

Destination Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei

Entwined by history and shared multi-ethnic populations, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei are Southeast Asia's terrific trio. Want beautiful beaches and idyllic islands? Crave delicious culinary sensations? Searching for an Indiana Jones-style adventure in steamy jungles or the region's hottest contemporary art, design and fashion creations? From must-see modern architecture to a fascinating range of indigenous peoples, these three countries tick all the boxes on the tropical destination wish list.

Commence your journey in either Malaysia's capital of Kuala Lumpur (KL) or the island state of Singapore and you'll immediately be impressed by how the preserved cultures of the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities connect with a drive to be as innovative and modern as other world metropolises. Trawl street markets, chow down at fabulous hawker stalls, deck yourself out in designer threads from the fanciest shopping malls, and dip into museums highlighting practically every aspect of local life – it's all waiting in these buzzing cities that keep an eye on their past while boldly striding into the future.

Contrasting with the dynamism of urban life is the laid-back charm of the region's rural and coastal escapes. Efficient and reliable transport networks mean it's no drama to access pretty much anywhere – from the deepest recesses of jungle to the peaks of the highest mountains and the depths of coral-reef-packed oceans, much of this protected in national parks.

Recent world economic woes have slashed the previously robust growth rates of this trio of warm, lush and naturally blessed countries, denting local confidence in the process. As far as visitors are concerned this translates into locals who are even more welcoming than ever, and bargain prices, particularly for accommodation, food and transport.

Malaysia

The repercussions of the March 2008 election – in which the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and its coalition partners in Barisan Nasional (BN) saw their parliamentary dominance slashed to less than the customary two-thirds majority – continue to ripple through Malaysian political life. Pakatan Rakyat (PR), the opposition People's Alliance, led by the back-from-the-wilderness Anwar Ibrahim (see p43), not only bagged 82 of the parliament's 222 seats but also took control of five out of Malaysia's 13 states including the key economic bases of Selangor and Penang. PR's victory was widely seen as the result of voters' disgust at the excesses of Malaysia's 'money politics' where bribes are paid to secure political clout and public-sector contracts.

BN's fall guy was mild-mannered but ineffectual prime minister Abdullah Badawi, who resigned in April 2009 in favour of his urbane deputy Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak (typically referred to as Najib Razak). Son of Abdul Razak, Malaysia's second PM after independence, and nephew of Abdul's successor Hussein Onn, Najib has been groomed for this role ever since he first entered national politics at the age of 23 in 1976.

FAST FACTS:

Malaysia

Population: 27.73 million

GDP per person:

US\$15,300

Life expectancy: 73.3 years

Inflation: 5.8%

Unemployment: 3.3%

Malaysians who can be awarded the highest

honorary rank of Tun: 35

However, the change of guard may be too late to resurrect the fortunes of UMNO, a party seen as corrupt and out of touch with the people according to a survey by the independent Merdeka Center (www.merdeka.org), a point of view publicly agreed with by former PM Dr Mahathir. It hasn't helped that Najib's standing has been undermined not only by his tangential involvement with a high-profile murder case (p44), but also by the political shenanigans in Perak where he was the architect of BN's power grab to recapture control of the state parliament (p146).

So far, to his credit, Najib has resisted playing on tensions between Malaysia's majority Malays and its ethnic-Chinese and Indian minorities. Similar strains also lie beneath the PR's loose alliance of the multi-racial Anwar-led Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), secular Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the staunchly Islamic Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS). Najib's Malaysia policy revolves around mutual respect and trust among Malaysia's different races – how far such respect and trust will extend as BN loses its grip on power after 50 years in the country's driving seat remains to be seen.

Singapore

The People's Action Party (PAP) continues to hold on to power by all means, as it has done since Lee Kuan Yew first led it to victory in 1959. Lee may have retired as prime minister in 1990, but he still keeps a watchful eye on government in his role as the island state's 'Minister Mentor'. His eldest son Lee Hsien Loong has been in the top job since 2004.

