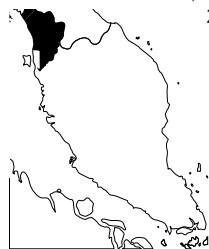


Kedah & Perlis



Tucked into Malaysia's northwest corner are two states that fairly drip with greenness and fertility: Kedah and Perlis. If Kuala Lumpur is Malaysia at its most frenetically developed, and Borneo the nation at its wildest and ruggedest, this is the country's, well, country: not paved, not jungled over, but cultivated, cared for and landscaped into a horizon of looping emerald ridges. Limestone pillars thrust up through this paddyscape and peasants dot it, the latter contributing to the harvest of over half of Malaysia's domestic rice supply.

Not that many foreigners see all this. While it may be one of the most toured states in Malaysia, most travellers would draw a blank if you asked them anything about 'Kedah.' That's because almost everyone knows it by its biggest island and Malaysia's number one holiday destination: Pulau Langkawi. One of those postcard places where life is a cruise ship commercial starring you, Langkawi is also a living island where there's a fair bit to explore beyond the beach, although no one will fault you for losing a few days (Weeks? Months? Langkawi has that effect...) on the sand. Langkawi's duty-free status also makes it popular with a certain kind of shopper, and it's not uncommon to see folks leaving the island with tanned arms busting with cartons of Marlboros.

Perlis is the smallest state in Malaysia; physically and culturally it borders Kedah. It's also proximate to Thailand, and most travellers rush through here on their way to that kingdom. Their loss: this corner of the country is part of the Malay heartland, which makes it overwhelmingly friendly and culturally significant. The Malays are known as *bumiputra* – sons of the soil – and that soil, physical and cultural, is most fertile in Kedah and Perlis.

HIGHLIGHTS

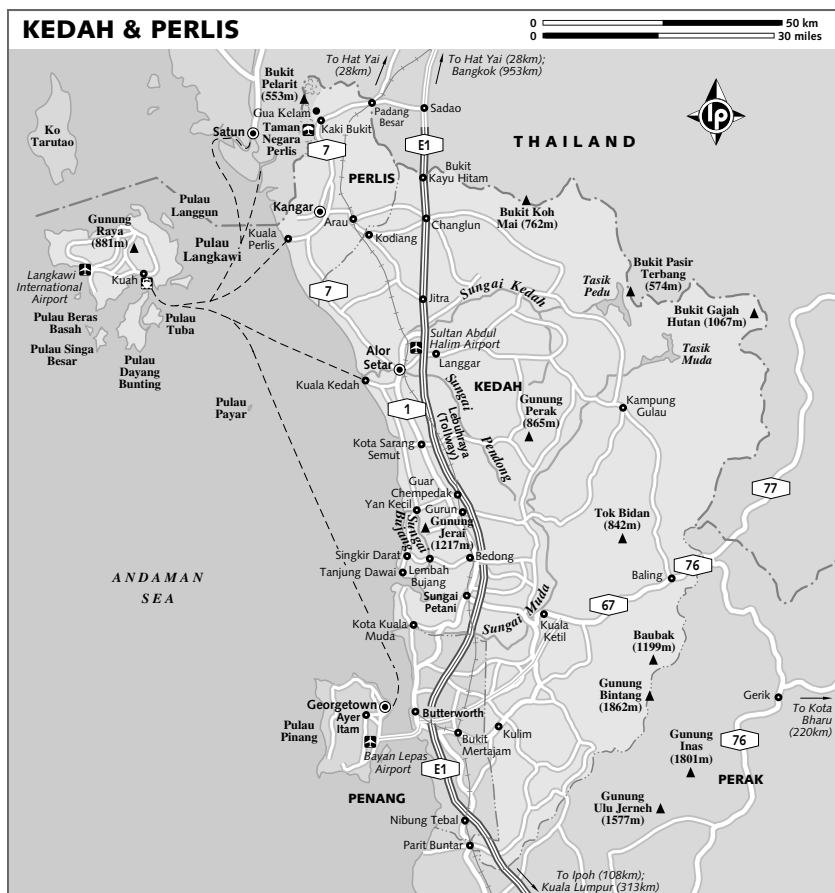
- Sliding through the seven pools of **Telaga Tujuh** (p219)
- Exploring Kedah's history as a Hindu-Buddhist kingdom at the **Muzium Arkeologi** (p210) in Lembah Bujang
- Deciding between staying in a colonial villa or Chinese mansion at **Temple Tree** (p223) in Langkawi
- Relaxing on one of the stunning beaches of **Pulau Langkawi** (p220)
- Riding the cable car to the top of Langkawi's **Gunung Machinchang** (p219) to enjoy the spectacular views



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 04

■ POPULATION: 2.17 MILLION

■ AREA: 10,236 SQ KM



Climate

Kedah and Perlis both enjoy a typical tropical climate, with temperatures between 21°C and 32°C throughout the year. The wettest time of year is between April and October, when the odd tropical storm is expected, whereas there is intermittent rainfall and occasional downpours at other times. Pulau Langkawi tends to see less rain than the mainland. Humidity hovers at around 90%.

National Parks

The tiny state park of Perlis (Taman Negara Perlis; p228) is a remote, 5000-hectare expanse of jungle running along the Thai border. For more details, contact the **park visitors centre** (☎ 945 7898). The entire Langkawi archipelago

is a Unesco-designated 'geopark' – the first one to be named so in Southeast Asia – but that status has more publicity than actual protective measures attached to it.

Dangers & Annoyances

Travellers crossing the land border into Malaysia from Thailand have reported a common scam practised by some travel operators. Foreigners are told that at the border crossing they need a certain amount of Malaysian ringgit (RM) to be allowed into the country (usually quite a high amount), and are then obliged to buy Malaysian currency at a highly disadvantageous rate. Don't be taken in by this con – it is not necessary to have a specified amount of Malaysian cash to cross the border.

Langkawi ‘beach boys’ – local men who make a living off small tourism activities, hustling or flings with foreign women – have a particularly bad reputation for aggression and general sleaziness. We’ve read many reports of fights between ‘beach boys’ and male travellers and saw two such incidents during our research. You may just want to be generally careful.

Getting There & Away

The main train line and the Lebuhraya (North–South Hwy) run through Kedah and Perlis, heading southwards to Butterworth and beyond, and northwards to the Thai border. Alor Setar, the state capital of Kedah, is the main transport hub, with bus connections to most major cities on the peninsula. It also has an airport, with regular flights to Kuala Lumpur (KL). Bukit Kayu Hitam in Kedah and Padang Besar in Perlis are the border crossings into Thailand.

Langkawi can be reached by air from KL, Georgetown and Singapore and by ferry from Georgetown, Kuala Kedah and Kuala Perlis and from Satun in Thailand.

Getting Around

Most of the big towns in Kedah and Perlis are easily reached by bus. Trains are infrequent, often leave at inconvenient times and are not particularly useful for travelling within the two states. There is no public transport on Langkawi. You will have to use taxis to get around, unless you rent a car or motorbike.

KEDAH

The iconic man-made geographic feature of Southeast Asia is and ever was the rice paddy. There’s something about its flatness and fecundity, all that green suggesting wild, energy and life, yet so expertly and elegantly partitioned off and cultivated. Its nature at its most vibrant, tamed into its most productive.

The paddy field is the eternal horizon of Kedah, Malaysia’s ‘rice bowl.’ Two blocks of colour constantly kiss at the edge of your eyesight: robin’s-egg blue on top and deep, alive green on the bottom, with strips of bitumen webbing through. If you find inspiration in the rustic, clean-lined aesthetic

of Asian agriculture, this state is the field of sunflowers to your inner van Gogh.

If not, it’s still worth spending some time here meeting Malays. Across the world, rural folk have a reputation for being hard working and hospitable. The cliché holds true in Kedah at least. Here farmers are bent over the ruins of great kingdoms like Srivijaya, and their children seek IT jobs in Alor Setar, but to a man, they’re all friendly as hell.

For travellers’ purposes there are essentially two Kedahs: the tropical island of Langkawi and its attached islets, and rural, little-visited mainland Kedah. Kedah state’s business hours differ from those of most of the peninsula. Banks and government offices are usually closed on Friday, but sometimes open a half-day on Saturday. For information on the state, check out www.visitkedah.com.my.

History

Kedah is one of the most historically significant Malay states. Settlement goes back to the Stone Age, and some of the earliest excavated archaeological sites in the country are near Gunung Jerai. More recent finds in Lembah Bujang date back to the Hindu-Buddhist period in the 4th century AD, and the current royal family can trace its line back directly to this time. Discoveries in Lembah Bujang show that it was the cradle of Hindu-Buddhist civilisation on the peninsula – the society that would become the foundation stone for Malay culture – and one of the first places to come into contact with Indian traders. The latter would eventually bring Islam to Malaysia, a religion whose cultural impact cannot be overstated here.

During the 7th and 8th centuries, Kedah paid tribute to the Srivijaya Empire of Sumatra, but later fell under the influence of the Siamese until the 15th century, when the rise of Melaka led to the Islamisation of the area. In the 17th century Kedah was attacked by the Portuguese, who had already conquered Melaka, and by the Acehnese, who saw Kedah as a threat to their own spice production.

In the hope that the British would help protect what remained of Kedah from Siam, the sultan handed over Penang to the British in the late 18th century. Nevertheless, in the early 19th century Kedah once again came under Siamese control, where it remained, either directly or as a vassal, until early in the 20th century when Siam passed control to the British.

This history of changing hands between the Thai and the British manifests, in places, as a somewhat hybrid Malay-Thai culture.

After WWII, during which Kedah (along with Kelantan) was the first part of Malaya to be invaded by the Japanese, Kedah became part of the Federation of Malaya in 1948, albeit reluctantly.

During the 2008 elections, Kedah, traditionally a breeding ground for leaders of the Barisan National ruling party, came out strongly in favour of the opposition, particularly the Islamist Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS).

SUNGAI PETANI

☎ 04

The only reason to stop at 'SP', on the highway between Butterworth and Alor Setar, is for transport connections to Gunung Jerai or the archaeology museum at Lembah Bujang.

