

Malaysia Directory

CONTENTS

Accommodation	466
Activities	468
Business Hours	468
Children	468
Climate	468
Courses	469
Customs Regulations	469
Dangers & Annoyances	469
Discount Cards	470
Embassies & Consulates	470
Festivals & Events	470
Food	472
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	472
Holidays	473
Insurance	474
Internet Access	474
Legal Matters	474
Maps	474
Money	474
Photography	475
Post	475
Telephone	475
Time	476
Toilets	476
Tourist Information	476
Travellers With Disabilities	477
Visas	477
Volunteering	478
Women Travellers	478
Work	479

ACCOMMODATION

Malaysia's accommodation possibilities range from rock-bottom flophouses to luxurious five-star resorts. Outside the peak holiday seasons (around major festivals such as Chinese New Year in January/February) big discounts are frequently available – it's always worth asking about special offers.

Budget places are those indicated with prices under RM70 per room (under RM100 in Kuala Lumpur); at such hotels and guesthouses don't expect much in the way of comfort, although most will offer a choice of rooms with or without air-conditioning and with or without attached bathrooms.

Midrange (in KL, RM100 to RM400; elsewhere RM70 to RM200) hotels will offer pleasant extras such as swimming pools, nicely designed rooms, and facilities such as restaurants and business centres. Top-end hotels charge over RM200 (in KL over RM400) per room.

Top end and a few midrange places often quote prices exclusive of tax (5%) and service charge (10%) – these charges are represented as ++ (called plus-plus), for example RM120++ for a double. Net means that tax and any service charges are included – these are the prices quoted in practically all budget and many midrange places. Tax and service charges are also applied to food, drinks and services in top hotels and the more expensive restaurants. We quote net prices for all budget and midrange places.

Warning: bed bug infestations are common in Malaysia's hotels and are a particular problem at the budget end of the market; see p603 for more details.

Camping

Many of Malaysia's national parks have official camping grounds and will permit camping in nondesignated sites once you are deep in the jungle. There are also many lonely stretches of beach that are ideal for camping. Likewise, it is possible to camp on uninhabited bays on many of Malaysia's islands. A two-season tent with mosquito netting is ideal. A summer-weight sleeping bag is OK, but the best choice is a light-weight bag-liner, since even the nights are warm.

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels. You'll find the true, insider low-down on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

PRACTICALITIES

- Connect to the reliable electricity supply (220V to 240V, 50 cycles) with a UK-type three-square-pin plug.
- Read the English-language newspapers the *New Straits Times*, the *Star* and the *Malay Mail*. In Malaysian Borneo you'll also find the *Borneo Post*, the *Eastern Times* and the *New Sabah Times*.
- Listen to Traxx FM (www.traxxfm.net; 90.3FM), HITZ FM (www.hitz.fm; 92.9FM) and MIX FM (www.mix.fm; 94.5FM) for pop music and Fly FM (www.flyfm.com.my; 95.8FM) for news (these frequencies are for the KL area). In Sabah, listen to Traxx FM (90.7FM) or Muzik FM (88.9FM); in Sarawak tune in to Traxx FM (89.9FM), or Wai FM (101.3FM) for tribal music.
- Watch Malaysia's two government TV channels (TV1 and TV2), four commercial stations (TV3, NTV7, 8TV and TV9) as well as a host of satellite channels.
- Use the metric system for weights and measures.

Homestays

Staying with a Malaysian family will give you a unique experience many times removed from the fast-paced and largely recognizable life of the cities and towns. It's worth enquiring with **Tourism Malaysia** (www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my) and each of the state tourism bodies about the homestay programs operating throughout the country in off-the-beaten-track *kampung* (villages). Also see p201 about a homestay program in Penang.

Hostels & Guesthouses

At beach resorts and in the main tourist cities you will find a variety of cheap hostels and guesthouses. These options may be huts on the beach, private homes or houses divided by partition walls into a number of rooms. Dormitory accommodation is usually available. Rooms are spartan, but this is the cheapest accommodation option around and often the nicest, with a real family atmosphere. These places often cater only to foreign travellers and offer their customers lots of little extras to outdo the competition, such as free tea and coffee, bicycles and transport. You'll normally pay around RM6 to RM30 for a dorm bed or RM15 to RM70 for a hotel-style room with air-con.

Hotels

Standard rooms at top-end hotels are often called 'superior' in the local parlance. Most hotels have slightly more expensive 'deluxe' or 'club' rooms, which tend to be larger, have a better view and include extras such as breakfast or free internet access. Many also have suites.

At the low end of the price scale are the traditional Chinese-run hotels usually offering little more than simple rooms with a bed, a table and chair, and a sink. The showers and toilets (which will sometimes be Asian squat-style) may be down the corridor. Note couples can sometimes economise by asking for a single, since in Chinese-hotel language 'single' means one double bed, and 'double' means two beds. Don't think of this as being tight; in Chinese hotels you can pack as many into one room as you wish.

The main catch with these hotels is that they can sometimes be terribly noisy. They're often on main streets, and the cheapest ones often have flimsy walls that stop short of the ceiling – great for ventilation but terrible for acoustics and privacy.

Longhouses in Malaysian Borneo

These communal homes, the traditional dwellings of the indigenous peoples of Borneo, may contain up to 100 individual family 'apartments' under one long roof. These days there are two main types of longhouse: tourist longhouses and authentic longhouses. While a visit to (or a stay overnight in) a tourist longhouse is easy enough, it's unlikely to be of much interest. A visit to an authentic longhouse can be a magical experience, but is tricky to arrange and there's a very specific etiquette; see p430 for details.

Resthouses

A few of the old British-developed resthouses in Malaysia are still operating. These were set up during the colonial era to provide accommodation for travelling officials, and later

provided comfortable shelter for all types of travellers. Many of the resthouses are still government owned but are privately operated. Some have been turned into modern mid-range resorts, others retain old colonial decor. The average price for a room in a resthouse is between RM70 and RM100, and this usually includes air-con and attached bathroom.

ACTIVITIES

See the Outdoor Activities chapter (p83).

BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are usually open from 8am to 4.15pm Monday to Friday. Most close for lunch from 12.45pm to 2pm, and on Friday the lunch break is from 12.15pm to 2.45pm for Friday prayers at the mosque.

Bank hours are generally 10am to 3pm on weekdays and 9.30am to 11.30am on Saturday.

Shop hours are variable, although a good rule of thumb for small shops is that they're open from 9am to 6pm Monday to Saturday. Major department stores, shopping malls, Chinese-run emporiums and some large stores are open from around 10am until 9pm or 10pm, seven days a week.

Restaurants generally serve breakfast 7am to noon, although a Malaysian breakfast is something that you could just as well eat for lunch and most places serving such food will be open straight through from early morning to late night. Unless mentioned otherwise the restaurants listed are open daily for lunch (noon to 2.30pm) and dinner (6pm to 10.30pm).

Most of Malaysia follows this working week: Monday to Friday, with Saturday a half-day. But in the more Islamic-minded states of Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu, government offices, banks and many shops are closed on Friday and on Saturday afternoon. These states have declared Friday the holiday, and their working week is from Saturday to Thursday, which is a half-day. However, federal government offices follow the same hours as the rest of the country.

CHILDREN

Practicalities

Travelling with the kids in Malaysia is generally a breeze. For the most part, parents needn't be overly concerned, but it pays to lay down a few ground rules – such as regular hand-washing –

to head off potential problems; see p604 for more on health issues. Children should especially be warned not to play with animals, as rabies occurs in Malaysia.

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* contains useful advice on how to cope with kids on the road and what to bring along to make things go more smoothly, with special attention paid to travelling in developing countries. Also useful for general advice is www.travelwithyourkids.com.

There are discounts for children for most attractions and for most transport. Many beach resorts have special family chalets. Chinese hotels can also work out a bargain as they charge by the room rather than the number of people. Cots, however, are not widely available in cheap accommodation. Public transport is comfortable and relatively well organised, although pushing a stroller around isn't likely to be easy given there are often no footpaths and kerbs are high.

Baby formula, baby food and nappies (diapers) are widely available. However, it makes sense to stock up on these items before heading to remote destinations or islands.