The 2009 worldwide economic downturn hit Singapore fairly hard. GDP shrunk by 12.5% in the last quarter of 2008 and growth for 2009 was forecast at -2%. The government dug deep into their S\$175 billion reserves and took out S\$4.9 billion as part of a S\$20 billion economic stimulus package.

Meanwhile the nanny state continues to loosen its paternalistic grip, actively promoting Singapore as an arts hub, allowing two casinos (oops, 'integrated resorts') to operate, and relaxing liquor licensing laws and those relating to public gatherings. This last measure allowed some 2500 pink-clad citizens to gather on 16 May 2009 at Speakers Corner to form a pink dot (www.pinkdot.sg) in support of gay rights.

There has been no relaxation, though, of Singapore's zero tolerance of drugs – one of the few areas where Singapore and Malaysia see eye to eye. A series of ongoing territorial battles have raged between the two since 1965, when Singapore was unceremoniously kicked out of its short-lived union with Malaysia. Negotiations on a replacement for the ageing and congested causeway linking the island with Johor Bahru faltered over Singapore's preconditions that Malaysia provide it with sand for reclamation projects and that Singaporean military jets have access to Malaysian airspace.

Squabbles also continue over payment for water (Singapore gets 40% of its water from Malaysia but plans to make itself self-sufficient by 2061, when the current agreement runs out) and Malaysian Railway land-holdings in Singapore. The sovereignty of Pedra Branca, a tiny outcrop in the South China Sea, is also disputed. The Hague ruled in favour of Singapore in 2008 but Malaysia has promised to keep digging for historical documents in order to challenge the decision.

Brunei

While relations between Malaysia and Singapore are likely to remain touchy for the foreseeable future, those between Malaysia and Brunei are far more cordial. The two countries may have minor disputes over

FAST FACTS:

Singapore

Population: 4.86 million

GDP per person:

US\$35,000

Life expectancy: 79 years

Inflation: 6.5%

Unemployment: 2.5%

Fine for littering: S\$1000

the rights to possible offshore gas and oil exploration sites and over the land border around Limbang, but they share Islam as a common faith and further goodwill was forged in August 2005 when Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, aged 58, took 26-year-old former TV journalist Azrinaz Mazhar Hakim, a Malaysian, as his third wife. Love must have been in the air in Brunei because in 2004 the 30-year-old Crown Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah Bolkiah married a 17-year-old half-Swiss commoner, Sarah Salleh.

Change is gradually creeping into the world's longest-running absolute monarchy. The legislative council has been restored for the first time in 20 years and an opposition political party has been allowed to form. Millions of dollars were spent to erect a building known as the parliament – however, voting still does not exist. The emphasis on Muslim culture has relaxed slightly, with the Education Minister losing his job in 2005 for pushing unpopular and obscure Islamic studies. The government is also trying to move beyond the oil- and gas-rich nation's habitual economic reliance on hydrocarbons.

FAST FACTS:**Brunei**

Population: 390,000

GDP per person:

US\$51,000

Life expectancy: 76 years

Inflation: 0.4%

Unemployment: 4%

Daily oil production:

193,000 barrels

Getting Started

Trips in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei can be tailored to suit all budgets. Getting around much of the region is a breeze thanks to the excellent transport infrastructure. More-detailed preparations will be needed to get to the more remote locations of Malaysian Borneo.

WHEN TO GO

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

Note that the haze from fires in Indonesia (see p80) is at its worst in March, September and October, which could make a holiday across the region during this time a less than pleasant experience.

Celebrations of one kind or another are held throughout the year. Bear in mind, though, that during the major public holidays (see p473, p560 and p591) many locals travel, putting pressure on transport and hotel vacancies. Chinese New Year, Hari Raya and Christmas are all especially busy. During these times it's best to wait until the holiday rush is over before travelling away from the major cities. The main beach and hill resorts get crowded on weekends at any time of year but are often deserted during the week.

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

COSTS & MONEY

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

See the relevant Climate sections for more information on the weather in Malaysia (p468), Singapore (p559) and Brunei (p590).