If you get stuck, there are a few hotels in the centre. The best is the **Swiss Inn** (☎ 422 3333; www.swissgarden.com; 1 Jln Pahlawan; r/stg RM300/450; ☎ ☎), a modern chain hotel with large, fresh rooms (nonsmoking) and great facilities. If you book online, rates are half, or even less, of the published prices. Another good choice is the **Seri Malaysia Hotel** (☎ 423 4060; www.serimalaysia.com.my; 21 Jln Pasar; r RM120; ☎), a big, three-storey place opposite the train station.

There are several Chinese and Malay food stalls in the lanes behind the HSBC Bank, just southwest of the clock tower.

Sungai Petani is on Malaysia's main train line, and there is one (7.10pm) daily connection to KL (from RM32, 10 to 11 hours) and two (6.30am and 3.40pm) to Hat Yai, Thailand (from RM16, four to five hours). The local bus station and taxi stand are on Jln Putri, a few hundred metres south of the clock tower and one block west of the main street. The long-distance bus station is also south of the clock tower, but a few blocks east across a small bridge. From there, express buses run to Alor Setar (RM4, hourly).

LEMBAH BUJANG

☎ 04

The source of much of Malay culture, traditions and society were the medieval Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms that traded and conquered across the Indian Ocean centuries ago. The area west of Sungai Petani was home to the most important Hindu-Buddhist kingdom on the peninsula, dating back to the

4th century AD. By the 7th century AD it was part of the large Srivijaya Empire of Sumatra, reaching its architectural peak in the 9th and 10th centuries. Hindu and Buddhist temples were scattered from Gunung Jerai south to Kota Kuala Muda, and in Lembah Bujang alone 50 archaeological sites have already been excavated.

The kingdom traded with India and the Khmer and Srivijaya empires, and was visited by the well-travelled Chinese monk I-Tsing (Yi Jing) in AD 671. In 1025 Srivijaya and Bujang were attacked by the Cholas of India, but the Lembah Bujang kingdom later forged an alliance with the Cholas against the waning Srivijaya Empire. The region continued to trade, but by the 14th century its significance had faded and the temples were deserted with the coming of Islam. They remained buried in the jungle until excavated by British archaeologist HG Quaritch-Wales in 1936.

Along the banks of Sungai Bujang, the **Muzium Arkeologi** (Archaeological Museum; ☎ 457 2005; admission free; ☎ 8am-4.15pm Sun-Thu, 8am-noon & 2.45-4.15pm Fri) chronicles the excavations, and displays stone carvings, pottery and other artefacts. However, most of the carvings have been lost, and only a handful of items are on display, such as a fragment of a wall frieze and a statue of the elephant god, Ganesh. Most numerous are yoni fertility stones.

Though of enormous archaeological significance, the displays don't have the best labelling and it's difficult to fully appreciate the site as presented. The largest temple is the 1000-year-old **Candi Bukit Batu Pahat**. Note the drainage ditches; their presence is testament to strong Indian influence, as locally designed Hindu and Buddhist temples did not have similar outlets.

The archaeological museum is off the Tanjung Dawai road, 2km north of the village of Merbok. From Sungai Petani, take a taxi (RM70) or one of the buses that run roughly every hour to Tanjung Dawai, get off at Merbok (RM2) and walk the 2km to the museum.

GUNUNG JERAI

The forest-clad 1217m Gunung Jerai dominates the surrounding flat plains. It was a sacred mountain in the ancient Hindu period and a landmark for ships sailing from India and Indonesia.

From the base of the mountain, a steep and narrow road snakes its way 13km through a forest recreation park to a sleepy hill resort. From here there are expansive views north across the rice paddies of Kedah and over to Langkawi.

There are few opportunities for hiking or exploring away from the paved road, although a guide can be arranged at the sole resort here. The road itself continues 3km past the resort to the peak and the remains of Candi Telaga Sembilan, a 6th-century Hindu bathing shrine, but the area is the property of the defence ministry and is off limits.

A few kilometres downhill from the resort is a tiny **forestry museum** with exhibits on native trees and their uses, but little on the mountain's flora and fauna. The highlight is an enormous fossilised elephant dropping. From the museum a paved trail leads through the forest to a waterfall and bathing pools.

Sleeping & Eating

Peranginan Gunung Jerai (☎ 423 4345; s & d RM60, f RM110; 🍴) The only place to stay, this is a low-key resort with accommodation divided between 20 dated rooms and six larger, and more preferable, chalets. All have hot water and TVs, and you'll find a restaurant and a basic shop at the resort.

Getting There & Away

Gunung Jerai is 30km north of Sungai Petani, and the turn-off is 3km north of Gurun just before Guar Chempedak. From the car park at the bottom of the mountain, minibuses run up to the resort approximately every 45 minutes from 8.30am to 5pm (RM5). Private vehicles can also use the road.

Although the local bus No 2 between Sungai Petani and Alor Setar passes right by the car park on Hwy 1, the express services use the Lebuhraya instead. From Sungai Petani you could also take a taxi or a local Guar Chempedak bus to the car park.

ALOR SETAR

☎ 04

Most travellers use the capital of Kedah, also known as Alor Star, as a hopping-off point to Thailand, Langkawi or southern Malaysia, but there's enough around to keep you exploring for a day. This is a very Malay city, culturally rooted in a conservative mindset that references a fairly strict interpretation of Islam

and reverence for the local monarchy. On the flip side, Alor Setar is a young city where life centres around a very popular mall. Shopping for electronics and clothes is all the rage with Kedah's kids. Austerity, obedience, reverence and consumer capitalism are the odd mix of ingredients that makes up the closest thing Kedah has to an urban scene.

Well, there's some interesting architecture too. The city's long association with Thailand is evident in Thai temples scattered around town, while its relatively small Chinese population lives in a suitably atmospheric (if compact) Chinatown. And the area around the *padang* (town square) is lined with mosques, a sultan's palace and a few colonial administrative buildings, although the town's relatively late transferral to the British (1909) from the Thais reduced the scope of European influence on local buildings.

Orientation

For travellers' purposes, there are three main areas of interest in Alor Setar that form a walkable triangle. The *padang* (town square) is surrounded by most of the city's interesting historical buildings. To the south, in the bend of the Sungai Anak Butik, is the atmospheric, dilapidated Chinatown. East of here, across Sungai Raja, is City Point Plaza, a large mall that anchors the town's commercial district.

Information

There are numerous internet cafes in City Point Plaza; all charge around RM3 per hour.

Maybank (Jln Sultan Badlishah)

Tourist information office (☎ 731 2322; mtpbkdh@tourism.gov.my; Kompleks Pelancongan Negeri Kedah, Jln Raja; 🕒 8am-1pm & 2-4.45pm Sun-Wed, to 4.30pm Thu) South of the town centre.

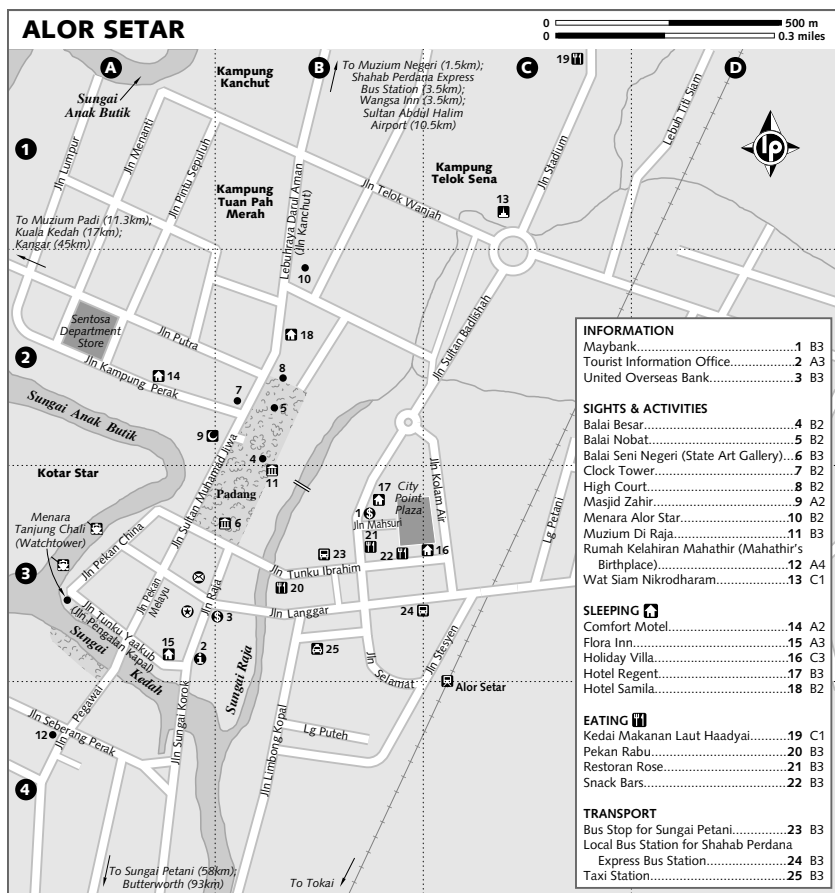
United Overseas Bank (Jln Raja)

Sights

Note that most businesses and museums are closed from noon to 2pm on Friday for Islamic prayers. This obviously does not extend to Buddhist temples.

PADANG

Some impressive buildings front the town square. The open-sided **Balai Besar** (Royal Audience Hall) was built in 1898 and is still used by the sultan of Kedah for royal and state ceremonies, though it is not open to the



public. Supported on tall pillars topped with Victorian iron lacework, the building also shows Thai influences in its decoration.

Next to the Balai Besar is the **Muzium Di Raja** (Royal Museum; ☎ 732 7937; Jln Raja; admission free; ⌚ 10am–6pm, from 9.30am Fri), which served as the royal palace for the sultan and other members of the family from 1856. Besides housing paraphernalia of the royal family, it's quite enjoyable to wander round the courtyard and admire the buildings.

At the southern edge of the square is the **Balai Seni Negeri**, built in 1893 as a courthouse. Although Kedah was not part of British Malaya at the time, the courthouse is still built in a distinctive, white-columned colonial style. Today it houses the **State Art**

Gallery (☎ 732 5752; Jln Raja; admission free; ⌚ 10am–6pm) and displays a decent gallery of contemporary Malaysian art.

To the north, the **Balai Nobat** (Hall of Drums; 1906) is a striking octagonal tower topped by an onion-shaped dome. It's the repository of the *nobat* (royal orchestra), principally composed of percussion instruments; the drums in this orchestra are said to have been a gift from the sultan of Melaka in the 15th century. It isn't open to the public, and the instruments are brought out only on ceremonial occasions such as royal weddings.

