but for some you need a boat. Mentawak Point, at a small river mouth, starts to break at 2ft to 3ft and can hold to 6ft and even more. It's a right-hander with a rock bottom and some reef. There's also a beach break in Mentawak in front of the Beach Hut (p280) and on the Barok side of the jetty.

The scene? The scene is small but growing every year. It's good for the local businesses, restaurants and guesthouses, especially during monsoon season. Many people come to Cherating to learn to surf and the Pahang Tourism Action Council organises some surf event every December. Last year [2008] was the Billabong Pro Am competition, which was open to anyone that wanted to join in.

To see some of Aril's Malaysia surfing photographs go to www.cheratingpoint.com.

Aril Zainal is a dedicated Malay surfer and surf photographer who follows the swells up and down the coast each year.

MIDRANGE

Midrange choices tend to fill with Malaysian holidaymakers on weekends and holidays, so book in advance during these times.

Ranting Beach Resort (☎ 581 9068; beachfront chalets RM100-150, garden chalets RM50-80; 🏠) The best chalets here are the wooden fan-cooled ones right on the busiest strip of the beach. Concrete air-con beachfront bungalows are also good, though a little musty, while the cheapest garden-side bungalows across the road from the beach were looking worn but were expecting a remodel. Service is near non-existent but the place is kept clean.

ourpick Villa de Fedella (Tanjung Inn; ☎ 581 9081; d/f chalets with air-con RM120/150, d/tr chalets with fan RM55-70; 🏠 📺) The grounds here are stunning. Chalets are clustered around a lotus-filled pond and a grassy lawn that's studded with coconut palms and stretches to the beach. Fan-cooled chalets are in good shape and have terraces overlooking the pond, but it's the massive, colonial feeling air-con chalets with good beds and hot showers that steal the show. It's run by a lovely local family.

Cherating Bay Resort (☎ 581 9988; d/f apt from RM140/260; 🏠 📺) Resembling a southern Californian apartment complex, the tidy

apartments here are arranged over two floors, and are all equipped with teapots, sinks, TVs and living areas. The top floor lets in more light. Among other facilities, there's a children's playground, pool with waterslide and restaurant.

TOP END

Residence Inn (☎ 581 9333; www.ric.com.my; r/chalet incl breakfast RM248/268; 🏠 📺 📺) Surrounding a good swimming pool, the newly remodelled, crisp and modern rooms are the most comfortable choice in town. Skip the chalets, which are old and dark. Service is great, there's a big restaurant and promotional rates from RM180 are often available.

Legend Resort (☎ 581 9818; www.legendsgroup.com; Lot 1290, Mukim Sungai Karang; d/ste incl breakfast RM450/800; 🏠 📺 📺) Outside Cherating, this luxury resort on the road to Kuantan has huge outdoor pools by the beach, spacious rooms, two restaurants, a lovely section of beach, squash and tennis courts, a convenience store, a bar with a snooker table and tempting discounts.

ourpick Club Med (☎ 581 9133; www.clubmed.com; .sg; all-incl package per night per person from RM550; 🏠 📺) Crafted to look like a particularly beautiful Malaysian *kampung* with wooden buildings on stilts, the resort comes fully equipped with

its own stretch of beach, immaculate sprawling lawns, international restaurants, nightclub, kiddies club, nearby turtle sanctuary and sports facilities. Prices are all-inclusive; contact the hotel for standard package deals.

Eating & Drinking

Nabill Café (meals around RM6; ☺ dinner) Eat where the locals do and save a handful of ringgit. Choose your fresh seafood then watch it get grilled in a delicious spicy sambal.

Payung Restaurant (meals RM15; ☺ lunch & dinner) Raised on stilts at the western end of the beach, this offers unbroken views around the bay. There's a large selection of seafood, steaks, poultry and vegetables, but it's the setting that is superlative. Try the *tom yam* (hot and spicy seafood soup, RM8).

Payung Restaurant (meals from RM17; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Off the main road against the quiet riverside, this semi-outdoor hang-out serves thin-crust pizzas and a selection of pastas (all from RM17). There's often groovy music playing and a friendly extended family to hang out with.

Most guesthouses run their own restaurants, the best being **Matahari Restaurant** (seafood barbecue from RM10; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) at the west end of town. The **Cherating Cottage Café** (breakfasts around RM5; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is the first to open in the mornings (around 8am) and serves good breakfasts.

Right on the beach, **Don't Tell Mama** (☺ till late) is the hippest bar in town and is a great place to stop by day or night to make friends over a cold beer. Impromptu barbecues and parties are the norm.

Getting There & Away

From Kuantan's local bus station catch a bus marked 'Kemaman' and ask to be dropped at Cherating (look for a sign by the road that reads 'Pantai Cherating'). Buses leave every 30 minutes (RM4.50, one hour, 6.45am to 8pm). When coming from the north, any bus heading for Kuantan will drop you on the main road. A taxi from Kuantan should cost about RM70.

From Cherating to Kuantan, wave down a Kuantan-bound bus from the bus stop on the highway (Route 3). For taxis from Cherating call the **Cherating Taxi Service** (☎ 581 9355).

Travelpost (☎ 581 9796; ☺ 9am-11pm) can arrange long-distance bus tickets (convenient

for those heading north to places like Kuala Terengganu or Kota Bharu), but takes a commission. Your only other option is to try to flag down northbound buses from the bus stop on the highway and hope there's an empty seat.

CENTRAL PAHANG

JERANTUT

☎ 09

Jerantut is the small, slightly dreary gateway to Taman Negara. There are no attractions in this town, but it's easy to manage and most visitors to the park spend at least one night here. Chinese liquor stores line up along Jln Diwangsa hoping you'll want to stock up on booze before heading to dry Kuala Tahan.

Information

Several banks in town can change cash and travellers cheques (change money before heading into Taman Negara). The ATMs do dry up sometimes so it's best to get money before reaching Jerantut.

AM Finance Bank (Jln Diwangsa; ☺ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri & 9.30am-noon Sat) Has an ATM that accepts most foreign cards, including Visa.

Bumi Putra Commerce (Jln Tahan; ☺ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri & 9.30am-noon Sat) The ATM accepts MasterCard and Cirrus.