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Checking the visa situation (p477, p563 & p592). Those travelling on an Israeli passport cannot enter Malaysia or Brunei.
- Checking government travel advice (p470).
- Proof of vaccination for yellow fever (p595) if coming from infected areas of Africa or South America.
- An umbrella or light raincoat for those sudden showers.
- A torch or head lamp, a pair of binoculars, a mosquito net and leech-proof socks – all essential gear for a jungle trek.
- A sweater or light jacket – but only if you're planning a trip to the cooler highlands (or going to any air-conditioned space in Singapore!).
- Sharp elbows – for battling with the locals over shopping bargains!

Fleapit hotels and hostels where beds can be as cheap as US\$3 a night are plentiful. The midrange is well catered for and hotel rooms with air-con and attached bathrooms start at around US\$30. Luxury hotels often have promotional rates, especially in Malaysia.

Food generally is inexpensive with the variety and quality excellent; you can usually get away with US\$3 for a full meal with a couple of drinks at a food centre or hawker stall – you'll pay even less if you're not that hungry. At the other end of the scale, fancy hotels and restaurants in the main cities offer international cuisine at international prices.

Alcoholic drinks are uniformly pricey. Beer costs about US\$2 a small can, almost double in isolated areas. Spirits are about 50% more expensive than beer. With alcohol pretty much unavailable in Brunei, at least you'll save money there.

Transport is generally a bargain. There are plenty of reasonably priced taxis for local travel. Drivers are fairly honest and fares are either fixed or calculated using meters. For long-distance journeys, Malaysia has excellent buses and trains, all at reasonable prices, and even flights need not be too costly if booked far enough in advance.

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

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Carbon-cutting overland travel to Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore from Europe and most parts of Asia is possible as long as you have time on your hands – the authoritative **Man in Seat 61** (www.seat61.com/Malaysia.htm) reckons it takes a minimum of 3½ weeks to reach Singapore from London by a combination of trains and buses. However, with no scheduled ferry services from the peninsula, reaching Malaysian Borneo and Brunei is much tougher to do without flying.

Once in the region, making your travels more sustainable can be as simple as taking part in a village homestay program (p467), visiting an organic farm in Singapore (p506) or even buying an eco-basket made by disadvantaged Malaysian women from the folks at **Salaam Wanita** (www.justmarketing.info).

Covered by enormous tracts of rainforest, some of it protected within national parks, it would also seem that Malaysia and Brunei are model countries in which to organise a 'green' vacation. The reality is more complex with best practices in sustainable travel not fully understood or wilfully being flouted as businesses 'green-wash' themselves to appear more environmentally friendly than they really are. As Andrew Sebastian, head of communications for the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS; see p81) says, 'Malaysia is still choking the golden goose of eco-tourism'.

Reality checks are provided by **Green Selipar** (<http://greenselipar.com>), which does a wonderful job of listing great sustainable travel initiatives around Malaysia, and the pressure group and consultancy **Wild Asia** (www.wildasia.org), which seeks to up standards by handing out sustainable tourism awards in the region. Also see our Sustainable and Green Top Picks (p22), and p478 and p564 for lists of volunteer work opportunities.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Into the Heart of Borneo (1987) by Redmond O'Hanlon is a hilarious account of author and poet James Fenton's journey into the Bornean interior in search of the fabled Sumatran rhinoceros.

HOW MUCH?

Midrange hotel double
RM100/S\$110/B\$100

Cup of coffee RM4/
S\$4.50/B\$4

Bowl of laksa RM5/
S\$4/B\$4

Restaurant meal RM30/
S\$20/B\$18

Newspaper RM2/S\$1.20/
B\$0.80

TOP PICKS



EATING & DRINKING

Allow your appetite to lead you around the region for a nonstop feast.