Just behind the Balai Nobat is the **High Court**, a classical white colonial building erected in 1922.

The Kedah state mosque, **Masjid Zahir**, is one of the largest and most beautiful mosques in Malaysia. Built in 1912, it has a classical beauty, more of an apparition from *The Thousand and One Nights* than a smoothed-out modern Malaysian mosque. The building encloses the cemetery of Kedah warriors who fought the Thais in 1821. Behind the structure, in contrast to the secular High Court, is the religious *syariah* (sharia) court complex.

On the opposite side of the lane, the decorative **clock tower**, painted in the same yellow and white livery as the Balai Nobat, was erected in the early 1900s so that the muezzin at the neighbouring mosque would know when to call the faithful to prayer.

If the Petronas Towers weren't enough for you in KL, the second-tallest tower in the country is the **Menara Alor Star** (Telekom Tower; ☎ 720 2234; www.menaraalorstar.com.my; Lebuhraya Darul Aman; adult/child RM6/3; ☎ 9.30am-10pm) which, at 165.5m, is also the tallest structure in town. A glass-sided lift will take you to the observation deck for good views of Alor Setar and the surrounding countryside. There's a revolving restaurant at the top, though it's not always open.

WAT SIAM NIKRODHARAM

Although Alor Setar has weathered Thai occupation, its main Buddhist community is Chinese in heritage. Thus the presence of this cross-cultural *wat* (Buddhist temple); typically Thai with its stupas, fire-in-the-lotus imagery and Angkor Wat-esque wall reliefs, yet scattershot with Chinese Buddhist saints, of import to the Chinese donors who funded the construction of this complex. This is one of those typically Malaysian cultural blends, in this case of Chinese Mahayana and Thai Theravada Buddhism (as mixed up as a Catholic cathedral crossed with a Protestant church).

MUZIUM NEGERI

The **Muzium Negeri** (State Museum; ☎ 733 1162; Lebuhraya Darul Aman; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm, from 9.30am Fri) is 2km north of the Padang. The small collection includes early Chinese porcelain, artefacts from archaeological excavations at Lembah Bujang and dioramas of royal and rural Malaysian life.

Most local buses from town to the express-bus station pass by the museum. A taxi from the town centre costs RM8.

MAHATHIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, fourth prime minister of Malaysia and longtime keystone of national politics, was born the youngest of nine children in Alor Setar in 1925. His childhood home, **Rumah Kelahiran Mahathir** (Mahathir's Birthplace; ☎ 772 2319; No 18 Lg Kilang Ais; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) is now preserved as a small museum, containing family effects, photos and the politician's old bicycle.

MUZIUM PADI

Muzium Padi (Paddy Museum; ☎ 735 1315; off K351 Hwy; adult/child/camera RM3/1/2; ☎ 10am-6pm, from 9.30am Fri) is all about Kedah's main crop: rice. It's located about 10km northwest of the city, amid, appropriately enough, green rice paddies. The complex, which resembles stacked brass flying saucers, is supposed to emulate the gunny sacks used by rice farmers. Inside...well, if you're *really* into rice, you'll love it. The main event is a top-floor rotating observation deck that looks out onto a mural of the surrounding rice fields (rather than the rather idyllic fields themselves); the gimmick pays homage to Gunung Keriang, a nearby limestone hill that, according to local folklore, is also supposed to rotate.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Flora Inn (☎ 732 2375; <http://florainn.tripod.com>; 8 Kompleks Medan Raja, Jln Pengkalan Kapal; s/d RM13/65; ☎) Flora Inn is sold as overlooking the 'magnificent' Sungai Kedah, which is little more than algal green glop. That aside, you will find clean, cheap rooms here situated by Chinatown and a small food court, and the management is bend-over-backwards friendly.

Comfort Motel (☎ 734 4866; 2C Jln Kampung Perak; s RM25-40, d RM35-50; ☎) This is a good-value Chinese hotel, located in a renovated wooden house across from the mosque. The rooms all have gleaming tiled floors and TVs, though only the higher-priced ones have private bathrooms.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Regent (☎ 731 1900; www.regentalorsetar.com; 1536 Jln Sultanah Badlishah; s/d RM98/150; ☎) Very much reminiscent of a mid-priced Western motel chain (with slightly dimmer lighting), the Regent comes with the requisite ugly blankets, bad art, comfy rooms and clean facilities. Breakfast included.

Hotel Samila (☎ 731 8888; 27 Jln Kanchut; s/d from RM120/160; 🍽️) You pay a little more at this midrange spot and get a little more: comfort, courteous service and quiet. Situated in a good spot for exploring the Padang.

TOP END

Holiday Villa (☎ 734 9999; www.holidayvilla.com.my; 162 Jln Tunku Ibrahim; r from RM310; 🍽️ 🚿) This towering hotel adjoining the City Point Plaza shopping mall is easily the best place in town. It has spacious, tastefully furnished rooms and a range of facilities, including a gym, a sauna and a few restaurants.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Restoran Rose (☎ 731 3471; Jln Sultan Baldishah; mains from RM4; 🍽️ lunch & dinner) Long-running Indian restaurant serving up the usual curries, roti and biryani dishes in the usual slightly tatty if perfectly clean cafeteria atmosphere (or lack thereof).

Kedai Makanan Laut Haadyai (☎ 732 5036; 1915 Jln Stadium; mains from RM10; 🍽️ 6.30pm-2am) Praised by locals as the best seafood in town, the fish, cockles, lobsters and any damn thing else that once called a body of water home is wonderfully fresh and prepared mainly in Chinese and Thai style. Generally hums to the pleasantly loud mastication of happy local families.

QUICK EATS

Pekan Rabu (Wednesday Market; Jln Langgar; 🍽️ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This goes on all day, every day, until late at night. Ground-floor outlets offer snack food and drinks while upstairs market stalls sell local products such as *dodol durian* (a gelatinous local sweet made from sticky rice, coconut and durian). The rest of the market is given over to clothes shops.

There are some simple **coffee shops** (Jln Tunku Ibrahim) at the front of City Point Plaza, where you can get noodles and coffee.

Getting There & Away

Alor Setar is 48km from the Bukit Kayu Hitam border to Thailand. Frequent buses go to the border, from where minibus taxis go to Hat Yai (see Bukit Kayu Hitam, p226, for this border crossing). A direct train via the Padang Besar border may be quicker and is certainly more convenient.

AIR

Sultan Abdul Halim Airport is 11km north of town just off the Lebuhraya. Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia and Firefly all offer daily flights; promotional fares to Kuala Lumpur can be as low as RM35 after taxes.

BUS

The tiny bus station on Jln Langgar handles only local buses, including the regular shuttle service to the Shahab Perdana express-bus station on Jln Mergong, 4km north of the town centre (90 sen). A taxi costs RM10. All long-distance buses leave from here.

Frequent buses depart throughout the day for Bukit Kayu Hitam (RM3.20), Kangar (RM3.80) and Kuala Kedah (RM1). There are also regular coaches, operated by several different companies, to KL (RM30), Ipoh (RM17), Butterworth (RM6.30), Melaka (RM35) and Johor Bahru (RM55), as well as to east-coast destinations including Kuantan (RM44.45), Kuala Terengganu (RM41.40) and Kota Bharu (RM28).

Bus services to Sungai Petani (RM3.70, one hour) make a stop on Jln Tunku Ibrahim opposite the Pekan Rabu market. Some buses from the express-bus station stop here too.

TAXI

Rates for a four-passenger taxi from the taxi station include RM40 to Bukit Kayu Hitam, RM65 to Butterworth, RM30 to Kangar, RM18 to Kuala Kedah and RM40 to Padang Besar.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 731 4045; Jln Stesyen) is south-east of the town centre. There is one daily northbound train to Hat Yai in Thailand (from RM12, three hours), and one southbound to KL (from RM35, 1½ hours).

KUALA KEDAH

☎ 04

This busy fishing village 11km from Alor Setar is the southern gateway to Langkawi. If you have time, visit **Kota Kuala Kedah**, a fort built around 1770 opposite the town on the far bank of Sungai Kedah. In one of history's little twists, this Portuguese-built castle became a bastion of Malay independence against warring Siamese, finally falling to invaders in 1821. Try to find 'Meriam Badak Berendam' (The Wallowing Rhino), a cannon stuck in the debris of the collapsed

sea wall, believed to be the abode of the fortress's guardian spirit.

Ferries (☎ 762-6295) to Langkawi leave approximately every half-hour (1½ hours from April to October, the wet season) from 7am to 7pm (adult/child RM23/17).

PULAU LANGKAWI

☎ 04

Langkawi is synonymous with 'tropical paradise': swaying palms, a cool colour contrast of jungle green and ocean blue (offset by brilliant blood red, rich purple and golden mellow come sunset). Despite their immense drawing power, these 99 islands, dominated by 478.5-sq-km Pulau Langkawi, have not been overdeveloped beyond recognition. The district's been duty free since 1986 and roping in tourists well before that. Since 2008 the archipelago's official title is *Langkawi Permata Kedah* (Langkawi, the Jewel of Kedah).

Get just a little ways off the main beaches (themselves pretty pristine) and this is idyllic rural Malaysia, all *kampungs* and oil lamps and admittedly some nice cars (tourists do tend to bring the ring-its with them). And Langkawi, frankly, is fun. Compared to Thailand, Malaysia's islands are dry when it comes to alcohol, but Langkawi is an exception to this rule. You'll still see all sorts of wholesome Malaysian fun happening (hundreds of Malays line dancing on a beach is a sight that sears itself into your eyeballs), but come night, there's a fair amount of booze-fuelled fun about. Past the bad behaviour is a commendable focus on

ecosustainability, although this track record isn't perfect.

Orientation

Langkawi is big folks, almost 500 sq km. Kuah, in the southeast corner of the island, is the main town and the arrival point for ferries, but the beaches are elsewhere.

On Langkawi's west coast, the most developed beach is Pantai Cenang, and its southerly appendage of Pantai Tengah. Pantai Kok's lovely beach is lined with luxury resorts and a modern marina. The airport is on the island's central-west coast near Kuala Muda. There are a few isolated resorts here, but the beach is pretty poor. The north coast of the island hides upmarket resorts at Teluk Datai in the west and Tanjung Rhu in the east.