Sights & Activities

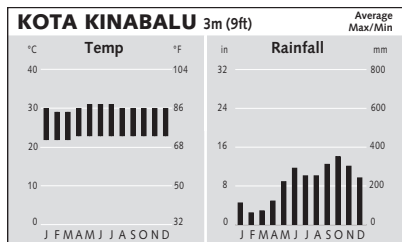
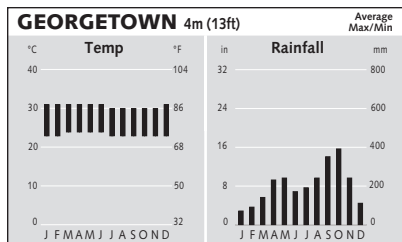
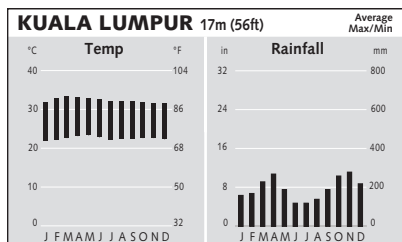
Some beach destinations suitable for families with younger children include Pulau Perhentian (p319), Pulau Kapas (p315) and Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park (p354). Those with older children might enjoy some of the jungle parks of the country, including Taman Negara (p294) and, over in Sarawak, the Bako (p423) and Gunung Mulu (p452) national parks. For more animal encounters also consider the Sepilok Orang-Utan Rehabilitation Centre (p375) in Sabah and the Kuala Gandah Elephant Conservation Centre (p303) in central Pahang.

For several ideas on how to entertain the kids in Kuala Lumpur see p108.

CLIMATE

The tropics can take some adjusting to. It's hot and humid year-round in Malaysia with temperatures rarely dropping below 20°C, even at night, and usually climbing to 30°C or more during the day. Take it easy when you first arrive and avoid running around in the heat of the midday sun.

Rain tends to arrive in brief torrential downpours, providing a welcome relief from the heat. At certain times of the year it may



rain every day, but it rarely rains all day. Although the region is monsoonal, it's only the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia that has a real rainy season – elsewhere it's just a time of year when the average rainfall is higher than at other times of the year.

Throughout the region the humidity tends to hover around the 90% mark, but on the peninsula you can always escape from heat and humidity by retreating to the delightfully cool hill stations.

For current weather forecasts check the website of the **Malaysian Meteorological Department** (www.kjc.gov.my/english/weather/weather.html).

For tips on the best times to visit, see p20.

COURSES

The best place to look for interesting courses is KL (p108). Elsewhere in Malaysia, travel

to Balok Beach in Pahang to study batik (p288), and to Kota Bharu for cookery and batik courses (p330).

CUSTOMS REGULATIONS

The following can be brought into Malaysia duty free: 1L of alcohol, 225g of tobacco (200 cigarettes or 50 cigars) and souvenirs and gifts not exceeding RM200 (RM500 when coming from Labuan or Langkawi). Cameras, portable radios, perfume, cosmetics and watches do not incur duty.

The list of prohibited items is: counterfeit currency, weapons (including imitations), fireworks, drugs and 'obscene and prejudicial articles' (pornography, for example, and items that may be considered inflammatory, or disruptive to Malaysia's ethnic harmony).

Visitors can freely carry only RM1000 in and out of Malaysia; there's no limit on foreign currency. When you enter Malaysia, you must fill out a Currency Declaration Form on which you are required to declare both the amount of ringgit notes, if the figure exceeds RM1000, and any amount of foreign currency you are carrying. Keep this form in your passport as you must produce it when leaving Malaysia.

Drug trafficking in Malaysia carries the death penalty.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Operators mentioned in this book have been personally checked by the authors and should be reliable. However, you should always check terms and conditions carefully.

Animal Hazards

Rabies occurs in Malaysia, so any bite from an animal should be treated very seriously. Snakes are probably the thing you'll encounter most in the jungle; see p604 for details on how to deal with snake bites.

Scams

Like any big city Kuala Lumpur has its share of scams. A popular one is from people who claim to have a relative studying abroad and need money for them; these always start with the scammer asking you where you come from – the best answer is none at all. Guys dressed as Buddhist monks can often be found around Jln Sultan Ismail in the Golden Triangle – they'll offer you a 'free'

good luck charm then expect you to pay a big donation; just try to avoid them.

For details of a scam at the Malaysia-Thailand border see p208.

Theft & Violence

Theft and violence are not particularly common in Malaysia and compared with Indonesia or Thailand it's extremely safe. Nevertheless, it pays to keep a close eye on your belongings, especially your travel documents (passport, travellers cheques etc), which should be kept with you at all times.

Muggings do happen, particularly in KL and Penang, and physical attacks have been known to occur, particularly after hours and in the poorer, run-down areas of cities. We've been told that thieves on motorbikes particularly target women for grab raids on their handbags. Also keep a watch out for sleazy local 'beach boys' in Langkawi and the Perhentians.

Credit-card fraud is a growing problem in Malaysia. Use your cards only at established businesses and guard your credit-card numbers closely.

A small, sturdy padlock is well worth carrying, especially if you are going to be staying at any of the cheap chalets found on Malaysia's beaches, where flimsy padlocks are the norm.

DISCOUNT CARDS

A Hostelling International (HI) card is of limited use in Malaysia, as only a handful of places accept it (see www.hihostels.com/dba/country-Malaysia-MY.en.htm for the list). The card can also be used to waive the small initial membership fee at some YMCAs and YWCAs. Bring it if you have one.

An international student identity card (ISIC) is worth bringing. Many student discounts, such as for train travel, are

available only for Malaysian students, but some places do offer discounts for international students.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

For a full list of Malaysian embassies and consulates outside the country check out www.kln.gov.my. Unless mentioned all the following foreign embassies are in Kuala Lumpur and are generally open 8am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

Australia (Map p96; ☎ 03-2146 5555; www.australia.org.my; 6 Jln Yap Kwan Seng)

Brunei (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2161 2800; Level 19, Menara Tan & Tan, 207 Jln Tun Razak)

Canada (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2718 3333; Level 18, Menara Tan & Tan, 207 Jln Tun Razak)

France (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2053 5500; 196 Jln Ampang)

Germany (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2142 9666; www.kuala-lumpur.diplo.de; Level 26, Menara Tan & Tan, 207 Jln Tun Razak)

Indonesia Georgetown (Off Map p180; ☎ 04-227 5141; 467 Jln Burma, Georgetown, Penang); Kota Kinabalu (Map p342; ☎ 088-218600; Lg Kemajuan, Karamunsing; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri); Kuala Lumpur (Map pp92-3;

☎ 03-2116 4100; 233 Jln Tun Razak) Visas (RM170) ready in one day; Kuching (Map p410; ☎ 082-421734; 6th fl, Bangunan Binamas, Jln Padungan; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri); Tawau (Off Map p392; ☎ 089-772052; Jln Apas, Tawau, Sabah)

Ireland (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2161 2963; Ireland House, The Amp Walk, 218 Jln Ampang)

Netherlands (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2168 6200; www.netherlands.org.my; 7th fl, The Amp Walk, 218 Jln Ampang)

New Zealand (Map p96; ☎ 03-2078 2533; Level 21, Menara IBC, 8 Jln Sultan Ismail)

Singapore (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2161 6277; 209 Jln Tun Razak)

Thailand Georgetown (Off Map p180; ☎ 04-226 8029; 1 Jln Tunku Abdul Rahman, Georgetown, Penang); Kota Bharu (Map p328; ☎ 09-744 0867; 4426 Jln Pengkalan Chepa, Kota Bharu, Kelantan); Kuala Lumpur (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2148 8222; 206 Jln Ampang)

UK (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2148 2122; www.britain.org.my; 185 Jln Ampang)

USA (Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2168 5000; <http://malaysia.usembassy.gov>; 376 Jln Tun Razak)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

With so many cultures and religions, there's an amazing number of occasions to celebrate in Malaysia. Although some of them have a fixed date, the Hindus, Muslims and Chinese

TRAVEL ADVISORIES

For the latest travel advisories check the following websites:

Australia (www.smarttraveller.gov.au)

Canada (www.voyage.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.safetravel.govt.nz)

UK (www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas)

USA (www.travel.state.gov/travel)

RAMADAN & ASSOCIATED FESTIVALS

The major Islamic events each year are connected with Ramadan, the month during which Muslims do not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset. Fifteen days before the start of Ramadan, on Nisfu Night, it is believed the souls of the dead visit their homes. During Ramadan Lailatul Qadar (Night of Grandeur), Muslims celebrate the arrival of the Quran on earth, before its revelation by Mohammed. A Quran-reading competition is held in KL (and extensively televised) during Ramadan.

Hari Raya Puasa marks the end of the month-long fast, with two days of joyful celebration. This is the major holiday of the Muslim calendar and it can be difficult to find accommodation in Malaysia, particularly on the east coast. During this time everyone wears new clothes, homes are cleaned and redecorated, and everyone seems to visit everyone else.

all follow a lunar calendar, so the dates for many events vary each year. Tourism Malaysia publishes a Calendar of Events pamphlet with specific dates and venues of various festivals and parades – state tourist offices have more detailed listings.

Apart from Ramadan (see above) the other major Islamic event is Hari Raya Haji, marking the successful completion of the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). It's a two-day holiday in many of the peninsula states, and is marked by the consumption of large amounts of cakes and sweets. For the Chinese community the major event of the year is Chinese New Year; the major Indian celebration is Deepavali.