- Join with the locals at one of Kuala Lumpur's vibrant night markets or hawker stall areas such as Jln Alor (p114) or Chinatown's Petaling St (p116)
- Sample the classic Ipoh dishes (p157) of *kway teow* (rice noodles)
- Indulge in a traditional afternoon tea amid the plantations of the Cameron Highlands (p159) or at Brunei's Empire Hotel (p586)
- Slurp the classic spicy-sour *asam laksa* (noodles with prawn paste and tamarind-flavoured gravy) of Penang (p192)
- Discover blue rice, banana *murtabak* (filled *roti canai*) and other local delicacies at Kota Bharu's fantastic night market (p332)
- Tuck into Nonya cuisine, a hybrid of traditional Chinese and Malay culinary styles, in Melaka (p249)
- Get your fingers sticky over chilli crab in Singapore (p536)
- Toast your longhouse host in Sarawak with *tuak*, the rice wine with an alcoholic punch (p430)

SUSTAINABLE & GREEN

Get in touch with nature, local traditions and people at these sustainable and environmentally friendly travel picks.

- Attend the Rainforest World Music Festival in Kuching (p416)
- Explore the giant caves of Niah National Park (p451)
- Take a boat trip down the river deep into Taman Negara (p298), Malaysia's top national park
- Go in search of the giant rafflesia flower and Rajah Brooke Birdwing butterfly with the Semai Orang Asli people of Ulu Geroh in Perak (p159)
- Trek around beautiful Tasik Chini and meet the Jakun people, an Orang Asli tribe (p288)
- Take a tour or arrange a homestay with KOPEL in Penang (p201)
- Study the local language, Bahasa Malaysia (p108) in Kuala Lumpur
- Walk the 7km from Tekek to Juara across the beautiful island of Tioman (p276)
- Spend a weekend helping out at the Ma' Daerah Turtle Sanctuary (p316) on the peninsula's east coast
- Swing through the treetops on the canopy walkway – one of the world's longest – in Brunei's magnificent Ulu Temburong National Park (p590)

OFFBEAT & ODD

Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei have more than their fair share of travel surprises.

- Dip your feet into KL's fish spas (p107)
- Search for Bigfoot in the jungles of Johor (p270)
- Squirm at the body piercings involved in the festival of Thaipusam (p52)
- Pay your respects to the sacred tooth of the Buddha at Singapore's Buddha Tooth Relic Temple (p499)
- Watch kung fu master Dr Ho Eng Hui break through a coconut husk with his index finger at Melaka's Jonker's Walk Night Market (p244)
- Count the multiple cat statues (p414) around Sarawak's evocative capital of Kuching, then get a tribal tattoo or piercing (p420)
- Take a spin in the revolving gallery of the Muzium Padi, a museum devoted to rice, 10km northwest of Alor Setar (p213)
- Glimpse the Ten Courts of Hell at Haw Par Villa in Singapore (p508)
- Check out Brunei's ghostly Jerudong Park Playground (p585), the sultanate's unofficial monument to reckless spending

Ghost Train to the Eastern Star (2008) by Paul Theroux sees the opinionated, perceptive travel writer get laid low by a tummy bug in Penang (holed up at the E&O no less!) then stick the knife into Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew.

Stranger in the Forest (1988) by Eric Hansen follows the intrepid author on his hike from Sarawak to Kalimantan and back with no proper papers, an unreliable map and a slender grasp of the local lingo.

Urban Odysseys (2009) edited by Janet Tay and Eric Forbes is a mixed bag of short stories set in Kuala Lumpur that capture the city's multifaceted, multicultural flavour.

From Majapahit to Putrajaya – Searching for the Other Malaysia (2005) by Farish A Noor is a collection of the local journalist's trenchant observations on the country.

The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither (1883) by Isabella Bird is a stiff-upper-lip account of the doughty Victorian-era traveller wending her way through the Malaysian jungles of Selangor and Perak, and crossing the Bukit Genting pass on the back of an elephant.

In the Footsteps of Stamford Raffles (1992; also titled *The Duke of Puddle Dock*) by Nigel Barley is part biography and travelogue as the author shadows the journey east made by the founder of Singapore.

Singapore Swing (2007) by John Malathronas exposes the quirkier side of the island state as the author hangs out with paranormal investigators and at brothels and opium dens in his search for Singapore's true soul.