Langkawi International Airport is in the western part of the island, about 5km north of Pantai Cenang.

Information

EMERGENCY

Langkawi Hospital (☎ 966 3333; Jln Bukit Tengah, Kuah)

INTERNET ACCESS

TCY International (☎ 955 2466; Pantai Cenang; per hr RM3) One of the cheaper internet cafes.

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.langkawi-ferry.com Ferry timetables and fares.

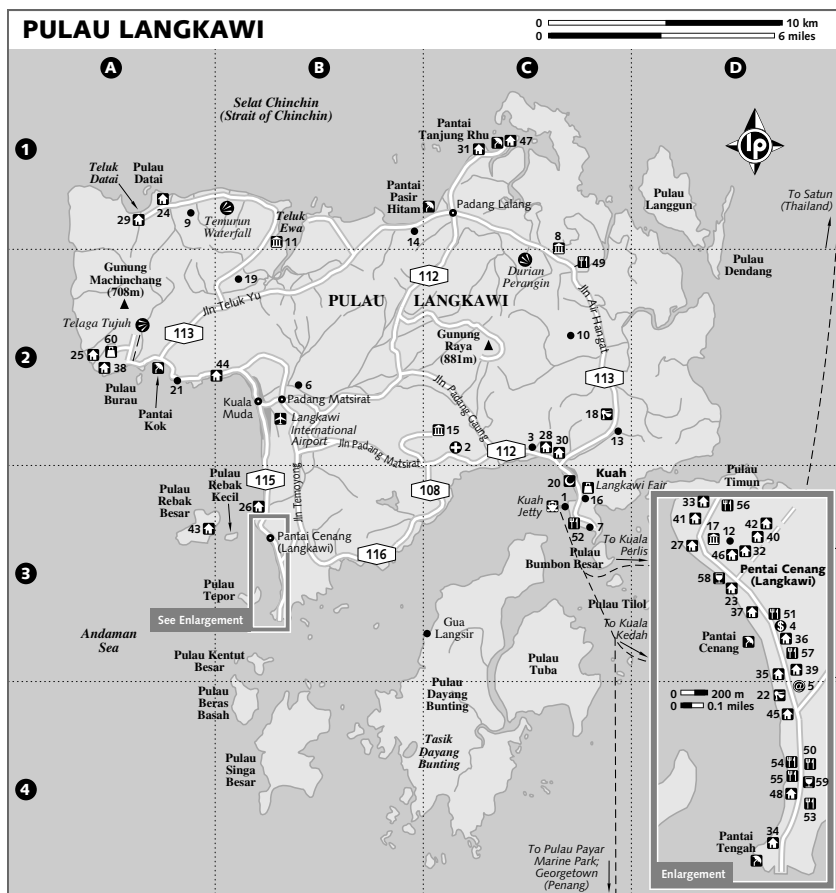
www.langkawigepark.com.my Information on the island's geopark status.

www.langkawi-online.com A comprehensive source of island information.

LEGENDARY LANGKAWI

The name Langkawi combines the old Malay words *helang* (eagle) and *kawi* (strong). Classical Malay literature claims the island as one of the resting places of Garuda, the mythological bird that became Vishnu's vehicle. The whole island is steeped in legends, and the favourite story is of Mahsuri, a maiden who was wrongly accused of infidelity. Before finally allowing herself to be executed, she put a curse on the island for seven generations. As proof of her innocence, white blood flowed from her veins, turning the sands of Langkawi's beaches white. Her mausoleum can be seen near Kuah (p217).

Another legend concerns the naming of places around the island. Pulau Langkawi's two most powerful families became involved in a bitter argument over a marriage proposal. A fight broke out and all the kitchen utensils were used as missiles. The *kuah* (gravy) was spilt at Kuah and seeped into the ground at Kisap, which means 'to seep'. A pot landed at Belanga Perak (Broken Pot) and finally the saucepan of *air panas* (hot water) came to land where Air Hangat village is today. The fathers of these two families got their comeuppance for causing all this mayhem – they are now the island's two major mountain peaks. You can learn more at the intriguing Lagenda Langkawi Dalam Taman (p217).



www.mylangkawi.com This website is also worth a look.

MONEY

The only banks are at Kuah, although there are ATMs at the airport and Telaga Harbour Park. There are also moneychangers tucked into and around duty-free shops. There are a couple of moneychangers at Pantai Cenang, but elsewhere most travellers have to rely on the resort hotels, which a) give bad rates and b) might not change money if you are not a guest.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourism Malaysia (☎ 966 7789; Jln Persiaran Putra, Kuah; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm) Comprehensive information on the whole island.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Bayu Adventures (☎ 966 0006; Jetty Point Complex, Kuah) Arranges day trips and package trips to Thailand.

Legend Admire Travel & Tours (☎ 966 1368; 50 Persiaran Bunga Raya, Kuah) This leading tour operator runs a variety of trips around the island and to Pulau Payar.

TCY International (☎ 955 2466; Pantai Cenang) Runs tours round Langkawi and Perlis.

Travel Shop (☎ 955 8829; Pantai Cenang) Attached to the Malibest Resort, this place can book an array of island tours.

Sights & Activities

KUAH & AROUND

Kuah is Langkawi's main town, and the main reason to stop here is for banks, ferries or duty-free shopping. There are, however, a few points of interest.

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	Pelangi Beach Resort.....41 D3		
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		Oriental Village.....60 A2	
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Next to the jetty, the **Legenda Langkawi Dalam Taman** (☎ 966 4223; Jln Persiaran Putra; admission free; ☞ 8am-7pm) is a landscaped 'folklore theme park' that stretches along the waterfront. Bright statues dotted amid the lakes illustrate several Langkawi legends – with signboards in English – and there's a narrow, mediocre strip of beach. It's a popular spot for joggers.

Just to the west are the golden onion domes of **Masjid Al-Hana** rising above **CHOGM Park**, which, as a plaque proudly states, was the site of the first-ever international coconut-tree climbing championship in 1987 (won by Sri Lanka). The flags represent members of the Commonwealth, whose leaders met here in 1989.

The international-standard **Gunung Raya Golf Resort** (☎ 966 8148; www.golfgr.com.my; Jln Air Hangat; 9/18 holes RM150/200; ☞ 7am-7pm), designed by golf guru Max Wexler, is about 8km north of town in a spectacular location in the foothills of Langkawi's highest mountain. Just south of the golf club is the **Kedah Marble** quarry. It's open to visitors.

In the same area you'll find **Langkawi Bird Paradise** (☎ 966 5855; 1485 Jln Kisap, off Jln Air Hangat; adult/child RM15/8; ☞ 9am-6pm), which touts itself

as Asia's first fully covered wildlife park. There are plenty of animals around (with an emphasis on exotic birds), but we can't say all of them look well cared for.

If you've been wondering what to get former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad for his birthday, you could see what everyone else bought at **Galeria Perdana** (☎ 959 1498; Mukim Air Hangat; admission RM10; ☞ 8.30am-5.30pm). Established by Mahathir himself, the museum displays the sort of weird gifts that get passed between foreign nations and heads of state (F-1 racers, Ming vases painted with Mahathir's face – that sort of thing).

KOTA MAHSURI & PADANG MATSIRAT

Back around 1819 (the date is debated), the Malay princess Mahsuri was unjustly accused of adultery and executed by stabbing. With her dying breath she cursed Langkawi with seven generations of bad luck and expired, supposedly bleeding white blood, a sign of her innocence. Not long after, the Siamese invaded the island, and some 160 years later, in 1987 (that's about seven generations) Langkawi took off as a tourism destination. That's the story anyways, and its been

commemorated by **Kota Mahsuri** (Mahsuri's Fort; ☎ 955 6055; Mukim Ulu Melaka; adult/child RM10/5; ☎ 8am-6pm), a historical complex that includes Mahsuri's Shrine (a fenced-in slab of white stone) as well as a re-creation of a traditional house, a theatre, a 'diorama museum' and some simple food outlets. A fun-in-a-cornyway dinner theatre that focuses on traditional dance takes place from 8pm to 11pm (except Thursday); the cost is RM99.

A result of Mahsuri's curse can still sometimes be seen in the 'field of burnt rice' at nearby **Padang Matsirat**. There, villagers once burnt their rice fields rather than allow them to fall into the hands of Siamese invaders. It's said heavy rain still sometimes brings traces of burnt grains to the surface.

These sites are west of Kuah, a few kilometres off the road leading to the west-coast beaches and the airport

PANTAI CENANG

Las Vegas has the strip, Bangkok has Khaosan Rd and Langkawi gets Pantai Cenang, 25km west of Kuah. OK, this 2km beach isn't as wild as those other spots, but it is Langkawi's main vein. There are some very fine top-end resorts here, as well as the bulk of Langkawi's budget and midrange accommodation. Come night time, an odd mix of expats, domestic tourists, backpackers and package holiday-makers take to the main road to eat, drink, window shop and generally make merry. That said, Pantai Cenang is fairly sedate in low season.

The beach is gorgeous: white sand, teal water, green palms and all that good stuff. A sandbar sometimes appears at low tide, allowing you to inspect local sea life. Between November and January you can walk across this sandbar to the nearby island of **Pulau Rebak Kecil**, but only for two hours around low tide. The island of **Pulau Tepor** can be reached by hired boat from Pantai Cenang.

At the southern end of Pantai Cenang is the Zon duty-free shopping centre and **Underwater World** (☎ 955 6100; www.underwaterworldlangkawi.com.my; adult/child RM38/28; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm, to 8.30pm Fri-Sun), Malaysia's largest aquarium, featuring 200 different species of marine and freshwater creatures. Some exhibits (especially the rainforest walk) are well executed; some feel like a tropical aquarium in need of a cleaning, but in general it's a great place for the kids.

At the northern end opposite Casa del Mar hotel is **Laman Padi** (Rice Garden; ☎ 955 4312; admission free; ☎ grounds 7am-midnight, museum 10am-6pm), an 'ecotourism' complex with picturesque rice paddies populated by water buffaloes and ducks. There's also a museum dedicated to rice cultivation, some restaurants, a post office and **Nawa Sari Spa** (☎ 955 4168; http://nawasaripa.com; Laman Padi; ☎ 10am-11pm), where you can contently watch rice paddies sway under the breeze while you're pummelled and oiled by Thai masseurs (massages RM45 to RM100).