Internet (1st fl, 11 Jln Tahan; per hr RM3; ☺ 9am-5pm)

Internet Café (NKS Hostel; per hr RM5; ☺ 24hr)

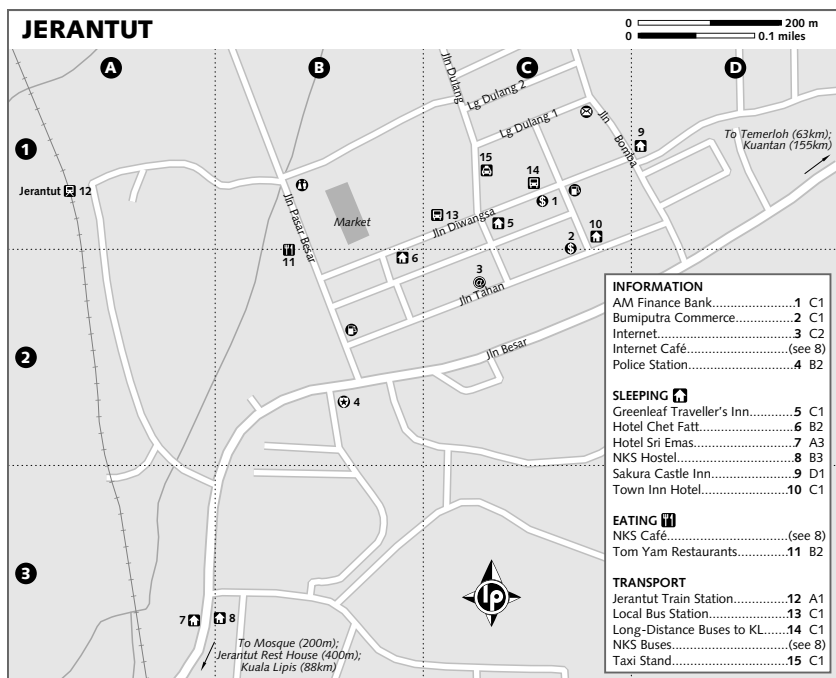
Police (☎ 266 2222; Jln Besar)

Sleeping

Most places offer luggage storage, are open 24 hours and can arrange transport to Taman Negara. Hotels can get very busy around July and August.

Hotel Sri Emas (☎ 266 4499; tamannegara@hotmail.com; 46 Jln Besar; dm/tr/f RM8/21/64, d without shower RM15-35, d with shower RM38; ☺ ☑) Many people get herded here by the handy NKS minivan that picks up at the bus and train station, and it's not a bad place to end up. Fan doubles with shared hot-water bathrooms have saggy mattresses, but are clean and excellent value (RM15!). Pricier rooms are bigger and have attached bathrooms and air-con. There's an internet terminal downstairs.

Hotel Chet Fatt (☎ 266 5805; 177 Jln Diwangsa; dm/d with shared bathroom RM10/20; ☑) Stumble across the street from the bus station if you arrive late



at night to this place with window-lit rooms, internet terminals and free filtered water.

Greenleaf Traveller's Inn (☎ 267 2131; 3 Jln Diwangsa; dm RM10, d RM20-30; 📶) Run by a sweet lady and her family, this is a quiet choice with simple, clean rooms and dorms.

Town Inn Hotel (☎ 266 6811; www.towninnhotel.com; Lot 3748, Jln Tahan; d/tr/q RM48/65/85; 📶 📺 📶) Bright clean rooms here are a big step-up from the backpacker oriented places. Service is friendly.

NKS Hostel (21-22 Jln Besar; d with/without shower incl breakfast RM50/35) Another arm of Sri Emas (and just across the street) NKS is ever so slightly more upmarket with clean, tiled rooms, although not all RM35 doubles (with TV) have outside-facing windows. NKS buses to Kuala Tahan and Kuala Tembling (for the boat) stop right outside the NKS Café and there's a large internet café on the ground floor so you can down your breakfast and check your email right before heading into the wilds of the national park.

Sakura Castle Inn (☎ 266 5200; sakuracastleinn@yahoo.com; 51-52 Jln Bomba; d RM55-85, f RM95; 📶) This is the classiest place in town (for Jerantut

remember) and has clean, comfortable rooms all with TVs (Astro), hot water and air-con.

Eating

An excellent food court specialising in *tom yam* is on Jln Pasar Besar, while cheap *kedai kopi* (coffee shops) serving Chinese food and Malay favourites can be found scattered around town.

NKS Café (NKS Hostel; 21-22 Jln Besar; meals RM10; ☎ 7.30am-9pm, closes 6pm low season) Serves mediocre Western breakfasts, Malay staples, *dou fu* (tofu) meals, sandwiches and beer.

Getting There & Away BUS

Long-distance buses leave from the ticket offices near the taxi stand; local buses depart from the station not far away on the same street.

Four buses depart daily to/from KL's Pekeliling bus station (RM17, three hours, last bus to/from Jerantut 5pm/4pm) via Temerloh. If you miss the bus to KL, buses go every hour to Temerloh (RM5, one hour, last bus 6.30pm), from where there are more connections to KL and other destinations. Three daily buses run

to/from Kuantan (RM16.10, 3½ hours). One bus runs daily to Johor Bahru (RM38).

Buses coming through from KL continue to Kuala Lipis; otherwise, take a bus to Benta Seberang (RM6, hourly from 7am to 6pm) and then another to Kuala Lipis.

NKS arranges minibuses and buses to a variety of destinations, including Tembeling jetty (RM5), KL (RM40), Perhentian Island jetty (RM65), Kota Bharu (RM65) and the Cameron Highlands (RM65). They leave from the NKS Café.

To/From Taman Negara

Most visitors prefer to take the wonderfully scenic river trip to the national park from Kuala Tembeling, but the public bus (RM7) all the way to Kampung Kuala Tahan at Taman Negara is a much cheaper way to get there. Buses depart from the bus station at 5.30am, 8am, 1.30pm and 5pm. In the return direction, buses leave Kampung Kuala Tahan for Jerantut at 7.30am, 10am, 3.30pm and 7pm. NKS minibuses from the NKS Hostel also make the trip to Kuala Tahan (RM25) at 8.30am and 1pm; returning 8am and 7.30pm.

Public buses go to the jetty at Kuala Tembeling (RM2, 45 minutes), for the boat to Taman Negara every hour from 7.45am to 5pm, but schedules are unreliable and don't coincide with boat departures. It's better to pay a bit more and take the NKS bus (RM5, 8.30am and 1.30pm; returning at 11.30am and 4.30pm) from in front of the NKS Hostel. These are linked to the boat services. Returning to Jerantut from the jetty, buses come by at around 12.30pm and 4pm, but again, don't count on it. For information on the boats to/from Kuala Tembeling and Taman Negara see p301.

Alternatively you can take a taxi (see below) from Jerantut to Kuala Tembeling/Kampung Kuala Tahan, drive or hitchhike (though never entirely safe) to the park.

TAXI

Taxi fares are as follows: Kuala Tembeling (RM20), Kampung Kuala Tahan (RM65), Temerloh (RM50), Cherating (RM240), Kuala Lipis (RM65), KL (RM200) and Kuantan (RM180). A surcharge of RM30 is enforced after 3pm.