LONELY PLANET INDEX

Litre of petrol RM1.80/
S\$1.25/B\$0.56

Litre of bottled water
RM1.50/S\$1.50/B\$1

Beer – large bottle of
Tiger RM11/S\$8

Souvenir T-shirt RM20/
S\$15/B\$20

Street snack – satay stick
RM0.50/S\$0.40/B\$0.25

INTERNET RESOURCES

All Malaysia (<http://allmalaysia.info>) The Star newspaper group's portal into a variety of information sources useful for travellers to the country.

Brunei Tourism (www.tourismbrunei.com) All kinds of tourism information on Brunei is available at the official government-sanctioned site.

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

Malaysiakini (www.malaysiakini.com) Find out what's really going on in the country at Malaysia's best online subscriber news site (some content is free to non-subscribers).

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

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

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

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

THE GRAND TOUR

Six Weeks/Kuala Lumpur to Bandar Seri Begawan

Start in **Kuala Lumpur** (KL; p90), for four days of sightseeing and acclimatisation. Next, cool off in the lush **Cameron Highlands** (p159), then warm up again on the beautiful beaches of **Pulau Langkawi** (p215).

Cross the mountainous spine of the peninsula to **Kota Bharu** (p327), a great place to encounter traditional Malay culture. Island- and beach-hop down the east coast, pausing at **Pulau Perhentian** (p319), **Cherating** (p289) and **Pulau Tioman** (p274). Swing inland for a week to explore **Taman Negara** (p294), then return to the west coast to soak up the historic atmosphere of **Melaka** (p239).

Singapore (p492) can easily swallow up a week of shopping, museum viewing and world-class eating. From here you can fly to **Kuching** (p409) in Sarawak, a good base for a longhouse excursion or for arranging a trek in the **Gunung Mulu National Park** (p452). Your next challenge, should you choose to accept it, is to climb **Mt Kinabalu** (p357). Finish up in **Bandar Seri Begawan** (p574), the capital of oil-rich Brunei.



SABAH-SARAWAK SAMPLER

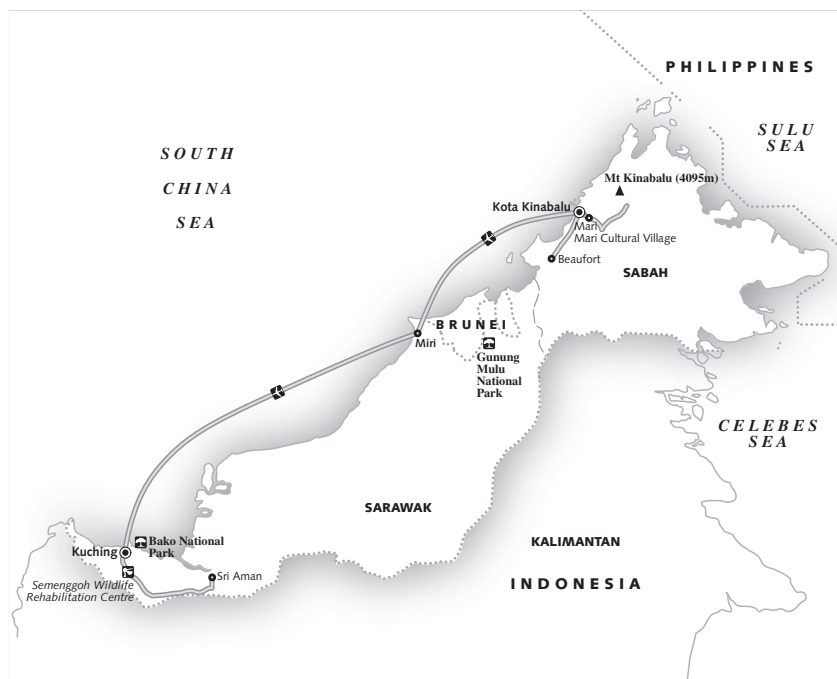
10 Days/Kota Kinabalu to Kuching

Start with Sabah's star attraction, **Mt Kinabalu** (p357). Assaults on Malaysia's highest peak can be launched from the state's government seat, **Kota Kinabalu** (p341) – not the most attractive of places. You'll be obliged to spend a day or two, so why not capital-ise on the flavourful local cuisine and try a day-trip cruise (including buffet dinner) down one of the tea-brown rivers in the **Beaufort Division** (p398), or learn a little about the local culture at the **Mari Mari Cultural Village** (p346)?