If Thai massage isn't your thing, get a different oily rubdown at **Indian Ayurvedic Massage** (☎ 955 9078; www.langkawi-ayurvedic-massage.com), in an unassuming hut 200m off the main road. Customers rave about treatments like *shirodhara*, where a continual flow of warm herbal oil is poured over your forehead as your head and shoulders are massaged. Treatments cost around RM65 to RM195.

Call the above spas to see if they'll provide you with free pick-up service.

PANTAI TENGAH

Head south and Langkawi gets a little more polished; as the road loops around a rocky headland, you're in more upscale Pantai Tengah. There are a few big, all-inclusive resorts here, good restaurants and bars and a few cheaper chalet clusters.

For the traveller in need of some spoiling, the six spa suites at **Ishan Spa** (☎ 955 5585; Pantai Tengah; ☎ 10am-10pm) offer some pretty posh pampering – air treatments, body scrubs, herbal baths and the like – in a space that screams traditional setting (dark wood, frangipani and the like), but also boasts all sorts of modern accents. Rates run from around RM100 to RM350, more for multiday treatments.

PANTAI KOK

On the western part of the island, 12km north of Pantai Cenang, Pantai Kok fronts a beautiful bay surrounded by limestone mountains, jungle and, sadly, a mall. **Telaga Harbour Park** (www.telagaharbour.com) is a yachting marina/harbourfront shopping complex plunked amid some very fine nature.

Heading inland from Pantai Kok you'll come across Oriental Village shopping complex and the station for **Langkawi Cable Car** (☎ 959 4225; adult/child RM25/18; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Thu, from noon Wed, 9.30am-7pm Fri-Sun), which will

take you on a vertiginous 20-minute trip to the top of the majestic **Gunung Machinchang** (708m). There are some incredible views along the way.

The **Anna & The King Gallery** displays props and costumes from the 1999 film of the same name, which was partly shot at Pantai Kok, but the gallery was closed for maintenance during our visit.

TELAGA TUJUH

If you've been splashing around the ocean, why not add some variety to your life and lounge in some freshwater rock pools? Telaga Tujuh (Seven Wells), located at the top of a waterfall inland from Pantai Kok, is a series of small pools connected by a thin trickle of mountain flow. The smooth rut between pools is slick enough to slide down, especially towards the bottom; doing so is great fun.

You can get here by rented car, motorbike or taxi; drive to the end of the road, about 1km past Pantai Kok, then turn along with the road to the right until you reach the car park. From here it's a steady 10-minute climb through the rainforest (stay to the right) to the wells at the top of the falls. You can make a 2.5 kilometre hike from here to the cable car station; this is a taxing route that requires sound shoes and a good level of physical fitness.

TELUK DATAI

The beaches and jungle around Teluk Datai are some distance off the main road around the island. Here you'll find Langkawi's most exclusive resorts and the **Golf Club Datai Bay** (☎ 959 2700; www.dataigolf.com; 9/18 holes RM300/400), said to be among Malaysia's top 10 courses. The resorts' beautiful beaches are for guests only. The road continues past the resorts to a headland where a short trail takes you through the jungle and down to the sea.

On the way to Teluk Datai is **Langkawi Crocodile Farm** (☎ 959 2559; adult/child RM15/10; ☎ 9am-6pm). If you're not a kid or sympathetic to reptiles you may enjoy the twice-daily 'stunt' shows and hourly feedings, but the small, dirty pools and the fact that many of the farm's residents are turned into meat is a turn-off for many.

Further along where the road turns west along the coast to Teluk Datai is the **Ibrahim Hussein Foundation Museum** (☎ 959 4669; adult/child RM12/free; ☎ 10am-6pm), which displays the abstract and multimedia works of its founder

and namesake. It's good art, especially if you need a break from traditional batik-work and the like.

Temurun Waterfall is halfway between the museum and the resorts. The high falls are worth a look; the turn-off is just east of a huge concrete archway spanning the road.

PANTAI PASIR HITAM

As you head east along the north coast the landscape humps into thickly jungled hills before flattening into a clawed, jagged coast where high tide seems to sweep out the beach. When you can see sand, it appears leopard-spotted and tiger-striped with black; this isn't technically a black-sand beach, but mineral oxides have added their colour scheme to the coast. The beach, Pantai Pasir Hitam, is only a couple of metres wide and located at the foot of a 5m drop, so you can't walk along it.

Before reaching the beach, you'll pass the **Kompleks Kraf Langkawi** (☎ 959 1913; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm), an enormous handicrafts centre where you can watch demonstrations of traditional crafts and buy any traditional Malaysian product or craft you can imagine. There are also a couple of on-site exhibitions devoted to local legends and wedding ceremonies.

You'll also eventually pass the Kedah cement plant, which stands out like a post-apocalyptic smoke-belching thumb amid the green.

TANJUNG RHU

Just beyond Pasir Hitam at the village of Padang Lalang there's a roundabout with a turn-off to the north to Tanjung Rhu, while the main road continues back to Kuah. Driving toward Tanjung Rhu you'll pass through a corridor of medium-density jungle with a river running to the east lapping at the shore of more hills. It looks like a tempting spot for a swim, but sheer drops make it tough to access the water.

Eventually you'll reach Tanjung Rhu, which has one of Langkawi's wider and better beaches, fronted by magnificent limestone stacks that bend the ocean into a pleasant bay. On clear days, the sunsets here give 'stunning' new meaning. The water is shallow, and at low tide you can walk across the sandbank to the neighbouring islands, except during the monsoon season. Local shops offer mangrove cruises, and kayaks can be hired.

BEST BEACHES

Langkawi's many beaches are among the best in Malaysia. The busiest is the 2km-long strip of sand at **Pantai Cenang**, which has the biggest concentration of hotels, and is popular with everyone from 20-something backpackers to older package tourists. There are watersports activities at hand, and the water is good for swimming, but jellyfish are common, so you might feel a bit tingly when you go for a dip. To the south, **Pantai Tengah** is quieter, with a more family-friendly/honeymooner atmosphere. The beaches at **Pantai Kok** on the west coast are again popular with family groups, but many of the best ones are inside luxury resorts and are inaccessible to nonguests, as are the beautiful sands at **Teluk Datai** on the north. Go to **Tanjung Rhu** for perfect sunsets. The beach on **Pulau Beras Basah** is one of the best for children. It's a small, clean shallow beach, great for swimming and for snorkelling.

Around the promontory, accessible by hired boat, is the **Gua Cerita** (Cave of Legends). Along the coast for a couple of kilometres before the beach, the tiny fish known as *ikan bilis* (anchovies) are spread out on mats to dry in the sun.

GUNUNG RAYA

The tallest mountain on the island (881m) can be reached by a snaking, paved road through the jungle. It's a spectacular drive to the top with views across the island and over to Thailand from a lookout point and a small teahouse (assuming there's no fog). Access to the mountain may occasionally be restricted by the government; the gate at the foot of the mountain will be lowered.

AIR HANGAT VILLAGE

This **village** (☎ 959 1357; culture shows adult/child RM4/2; ☎ 9am-6pm) is towards the north of the island, not far from the turn-off to Tanjung Rhu, and is known for its hot springs. Apart from watching the water gush along artificial channels and buying souvenirs, there's not much to do, although 'cultural shows' take place occasionally – contact the tourist office to see if anything is lined up. As with so many places on Langkawi, the springs are associated with an intriguing legend (see the box, p215).

DURIAN PERANGIN

Roughly 15km north of Kuah is the turn-off to these waterfalls, which are 3km off the main road. The swimming pools, 10 minutes' walk up through the forest, are always refreshingly cool, although the falls are best seen at the end of monsoon season: late September and early October. In the dry season, naturally, they are not so spectacular.

PULAU DAYANG BUNTING

Tasik Dayang Bunting (Lake of the Pregnant Maiden) is located on the island of the same name. It's a freshwater lake surrounded by craggy limestone cliffs and dense jungle, and its good for swimming. You can rent a pedalo for a spin round the lake, or just sit on the edge of the jetty and have your toes nibbled by the resident catfish.

Legends say a childless couple, after 19 years of trying, had a baby girl after drinking from this lake; since then it's been a popular pilgrimage destination for those wanting children. The lake is also supposedly inhabited by a giant white crocodile. North of the lake is **Gua Langsir** (Cave of the Banshee), which is inhabited by thousands of bats.

The island is best visited on one of the island-hopping tours.

PULAU PAYAR MARINE PARK

Strung out like several green jewels in the teal is this marine park, the focus of Langkawi's dive and snorkelling expeditions. Most trips come to 2km-long Pulau Payar, although you probably won't see the interior of the island – all the action centres on a diving platform and horseshoe-bend of coast. Inquire about the water conditions before you go, as it can be murky. But when it's clear you don't even have to snorkel to be treated to some wonderful views of tropical fish.

Langkawi Coral (☎ 966 7318; www.langkawicoral.com; Lot 1-21 Jetty Point Complex, Kuah) is the main tour operator for Pulau Payar. Trips including snorkelling/diving cost RM240/300. You can also book tickets to the park from Penang (see p188). **East Marine** (☎ 966 3966; www.eastmarine.com.my; Royal Langkawi Yacht Club, Jln Pantai Dato Syed Omar, Kuah) offers the same trip for RM240/340, as does **Pro Dive** (☎ 955 3739; Pantai Cenang). The East

Marine and Pro Dive outfits both offer PADI-certification for around RM1500.

Tours

There are travel agents in Kuah, along Pantai Cenang and at most upmarket resorts that organise tours (see Travel Agencies, p216). Note the following prices are especially subject to change depending on whether meals are included, the number of sites visited etc.

The most popular day trip is the island-hopping tour, offered by most companies (adult/child from RM60/40). The tour usually takes in Pulau Dayang Bunting, Pulau Beras Basah, sea stacks, sea caves and a cruise around mangroves for a look at the local eagles. Pulau Singa Besar might also be visited, with its resident population of mouse deer and crotchet monkeys.

Eagle-feeding tours (adult/child from RM170/110) put customers up close with Langkawi's famous brahminy kites and sea eagles, but there is a significant argument for not feeding the birds. Eagles run the risk of becoming dependent on human handouts and lose their fear of human contact, making them easier prey for hunters. If bad meat is thrown to the eagles (which congregate in large flocks for feeding tours), the health risks to the relatively small population are enormous. Finally, while providing eye candy for tourists, no significant research knowledge is gained from the feeding sessions.