There are many other special events, ranging from fun runs, kite-flying and fishing competitions to the Malaysian Grand Prix – see the destination chapters for details of events specific to particular towns and cities.

January–February

Thai Pongal A Hindu harvest festival marking the beginning of the Hindu month of Thai, considered the luckiest month of the year. This Tamil celebration is always held on 14 January.

Chinese New Year Dragon dances and pedestrian parades mark the start of the new year. Families hold open house, unmarried relatives (especially children) receive *ang pow* (money in red packets), businesses traditionally clear their debts and everybody wishes you *kong hee fatt choy* (a happy and prosperous new year). The New Year is celebrated on 14 February 2010, 3 February 2011 and 23 January 2012.

Birthday of the Jade Emperor Nine days after New Year, this Chinese festival honours Yu Huang, the supreme ruler of heaven, with offerings at temples.

Chap Goh Meh 15 days after Chinese New Year, the celebrations officially end.

Thaipusam Dramatic Hindu festival (now banned in India), in which devotees honour Lord Subramaniam with acts of amazing physical resilience – see p52.

Prophet Mohammed's Birthday Muslims pray and religious leaders recite verses from the Quran. In 2010 it will be held on 26 February, in 2011 on 15 February and in 2012 on 4 February.

March–April

Malaysian Grand Prix Formula One's big outing in Southeast Asia is held at the Sepang International Circuit in Selangor (see p138) either at the end of March or early April.

Panguni Uttiram The marriage of Shiva to Shakti and of Lord Subramaniam to Theivani is celebrated on the full-moon day of the Tamil month of Panguni.

Birthday of the Goddess of Mercy Offerings are made to the very popular Kuan Yin at her temples across the region.

Cheng Ming On Cheng Ming, Chinese traditionally visit the tombs of their ancestors to make offerings and to tend, clean and repair the tombs.

Sri Rama Navami A nine-day festival held by those of the Brahmin caste to honour the Hindu hero of the Ramayana, Sri Rama.

Birthday of the Monkey God The birthday of T'se Tien Tai Seng Yeh is celebrated twice a year. Mediums pierce their cheeks and tongues with skewers and go into trances during which they write special charms in blood.

April–May

Songkran Festival A traditional Thai Buddhist New Year festival in which Buddha images are bathed.

Chithirai Vishu The start of the Hindu New Year.

Birthday of the Queen of Heaven Ma Cho Po, the queen of heaven and goddess of the sea, is honoured at her temples.

Wesak Day Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death are celebrated with various events, including the release of caged birds to symbolise the setting free of captive souls and processions in KL, JB, Melaka and Penang. It's celebrated on 27 May 2010, 17 May 2011 and 6 May 2012.

June

Gawai Dayak Annual Sarawak Dayak Festival on 1 and 2 June to mark the end of the rice season, with war dances, cockfights and blowpipe events.

Festa de San Pedro Christian celebration on 29 June in honour of the patron saint of the fishing community; notably celebrated by the Eurasian-Portuguese community of Melaka.

Birthday of the God of War Kuan Ti, who has the ability to avert war and to protect people during war, is honoured on his birthday.

Dragon Boat Festival Commemorates the death of a Chinese saint who drowned himself. In an attempt to save him, the local fishing community paddled out to sea, beating drums to scare away any fish that might attack him. To mark the anniversary, this festival is celebrated from June to August, with boat races in Penang and other places.

July–August

Birthday of Kuan Yin The goddess of mercy has another birthday!

Sri Krishna Jayanti A 10-day Hindu festival celebrating popular events in Krishna's life is highlighted on day eight with celebrations of his birthday. The Laxmi Narayan Temple in KL is a particular focus.

Rainforest World Music Festival Held annually either in July or August for three days at the Sarawak Cultural Village (p425), this wonderful music and arts festival features musicians from around the world and highlights indigenous music from Borneo.

August–September

Festival of the Seven Sisters Chinese girls pray to the weaving maid for good husbands.

Festival of the Hungry Ghosts The souls of the dead are released for one day of feasting and entertainment on earth. Chinese operas and other events are laid on for them and food is put out. The ghosts eat the spirit of the food, but thoughtfully leave the substance for mortal celebrants. Mainly in Penang.

National Day (Hari Kebangsaan) Malaysia celebrates its independence on 31 August with events all over the country, but particularly in KL where there are parades and a variety of performances in the Lake Gardens.

Vinayagar Chaturthi During the Tamil month of Avani (around August and September), prayers are offered to Vinayagar, another name for the popular elephant-headed god Ganesha.

Moon Cake Festival The overthrow of the Mongol warlords in ancient China is celebrated by eating moon cakes and lighting colourful paper lanterns. Moon cakes are filled with bean paste, lotus seeds and sometimes a duck egg-yolk.

September–October

Navarathri In the Tamil month of Purattasi, the Hindu festival of 'Nine Nights' is dedicated to the wives of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. Young girls are dressed as the goddess Kali.

Festival of the Nine Emperor Gods Nine days of Chinese operas, processions and other events honour the nine emperor gods. Fire-walking ceremonies are held on the evening of the ninth day at the Kau Ong Yah Temples in KL and Penang.

Puja Ketek Offerings are brought to Buddhist shrines (*ketek*) in the state of Kelantan during this festival in October. Traditional dances are often performed.

October–November

Thimithi (Fire-Walking Ceremony) Hindu devotees prove their faith by walking across glowing coals at temples in Melaka.

Kantha Sashti Subramaniam, a great fighter against the forces of evil, is honoured during the Hindu month of Aipasi.

Deepavali Later in the month of Aipasi, Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana is celebrated with the Festival of Lights, when tiny oil lamps are lit outside the homes of Hindu people, as it's believed that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, will not enter an unlit home. For business people, this is the time to start a new financial year, and for the family a predawn oil bath, new clothes and lots of sweets is the order of the day. In 2010 Deepavali is celebrated on 5 November, in 2011 on 26 October and in 2012, 13 November.

Birthday of Kuan Yin This popular goddess of mercy gets to celebrate her birthday for the third time in the year. **Kartikai Deepam** Huge bonfires are lit to commemorate Shiva's appearance as a pillar of fire following an argument with Vishnu and Brahma. The Thandayuthapani Temple in Muar is a major site for this festival.

Guru Nanak's Birthday The birthday of Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion, is celebrated on 22 November.

December

Winter Solstice Festival A Chinese festival to offer thanks for a good harvest.

FOOD

The region's food and drink offerings are simply terrific, with unbeatable variety, high quality and pleasantly low costs. For a complete description, see p60.

Restaurant and café listings in this guide give an indication of how much you'll pay for a main course or meal (including starter and soft drink). In general, for a budget meal you'll be looking at under RM10, from RM10 to RM39 for a midrange meal, and RM40 and above for a top-end meal.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

The level of gay tolerance in Malaysia is directly related to its status as a predominantly conservative Muslim country. It's illegal for men of any age to have sex with other men.

In addition, the Islamic *syariah* laws (which apply only to Muslims) forbid sodomy and cross-dressing. Outright persecution of gays and lesbians is rare but not unknown.

Gay and lesbian travellers should avoid behaviour that attracts unwanted attention. Malaysians are conservative about displays of public affection; women, and straight Indian men, can get away with same-sex hand-holding, but an overtly gay couple doing the same would attract attention. It is highly unlikely, however, that you will encounter vocal or aggressive homophobia.

Given all this, you may be surprised to hear there's actually a fairly active and visible gay scene in KL; see p120. The lesbian scene is less obvious but, naturally, exists for those willing to seek it out. Start looking for information on www.utopia-asia.com or www.fridae.com, both of which provide good coverage of gay and lesbian events and activities across Asia.

The **PT Foundation** (www.ptfmalaysia.org) is a voluntary nonprofit organisation providing sexuality and HIV/AIDS education, care and support programs for marginalised communities.

HOLIDAYS

In addition to national public holidays, each state has its own holidays, usually associated with the sultan's birthday or a Muslim celebration. Muslim holidays move forward 10 or 11 days each year. Hindu and Chinese holiday dates also vary, but fall roughly within the same months each year.