Leapfrog by plane from KK to Miri (p445) and then on to Mulu for **Gunung Mulu National Park** (p452), home to the world's largest caves, and several memorable jungle treks, including the notorious Headhunters Trail. Pass through Miri once more on a quick flight down to **Kuching** (p409). Sarawak's capital is a real charmer and will easily keep you occupied for several days. Break up your time in town with a visit to **Semenggoh Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre** (p428), **Bako National Park** (p423), and, if you have time, one of the longhouse communities in the **Sri Aman Division** (p433).

Tight on time?

We've got you covered. This abridged itinerary offers a sample of Borneo's best – steamy jungles, snaking rivers and smoky longhouse verandahs – while still saving plenty of sights for next time ('cause you know you'll be back for seconds).



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

REDISCOVERING MALAYSIA & SINGAPORE

Three Weeks/
Putrajaya to Singapore

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

From Kuala Lumpur International Airport go directly to **Putrajaya** (p136), the nation's fast-evolving administrative capital and a showcase of modern Malaysian architecture. Then head to the coast to the sleepy old royal capital of **Kuala Selangor** (p140), near to which you can observe the dazzling natural display of fireflies. In the tiny hill station of **Bukit Larut** (p172) there's only accommodation for around 70 visitors – pack your mac, as it's one of the wettest places in Malaysia! The really ambitious could also cram the almost forgotten state of Perlis, on the Thai border, into their first week of travel; the highlight here is **Taman Negara Perlis** (p228).

In week two, if you're up for a rugged jungle experience, dive into either the **Endau-Rompin National Park** (p269) or **Kenong Rimba State Park** (p303). Otherwise take a leisurely tour up the east coast, favouring smaller coastal towns such as **Merang** (p316) or a quiet island such as **Pulau Kapas** (p315). Alternatively rent a houseboat to explore **Tasik Kenyir** (p312).

In week three do some more island-hopping in the **Seribu Archipelago** (p266) before crossing the causeway into **Singapore** (p492). You might think it impossible that this island state could have any unexplored corners but tourists are light on the ground in **Pulau Ubin** (p504), where cycling is the best way of getting around. Also forgo shopping in favour of bird-spotting in the **Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve** (p505).



ULTIMATE BORNEO

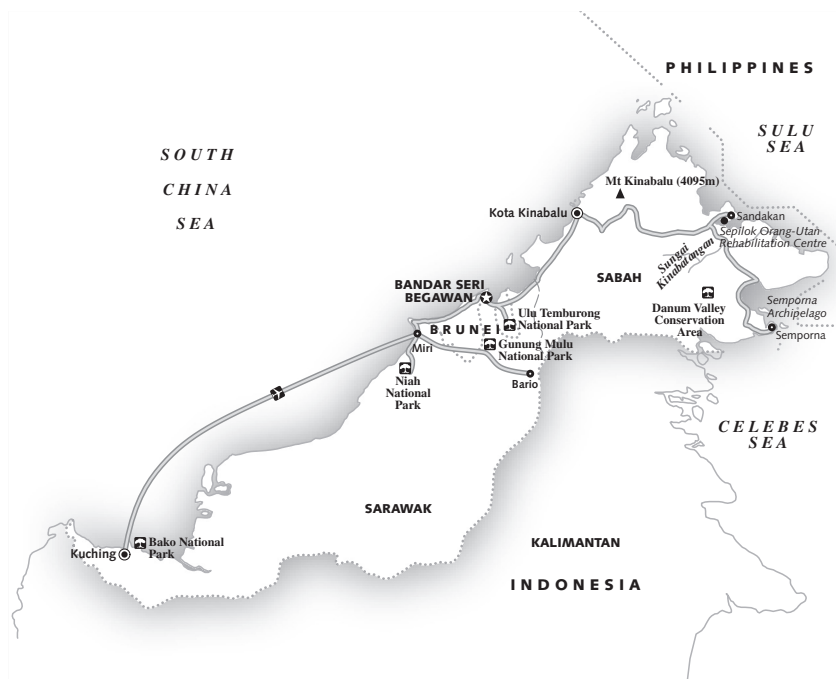
One Month/Kuching to Semporna Archipelago