TRAIN

Jerantut train station (☎ 266 2219) is on the Tumpat–Gemas railway line (also known as

the jungle railway). All northbound trains go via Kuala Lipis and Gua Musang.

Two express trains run daily to Singapore (2am, 12.30pm), via Johor Bahru. For KL Sentral, take the 12.30am express; there are four trains for Kuala Lipis.

For an up-to-date timetable and list of fares, consult **KTM** (www.ktmb.com.my).

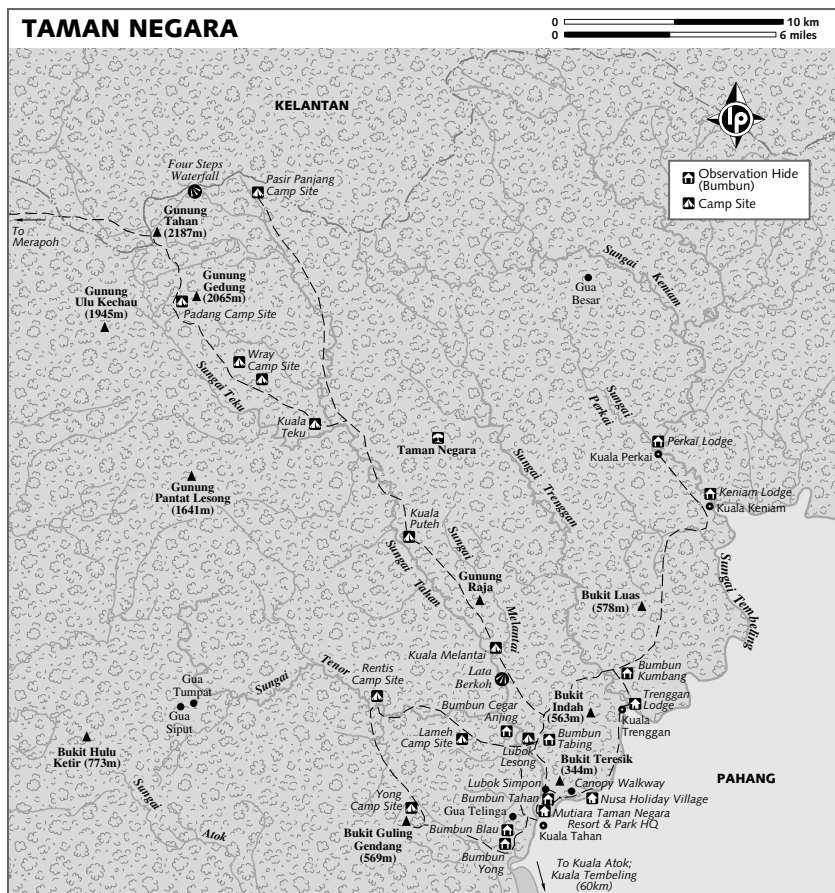
TAMAN NEGARA

The 'green lungs' of the Malay Peninsula, Taman Negara blankets 4343 sq km (from Pahang to Kelantan and Terengganu) in shadowy, damp, impenetrable jungle. Inside this buzzing tangle, ancient trees with gargantuan buttressed root systems dwarf luminous fungi, orchids, two-tone ferns and even the giant rafflesia (the world's largest flower). Hidden within the flora are Asian elephants, tigers, leopards and rhinos, as well as smaller wonders such as flying squirrels, but these animals stay far from the park's trails and sightings are extremely rare. Even if the animals do come close, the chances are you'll never see them through the dense jungle thicket. What you might see are snakes (dog-toothed cat snakes, reticulated pythons, temple pit vipers and red-headed kraits), lizards, monkeys, small deer and perhaps tapir. Nearly everyone who visits Taman Negara gets an up-close and personal meeting with leeches and an impressive array of flying and crawling insects.

The time scale is as dauntingly massive as the jungle itself (it's 130 million years old), which is claimed to be the oldest in the world. None of the Ice Ages had any effect here, and Taman Negara has eluded volcanic activity and other geological upheavals. The Batek people, one of Malaysia's aboriginal groups (also called Orang Asli), are relative newcomers compared with much of the forest's life. Between 200 and 400 Batek make their home in the park, where they live off hunting and gathering, moving around often to different encampments.

The more you put into a visit to Taman Negara, the more you'll get out of it. Fleeting visits are naturally feasible, but invariably only scratch the surface. Consider an overnight trek or at least a long boat-trip up one of the park's rivers (p298).

The best time to visit the park is during the dry season from February to September. Rainfall is not constant during the rainy



season, but when it rains it pours, and trails rapidly transform into treacherous, muddy bogs. The peak tourist season is from April to August.

Orientation

The park headquarters and the privately run Mutiara Taman Negara resort are at Kuala Tahan at the edge of Taman Negara National Park, while all the other accommodation and restaurants are across Sungai Tembing at Kampung Kuala Tahan. River taxis buzz between the two sides of the river (RM1 each way) throughout the day.

Information

Daily **video shows** (🕒 7pm) on Taman Negara are shown in the exhibition hall at the

Mutiara Taman Negara resort/park headquarters and at the NKS Restaurant in Kampung Kuala Tahan. The exhibition hall at the Mutiara also has informative displays on the park.

For health care, the Poliklinik Komuniti is adjacent to Agoh Chalets in Kampung Kuala Tahan, opposite the school.

INTERNET

Internet cafe (per 10 min RM1; 🕒 8am-midnight) Just down from the Teresek View Motel.

Internet cafe (per hr RM6) At Agoh Chalets, it has fast connections.

POLICE

Police station (☎ 266 6721) Next to the Teresek View Motel.

THE FUTURE OF TAMAN NEGARA

First established as a preservation area in 1937, Taman Negara is Malaysia's oldest and most prestigious national park. Its relentless promotion as a wildlife haven and *the* place for an experience of the Malaysian jungle, however, has been met by growing numbers of visitors (around 60,000 per year).

Large animals once roamed right up to park headquarters, but sightings are becoming very rare and the effective animal habitat area of the park has shrunk. The busy 5% of the park, through which hiking trails run, is largely shunned by wildlife so the chances of seeing anything at all these days is dismal. Meanwhile, the 631 elephants (the largest population in Southeast Asia) and up to 110 of Malaysia's estimated 300 tigers that call Taman Negara home have been increasingly pushed towards the Kelantan and Terengganu borders.

The visitor boom is not all bad news, though, as the resort provides necessary local employment; and increasing revenues from tourism, along with stiff government penalties, has helped eliminate poaching. Orang Asli are allowed to hunt small animals and continue their traditional nomadic lifestyle, but their impact is relatively low (although the impact of tourism on the Orang Asli is high).