Public Holidays

January–February

New Year's Day 1 January (except in Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu)

Thaipusam Variable (in Johor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Penang and Selangor only)

Federal Territory Day 1 February (in KL, Labuan and Putrajaya only)

Sultan of Kedah's Birthday 7 February (in Kedah only)

Chinese New Year Variable, two days in late January/early February (one day only in Kelantan and Terengganu)

Prophet Mohammed's birthday Variable, February/March

Hari Raya Haji Variable, February/March

March

Sultan of Selangor's Birthday Second Saturday of March (in Selangor only)

Anniversary of Installation of Sultan of Terengganu 21 March (in Terengganu only)

Muslim New Year Variable

Sultan of Kelantan's Birthday 30 and 31 March (in Kelantan only)

April

Sultan of Johor's Birthday 8 April (in Johor only)

Good Friday Variable (in Sarawak and Sabah only)

Melaka Historical City Day 15 April (in Melaka only)

Sultan of Perak's Birthday 19 April (in Perak only)

Sultan of Terengganu's Birthday 29 April (in Terengganu only)

May

Labour Day 1 May

Raja of Perlis' Birthday Variable, April/May (in Perlis only)

Wesak Day Variable

Harvest Festival Variable (in Sabah and Labuan only)

June

Yang di-Pertuan Agong's (King's) Birthday First Saturday in June

Dayak Festival 1 and 2 June (in Sarawak only)

Prophet's Birthday Variable

July

Governor of Penang's Birthday Second Saturday in July (in Penang only)

Governor of Negeri Sembilan's Birthday 19 July (in Negeri Sembilan only)

August

Malaysia's National Day (Hari Kebangsaan)

31 August

September

Malaysia Day 16 September (in Sabah only)

Hari Raya Puasa Variable September/October (two day celebration of end of Ramadan)

October–November

Governor of Melaka's Birthday Second Saturday in October (in Melaka only)

Sultan of Pahang's Birthday 24 October (in Pahang only)

Israik Mikraj (Ascension of the Prophet) Variable (in Kedah and Negeri Sembilan only)

Deepavali Variable (no holiday in Sarawak and Labuan)

Awal Ramadan (Beginning of Ramadan) Variable (in Johor and Melaka only)

December

Nuzul Al-Quran Variable (in Kelantan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Selangor and Terengganu)

Hari Raya Puasa Variable

Christmas Day 25 December

School Holidays

Schools in Malaysia break for holidays five times a year. The actual dates vary from state to state but are generally in January (one week), March (two weeks), May (three weeks), August (one week) and October (four weeks).

INSURANCE

It's always a good idea to take out travel insurance. Check the small print to see if the policy covers potentially dangerous sporting activities such as diving or trekking, and make sure that it adequately covers your valuables. Health-wise, you may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than your having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure that you keep all documentation. Check that the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home.

A few credit cards offer limited, sometimes full, travel insurance to the holder.

For information on health insurance, refer to p595 and for info on car insurance see p487.

INTERNET ACCESS

You'll have to be deep in the jungle to be off-line in Malaysia. KL is as wired a city as they come with ubiquitous hot spots for wi-fi connections (often free; see p94) and cheap internet cafes typically charging RM3 per hour for broadband access. In the remote reaches of the peninsula and Malaysian Borneo don't expect the internet to be fast though.

Digital warriors should equip themselves with a three-pronged, square-pin plug (as used in the UK) or adaptor for their computer. If your computer is not wi-fi enabled, check whether the internal or card modem is enabled to work outside your home country – not all are.

If you intend to rely on cybercafes, you'll need to carry three pieces of information with you to enable you to access your internet mail account: your incoming (POP or IMAP) mail server name, your account name and your password. Your internet service provider (ISP) or network supervisor will be able to give you these.

Among the internet providers in Malaysia are **Jaring** (www.jaring.my) and **Telekom Malaysia** (www.tm.com.my).

LEGAL MATTERS

In any dealings with the local police it will pay to be deferential. You're most likely to come into contact with them either through reporting a crime (some of the big cities in Malaysia have tourist police stations for this purpose) or while driving. Minor misdemeanours may be overlooked, but don't count on it, and be careful about offering anyone a bribe – Malaysia is not that sort of country.

Drug trafficking carries a mandatory death penalty. A number of foreigners have been executed in Malaysia, some of them for possession of amazingly small quantities of heroin. Even possession of tiny amounts can bring down a lengthy jail sentence and a beating with the *rotan* (cane). Just don't do it.

MAPS

Periplus (<https://peripluspublishinggroup.com>) have maps covering Malaysia, Peninsular Malaysia and KL. Tourism Malaysia's free *Map of Malaysia* has useful distance charts, facts about the country and inset maps of many major cities.

For accurate maps of rural areas contact the **National Survey & Mapping Department** (Ibu Pejabat Ukur & Pemetaan Malaysia; Map pp92-3; ☎ 03-2617 0800; www.jupem.gov.my; Jln Semarak, Kuala Lumpur; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri).

MONEY

See the Quick Reference page on the inside front cover for currency exchange rates.

ATMs & Credit Cards

MasterCard and Visa are the most widely accepted brands. Banks will accept credit cards for over-the-counter cash advances, or you can make ATM withdrawals if you have your PIN. Many banks are also linked to international banking networks such as Cirrus (the most common), Maestro and Plus, allowing withdrawals from overseas savings accounts.

Maybank (www.maybank2u.com.my), Malaysia's biggest bank with branches everywhere, accepts both Visa and MasterCard. HSBC accepts Visa, and the Standard Chartered Bank accepts MasterCard. If you have any questions about whether your cards will be accepted in Malaysia, ask your home bank about its reciprocal relationships with Malaysian banks.

Contact details for credit card companies in Malaysia:

American Express (☎ 2050 0000; www.american.express.com/malaysia)

DinersCard (☎ 2161 1055; www.diners.com.my)

MasterCard (☎ 1800 804 594; www.mastercard.com/sea)

Visa (☎ 1800 802 997; www.visa-asia.com)

Currency

The ringgit (RM) is made up of 100 sen. Coins in use are 1 sen, 5 sen, 10 sen, 20 sen and 50 sen; notes come in RM1, RM5, RM10, RM50 and RM100.

Malaysians sometimes refer to ringgit as 'dollars', which is the old name used for the country's currency. Unless someone makes it clear that they are talking about US dollars, you can be sure they mean ringgit.

Be sure to carry plenty of small bills with you when venturing outside cities – in most cases people cannot change bills larger than RM10.

Taxes & Refunds

There is no general sales tax but there is a government tax of 5% at some midrange and all top-end hotels and many larger restaurants (in addition to an establishment's 10% service fee).

Travellers Cheques & Cash

Banks in the region are efficient and there are plenty of moneychangers. For changing cash or travellers cheques, banks usually charge a commission (around RM10 per transaction, with a possible small fee per cheque), whereas moneychangers have no charges but their rates vary more – so know what the current rate is before using moneychangers. Compared with a bank, you'll generally get a better rate for cash at a moneychanger – it's usually quicker too. Away from the tourist centres, moneychangers' rates are often poorer and they may not change travellers cheques.

All major brands of travellers cheques are accepted across the region. Cash in major currencies is also readily exchanged, though like everywhere else in the world the US dollar has a slight edge.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Malaysians usually have no antipathy to being photographed, although, of course, it's polite

to ask permission before photographing people and taking pictures in mosques or temples. For advice on taking better photos, Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures* is written by travel photographer Richard I'Anson.

Burning digital photos to a disk can easily be arranged at photo development shops across the country; it will cost around RM10 per disk. Print film is also commonly available – a 36-exposure roll is around RM9. Slide film is a little harder to come by and more expensive – a 36-exposure roll of Fuji Velvia averages RM30. Professional slide film can be found only in the biggest cities – if you're a serious photographer, you may want to bring your own slide film.

Processing prices for a 36-exposure roll of slide film range from RM15 to RM18 (mounted), and 60 sen to 70 sen per exposure for print film. In bigger cities like KL, you'll find photo shops with a decent range of equipment at reasonable prices.

POST

Pos Malaysia Berhad (☎ 1300 300 300; www.pos.com.my) runs an efficient postal system with good poste restante at the major post offices. Post offices are open daily from 8am to 5pm, and closed on Sunday and public holidays (closed on Fridays and public holidays in Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu).

Aerograms and postcards cost 50 sen to send to any destination. Letters weighing 20g or less cost 90 sen to Asia, RM1.40 to Australia or New Zealand, RM1.50 to the UK and Europe, and RM1.80 to North America. Parcel rates range around RM20 to RM60 for a 1kg parcel, depending on the destination.

Main post offices in larger cities sell packing materials and stationery.

TELEPHONE

Landline services are provided by the national monopoly Telekom Malaysia (TM; www.tm.com.my).

Fax

Fax facilities are available at TM offices in larger cities and at some main post offices. If you can't find one of these try a travel agency or large hotel.

International Calls

If you have your mobile phone with you, once you've sorted out a local SIM you should have

no problem dialling overseas. Otherwise our advice is to buy a cheap local mobile phone to avoid the frustration of having to deal with the neglected and run-down public phone system.

International direct dial (IDD) calls and operator-assisted calls can be made from any private phone. The access code for making international calls to most countries is ☎00. Call ☎108 for the international operator and ☎103 for directory enquiries. You'll get the best rate if you buy an international prepaid telephone card, available from 7-Elevens and other small grocery stores and newsagents.

To make an IDD call from a payphone, you'll have to find a TM payphone marked 'international' (with which you can use coins or TM phonecards; dial the international access code and then the number). Sadly, there are very few regular payphones that allow IDD calls, apparently because of a rash of counterfeit phonecards.