Initiate yourself into the Bornean lifestyle using **Kuching** (p409), the dreamy riverine capital, to explore the local **longhouses** (p430) and **Bako National Park** (p423). Fly to **Miri** (p445), a lacklustre port city in northern Sarawak, but a great base for trips to the impressive **Niah Caves** (p451); **Gunung Mulu National Park** (p452) for more caves (the world's biggest), the heart-pumping trek to the Pinnacles and a sweat-drenching trek along the Headhunters Trail; and **Bario** (p458), a quiet farming community tucked away in the vine-draped Kelabit Highlands. The really adventurous can tackle a multi-day pilgrimage connecting the dots between hidden runes and far-flung longhouses.

You'll need to pass through Miri yet again to make your way overland to **Bandar Seri Begawan** (p574), Brunei's friendly micro-capital. While here don't miss out on **Ulu Temburong National Park** (p590) in Temburong, Brunei's smaller sliver of jungle land.

Cross back into Malaysia and pause in **Kota Kinabalu** (p341) for some interesting local cuisine before setting your sights on **Mt Kinabalu** (p357). Catch your breath after the climb with some ape love at **Sepilok Orang-Utan Rehabilitation Centre** (p375), followed by a layover in **Sandakan** (p370) for a brief lesson in colonial history. The mighty **Sungai Kinabatangan** (p379) is next, offering wildlife enthusiasts plenty of photo fodder. If you've got the time (and the dime), head deep into Sabah's green interior for a trek through the **Danum Valley Conservation Area** (p384). Finish up by exploring the magnificent dive sites of the **Semporna Archipelago** (p388), accessed by the unremarkable town of **Semporna** (p386).

This itinerary – Borneo's grand tour – tackles the island's top five treks (p356) and leaves plenty of time for some sun, sand, caves and culture. Five or six weeks would be ideal if you really want to take it all in.



TAILORED TRIPS

COLONIAL FOOTSTEPS

Spend several days soaking up the enduring Portuguese and Dutch influence in World Heritage-listed **Melaka** (p239) before seeing how the British shaped **Kuala Lumpur** (p90) into command central for their adventures in Malaya. A fitting base would be **Carcosa Seri Negara** (p112), former residence of the British government's man in Malaya.

Near the one-time tin boom town of Ipoh is **Kellie's Castle** (p158), the eccentric (and unfinished) Indian-influenced mansion of a wealthy rubber-plantation owner. Savour the mock-Tudor style of Ye Olde Smokehouse in the **Cameron Highlands** (p165) or **Fraser's Hill** (p136).

Kuala Kangsar (p167) was one of the first places the British established control on the peninsula. **Georgetown** (p179) on the island of Penang is the oldest British settlement in Malaysia.

When it comes to grand colonial relics you really shouldn't miss out on **Raffles Hotel** (p496) in Singapore; enjoy sinking a G&T in its Bar & Billiard Room or take high tea in the Tiffin Room.

Over in Borneo, Sarawak's capital **Kuching** (p409) is where you'll find Fort Margherita built by James Brooke, the state's first White Raja. Also follow the heritage trail of colonial-era buildings in **Sandakan** (p370), one-time capital of British North Borneo.