With all the increased traffic putting strains on the park, there has been much talk of how to best preserve Taman Negara and cater to increasing visitor attention. Restricting access, by introducing quotas or raising prices may be unpalatable as Taman Negara is one of Malaysia's major tourist attractions. Not only does it generate foreign income but the park is also an important educational resource for Malaysians, who are increasingly aware of the ecology and natural beauty of their own wilderness areas.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Information Centre (☎ 9am-11pm) Right at the riverside end of the road out of Kampung Kuala Tahan, it offers everything from onward transport info to tours.

Tourist Information Counter (☎ 8am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-noon & 3-10pm Fri) In the building behind the reception of Mutiara Taman Negara resort, this is where you must register before heading off into the park. Also offers park information and guide services (below).

Permits

Most people purchase **permits** (park entrance/camera/fishing RM1/5/10) when they buy their bus and/or boat tickets to Kuala Tahan with NKS in Jerantut. Otherwise you'll need to get your permits at the Tourist Information Counter (above) at Mutiara Taman Negara resort. Permits can also be picked up at the office at the Kuala Tembeling jetty. Failure to buy a permit can incur fines of up to RM10,000 (or three years' imprisonment).

Guides

Guides who are licensed by the Wildlife Department have completed coursework in forest flora, fauna and safety. Often the Kuala Tahan tour operators offer cheaper prices than those available at the Tourist Information Counter at Park Headquarters (whose guides are licensed), but talk with these guides first to find out what training they've had. Guides cost RM180 per day (one guide can lead up to

12 people), plus there is a RM100 fee for each night spent out on the trail.

Activities

The major activity at Taman Negara is penetrating the magnificent jungle. There's a wide variety of walking and trekking possibilities – from an hour's stroll to nine arduous days up and down 2187m-high Gunung Tahan. You can shorten your hiking time in most cases by taking river bus services (see p298) or tours that include boat transport. Don't enter the jungle after 6pm (unless on a guided trek), and do pack a torch (flashlight) just in case.

The trails around the park headquarters are convenient but heavily trafficked. Relatively few visitors venture far beyond the headquarters, and longer walks are much less trammelled. A long day-walk will take you away from the madding crowd, but getting well away from it all requires a few days trekking and/or expensive trips upriver by boat.

SHORT WALKS FROM KUALA TAHAN

Easy-to-follow trails around park headquarters are signposted and marked with approximate walking times; enquire at the information office for details on other routes. All these walks can be shortened by taking Nusa Camp's river bus (see p298) one or both ways to the nearest stop.

Canopy Walkway & Around

East from the park headquarters, the Bukit Indah (Indah Hill) trail leads along Sungai Tembeling to the **Canopy Walkway** (adult/child RM5/3; ☞ 10am-3.30pm Sat-Thu, 9am-noon Fri), 30 minutes away. Queues can get long here as only four people are allowed on each swinging gangplank at one time (show up before 10.30am or around noon to avoid the tour groups), but it allows for closer inspections of the higher forest reaches. The walkway is suspended between huge trees and the entire circuit takes around 40 minutes.

From behind the Canopy Walkway a trail leads to **Bukit Teresik** (344m), from the top of which are fine views across the forest. The trail is steep and slippery in parts, but is easily negotiated and takes about an hour up and back. You can descend back along this trail to the Mutiara Taman Negara resort or, near the Canopy Walkway, take the branch trail that leads across to **Lubok Simpon**, a swimming area on Sungai Tahan. From here it is an easy stroll back to park headquarters. The entire loop can easily be done in three hours.

Past the Canopy Walkway, a branch of the main trail leads to **Bukit Indah** (563m), another steep but rewarding hill-climb offering fine views across the forest and the rapids in Sungai Tembeling.

Kuala Trenggan

The well-marked main trail along the bank of Sungai Tembeling leads 9km to Kuala Trenggan, a popular trail for those heading to the Bumbun Kumbang hide (p298). Allow five hours. Though generally flat, it traverses a few

small hills before reaching Sungai Trenggan. From here, boats go back to Nusa Holiday Village and Kampung Kuala Tahan, or it's a further 2km walk to Bumbun Kumbang. An alternative longer trail leads inland, back across Sungai Trenggan from Bumbun Kumbang to the camp site at Lubok Lesong on Sungai Tahan, then back to park headquarters (six hours). This trail is flat most of the way and crosses small streams. Check with park headquarters for river levels – Sungai Trenggan can be forded only when levels are low.

Gua Telinga

From the park headquarters, it's roughly a 1½-hour walk (2.6km). Think wet: a stream runs through this cave (with sleeping bats) and a rope guides you for the strenuous 80m half-hour trek – and crawl – through the cave. Return to the main path through the cave or take the path round the rocky outcrop at its far end. From the main path, it's a 15-minute walk to Bumbun Blau hide or you can walk directly back to Kuala Tahan.

Lata Berkoh

North from park headquarters, the trail leads to Gunung Tahan, but you can do an easy day walk to Lata Berkoh, the cascading rapids on Sungai Tahan. The trail passes the Lubok Simpon swimming hole and Bumbun Tabing, 1¼ hours from Kuala Tahan. There is one river crossing before you reach the falls, which can be treacherous if the water is high; do not attempt the river crossing in high water – you should hail one of the boatmen waiting on the opposite side to ferry you across.

PLANNING

Leeches are everywhere inside the park (but are rarely found in Kampung Kuala Tahan) so boots with gaiters or long socks tucked over your trousers (for that fashionable look) then doused in DEET will make hiking more pleasant. Note that insect repellent with DEET isn't usually available in Taman Negara, so stock up before you get there.

Camping, hiking and fishing gear can be hired at the Mutiara Taman Negara resort shop or at several shops and guesthouses on the Kampung Kuala Tahan side. Asking prices per day are around RM8 for a sleeping bag, RM10 for a rucksack, RM25 for a tent, RM20 for a fishing rod, RM5 for a sleeping pad, RM8 for a stove and RM8 for boots. Prices can be negotiated and it's good to shop around for bargains as well as quality.

Taman Negara: Malaysia's Premier National Park by David Bowden (available in the bigger bookshops of Kuala Lumpur or online) is an excellent book on the park, with detailed route maps and valuable background information.

See the boxed text, p86, for more information on leech protection and preparation for trekking.

LONGER TREKS**Kuala Keniam**

A popular walk is the trail from Kuala Trengganu to Kuala Keniam. It's normally done by chartering a boat to Kuala Keniam and then walking back to Kuala Trengganu (six hours). The trail is quite taxing and hilly in parts, and passes a series of limestone caves. This walk can be combined with one of the Kuala Tahan–Kuala Trengganu trails to form a two-day trip, staying overnight in the Trengganu Lodge or at Bumbun Kumbang (see below). It is also possible to walk from Kuala Keniam to the lodge at Kuala Perkai, an easy two-hour walk.