There are several cruise operators in Langkawi, including **Crystal Yacht Holidays** (☎ 955 6545; www.crystalyacht.com), which operates popular sunset dinner cruises (adult/child from RM220/100).

More active trips are run by **Langkawi Canopy Adventures** (☎ 955 4744; www.langkawi.travel/lca.htm) and include jungle trekking (RM120), abseiling through the rainforest (from RM210) and kayak trips (from RM250). The company also operates triathlon/ironman training camps.

Fishing trips are also available, costing from around RM300 for four hours, though prices will depend on when, and for how long, you want to go.

During the monsoon season from July to mid-September, the seas are often too rough and unpredictable for many of the above boat trips.

Diving trips normally concentrate on Pulau Payar (opposite).

Festivals & Events

Langkawi hosts some major events including the **Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace exhibition** (LIMA; [www.limamaritime.com .my](http://www.limamaritime.com.my)) around November, the **Langkawi Arts and Crafts Festival** (LACRAF) in December, the **Langkawi International Water Festival** in April and the biennial **Langkawi International Festival of Arts** (LIFA).

Sleeping

Accommodation options are constantly improving here, especially at the luxury end of the scale. Teak villas and gussied-up traditional huts (with chandelier showerheads, silk sheets and cable TV, natch) strive to outdo each other in the pampering stakes, all to your benefit. Further down the price range you'll end up in decent hotels and chalets, while backpackers will find a decent variety of hostels and dorms. All categories of price are 30% to 50% more expensive than what you'll find on the mainland.

During school holidays and the peak tourist season (November to February), Pulau Langkawi can become crowded, though something can usually still be found. At other times of the year supply far outstrips demand.

KUAH

There's no reason to stay in Kuah unless you *seriously* have a thing for duty-free shopping.

Eagle Bay Hotel (☎ 966 8585; www.eaglebay.com.my; 33 Jln Persiaran Putra; s & d RM125, f RM135; 🍷) Right opposite CHOQM Park, this book has a drab cover, but on the inside it's a smart hotel that provides the usual three-star comforts and various package deals.

City Bayview Hotel (☎ 966 1818; [www.bayviewhotels .com/langkawi](http://www.bayviewhotels.com/langkawi); 1 Jln Pandak Mayah; r/ste from RM185/260; 🍷 🍷 🍷) A reliable choice. This is your standard high-rise chain hotel decked out with stylish rooms and excellent facilities, including a gym, sauna and rooftop pool.

PANTAI CENANG

Pantai Cenang encompasses all the variety of Langkawi accommodation, from veritable jungle villas to backpacker enclaves. As regards the latter, this is the best concentration of budget accommodation on the island. Many places are on the opposite side of the road from the beach and don't have sea views.

Budget

Gecko Guesthouse (☎ 019-428 3801; rebeccaftott@hotmail.com; dm RM10, r RM25-70; 🏠) 'How long you been here?' 'Two weeks.' 'How long were you going to stay originally?' 'Three days.' 'How long are you staying?' (Laughs). Yep – that's the vibe in this most backpacker of backpacker joints. There are a jingly collection of bungalows, chalets and dorms, lotsa dreadlocked folk in the common area, very good chocolate milkshakes behind the bar and a fair bit of popularity – you may want to book early.

Rainbow Lodge (☎ 955 8103; dm RM15, r from RM40) Set a little ways back from the beach, this is a perfectly passable option for those needing a cheap place to rest in between eating, drinking, hangover and more drinking. The dorm looks like a barracks, but it's a good spot for meeting folks.

Sweet Inn (☎ 955 8864; r RM50-70; 🏠 📺) Super Sweet, actually: a cute yellow building dotted with umbrella-shaded tables, rooms that keep cool in the heat and a friendly common area where meeting fellow congregants at the temple of backpacking is easy and breezy. Just behind but almost sharing the same grounds with Sweet Inn is Daddy's Guest House, where rooms (RM40) are a bit cheaper. It looks a little more like a Malaysian apartment block, but the actual rooms are quite nice, and top-floor ones have sea views.

AB Motel (☎ 955 1300; r RM50-90; 🏠) This is a relatively basic complex of scrubbed-down rooms that gets good reviews from travellers for its cleanliness and extremely easy beach access.

Palms Guest House (☎ 017-631 0121; r from RM65; 🏠 📺) Run by a friendly English couple, this is an upscale guesthouse, slightly so in terms of price and more so in terms of conditions – rooms feel like the guest suite in a family cottage by the sea. They're clean and centred around a gravel-strewn courtyard shaded by (guess) palms, and there's free wi-fi.

Midrange

Langkapuri Beach Resort (☎ 955 1202; s & d from RM95, f from RM160; 🏠) Pleasant clutch of chalets at the southern end of the beach, near the Zon shopping complex. The chalets are small but clean and comfortable. The pricier ones have sea views and a bit more character.

Malibest Resort (☎ 955 8222; http://langkawi.baron-reservations.net; r RM120-230; 🏠) Malibest is a friendly place with a great variety of rooms

set among palm trees right on the sand. These range from slightly older but still comfortable wooden chalets to more modern brick bungalows to the undisputed king of the crop: 'tree-top' chalets that sit atop tall wooden pylons and enjoy uninterrupted sea views.

Nadia's Inn Comfort Langkawi (☎ 955 1202; r/ste from RM120/320; 🏠 📺) Despite having a name that sounds more like a phrase than a hotel, the rundown on Nadia's is short and sweet: it's a pleasant series of rooms (some of which, admittedly, have horrendous pink lighting – avoid) situated around a faux thatch *kampung* with spacious dimensions, crisp sheets and pleasant-as-you-please service.

Grand Beach Resort (☎ 955 1457; s/d from RM140/180; 🏠) These wooden chalets include what are, essentially, attached cottages that are good for large groups of travellers, but if you're on your own you may want to opt for another option. You'll want to avoid the fan rooms, which get waaay too stuffy.

Langkawi Boutique Resort (☎ 955 7778; www.langkawaholidayresort.co; s & d from RM145, tr from 185; 🏠 📺 📺) Hey – nothing says classy like lots of marble in a bathroom, right? There may not be loads of character here, seeing as it's a tower near a pool, some palms and the ocean, but when you're paying a solidly midrange price for an almost-top-end experience, who's complaining?

Top End

Pelangi Beach Resort (☎ 952 8888; www.pelangi.beachresort.com; r/ste from RM546/1268; 🏠 📺 📺) This rambling resort towards the northern end of the beach has tastefully furnished chalets in vast, landscaped grounds. It's a family-oriented resort with a full program of kids' activities and sports, restaurants and every imaginable luxury – even electric buggies to take you to your room.

our pick Bon Ton Resort (☎ 955 1688; www.bontonresort.com.my; villas RM590-1160; 🏠 📺 📺) The trick of the posh Southeast Asian resort is to present the lodging under the guise of traditional aesthetics, but deck it out with the best modern luxuries, resulting in the best of both worlds. And with that, ladies and gentlemen, we present: the Bon Ton. These eight distinct Malay stilt houses perch over a coconut plantation and a pool, each one decked out with dark wood (wonderful) and positioned to catch the breeze. It's somehow regal and rustic all at once, with its organic

accents and traditional craftwork, and very beautiful overall.

Temple Tree (☎ 955 1688; www.templetree.com.my; villa from RM690-1090; 🏠 📶 🚶) This extension of the Bon Ton (above) is a collection of villas that expands on the historical-structure theme; whereas Bon Ton draws inspiration from Malay *kampung*-style stilt houses, Temple Tree references Malaysia as a whole, with Chinese, Penang, colonial-style and other themed residences. The digs are as incredible as the properties at Bon Ton, so it all just depends: do you want to be pampered in a Malaysian village or a colonial villa?

Casa del Mar (☎ 955 2388; www.casadelmar-langkawi.com; r/ste from RM740/1170; 🏠 📶 🚶) Directly opposite the Laman Padi, this is a sumptuous, Spanish villa-style place on a lovely stretch of beach. Several package deals are available, and prices vary dramatically according to occupancy.

PANTAI TENGAH

Larger, midrange resorts dominate Pantai Tengah, though it's still less built up than Pantai Cenang, and is popular with young families.

Zackry Guest House (www.zackryguesthouse.langkawi.networks.com; dm/s/d RM20/30/40; 🏠 📶) The best budget accommodation in Tengah is this friendly, sprawling guesthouse, inhabited by happy travellers boozing it up in the common area, Irish owner Neve and her Malaysian boyfriend Chaz and several large, friendly dogs. Rooms are clean and cosy, and there are no phone bookings.

Tropical Resort (☎ 955 4075; from r RM90; 🏠) A huddle of modern chalets is set among palm trees in this quiet spot at the back of the beach, just a few minutes' walk from the seashore. It's probably best for singles; families may find the conditions a little cramped.

Sunset Beach Resort (☎ 955 1751; www.sunsetbeachresort.com.my; r RM160-260; 🏠) This is a more upmarket resort, with comfortably furnished chalets surrounded by lush tropical gardens; it has that whole village-cum-resort vibe going on. There's no sea views, although the beach is close.

Frangipani (☎ 955 2020; www.frangipanilangkawi.com; r/ste from RM430/900; 🏠 📶 🚶) All sorts of businesses in Langkawi seek your custom by claiming to prioritise eco issues, but the Frangipani put its money where its mouth is. Treatment plants recycle resort water;

energy-efficient light bulbs are in every room; sustainable building materials provide the setting. And the rooms themselves are easily the match of the best high-end chains: big beds, big spoiling and big views.

Holiday Villa (☎ 955 1701; www.holidayvilla.com.my; r/ste from RM240/810; 🏠 📶 🚶) A vast, modern complex, with tennis courts, a gym, several restaurants and an indoor pool 'exclusively for ladies'. Rooms are airy and brightly furnished, and look out over the lawns and the soft white-sand beach.

PANTAI KOK

Geopark Hotel (☎ 959 2300; www.oriental-inn.com; r from RM184; 🏠) Located within the Oriental Village shopping compound inland from Pantai Kok, this modern hotel has large, neatly furnished rooms with the usual mod-cons such as minibars and satellite TVs. It's a bit overpriced considering the distance from the sea.