ISLANDS & BEACHES

From **Kuala Lumpur** (p90) start by making a day trip to the atmospheric fishing village of **Pulau Ketam** (p140) for tasty seafood. Moving north, **Pulau Pangkor** (p148) has good beaches; for something more exclusive, though, spend the night on the resort island of **Pulau Pangkor Laut** (p152), with access to the idyllic beach at Emerald Beach.

Pulau Langkawi (p215) is blessed with several lovely beaches including Pantai Cenang and Pantai Kok. You can also make boat trips to the nearby island of **Pulau Dayang Bunting** (p220) to swim in a freshwater lake.

Pulau Perhentian Besar (p319) is less crowded and just as gorgeous as its more popular twin, Pulau Perhentian Kecil. On gorgeous **Pulau Tioman** (p274) head over to Juara for some quiet relaxation. There are numerous other equally attractive – and far less touristy – islands off the east coast; try the **Seribu Archipelago** (p266).

In Sarawak, good beaches can be found in both **Bako National Park** (p423) and **Similajau National Park** (p444). For stretches of white sand head to the islands in **Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park** (p354). For underwater adventures don't miss out on the spectacular dive sites around the islands of the **Tun Sakaran Marine Park**, including the limestone pinnacle **Pulau Sipadan** (p388).



KIDS' MALAYSIA & SINGAPORE

In **Kuala Lumpur** (p90) keep the kids happy with visits to the **KL Bird Park** (p101) and to the Skybridge at the **Petronas Towers** (p95), where you'll also find the Petrosains interactive science discovery centre. Within day-trip distance of KL are the theme parks at **Sunway Lagoon** (p138) and **Genting Highlands** (p132), both of which are ideal places for all the family to cool down and revive.

Day-trip distance from KL is the **Kuala Gandah Elephant Conservation Centre** (p303), where it's possible to feed the elephants and go for a swim with them. To further experience the wonders of the jungle, head to **Taman Negara** (p294). Even if a long hike in this premier national park is out the question, children can clamber across the canopy walkway or float down the river on an inner tube. Out of the beaches and islands of the east coast, you could choose **Pulau Kapas** (p315) or **Cherating** (p289), slightly more geared towards family holidays.

Singapore (p492) has tonnes of family-friendly diversions including the excellent **zoo and night safari** (p504). Monkeys can easily be spotted on walks around **Bukit Timah Nature Reserve** (p505) and the **MacRitchie Reservoir** (p505). It's fun pedalling around **Pulau Ubin** (p504) and you can hire bikes on **Sentosa Island** (p509), which also boasts a top-class aquarium, dolphin shows, an old fort and OK beaches.



LAND & SEA ADVENTURES

Top of the list is **Taman Negara** (p294), which includes Gunung Tahan, Peninsular Malaysia's highest peak. The far less tourist-frequented **Endau-Rompin National Park** (p269) has Malaysia's largest population of Sumatran rhinos, although don't count on spotting these elusive beasts.

Pulau Redang (p317) is a spectacular dive site – nine islands surrounded by fine coral reefs and clear water. An alternative dive destination is the much less visited gem of **Pulau Lang Tengah** (p318). The **Seribu Archipelago** (p266) offers super dive conditions less the crowds; the most accessible islands are Besar, Sibul and Rawa, but the best diving is around Pemanggil and Aur.

Malaysian Borneo has 23 national parks including marine reserves and the rarefied heights of **Mt Kinabalu** (p357); set aside three days to reach the summit. In **Gunung Mulu National Park** (p452) allow four days to tramp the Headhunters Trail and climb to the jagged Pinnacles. A day is sufficient for **Niah National Park** (p450) with its giant caves. Give yourself two days in **Bako National Park** (p423) to hunt out exotic flora and fauna, and to enjoy walks along the rugged coastline.

Don't miss the spectacular **Tun Sakaran Marine Park** (p388) or **Pulau Layang Layang** (p369), part of the famous Borneo Banks, where shallow reefs and impressive drop-offs both play host to shoals of tuna, barracuda and hammerhead sharks. For adventurous trekking both the **Danum Valley** (p384) and the **Crocker Range** (p396) are recommended.



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