Gunung Tahan

Really adventurous travellers climb Gunung Tahan (2187m), the highest peak in Peninsular Malaysia, 55km from park headquarters. It takes nine days at a steady pace, although it can be done in seven. A guide is compulsory (RM700 for seven days plus RM75 for each day thereafter). With no shelters along the way, you have to be fully equipped. Try to organise this trek in advance so you don't have to hang around park headquarters for a couple of days.

Rentis Tenor

From Kuala Tahan, this trek takes roughly three days. Day one: take the trail to Gua Telinga, and beyond, for about seven hours, to Yong camp site. Day two is a six-hour walk to the Rentis camp site. On day three cross Sungai Tahan (up to waist deep) to get back to Kuala Tahan. It's roughly a six hour walk, or you can stop over at the Lameh camp site, about halfway.

HIDES & SALT LICKS

Animal-observation hides (*bumbun*) are built overlooking salt licks and grassy clearings, which attract feeding nocturnal animals. You'll need to spend the night in order to see any action. There are several hides close to Kuala Tahan and Kuala Trengganu that are too close to human habitation to attract the shy animals. Your chances of seeing wildlife increase if you head for the hides furthest away from park headquarters. There's a chance of spotting tapir, wild boar or deer, but sightings of elephant and other large game are extremely rare. Even if you don't see any wildlife, the jungle sounds are worth it – the 'symphony' is best at dusk and dawn.

Hides (RM5 per person per night) need to be reserved at the Tourist Information Counter (p296) and they are very rustic with pit toilets. Some travellers hike independently in the day to the hides, then camp overnight returning the next day, while others go to hides that require some form of transport and a guide; the Tourist Information Counter can steer you in the right direction. For overnight trips you'll need food, water and a sleeping bag. Rats on the hunt for tucker are problematic, so hang food high out of reach.

The hides (with distances from park headquarters) are Bumbun Tahan (250m), Bumbun Blau (3.1km), Bumbun Yong (4km), Bumbun Tabing (3.1km), Bumbun Kumbang five hours walk and Bumbun Cegar Anjing (1½ hours walk). They can be reached on foot and/or by river boat.

FISHING

Anglers will find the park a real paradise. Fish found in the park's rivers include the superb fighting fish known in India as the *mahseer*, but here as the *kelasa*.

Popular fishing rivers include Sungai Tahan, Sungai Keniam (north of Kuala Trengganu) and the remote Sungai Sepia. Simple fishing lodges are scattered through the park and can be booked at park headquarters. The best fishing months are February, March, July and August. Fishing permits are RM10, and hiring a rod costs RM20 per day.

RIVER BUS & BOAT TRIPS

The Mutiara Taman Negara resort has daily boats that go upriver to Kuala Trengganu at 10am and 2.30pm. In the reverse direction, boats leave Kuala Trengganu at 11.15am and 3.15pm. These services are intended for guests only.

Nusa Holiday Village (p300) runs a very useful river bus (not restricted to guests) from the Nusa Riverbus jetty on the Kampung Kuala Tahan side to the following places (prices are one way; return trip prices are about 1½ times the one-way fare):

Bumbun Yong (RM15) Three per day; first boat 8.30am.

Canopy Walkway (RM10) Boats at 10.15am & 12.30pm, returning 11.30am & 1.45pm.

Gua Telinga (RM10) Four boats per day; first boat 8.30am.

Kuala Tembeling (RM25) One boat per day at 9am.

Kuala Trengganu (RM30) Boats at 10.15am & 3.05pm, returning 11am & 3.30pm.

Nusa Holiday Village (guest/nonguest RM6/15) Six boats per day; first boat 8.15am.

The same boat also runs from Nusa Holiday Village to Kuala Trenggan (RM15).

Keep in mind that these regularly scheduled river-boat services run pretty much on time during the peak season, but may be dropped entirely during the rainy season. It's best to ask at Nusa Holiday Village or the Mutiara Taman Negara resort for up-to-the-minute information.

In addition to these boat trips, you can arrange private boat trips at the Tourist Information Counter (p296), or at the restaurants in Kampung Kuala Tahan (the latter are usually 10% cheaper). The following prices are for boats seating four/10 people from Kuala Tahan: Bumbun Tabing RM50 (four-seater), Bumbun Cegar Anjing RM50 (four-seater), Canopy Walkway RM50/65, Gua Telinga RM50/65, Lubok Lesong RM100 (four-seater), Kuala Keniam RM210/260, Kuala Trenggan RM110/150, Kuala Perkal RM320 (four-seater), Lata Berkoh RM160 (four-seater), Nusa Holiday Village RM90/110.

Tours

Everyone in Kuala Tahan wants to take you on a tour. There are popular night tours (RM35), which are on foot or by 4WD. You're more likely to see animals (such as slow loris, snakes, civets and flying squirrels) on the drives, which go through palm-oil plantations outside the park but even these don't guarantee sightings.

Many travellers sign up for tours to an Orang Asli settlement. Tribal elders give a general overview and you'll learn how to use a long blowpipe and start a fire. While local guides insist that these tours provide essential income for the Orang Asli, most of your tour money will go to the tour company. A small handicraft purchase in the village will help spread the wealth.

Sleeping

KUALA TAHAN

Mutiara Taman Negara resort (☎ 266 3500, in KL 03-2145 5585; www.mutiarahotels.com; camp site RM5, dm/guesthouse/chalets/bungalows incl breakfast RM60/300/470/1800; 📶) Conveniently located right at park headquarters, there's a huge range of accommodation here from OK

TOUR WARNING

Before booking a tour, take time to talk to other travellers for their experiences on tours and possible recommendations. For example, sometimes everyone is raving about all the animals they saw on the night 4WD tour while at other times of the year people aren't seeing anything. Some operators promise certain tour features that fail to materialise on the tour itself.

By all means wait till you arrive in Taman Negara and ask around there; it is simple to reach the park under your own steam and find a tour guide there.

guesthouse rooms (all with garden terraces) in an older brick building to comfortably palatial (though dark) colonial-style family and honeymoon suites (some with kitchens) in wooden chalets. Clean, eight-person dorms (with air-con, wardrobe and mosquito nets) are good quality, but expensive. Campers are only accepted in groups of 10 or more.

KAMPUNG KUALA TAHAN

Kampung Kuala Tahan, directly across the river from park headquarters, is where most of Taman Negara's lodging, restaurants and shops are found. It's a scruffy place and standards are low, but it's a pleasant enough base. Crossing the river is easy; sampans go on demand throughout the day and the evening (fare RM1).