Mutiara Buraubay (☎ 959 1061; www.mutiarahotels.com/mutiara_buraubay; s/d from RM480/500; 🏠 📶 🚶) There are huge swathes of rainforest and beach to explore at Mutiara Bay, plus some 150 decked out, cool and comfortable cabanas to stay in. It's a beautiful spot (all 19 acres of the resort), and between your beach hut and the ocean you may run into some resident monkeys.

Berjaya Langkawi Beach & Spa Resort (☎ 959 1888; www.berjayaresorts.com; r/ste from RM550/1000; 🏠 📶 🚶) Past the headland at the northwestern end of the beach, the oversized Berjaya seems to take up the entire northwest coast of the island. There's some 500 rooms spread over a vast area; guests are ferried between reception and their chalets in minibuses. The waterfront suites are the most attractive, while others look out onto the lush rainforest.

Sheraton Langkawi Beach Resort (☎ 952 8000; www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton; r/ste from RM690/1355; 🏠 📶 🚶) To the southeast of the other resorts, the Sheraton Langkawi has all the usual five-star amenities in an attractively secluded setting on a forested headland by the sea. It's popular with young families.

PULAU REBAK BESAR

Rebak Marina Resort (☎ 966 5566; www.rebakmarina.com; s & d from RM385, f from RM650; 🏠 📶 🚶) Lying just off Pantai Cenang, the small island of Rebak Besar plays host to this exclusive resort, which offers spacious and elegant chalets in beautifully landscaped grounds. It has all the

facilities you would expect, including a gym, a spa, tennis courts and restaurants. Transfers from Langkawi airport are included in the price, and there are several different package deals available, as well as an international-standard yachting marina.

TELUK DATAI

Andaman Langkawi (☎ 959 1088; www.theandaman.com; r/ste from RM990/1500; 🏠 📺 📶) Just past Golf Club Datai Bay in a grand wooden Malay-style building within the rainforest is this luxurious retreat with a gym, a spa, tennis courts and its own private beach. It has a kids' club and a babysitting service for families.

Datai Langkawi (☎ 959 2500; www.ghmhotels.com; r/ste from RM1530/2550; 🏠 📺 📶) The island's most exclusive beach resort, where you can choose between rainforest villas and roomy seafront chalets, many built on stilts over the water. It has a small city's worth of amenities (spas, gyms, yoga, the works) and a knowledgeable jungle-trekking guide on its staff.

TANJUNG RHU

Tanjung Rhu Resort (☎ 959 1033; www.tanjungrhu.com.my; r from RM1400; 🏠 📺 📶) Tucked into a secluded cove on the north coast is a glorious golden beach and a cloud of semi-traditional buildings arranged around a central courtyard. This serene resort (one gets the sense the establishment is trying to blend in with, rather than dominate the jungle) is within walking distance of gorgeous Tanung Rhu beach.

Four Seasons Resort (☎ 950 8888; www.fourseasons.com/langkawi; r from RM1850; 🏠 📺 📶) Occupying a superb location overlooking the Andaman Sea, the Four Seasons is a truly luxurious amalgamation of 'pavilions' and villas with all the indulgent comforts and mod-cons you would expect from this international chain. The villas come with large, open lounges, marble bathrooms, plasma TVs and gorgeous sea views, while rooms in the two-storey pavilions look onto the gardens.

Eating

KUAH

Eating options in Kuah town consist of several cheap Chinese eateries and outposts of Western chains.

Charlie's Place (☎ 966 4078; www.langkawiyahtclub.com; Jln Pantai Dato Syed Omar; mains from RM20; 🍷 9am-11pm) About 500m uphill from the jetty is the

white-gloved ambience and Western-Asian menu of the breezily aristocratic Charlie's.

Barn Thai (☎ 966 6699; Mukim Kisap; mains from RM20; 🍷 lunch & dinner) On the island's east coast, 9km north of Kuah, is this upmarket Thai restaurant with live jazz on some nights (reservations advisable). The setting, at the end of a raised walkway through a mangrove forest reserve, is actually better than the food.

PANTAI CENANG

Many of the hotels at Pantai Cenang have restaurants.

Tomato (☎ 955 5853; mains from RM4; 🍷 24hr) There are some great tomatoes along Cenang beach. This one serves excellent rotis and a standard curry-rice Indian/Malay menu at all hours – take note, nighthawks.

Red Tomato (☎ 955 9118; mains from RM18; 🍷 8am-3pm & 6-11pm Sat-Thu) The second tomato is red and run by expats who crank out some of the best pizza and pasta on the island. Of all the midrange places serving Western standards on the Cenang strip, this is probably your best bet.

our pick Champor-Champor (☎ 955 1449; mains from RM18; 🍷 7-10.30pm) Serves up imaginative regional cuisine such as pan-fried bamakoise (a local fish) with banana, tofu satay and coconut-crusting calamari. The menu descriptions are particularly intriguing – such as the Thai green curry 'with an exotic taste that makes you kinky' – and the tranquil, open-air garden filled with sweet incense and surrounded with plants and native carvings provides a romantic setting to while away a tropical evening.

Putumayo (☎ 953 2233; mains RM30-40; 🍷 7-10.30pm) Excellent service (the waiter folds your napkin in your lap) amid a beautiful open-air courtyard. The cuisine ranges from across Asia, looping from Malaysia through Thailand to China; we highly recommend the fish cooked Nonya style.

Nam (☎ 955 3643; mains RM30-74; 🍷 11am-11pm) At Bon Ton Resort, Nam boasts a well-executed menu of fusion goodness, from pistachio-encrusted haloumi to a nine-course sampler of Straits Chinese cuisine, and at night, amid Bon Ton's starry jungle grounds, the setting is superb. We didn't make it to the also-fusion-focused restaurant in the Straits Club House in nearby Temple Tree, but have heard plenty of glowing reviews from travellers.

There's a *pasar malam* (night market) north of Pantai Cenang held once or twice a week; it's a good place to get authentic Malay food on the cheap.

PANTAI TENGAH

Boom Boom Corner (☎ 012-473 7167; mains from RM4; ☹ 5pm-late) At the northern end of the strip is a bustling food court serving good-value Malay and Pakistani food.

Fat Mum's (☎ 012-470 7863; Jln Teluk Baru; mains from RM8; ☹ 4pm-midnight) Further on, towards Holiday Villa, Fat Mum's serves up Chinese dishes. It's cheap, cheerful and can get pretty boisterous come the evening.

Kantan (☎ 017-480 9722; mains from RM18; ☹ 3-11pm) Supposedly the country's largest restaurant built in traditional Malay style, Kantan looks like a *kampung* house on steroids. Inside, the menu focuses on upscale executions of traditional Malay food like rendang, fish cooked in coconut milk and such, but the spice is very much toned down for foreigners.

PANTAI KOK

The Oriental Village shopping complex has a handful of restaurants, including **Krathong** (☎ 959 2336; mains from RM8; ☹ lunch & dinner Wed-Mon), a quiet Thai restaurant offering traditional curries and fish dishes.

On the seafront, Telaga Harbour Park is home to a few trendy restaurants, including the oddly Marxist-chic themed **Zabinsa's USSR Restaurant** (☎ 012-432 7408; Perdana Quay; mains from around RM12; ☹ noon-midnight), featuring some vaguely Russian specialities.

Drinking

As Langkawi is a duty-free island, it's arguably the best spot for a booze in Malaysia. While you can get alcohol at many restaurants and hotels for half the price on the mainland, there's a good strip of bars here as well. Most bars open around 5pm and close between 11pm or much, much later, depending on how staff are feeling and how many customers are around.

A good place to start is **Bob Marley Bar**, which tends to open around lunchtime. There are beach mats, posters of the great dreaded one, a fairly predictable soundtrack and very good all-round vibe. If you head south along Pantai Cenang past Zon, you'll hit the **1812 Bar**, run by a slightly mad if friendly northern Englishman who, should you be able to take

a tease from him, is one of the best barmen on the island.

As the evening wears on lots of folks end up in Pantai Tengah, where's there's a well-trodden nightspot path. **Reggae Bar** (☹ noon-2am Sat-Thu), a beachside affair, is actually less reggae-oriented than the Bob Marley Bar, while **Sunba Retro Bar** turns into a dancey mega-club open till about 3am. If you're still ready to party after that, **Little Lyli'a's Chill Out Bar** is, as the name suggests, a laid-back spot that stays open till – oh God, is that the sunrise? Damn.

If you'd prefer to sip a cocktail in more sophisticated surrounds, try the bars at any of the island's upmarket resorts.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Malaysia Airlines (☎ 955 6322), **AirAsia** (☎ 03-2171 9333) and **Firefly** (☎ 03-7845 4543) all have two or three flights daily between Langkawi and KL, with promotional fares going for as low as RM35. Malaysia Airlines and Firefly fly to Penang (RM85) and Tiger Airways and Silk Air fly to Singapore (RM103).

BOAT

All passenger ferries to/from Langkawi operate out of Kuah. From about 8am to 6.30pm, regular ferries operate roughly every hour in either direction between Kuah and the mainland port of Kuala Perlis (RM18, one hour) and every 30 minutes to and from Kuala Kedah (RM23, 1½ hours).

Langkawi Ferry Services (LFS; ☎ 966 9439) and **Ekspres Bahagia** (☎ 966 5784) operate two daily ferries between Kuah and Georgetown (RM60/115 one way/return, 2½ hours) on Penang. Boats depart from Georgetown at 8.30am and 8.45am and leave Kuah at 2.30pm and 5.30pm.

Ferry to Thailand

From the Kuah jetty, LFS makes runs four times a day, between 9.30am and 4pm, to Satun on the Thai coast (RM30, one hour). From the port you can take a taxi to Satun town for connections to Hat Yai or Phuket.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Taxi destinations from the airport include Kuah jetty or Pantai Cenang (RM24), Pantai Kok (RM28), Tanjung Rhu (RM35) and Teluk Datai (RM45). Buy a coupon at the

desk before leaving the airport terminal and use it to pay the driver.

CAR

Cars can be rented cheaply, and touts from the travel agencies at the Kuah jetty will assail you upon arrival. Rates start at around RM60 per day, but drops with bargaining. Cars and Jeeps can also be rented more expensively at the upmarket beach resorts.

MOTORCYCLE & BICYCLE

The easiest way to get around is to hire a motorbike for around RM35 per day. You can do a leisurely circuit of the island (70km) in a day. The roads are excellent, and outside Kuah it's very pleasant and easy riding. Motorbikes can be hired at stands all over the island. A few places also rent mountain bikes for RM15 per day.