The third option is to go to a TM office, where you can make IDD or operator-assisted international calls.

If you're making a call to Malaysia from outside the country, dial ☎60, drop the 0 before the Malaysian area code, then dial the number you want. See individual destination chapters for specific area codes.

Local Calls

Making domestic telephone calls in Malaysia is usually a simple matter, provided you can find a working payphone (try train stations, shopping malls and big hotels). You can direct-dial long-distance between all major towns in Malaysia. Local calls cost 10 sen for three minutes.

Although there are a few private operator payphones dotted around, they're so rare that they are sure to become extinct. Less rare – although hardly common – are TM payphones which take coins or prepaid cards which are available from TM offices, post offices and some shops such as 7-Eleven. Here you'll also find a range of calling cards in amounts ranging from RM10 to RM60 in value.

Mobile Phones

As long as you have arranged to have 'global-roaming' facilities with your home provider, your GSM digital phone will automatically tune into one of the region's digital networks.

If not, and you have your phone with you, the simplest way to go mobile is to buy a prepaid SIM card for one of the services on arrival in the country.

Even if you've not brought a phone with you it's far simpler to buy a cheap mobile on arrival and use that to make your calls while in Malaysia rather than deal with the dilapidated public phone network.

The three main mobile-phone service providers are **Celcom** (www.celcom.com.my; numbers beginning with 013 or 019), **DiGi** (www.digi.com.my; numbers beginning with 016), and **Maxis** (www.maxis.com.my; numbers beginning with 012 or 017). If you're sticking to Peninsular Malaysia any of the three are fine, but if you're heading into the remoter parts of Malaysian Borneo then get Celcom, which has the largest coverage of the three (it works in distant regions like Bario and Mulu).

Rates for a local call are around 40 sen per minute and an SMS is 10 to 15 sen. Top-up cards for prepaid SIM cards are available at all 7-Elevens and, if you're planning on calling overseas a lot, it's probably worthwhile getting a calling card too; a good one is TM's **iTalk** (www.i-talk.com.my).

TIME

Malaysia is 16 hours ahead of US Pacific Standard Time (San Francisco and Los Angeles), 13 hours ahead of US Eastern Standard Time (New York), eight hours ahead of GMT/UTC (London) and two hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time (Sydney and Melbourne). Thus, noon in the region is 8pm in Los Angeles and 11pm in New York (the previous day), 4am in London, and 2pm in Sydney and Melbourne.

TOILETS

Although there are still some places with Asian squat-style toilets in Malaysia, you'll most often find Western-style ones these days. At public facilities toilet paper is not usually provided. Instead, you will find a hose which you are supposed to use as a bidet or, in cheaper places, a bucket of water and a tap. If you're not comfortable with this, remember to take packets of tissues or toilet paper wherever you go.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourism Malaysia (www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my) has an efficient network of overseas offices, which are useful for predeparture planning.

Unfortunately, its domestic offices are less helpful and are often unable to give specific information about destinations and transport. Nonetheless, they do stock some decent brochures as well as the excellent *Map of Malaysia*.

Within Malaysia there are also a number of state tourist-promotion organisations, such as KL's **Malaysian Tourist Centre** (p95) and the office of **Tourism Melaka** (p242), which often have more detailed information about specific areas.

Where there are representatives, Tourism Malaysia and state tourism offices are listed in individual destination entries.

Tourism Malaysia maintains the following offices overseas:

Australia Melbourne (☎ 03-9654 3177; 355 Exhibition Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000); Perth (☎ 08-9481 0400; MAS Bldg, 56 William St, Perth, WA 6000); Sydney (☎ 02-9299 4441; Level 2, 171 Clarence St, Sydney, NSW 2000)

Canada (☎ 604-689 8899; www.malaysiantourism.ca; 1590-111 West Georgia St, Vancouver BC V6E 4M3)

France (☎ 01-4297 4171; www.ontmalaisie.com; 29 rue des Pyramides, 75001 Paris)

Germany (☎ 069-460 923 420; www.tourismmalaysia.de; Weissfrauenstrasse 12-16, D-60311 Frankfurt-am-Main)

Japan Osaka (☎ 06-6444 1220; 10F Cotton Nissay Biru, 1-8-2 Otsubo-Honmachi, Nishi-ku, Osaka 550-0004); Tokyo (☎ 03-3501 8691; www.tourismmalaysia.or.jp; 5F Chiyoda Biru, 1-6-4 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0006)

Singapore (☎ 02-6532 6321; 01-01 B/C/D, 80 Robinson Rd, Singapore 068898)

Thailand (☎ 02-631 1994; Unit 1001 Liberty Sq, 287 Silom Rd, Bangkok 10500)

UK (☎ 020-7930 7932; 57 Trafalgar Sq, London WC2N 5DU)

USA Los Angeles (☎ 213-689 9702; 818 West 7th St, Suite 907, Los Angeles, CA 90017); New York (☎ 212-754 1114; 120 East 56th St, Suite 810, New York, NY 10022)

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

For the mobility impaired, Malaysia can be a nightmare. In most cities and towns there are often no footpaths, kerbs are very high, construction sites are everywhere, and crossings are few and far between. On the upside, taxis are cheap and both Malaysia Airlines and KTM (the national rail service) offer 50% discounts on travel for travellers with disabilities.

Before setting off get in touch with your national support organisation (preferably with the travel officer, if there is one). For general travel advice in Australia contact **Nican** (☎ 02-

VISA STAMPS

We've heard of travellers having problems when they leave Malaysia after having entered the country by train from Singapore – this is because the Malaysian immigration officials at Singapore's railway station, which is the southern termination point for Malaysia's Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM), do not stamp your passport. This shouldn't be a problem as long as you keep your immigration card and your train ticket to show how you entered the country. Your details will have been input into the Malaysian immigration computer and should come up when you exit. Stand your ground if anyone asks you to pay a fine.

6241 1220; www.nican.com.au); in the UK contact **Tourism For All** (☎ 0845 124 9971; www.tourismforall.org.uk); and in the USA try **Accessible Journeys** (☎ 800-846 4537; www.disabilitytravel.com), an agency specialising in travel for those with disabilities, or **Mobility International USA** (☎ 541-343 1284; www.miu.sa.org).

VISAS

Visitors must have a valid passport or internationally recognised travel document valid for at least six months beyond the date of entry into Malaysia. The following gives a brief overview of other requirements – full details of visa regulations are available on the website www.kln.gov.my.

Commonwealth citizens (except those from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan), and citizens of the Republic of Ireland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, San Marino and Liechtenstein do not require a visa to visit Malaysia.

Citizens of Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, the Slovak Republic, South Korea, Sweden, the USA and most Arab countries do not require a visa for a visit of less than three months.

Citizens of Greece, South Africa and many South American and African countries do not require a visa for a visit of less than one month. Most other nationalities are given a shorter stay-period or require a visa.

Citizens of Israel cannot enter Malaysia.

Nationals of most countries are given a 30- or 60-day visa on arrival, depending on

the expected length of stay. As a general rule, if you arrive by air you will be given 60 days automatically, though coming overland you may be given 30 days unless you specifically ask for a 60-day permit. It's possible to get an extension at an immigration office in Malaysia for a total stay of up to three months. This is a straightforward procedure that is easily done in major Malaysian cities (immigration offices are listed under Information in the relevant destination chapters).

Sabah and Sarawak are treated like separate countries. Your passport will be checked on arrival in each state and a new-stay permit issued. You are usually issued with a 30-day permit on arrival in Sarawak or Sabah. Travelling directly from either Sabah or Sarawak back to Peninsular Malaysia, however, there are no formalities and you do not start a new entry period, so your 30-day permit from Sabah or Sarawak remains valid. You can then extend your initial 30-day permit, though it can be difficult to get an extension in Sarawak. For more information see the Sabah (p340) and Sarawak (p407) chapters.

VOLUNTEERING

Opportunities include:

All Women's Action Society Malaysia (www.awam.org.my) Aims to improve the lives of women in Malaysia by lobbying for a just, democratic and equitable society with respect and equality for both genders.

Amnesty International (www.aimalaysia.org) Help out the local branch of the human rights organisation on their various campaigns.

LASSie (www.langkawilassie.org.my) Dog and cat lovers may want to help out at the Langkawi Animal Shelter & Sanctuary Foundation, next to Bon Ton Resort (see p222).

Ma' Daerah Turtle Sanctuary In Terengganu (p316).

Malaysian AIDS Council (www.mac.org.my) Assist in their campaigning work.

Malaysian Nature Society (www.mns.org.my) Check their website or drop them a line to find out ways you can get involved in helping preserve Malaysia's natural environment.

Miso Walai Homestay Program (<http://misowalaihomestay.com>) Gets travellers involved with local wetlands restoration projects.

PAWS (www.paws.org.my) Animal rescue shelter near KL's Subang Airport.