Try to arrive early in the day or book in advance since the better places fill up quickly.

Liana Hostel (☎ 266 9322; dm RM10) Has barracks-like, four-bed dorm rooms and non-existent service.

our pick Durian Chalet (☎ 266 8940; dm/d/f RM10/40/50, A-frame RM25) About 800m outside of the village (beyond the Tersek View Hotel) in a flowery garden between rubber and durian plantations, this family-run forest hideaway is a destination in itself. Besides the six-bed dorm, the cheapest options are microscopic, rustic, twin-sized A-frame huts with bathrooms. Better are the well-maintained, large doubles and family rooms painted in bright colours that exude a simple village-style charm. All options have fans and mosquito nets, there's a simple restaurant and you can pitch a tent for RM2.

Tembeling Riverview Hostel (☎ 266 6766; rosnahtv@hotmail.com; dm RM10, r RM35-50) Straddling the thoroughfare footpath, folks stay here to be close to the action not for privacy, though there are some pleasant communal areas overlooking the river. Rooms are barrack basic.

our pick **Tahan Guesthouse** (☎ 266 7752; dm/d RM10/50) Far enough from 'town' to feel away from it all but close enough to be convenient, Tahan Guesthouse (about 200m from the Teresek View Motel) has excellent four-bed dorms and even better, colourfully painted bright rooms upstairs. The whole place feels like a happy preschool with giant murals of insects and flowers all over the place.

Yellow Guesthouse (☎ 266 4243; dm/d RM10/80; ☎ ☎ ☎) Up and over the top of the hill from the NKS floating restaurant, this quiet new place is cleaner and in better shape than most of the others. The big rooms and dorms have brightly painted walls and new mattresses and the owner is super-friendly and helpful.

Mat Leon Village (☎ 013-998 9517; dm/chalets RM15/60) This boasts a supreme forest location with views over the river (swimming possible) from its restaurant, clean four-bed dorms (shared shower), ageing chalets (with shower) and free boat pick-up from the Mat Leon floating deck at the Kampung Kuala Tahan jetty. On foot go past Durian Chalet for around 350m to the sign at the edge of the forest; follow the forest path for 200m and you will see the chalets on the far side of a small stream.

Teresek View Motel (☎ 019-970 6800; mr8seasons@gmail.com; chalets RM50-60, r RM70-90; ☎) You can't miss this eyesore of a cement building in the 'centre' of Kuala Tahan. The good rooms in the main building are tiled, clean and have hot-water bathrooms and terraces, but lack the homey feel of the family run places elsewhere. Budget chalets across the street have floors that give way underfoot, but are decent value and well kept. There's a minimart and restaurant here as well.

Agoh Chalets (☎ 266 9570; d/f RM50/80; ☎ ☎) Chalets here are made from concrete modelled to look like logs and all surround a shady garden in the middle of the village. The interiors are ageing, but are in better shape than many other places.

Woodland Resort (☎ 266 1111; www.woodland.com.my; d/chalets/ste from RM108/160/252; ☎ ☎ ☎) Just before the Rainforest Resort, this place has

small, musty cave-like standard rooms and much better spacious, well-lit deluxe chalets. Accommodation (all with satellite TV and air-con) is spread over a plain yard and the pool is quite small.

Rainforest Resort (☎ 266 7888; www.rainforest-tamanegara.com; d/ste incl breakfast from RM207/414; ☎ ☎ ☎) Slightly behind town away from the river, the spotless, modern rooms here are the most comfortable in Kampung Kuala Tahan. It's worth upgrading to a deluxe, which gets you much more room as well as a pleasant terrace. Prices include breakfast at the vaguely stylish restaurant and service is friendly and professional. Near-constant promotional rates are about 40% lower than the published rates (making a deluxe room about RM190).

SOUTH OF KAMPUNG KUALA TAHAN

Several peaceful places lie removed from the action west off the main Kampung Kuala Tahan-Jerantut road south of Kampung Kuala Tahan.

Park Lodge (☎ 017-983 2074; www.parklodge.nurnilam.com; fan d incl breakfast RM50) Hidden away down a dirt track around 500m south of Kuala Tahan, this quiet spot has eight chalets and a restaurant. They can drive guests to Kampung Kuala Tahan.

Persona Village Resort (☎ 266-9696; www.persona.tamanegara.com; chalets RM145-240; ☎) This modern, recently constructed chalet resort has pleasant river views, trekking packages and good discounts, but little personality.

our pick **Traveller's Home** (☎ 2667766; www.travellershome.com.my; d incl breakfast RM160, chalet incl breakfast & dinner RM185; ☎ ☎) Very clean and highly recommended, this bright and airy place, around 1km down a turn-off 2km south of Kuala Tahan (look for the signs), has impeccable, friendly service that will make you feel instantly at home. Rooms here are very new (with balcony) and there's a handy book and DVD library and internet access (per hour RM4), plus all-day free coffee, tea and soft drinks. Chalets are more private and luxurious, and are nestled in the garden's many fruit trees. Free shuttles to Kampung Kuala Tahan are available on demand. This is an excellent choice for families.

NUSA HOLIDAY VILLAGE

About a 15-minute boat ride upriver from park headquarters, **Nusa Holiday Village** (☎ 266 3043, in Jerantut 09-266 2369, in KL 03-4042 8369;

www.tamanegara-nusaholiday.com.my; camp sites RM5, dm/A-frames/cottages/houses RM15/55/90/110) is more of a 'jungle camp' than anything. The isolation paired with the staff's general lack of English skills makes this a difficult place to stay unless you're on a packaged itinerary (three-days and two-nights from RM295 per person). The double cottages are the best value, while the cheaper A-frames are literally falling in on themselves. The restaurant serves good but unexciting food. Camping costs RM15, tent included.

At the time of research Nusa Camp was building an activities-oriented Outward Bound Centre just downriver.

KUALA PERKAI & KUALA KENIAM

Located about an hour upstream from Kuala Trengganu, the Kuala Keniam **lodge** (camp sites per person RM1, r RM100) is without electricity. Four-bed dorms are available at **Kuala Perikai** (camp site per person RM1, dm RM8), also without electricity and a further two hours' walk past Kuala Keniam. If camping at either of these places, bring your own tent. Check with the Mutiara Taman Negara resort to see if these are operational when you arrive in the park.

Eating

Floating barge restaurants line the rocky shore of Kampung Kuala Tahan, all selling the same ol' cheap basic noodle and rice meals plus bland Western fare. These restaurants tend to come and go, but at the time of research the best was **Mama Chop** (meals around RM7; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) at the far northern end of the strip and accessible by a small staircase. Mama's serves Indian vegetarian banana leaf meals at lunchtime and has very good clay-pot dishes for dinner.