TAXI

As there is no public transport available, taxis are the main way of getting around, but fares are relatively high and it may be worth your time to rent your own vehicle. There is a taxi station at the Langkawi Fair mall and at the jetty (☎ 965 2242). From the Kuah jetty, sample set fares include RM5 to Kuah town, RM24 to Pantai Cenang/Pantai Tengah and RM28 to Pantai Kok. A taxi between Pantai Cenang and Pantai Kok will cost you RM26.

BUKIT KAYU HITAM

☎ 04

This is the main border crossing between Malaysia and Thailand, 48km north of Alor Setar. The Lebuhraya handles the vast majority of road traffic between the two countries, and all buses to Hat Yai, Thailand, come this way so immigration processing on both sides of the border can become jammed. Taking the train via Padang Besar is almost always a quicker and more convenient alternative.

At the border post there are a few restaurants, private car-parking facilities and a **Tourism Malaysia Office** (☎ 922 2078, 731 2322; ☎ 9am-5pm). The easiest way to cross the border is to take a through bus all the way to Hat Yai (though when the border opens in the morning, the lines can be horrendous). Buses and taxis from Alor Setar run to the Malaysian customs post. From here it's roughly 2km to the border crossing. Taxis

on the other side run to Sadao, from which there are buses on to Hat Yai.

If arriving from Thailand, ensure that your passport is stamped by the Malaysian border police – otherwise you may be fined for 'illegal entry' when you leave Malaysia.

There is no accommodation on the Malaysian side. Even with the expense of shelling out for a taxi, you'll end up saving money (and headaches) by proceeding immediately to your next destination.

Once in Malaysia, you'll find taxis (RM35) and regular buses (RM5) to Alor Setar, from which frequent buses go to Kuala Kedah (for Langkawi), Butterworth, KL and destinations across the peninsula. Kuala Perlis, the other departure point for Langkawi, is more difficult to reach – first take a bus to Changlun, another to Kangar and then another to Kuala Perlis.

PERLIS

Perlis is Malaysia's smallest state and doesn't tend to register on most travellers' radar except as a transit point to Thailand or Langkawi (via Kuala Perlis). Even Malays tend to regard it as essentially a rice-producing pocket along the Thai border. This isn't an area that's particularly heavy on sites of interest to tourists, but at the risk of stereotyping, as in many rural backwaters the population here is quite friendly. It can be a kick just to hang out with the locals and improve your Bahasa Malaysia (because English definitely isn't widely spoken). Otherwise, small but beautiful Taman Negara Perlis state park is worth exploring. Being a predominantly Muslim state, Perlis observes the same business hours as neighbouring Kedah.

History

Perlis was originally part of Kedah, though it variously fell under Thai and Acehnese sovereignty. After the Siamese conquered Kedah in 1821, the sultan of Kedah made unsuccessful attempts to regain his territory until, in 1842, he agreed to Siamese terms. The Siamese reinstalled the sultan, but made Perlis into a separate vassal principality with its own raja.

As with Kedah, power was transferred from the Thais to the British under the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty, and a British Resident was installed at Arau. A formal

treaty between Britain and Perlis wasn't signed until 1930. During the Japanese occupation in WWII, Perlis was 'returned' to Thailand, and then after the war it again returned to British rule until it became part of the Malayan Union, and then the Federation of Malaya in 1957.

KANGAR

☎ 04

Kangar, 45km northwest of Alor Setar, is the state capital of Perlis. As with the state it's the capital of, there's not a heck of a lot to do here besides relax, pray or chat, all of which are fine options for those awaiting an onwards bus.

Sights

Kangar's sole attraction is the **Muzium Negeri Perlis** (National Museum; ☎ 977 1366; Kompleks Warisan Negeri, Jln Kolam; admission free; 🕒 9am-4pm Sun-Thu, 9am-noon Sat), with dry exhibitions on the history of the state and the royal family.

Around 7km southwest of Kangar, the modern **Muzium Kota Kayang** (☎ 977 0027; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm) houses more displays on local history, including Neolithic tools, royal regalia and ceramics. Also at the site are the modest mausoleums of two 16th-century sultans of Kedah. You'll need to catch a taxi from Kangar to get here (RM15).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Ban Cheong (☎ 976 1184; 79 Jln Kangar; s/d RM35/60; 🍷) This old Chinese hotel in the town centre has basic singles with fan and shared bathrooms and air-con doubles with private facilities. It's a reasonable budget option for an overnight stay.

Putra Palace (☎ 976 7755; 135 Psn Jubli Emas; r/ste from RM158/308; 🍷 📺 📺) This huge, blocky edifice around 1km east of the town centre is Kangar's top hotel. Rooms are furnished to a high standard and have the usual mod-cons, and there's an excellent restaurant and a gym.

There are many cheap restaurants and cafes sprinkled around the bus station, including **Kedai Kopi Malaysia** (Jln Jubli Perak), attached to the hotel of the same name, and **Embassy** (Jln Jubli Perak), a food court a few doors along, serving standard Chinese fare and beer. They're both open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Getting There & Away

The express-bus station is on the southern edge of town, off Jln Jubli Perak. There are departures to KL (RM33, two daily), Butterworth (RM7.60, one daily), Alor Setar (RM3.80, several daily), Ipoh (RM19.70, two daily), Kota Bharu (RM29.50, one daily) and Johor Bahru/Singapore (RM58, one daily, 12 hours), as well as regular buses to Kuala Perlis (RM1.20). Infrequent buses to Kaki Bukit (RM3.20) and Padang Besar (RM3.20) leave from the chaotic local bus station on Jln Tun Abdul Razak.

If you're impatient to get to Langkawi, a taxi to Kuala Perlis from the bus station costs RM18.

KUALA PERLIS

☎ 04

This small port town in the extreme northwest of the peninsula is visited mainly as a departure point for Langkawi. It is also the closest access port to the island from Thailand.

Sleeping & Eating

Pens Hotel (☎ 985 4122; Jln Kuala Perlis; s & d from RM50; 🍷) Probably the best place in town, with neat, comfortable rooms. Along the same street are a few grotty, dirt-cheap hostels.

Near the jetty are several Malay food stalls serving Kuala Perlis' famous special laksa, as well as a few Chinese restaurants.

Getting There & Away

The bus and taxi station is a short walk from the jetty towards town. The frequent bus 56 to Kangar (RM1.20) swings by the jetty before terminating at the station. Less-frequent direct buses depart for Butterworth, Alor Setar, KL and Padang Besar. From the bus station or the jetty, taxis go to Kangar (RM12) and Padang Besar (RM25).

Ferries to Kuah, on Pulau Langkawi, leave at least hourly between 8am and 6pm (RM15).

PADANG BESAR

☎ 04

On the Thai border 35km northeast of Kangar, Padang Besar itself is nothing special, but it's a popular destination for Malaysians because of the duty-free markets in the neutral territory between the two countries. Near the large roundabout are a few banks that will change travellers cheques. Moneychangers will give you even better rates for bank notes (foreign

or Thai baht) and have the added advantage of being open longer hours than banks, and open every day.

If arriving from Thailand, ensure that your passport is stamped by the Malaysian border police – otherwise you may be fined for ‘illegal entry’ when you leave Malaysia.

There’s some accommodation on the Malaysian and Thai sides of the border, but you’re better off avoiding these mostly dingy budget hotels and heading straight for Kangar or beyond.

Malaysian buses stop near the large roundabout around a kilometre from the large border-crossing complex on the Malaysian side. There are regular buses to/from Kangar (RM4) and, less frequently, to Kaki Bukit. The taxi stand is on the left before you reach the bus stop, and fares are posted for destinations, including Kaki Bukit (RM15) and Kangar (RM20).

Very few people, if any, walk the more than 2km of no-man’s land between the Thai and Malaysian sides of the border. Motorcyclists shuttle pedestrian travellers back and forth for about RM5 each way, though bargaining is possible.

There is one daily train connection between Padang Besar and Hat Yai (RM9, 50 minutes). All passengers must disembark to clear customs and immigration (both Thai and Malaysian) before reboarding.

TAMAN NEGARA PERLIS

The small state park of Taman Negara Perlis in the northwest of the state runs for 36km along the Thai border, covering about 5000 hectares. It comprises the Nakawan Range – the longest continuous range of limestone hills in Malaysia – and the Mata Ayer and Wang Mu Forest Reserves.

Information

The **Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 945 7898; psp@pd.jaring.my; Jln Kaki Bukit; 🕒 9am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) is signposted 3km from the small town of Kaki Bukit. All visitors must register here, and entry to the park is RM2 per day. Guides (RM30 for four

hours) can also be hired at the centre, and are obligatory for many areas.

Sights & Activities

Taman Negara Perlis has heavily forested slopes and numerous cave systems, such as **Gua Wang Burma**, which has intriguing limestone formations. The park is the country’s only semi-deciduous forest, and is rich in wildlife; this is the only habitat in Malaysia for the stumptailed macaque. White-handed gibbons and a rich array of birds can also be found here.

Just outside the park, **Gua Kelam** (Cave of Darkness; admission RM1; 🕒 9am-6pm) is a 370m-long cavern gouged out in tin-mining days; today it’s the state’s top tourist attraction. A river runs through the cave and emerges in a cascade at a popular swimming spot and a landscaped park. The old tin mine is a short walk from the far end of the cavern. Listen for motorcycles that may be rushing through, and watch out for exploding guano (the build-up of phosphates is highly flammable). The cave is a 1km walk from Kaki Bukit.

The **Wang Kelian Sunday Market** straddles the Malaysia-Thailand border. Fruit, vegetables and clothes from both countries are for sale, and no passport is needed, provided you stay in the market area. The Malaysian side of the market is open every day.

Sleeping

The modern wooden chalets in the **park visitor centre** (dm RM10, chalets RM50-80; 🚽) are very comfortable. You can pitch a tent for RM1.

Getting There & Away

There is no public transport to the park. The nearest town is Kaki Bukit, from which a winding mountain road leads to the tiny village of Kampung Wang Kelian. The park visitor centre is signposted 3km further on.

A taxi to the park from Kangar will cost around RM50 to RM60. Taxis may be harder to find in Kaki Bukit. If you can find one, a taxi from Kaki Bukit to the park will cost roughly RM20 to RM30, but you may be able to negotiate.

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