Real Gap (www.realgap.com) Arranges trips that involve environmental project and community work in Sabah, or work as an assistant at Zoo Negara near KL.

Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands (Reach; www.reach.org.my) Take part in reforestation and recycling programs in the Cameron Highlands.

Sepilok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre (p375) Has one of the best established volunteer programs for animal lovers.

Travellers Worldwide (www.travellersworldwide.com) Offers a range of programs including working on wildlife reserves, with disabled children, teaching English and scuba-diving work experience.

Trekforce (www.trekforce.org.uk) Offers a 10-week course working with the Kelabit people on community projects in Sarawak's Kelabit Highlands

Wild Asia (www.wildasia.org) Check this organisation's website for a variety of volunteer options generally connected with the environment and sustainable tourism in the region.

World Challenge (www.world-challenge.co.uk) Brings a lot of (mainly UK) volunteers to Malaysia for conservation and other projects.

Zoo Negara (p132) Help the zookeepers feed and care for their charges.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

The key for women travelling with minimum hassle in Malaysia is to blend in with the locals, which means dressing modestly and being respectful, especially in areas of stronger Muslim religious sensibilities, such as the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Regardless of what local non-Muslim women wear, it's better to be safe than sorry – in the past we've had reports of attacks on skimpily-clad women ranging from minor verbal aggravation to full-on physical assault.

Be proactive about your own safety. Treat overly friendly strangers, both male and female, with a good deal of caution. In cheap hotels check for small peepholes in the walls and doors. You could always plug the holes with tissue paper or try asking to change rooms, but if you're on a budget you may not have much of a choice in some towns. On island resorts, stick to crowded beaches, and choose a chalet close to reception and other travellers.

No matter how limited your budget, it sometimes pays to upgrade – take taxis after dark or in seedy areas of town, and treat yourself to a midrange hotel if all your other options are brothels or the equivalent. We've also had reports of women being targeted in busy city areas by thieves on motorbikes who snatch handbags – make sure you walk with

your bag slung across your body, away from the road.

In conservative Muslim areas, consider tying a bandanna over your hair as a minimal concession to the headscarf worn by most Muslim women. When you're visiting mosques, cover all limbs, and either borrow a headscarf at the entrance to the mosque or buy one of the cheap silk ones that are available on the street. At the beach, most Malaysian women swim fully clothed in T-shirts and shorts, so don't even think about going topless.

Tampons and pads are widely available in Malaysia, especially in the big cities, and over-the-counter medications for common gynaecological health problems (like yeast infections) are also fairly easy to find.

WORK

There are possibilities for those who seek them out, from professional-level jobs in finance, journalism and the oil industry to temporary jobs at some guesthouses and dive centres in popular resort areas. Those with teaching credentials can find English-teaching jobs in Malaysia, though pickings are slim compared to Japan and Korea. Teachers can check some of the many TEFL sites, including Edufind Jobs (www.jobs.edufind.com).

Depending on the nature of your job, you'll need either an Expatriate Personnel Visa or a Temporary Employment Visa. For details and requirements, check the Immigration Department of Malaysia's website (www.imi.gov.my).

For details of volunteer work see opposite.

Malaysia Transport

CONTENTS

GETTING THERE & AWAY	480
Entering Malaysia	480
Air	480
Land	483
Sea	483
GETTING AROUND	484
Air	484
Bicycle	485
Boat	485
Bus	485
Car & Motorcycle	485
Hitching	487
Local Transport	487
Tours	488
Train	488

GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING MALAYSIA

The main requirements are a passport that's valid for travel for at least six months, proof of an onward ticket and adequate funds for your stay, although you will rarely be asked to prove this. Sabah and Sarawak have additional entry procedures; see p407 and p340.

For details of visa and other entry requirements, see p477. Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

AIR

Airports & Airlines

Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA; Map p130; www.klia.com.my) at Sepang, 75km south of Kuala Lumpur (KL), is the main gateway. Near KLIA is the Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCC-T), from which **AirAsia** (www.airasia.com) operates. Together both of these terminals handle the bulk of international flights, with the exception of a few flights from Asia and Australia, which come via Penang, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and a few other cities (see the relevant chapters for specific airport details).

For airline offices in KL and other cities see the regional chapters.

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

AIRLINES FLYING TO/FROM MALAYSIA

- AirAsia** (www.airasia.com)
- Batavia Air** (www.batavia-air.co.id)
- Berjaya Air** (www.berjaya-air.com)
- Cathay Pacific** (www.cathaypacific.com)
- Emirates** (www.emirates.com)
- Eva Air** (www.evaair.com/html/b2c/english/)
- Firefly** (www.fireflyz.com.my)
- Kartika Airlines** (www.kartika-airlines.com)
- Malaysia Airlines** (www.malaysiaairlines.com)
- Qantas** (www.qantas.com)
- Royal Brunei Airlines** (www.bruneiair.com)
- Silk Air** (www.silkair.com)
- Singapore Airlines** (www.singaporeair.com)

Tickets

When shopping for a ticket, you should compare the cost of flying into Malaysia versus the cost of flying into Singapore. From Singapore you can travel overland to almost any place in Peninsular Malaysia in less than a day, and Singapore also has direct flights to Malaysian Borneo and Brunei. KL and Singapore are also good places to buy tickets for onward travel.

To research and buy a ticket on the internet, try these online booking services:

www.cheapflights.com Really does post some of the cheapest flights, but get in early to get the bargains.

www.dialaflight.com Offers worldwide flights out of Europe and the UK.

www.expedia.com A good site for checking worldwide flight prices.

www.kayak.com Great search engine for flight deals with links through to its selections.

www.lastminute.com Start here and choose sites specifically for Australia, the US and the UK, as well as a variety of other European countries.

www.statravel.com STA Travel's US website. There are also UK and Australian sites (www.statravel.co.uk and www.statravel.com.au).

www.travel.com.au A good site for Australians to find cheap flights.

Australia

Discounted fares from Melbourne or Sydney to Kuala Lumpur range from around A\$800 to A\$1300 return, although purchase your ticket far enough in advance with AirAsia and you can get deals as low as A\$391 from Perth, A\$630 from Brisbane and A\$646 from Melbourne. **Malaysia Airlines** (MAS; www.malaysiaairlines.com), **Singapore Airlines** (www.singaporeair.com) and **Qantas** (www.qantas.com) all offer good deals; also check some of the Middle Eastern airlines that fly between Europe and Australia.

Two well-known agencies for cheap fares, with offices throughout Australia, are **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) and **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; www.statravel.com.au).

Brunei

Royal Brunei Airlines (www.bruneiair.com), Malaysia Airlines and AirAsia have direct flights between Bandar Seri Begawan and KL: advance purchase tickets on AirAsia go for as little as B\$91. For more details on flights into and out of Brunei see p593.

Canada

There are no direct flights between Canada and Malaysia; the cheapest fares are going to be on an airline like **Eva Air** (www.evaair.com/html/b2c/english/) via Taiwan. For flights to Malaysia, low-season return fares from Vancouver average C\$1200; from Toronto C\$1350.

Travel CUTS (☎ 866 246 9762; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency.

China & Hong Kong

AirAsia return flights to KL from Shenzhen start from around Y1000; the company also has budget services to Guangzhou, Guilin, Haikou, Hangzhou (for Shanghai) and Tianjin. For other options check the Chinese site of **STA Travel** (www.statravel.com.cn).

Return flights from Hong Kong start from around HK\$1175 with AirAsia. Cathay Pacific also has direct flights from Hong Kong to Penang and Kota Kinabalu.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow jetsetters to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: lonelyplanet.com.

The Tsim Sha Tsui area is Hong Kong's budget travel-agency centre. Try **Hong Kong Student Travel** (☎ 2730 2800; www.hk.st.com) or **Traveller Service** (☎ 2375 2222; www.taketraveller.com).

Continental Europe

There's not much variation in fares from the main European cities. All the major airlines as well as travel agencies are usually offering some sort of deal, so shop around. From Paris to KL costs as little as €720 return with **Emirates** (www.emirates.com).

Specialising in youth and student fares **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 0825-000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr) has branches across France. Also try **AnyWay.com** (☎ 0892-302 301; http://voyages.anyway.com) and **Lastminute** (☎ 0892-705 000; www.fr.lastminute.com).

Recommended agencies in Germany include **STA Travel** (☎ 069-7430 3292; www.statravel.de) and **Travel Overland** (☎ 01805-276 370; www.travel-overland.de).

In Italy try **CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06-441 1166; www.cts.it), in the Netherlands **Airfair** (☎ 0900-771 7717; www.airfair.nl) and in Spain **Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902-200 400; www.barceloviajes.com).