For something more high class head to **Seri Mutiara Restaurant** (Mutiara Taman Negara resort; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner), which has salads (from RM16), sandwiches/burgers (from RM20), pizza (RM30), local dishes and a small kiddies' menu (from RM10). Breakfast (American/buffet RM30/40) is filling. This is also the only place in the area where you can get a beer.

Getting There & Away

Most people reach Taman Negara by taking a bus from Jerantut to the jetty at Kuala Tembling, then a river boat from here to the park. However, there are also popular private minibus services that go directly to/from

several tourist destinations around Malaysia directly to/from Kampung Kuala Tahan. You can also take a bus from Jerantut direct to Kampung Kuala Tahan (see p294 for details), but by doing this you miss the scenic boat trip.

BOAT

The 60km boat trip from Kuala Tembling (18km north of Jerantut) to Kuala Tahan takes two to three hours, depending on the level of the river. Along the river you'll see several Orang Asli *kampung*, local fishing people and domestic animals such as water buffalo. You might also see monkeys, otters, kingfishers and hornbills from the boat. It's a beautiful journey and a highlight for many visitors.

Regular boats (one way RM35) depart daily at 9am and 2pm (9am and 2.30pm Friday). Extra boats are laid on during the busy season, but the service can be irregular during the November to February rainy season. Boats are run by the Mutiara Taman Negara resort and Nusa Holiday Village. At Tembeling, the Mutiara's office is up the steps above the jetty, and Nusa Holiday Village's is near the parking area.

On the return journey, regular boats leave Kuala Tahan at 9am and 2pm (2.30pm on Friday).

BUS & TAXI

For details on buses and taxis from Jerantut to Kuala Tembeling, see p294. A public bus from Kampung Kuala Tahan goes to KL (RM26) every day at 8am via Jerantut. **NKS** (☎ 03-2072 0336; www.taman-negara.com) and **Banana Travel & Tours** (☎ 017-902 5952; Information Centre, Kampung Kuala Tahan) run several useful private services, including daily buses to KL (RM35) and minibuses to Penang (RM120), the Perhentian Islands (RM165 including boat) and the Cameron Highlands (RM95). These minibuses can also drop you off en route anywhere in between.

CAR

A road goes all the way from Jerantut to Kampung Kuala Tahan, traversable in an ordinary car. Hitching is possible, too (though not always safe).

BY FOOT

You can walk into or out of the park via Merapoh, at the Pahang–Kelantan border. The

trail from Merapoh joins the Gunung Tahan trail, adding another two days to the Gunung Tahan trek (see p298). Guides are compulsory and can be hired in Merapoh to take you in. Contact the **Kuala Lipis tourist information centre** (☎ 09-312 3277).

KUALA LIPIS

☎ 09

At the confluence of the Lipis and Jelai rivers, Kuala Lipis is a bustling little town with a charming colonial-era centre of Chinese shophouses. A large percentage of the population is Chinese or Indian, with the common language between them being English, so it's easy to chat with these particularly friendly locals and find your way around.

Lipis was a gold-mining centre long before the British arrived in 1887, but the town's heyday began in 1898 when it became the capital of Pahang. Grand colonial buildings date from this period, and trade increased when the railway came through in 1924. In 1957 the capital shifted to Kuantan and Kuala Lipis went into decline, but now it's on the rise again with people pouring in once again to seek their fortunes in gold mining. The town is rapidly expanding with a newly built modern section known as 'New Town' across the river from the old centre.

Besides being an interesting destination in itself, Kuala Lipis is the major launching pad for visits to the nearby Kenong Rimba State Park.

Information

Hand-drawn maps of Kuala Lipis are available at Appu's Guest House (right). There are a few banks with ATMs on Jln Besar and the post office is east of the train station.

The two private travel agencies at the train station called **Tourist Office** (☎ 312 5032; off Jln Besar; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) and **Tuah Travel & Tours** (☎ 312 2292; off Jln Besar; tuahtravel@hotmail.com; ☎ 9.30am-2pm Mon-Sat) are equally helpful, organise trips to Kenong Rimba (day trips from RM150 per person) and can answer basic questions.

Sights & Activities

Kuala Lipis has some lovely colonial-era architecture. Maroon and white, and decorated with arches, the noble **District Offices**, located off Jln Lipis, crown a hill 1km south of the centre of town. The offices overlook

the exclusive **Clifford School**, a grand public building that began life as the Anglo-Chinese School in 1913 and was later named after Sir Hugh Clifford, the second British Resident of Pahang. During the occupation, the school served as the headquarters of the Kempetai (the Japanese secret police).

The road next to the school leads up the hill to the black-and-white wooden **Pahang Club**, off Jln Lipis, a stately and dignified bungalow with wide, open verandahs.

A very pleasant **walk** starts on the road behind the Lipis Centrepoint Complex. Follow the road up the hill where the sign says 'Driving Range Lipis'. You will soon pass the **Istana Hinggap** on your right; keep going uphill and the road forks. Take either branch and you will be led to old, wooden built colonial-era houses – some now abandoned and being slowly reclaimed by jungle.

If you're in town on Friday evening, be sure to visit the excellent **night market** held in the parking lot next to the bus station.

A taxi around town for an hour to see the sights costs RM25.

Sleeping, Eating & Drinking

There are busy and popular food stalls on either side of the northern end of the overhead walkway crossing Jln Pekeliling.

Appu's Guesthouse (Hotel Lipis; ☎ 312 3142; jungle appu@hotmail.com; 63 Jln Besar; dm RM10, d RM20-35, q RM60; 🍷) Appu's is great for tourist info and guide services, but it's very rundown. Locks on the doors don't work well so lone women may not feel safe here.

Hotel Jelai (☎ 312 1192; 44 Jln Jelai; r RM50-60; 🍷 ☎) Clean, newly refurbished rooms are plain, but this is a great location on the riverfront and service is friendly.

Centrepoint Hotel & Apartments (☎ 312 2688; Jln Centrepoint, Jln Pekeliling; ekonomi s/d RM48/70, standard d from RM108; 🍷) One floor of this high-rise hotel is dedicated to mediocre ekonomi rooms, while the rest of the place has more comfortable standard rooms. It's the busiest place in town and has a tour office (specialising in trips to Kenong Rimba), great service and a bustling food court down stairs.

Residence Rest House (☎ 312 2788; r RM60-150; 🍷) In a huge, homey colonial hilltop house that once housed the British Resident, rooms here are massive with floral wallpaper, big windows and garden grounds. The restaurant is only open for dinner and a taxi to town costs RM7.

Flash Jack's Bar 55 (☎ 019-966 7903; New Town) Recently moved to 'New Town' near the bus station, this low-key place is run by the affable Jack.

Getting There & Away

Buses run from the **bus station** (Transnasional ☎ 312 5055) in New Town to KL (RM15, four hours, six daily), Kuantan (RM24, six hours, four daily) via Temerloh (RM13.40), Raub (RM5) and Gua Musang (RM11.20, two hours, two daily), from where you can catch onward buses to Kota Bharu.

Daily trains run to Singapore (7.39am, 12.55am) and KL (10.54pm). Trains bound for Singapore, KL or Gemas stop at Jerantut (for Taman Negara). The local ('jungle') train connects with Wakaf Baharu, the closest station to Kota Bharu.

Taxis leave from the bus station for KL (RM180), Jerantut (RM65), Kuala Tahan (RM50), Gua Musang (RM120), Temerloh (RM100) and Kuantan (RM200).

KENONG RIMBA STATE PARK

☎ 09

A sprawling area of lowland forest rising to the limestone foothills bordering Taman Negara, this 120-sq-km forest park can be explored on three- or four-day jungle treks organised from Kuala Lipis. It's a much less-visited alternative to Taman Negara. Sightings of big mammals are rare so monkeys, wild pigs, squirrels, civets and possibly nocturnal tapir are all you should expect to see. The park is also home to the Batek people, an Orang Asli tribe. For information on preparing for the jungle, see the boxed text, p86.

Visitors need to acquire a permit from the **Kuala Lipis District Forest Office** (☎ 312 1373). Guides are compulsory for entry to the park and can be arranged in Kuala Lipis. **Appu** (☎ 312 2619) of Appu's Guesthouse in Kuala Lipis offers cheap tours – RM80 per person per day plus RM200 (minimum three people) for the boat to and from Jeti Tanjung Kiara and a RM2 per-person per-night camping fee. Tours include food, guide and all expenses in the park, but they are no-frills jungle experiences – you camp in the park, with all equipment and meals provided. Trips go when enough people are interested – it's best to get a group together yourself.

You can also book trips through Tourist Office and Tuah Travel (opposite), and

Kiara Holidays (at the Centrepoint Hotel & Apartments, opposite).

There is also simple dorm and chalet accommodation available at the **Persona Rimba Resort** (☎ 312 5032).

Getting There & Away

Access to Kenong Rimba is from Kuala Lipis on southbound local trains to Batu Sembilan (Mile 9). From Batu Sembilan, hire a boat (per person RM25) to Jeti Tanjung Kiara, just across the river from Kampung Kuala Kenong.

TEMERLOH

☎ 09

An old town on the banks of the enormous Sungai Pahang, Temerloh has hints of colonial style and a colourful Sunday market. As the main city of central Pahang, it serves as a transport hub – the chief reason to visit. The train station is 12km away at **Mentakab**, a thriving satellite of Temerloh with a bustling nightly market.

If you get stuck overnight try the **Hotel Semantan** (☎ 296 8111; C-98 Jln Dato Ngau Ken Lock; d RM60-70, f RM100; ☺ ☑), opposite the Dunhuang Chinese restaurant, which offers clean and spacious rooms.

Buses go to all parts of the peninsula from Temerloh, including Kota Bharu (RM42), Kuala Lipis (RM13.40), Melaka (RM16) and Penang (RM51.30). Regular buses depart to Jerantut (RM7), KL's Pekeliling bus station (RM10) and Kuantan (RM10).

Taxis at the bus station go to Mentakab (RM10), Jerantut (RM38), Kuantan (RM95) and KL (RM150).

AROUND TEMERLOH

Kuala Gandah Elephant Conservation Centre

The **Kuala Gandah Elephant Conservation Centre** (☎ 09 279 0391; www.wildlife.gov.my/webpagev4_en/bhg_ekogandah.html; Kuala Gandah, Lanchang; entry by donation; ☺ 10am-4.45pm) is the base for the Department of Wildlife and National Parks' Elephant Relocation Team, which helps capture and relocate rogue elephants from across Southeast Asia to other suitable habitats throughout the peninsula, such as at Taman Negara. Most of the elephants at the centre are work elephants from Myanmar or Thailand.

Visitors to Kuala Gandah are first shown a **video** (☺ 1pm, 1.30pm & 3.45pm daily, also 12.30pm

Sat & Sun) about the elephant's plight, then can watch and join in while the handlers wash down and feed the big guys fruit (🕒 2pm Saturday to Thursday, 2.45pm Friday). Next everyone is herded to an elevated hut to line up to ride on an elephant and finally you can line up again to get dumped into the river off an elephant's back and take a swim with a few of the gentle beasts. Public bathrooms with showers are available to rinse off afterwards – bring a change of clothes!

While all of this is good fun and hopes to raise awareness about the elephants' precarious situation in Southeast Asia, animal activists criticise the circus-like activities at the centre, which they claim are not enjoyable for the animals and are not in line with animal welfare principles. The centre also received negative press in 2006 when one elephant died and another was injured due to mishandling by the centre; it remains questionable if the centre has improved its handling practices since this time.

Before heading out this way, it's imperative to call the centre to reserve a ticket (only 120 people are admitted each day) and check on opening times – if you are on a tour this will be taken care of by your operator.

Deerland

About five minutes away on the road to Kuala Gandah, **Deerland** (☎ 013-967 6242; 67 Jln Zabidin; entry adult/child RM10/5; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm Sat-Thu) is a mini zoo in the forest. The main activity here is petting one of the three Malaysian sun bears. The bored-looking sun bears don't seem to like this much and after watching

one husk a coconut with its massive, sharp claws, you have to wonder if these up-close encounters are safe. The three species of deer (which you can also pet) look happier in their very large enclosure and there are also some caged birds and monkeys. The team here also leads 2½-hour **medicinal herb jungle treks** (RM35 per person; reserve at a least day in advance) that include lunch and an adventurous river crossing along a network of swinging ropes. Similar treks lasting up to three days can also be arranged.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation near these two sites is available at **Mr Zukifili's Homestay** (☎ 013-377 3838) in a basic *kampung*-style house on the roadside.

Saudi's Cafe (meals RM4), on the grounds of the Kuala Gandah Elephant Conservation Centre, is a mom-and-pop shack serving simple Malay grub like nasi goreng and mee sup (noodle soup).

Getting There & Away

These two sites are located about 150km east of KL near the town of Lanchang west of Mentakab. Getting to this area independently is difficult without your own wheels. You can get a taxi from Mentakab (RM50) or Temerloh (RM60), but these rates are one way and you might have to pay more if the driver has to wait to take you back from where you came. Most people visit on tours (including a visit to Kuala Gandah and Deerland), available from KL, Jerantut, Cherating and other tourist hubs on the peninsula. Expect to pay around RM180 per person for a day tour from KL.

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