Indonesia

AirAsia has direct connections between KL and 15 destinations in Indonesia, including Jakarta (one way from 219,000Rp/RM96), Medan (145,000Rp/RM72.50), Padang (240,000Rp/RM168) and Denpasar (639,000Rp/RM163). Malaysia's other budget airline **Firefly** (☎ 03-7845 4543; www.firefly.com.my) connects KL (Subang) with Medan, Pekanbaru, Batam and Padang; and Penang with Banda Aceh and Medan. Malaysia Airlines has services to Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, Denpasar and Jogjakarta and has fares comparable to the budget carriers if you book far enough in advance. Indonesian budget carrier **Kartika Airlines** (www.kartika-airlines.com) flies between Medan and Penang.

From Kuching **Batavia Air** (www.batavia-air.co.id) flies to Pontianak (see p420 for details).

A reliable Jakarta-based agency is **Smailing Tours** (☎ 350 8080; www.mysmailing.com).

Japan

Direct return flights to KL cost between ¥50,000 and ¥70,000, although with one stop you can find fares for as low as ¥32,000. One-way tickets average around ¥50,000.

It's usually around ¥10,000 cheaper to fly to/from Tokyo, rather than Osaka/Kansai International Airport.

Reliable discount agencies in Japan include **No 1 Travel** (☎ 03-3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com), **Across Travellers Bureau** (☎ 03-5467 0077; www.across-travel.com) and **STA Travel** (☎ 03-5391 2922; www.statravel.co.jp).

New Zealand

Return fares range from NZ\$1200 to NZ\$1600 between Auckland and KL on Emirates. Round-the-World (RTW) and Circle Pacific fares for travel to/from Malaysia are often good value.

Flight Centre (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0800 474 400; www.statravel.co.nz) have branches in Auckland and elsewhere in the country; check the websites for complete listings.

Singapore

AirAsia, Firefly, Malaysia Airlines and Singapore Airlines operate frequent flights between Singapore and KL as well as several other destinations in Malaysia, including Ipoh, Kuala Terengganu, Kuantan, Langkawi, Melaka and Penang. AirAsia one-way tickets start at S\$40 from Singapore (RM48.50 from KL).

Silk Air (www.silkair.com), Singapore Airlines' regional wing, has daily flights between Singapore and Langkawi. **Berjaya Air** (www.berjaya-air.com) flies from Selatar Airport (p567) to Pulau Tioman in Malaysia.

With the considerable difference in the exchange rate, it's much cheaper to buy tickets in Malaysia. So rather than buying a return fare to Malaysia from Singapore, buy a one-way ticket and then buy the return leg in Malaysia.

Thailand

AirAsia (www.airasia.com) has one-way/round-trip flights from Bangkok to KL from around 1535/2645B. Check its website for similarly cheap fares to another 11 Thai destinations. Firefly connects KL (Subang) with Koh Samui and Phuket, as well as Penang with Phuket. For advance purchases Malaysia Airlines also has good deals for direct services to Bangkok and Phuket.

Bangkok has a number of excellent travel agencies, but there are also some suspect

ones; you should ask the advice of other travellers before handing over your cash.

STA Travel (☎ 662-236 0262; www.statravel.co.th) is a reliable place to start.

UK

From London you can take your pick from a wide range of carriers, one of the cheapest being AirAsia with fares as low as UK£413 return, although Malaysia Airlines also has deals from UK£435 return.

Reputable agencies in London:

ebookers (☎ 0871 223 5000; www.ebookers.co.uk)

Flight Centre (☎ 0870-499 0040; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

STA Travel (☎ 0871-230 0040; www.statravel.co.uk)

Trailfinders (☎ 0845-058 5858; www.trailfinders.com)

USA

Malaysia Airlines has fares of around US\$800 from New York or US\$1170 from Los Angeles to KL. Cheaper fares may sometimes include a stopover.

If you are going to be travelling the region, you could always look into the Circle Pacific pass offered by **Oneworld** (www.oneworld.com) carriers.

Good deals on tickets can also be found in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and other big cities. A good place to start is **STA Travel** (☎ 1-800-781 4040; www.statravel.com), which has a wide network of offices.

LAND

Brunei

See p593 for details of border crossings into Brunei from Sarawak.

Indonesia

Several express buses run between Pontianak in Kalimantan and Kuching and Miri in Sarawak, and Kota Kinabulu in Sabah. The bus crosses at the Tebedu/Entikong border. See p421 for details.

Singapore

The Causeway linking Johor Bahru with Singapore handles most traffic between the countries. Trains and buses run from all over Malaysia straight through to Singapore, or you can take a bus to JB and get a taxi or one of the frequent buses from JB to Singapore (p261). For further information see p565 and p124.

Trains linking Singapore and KL cost between S\$30/RM34 and S\$130/RM130

depending on what class of ticket you buy and whether you go for a berth or not. The journey takes about seven hours. For more details see p566.

A good website with details of express buses between Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand is the **Express Bus Travel Guide** (www.myexpressbus.com).

There is also a causeway linking Tuas, in western Singapore, with Geylang Patah in JB. This is known as the Second Link, and some bus services to Melaka and up the west coast head this way. If you have a car, tolls on the Second Link are much higher than those on the main Causeway.

Thailand

BUS & CAR

You can cross the border by road into Thailand at Padang Besar (p227), Bukit Kayu Hitam (p226), Rantau Panjang (Sungai Golok on the Thai side) and Pengkalan Kubor (p333).

TRAIN

The rail route into Thailand is on the Butterworth–Alor Setar–Hat Yai route, which crosses into Thailand at Padang Besar. You can take the **International Express** (☎ 03-2267 1200; www.ktmb.com.my) from Butterworth all the way to Bangkok. Trains from KL and Singapore are timed to connect with this service.

From Butterworth to Hat Yai the 2nd-class fare is upper/lower berth RM65/73, to Bangkok RM95/103, from Alor Setar to Hat Yai RM58.40/66.40 and to Bangkok RM88.40/96.40.

From Alor Setar there is an additional daily northbound train to Hat Yai (from RM12, three hours). And from KL there is one through service daily (the Senandung Langkawi) to Hat Yai (seat/upper berth/lower berth RM44/52/57).

From Hat Yai there are frequent train and bus connections to other parts of Thailand.

The opulent **Eastern & Oriental Express** (www.orient-express.com) also connects Singapore and Bangkok (p566) making stops in KL and Butterworth (for Penang).

SEA Brunei

Boats connect Brunei to Lawas and Limbang in Sarawak, and to Pulau Labuan, from where boats go to Sabah. With the exception

of speedboats for Limbang, all international boats now depart from Muara, 25km north-east of Bandar Seri Begawan, where Brunei immigration formalities are also handled.

See p594 for more information and details on boat services.

Indonesia

The following are the main ferry routes between Indonesia and Malaysia:

- Bengkalis, Sumatra, to Melaka (see p252)
- Batam to Johor Bahru (p261)
- Dumai, Sumatra, to Melaka (see p252)
- Medan, Sumatra, to Penang (see p196)
- Pekanbaru, Sumatra, to Melaka (see p252)
- Tanjung Pinang, Bintan, to Johor Bahru (p261)
- Tanjung Balai, Sumatra, to Pelabuhan Klang (see p140) and Kukup (see p261)
- Tarakan, Kalimantan, to Tawau (see p393)

Singapore

Singapore has a number of regular ferry connections to Malaysia and the Indonesian islands of Batam and Bintan. Cruise trips in the region are also very popular with locals. For more details see p566.

Thailand

Ferries connect Kuah on Pulau Langkawi with Satun on the Thai coast and, from November to mid-May, with Ko Lipe (see p225); make sure you get your passport stamped going in either direction.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

Airlines in Malaysia

The two main domestic operators are **Malaysia Airlines** (MAS; ☎ 1300-883 000, outside Malaysia ☎ 03-2161 0555; www.malaysia-airlines.com.my) and **AirAsia** (☎ 1300-889 933, outside Malaysia ☎ 603 8660 4343; www.airasia.com).

The MAS subsidiary **Firefly** (☎ 03-7845 4543; www.fireflyz.com.my) has flights from KL (Subang) to Penang, Kota Bharu, Kuala Terengganu, Kerteh, Langkawi, Johor Bahru, Alor Setar and Kuantan, and from Penang to KL (Subang), Johor Bahru and Langkawi.

Berjaya Air (☎ 03-7847 8228; www.berjaya-air.com) flies between KL (Subang), Pulau

Tioman, Pulau Pangkor and Pulau Redang in Peninsular Malaysia, as well as Singapore and Koh Samui in Thailand.

Over in Malaysian Borneo, MAS's subsidiary **MASwings** (☎ 1300-88 3000, outside Malaysia 03-7843 3000; www.maswings.com.my) offers local flights within and between Sarawak and Sabah. These services are very much reliant on the vagaries of the weather. In the wet season (October to March in Sarawak and on Sabah's northeast coast; May to November on Sabah's west coast), places like Bario in Sarawak can be isolated for days at a time, so don't venture into this area if you have a very tight schedule. These flights are completely booked during school holidays. At other times it's easier to get a seat at a few days' notice, but always book as far in advance as possible.

DISCOUNTS & SPECIAL FLIGHTS

All the airlines offer discounts tickets on the internet, depending on how far in advance you book – in some cases you might only pay for the airport taxes. A variety of other discounts (typically between 25% and 50%) are available for flights around Malaysia on Malaysia Airlines, including for families and groups of three or more – it's worth inquiring when you book tickets in Malaysia. Student discounts are available, but only for students enrolled in institutions that are in Malaysia.

Air Passes

Malaysia Airlines' Discover Malaysia pass costs US\$199 (not including airport taxes) and travellers can take five flights anywhere in Malaysia within a 28-day period. It also has a US\$99 pass for five flights with any one province. You must have flown into Malaysia on a Malaysia Airlines flight to qualify for this pass, though.

For flying around the region the **Asean Air Pass** (www.visitsasean.travel) needs to be bought at the same time as a ticket from your home country to the region on one of the following airlines: Singapore Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Thai, Garuda, Silk Air, Philippine Airlines, Air Vietnam, Laos Airlines and Myanmar Airlines. You can buy a minimum of three coupons (US\$420) covering three flights, up to a maximum of six coupons (US\$600).

For more details on these and a host of other air passes that are useful for travellers

covering the region at speed, check out www.airtimetable.com/airpass_asia.htm.

BICYCLE

Bicycle touring around Malaysia and neighbouring countries is an increasingly popular activity. The main road system is well engineered and has good surfaces, but the secondary road system is limited. Road conditions are good enough for touring bikes in most places, but mountain bikes are recommended for forays off the beaten track.

KL has plenty of bicycle shops. Top-quality bicycles and components can be bought in major cities, but generally 10-speed (or higher) bikes and fittings are hard to find. Bringing your own is the best bet. Bicycles can be transported on most international flights; check with the airline about extra charges and shipment specifications.

KL Bike Hash (www.bikehash.freesevers.com) has a whole load of useful information and links to other cycling-connected sites in Malaysia. Also see **David's Cycling Adventure** (www.bicycletouringmalaysia.com), run by a local guy who also offers homestays at his home in the state of Perak. It's a mine of information about cycling around the region.

BOAT

There are no services connecting Peninsular Malaysia with Malaysian Borneo. On a local level, there are boats and ferries between the peninsula and offshore islands, and along the rivers of Sabah and Sarawak – check the relevant chapters for details. Note that some ferry operators are notoriously lax about observing safety rules, and local authorities are often nonexistent. If a boat looks overloaded or otherwise unsafe, *do not board it* – no-one else will look out for your safety.

BUS

Bus travel in Malaysia is economical and generally comfortable, and seats can be reserved. It's also fast – sometimes too fast. In a bid to pack in as many trips as possible, some bus drivers speed recklessly, resulting in frequent, often fatal, accidents. There's even an online petition (see <http://buscrashnomore.blogspot.com>) aimed at getting the government to do something about it.

Konsortium Transnasional Berhad (www.ktb.com.my) is Malaysia's largest bus operator running services under the **Transnasional** (☎ 1300-888 582;

www.transnasional.com.my), **Plusliner** (www.plusliner.com) and **Cityliner** (www.cityliner.com.my) brands. Its services tend to be slower than rivals, but not that much safer, as its buses have also been involved in several major accidents. They have competition from a variety of privately operated buses on the longer domestic routes including **Aeroline** (www.aeroline.com.my) and **Supernice** (www.supernice.com.my). There are so many buses on major runs that you can often turn up and get a seat on the next bus.

On main routes most private buses have air-con (often turned to frigid so bring a sweater!) and cost only a few ringgit more than regular buses.

In larger towns there may be a number of bus stations; local/regional buses often operate from one station and long-distance buses from another; in other cases, KL for example, bus stations are differentiated by the destinations they serve.

Bus travel off the beaten track is relatively straightforward. Small towns and *kampung* (villages) all over the country are serviced by public buses, usually non-air-conditioned rattlers. Unfortunately, they are often poorly signed and sometimes the only way for you to find your bus is to ask a local. These buses are invariably dirt cheap and provide a great sample of rural life. In most towns there are no ticket offices, so buy your ticket from the conductor after you board.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Driving in Malaysia is fantastic compared with most Asian countries. There has been a lot of investment in the country's roads, which are generally of a high quality. New cars for hire are commonly available and fuel is inexpensive (RM1.80 per litre).

It's not all good news. Driving in the cities, particularly KL, can be a nightmare, due to traffic and confusing one-way systems. Malaysian drivers aren't always the safest when it comes to obeying road rules – they mightn't be as reckless as those you might see elsewhere in Southeast Asia, but they still take risks. For example, hardly any of the drivers keep to the official 110km/h speed limit on the main highways and tailgating is a common problem.

The Lebuh raya (North–South Hwy) is a six-lane expressway that runs for 966km along the length of the peninsula from the Thai border in the north to JB in the south. There are quite steep toll charges for using the expressway

The best place to look for car hire is KL (p126), though Penang is also good (p198). In Sabah and Sarawak there is less competition and rates are higher, partly because of road conditions.

Most rental companies also require that drivers are at least 23 years old.

Insurance

Rental companies will provide insurance when you hire a car, but always check what the extent of your coverage will be, particularly if you're involved in an accident. You might want to take out your own insurance or pay the rental company an extra premium for an insurance excess reduction.

Road Rules & Hazards

Driving in Malaysia follows many of the same rules as in Britain and Australia – cars are right-hand drive, and you drive on the left side of the road. The only additional precaution you need to take is to be aware of possible road hazards: stray animals and the large number of motorcyclists. And take it easy on the *kampung* back roads.

Wearing safety belts is compulsory. Although most drivers in Malaysia are relatively sane, safe and slow, there are also a fair few who specialise in overtaking on blind corners and otherwise trusting to divine intervention. Malaysian drivers also use a curious signalling system, where a flashing left indicator means 'you are safe to overtake' or 'I'm about to turn off'. Giving a quick blast of the horn when you're overtaking a slower vehicle is common practice and helps alert otherwise sleepy drivers to your presence.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch, particularly single women, should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

This said, Malaysia has long had a reputation for being a great place for hitchhiking, and it's generally still true, though with inexpensive bus travel most travellers don't bother.

On the west coast of Malaysia, hitching is generally quite easy, but it's not possible on the main Lebuhraya expressway.

On the east coast, traffic is lighter and there may be long waits between rides. The same applies to hitching in Malaysian Borneo.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Local transport varies widely from place to place. Large cities in Malaysia have local taxis (as opposed to long-distance taxis, see below). These taxis usually have meters, but there are exceptions to this rule (usually in smaller towns like Kuantan in Pahang). For metered taxis, rates are as follows: flagfall (first 2km) is RM2; 10 sen for each 200m or 45 seconds thereafter; 20 sen for each additional passenger over two passengers; RM1 for each piece of luggage in the boot (trunk); plus 50% on each of these charges between midnight and 6am. Drivers are legally required to use meters if they exist – you can try insisting that they do so, but sometimes you'll just have to negotiate the fare before you get in.

In major cities there are also buses, which are extremely cheap and convenient, provided you can figure out which one is going your way. KL also has commuter trains (p127), and a Light Rail Transit (LRT; p128) and monorail system (p127).

Bicycle rickshaws (trishaws) have died out in KL, but they still exist in such places as Georgetown and Melaka, and are definitely handy ways of getting around the older parts of town, which have convoluted and narrow streets.

In the bigger cities across Malaysian Borneo, such as Kuching and Kota Kinabalu, you will find taxis, buses and minibuses. Once you're out of the big cities, though, you're basically on your own and must either walk or hitch. If you're really in the bush, of course, riverboats and aeroplanes are the only alternatives to lengthy jungle treks.

Long-Distance Taxi

Long-distance taxis make Malaysian travel – already easy and convenient even by the best Asian standards – a real breeze. In almost every town there will be a *teksi* stand where the cars are lined up and ready to go to their various destinations.

Taxis are ideal for groups of four, and are also available on a share basis. As soon as a full complement of four passengers turns up, off you go.

If you're travelling between major towns, you have a reasonable chance of finding other

THE EVOLUTION OF MALAYSIA'S RAILWAY

Malaysia's first railway line was a 13km route from Taiping to Port Weld that was laid in 1884, but it's no longer in use. By 1903 you could travel all the way from Johor Bahru to near Butterworth; the line was extended to the Thai border in 1918 and across the Causeway to Singapore in 1923. In 1931 the east-coast line was completed, effectively bringing the railway system to its present state.

Keppel Railway Station in Singapore, built in 1932, is actually still part of Malaysia, as is the land on which the tracks run up to the Causeway. This was part of the deal done at the time of federation, and it's one that Singapore, with its hungry eye on the local development possibilities of this corridor of Malaysian land, is keen to have revised.

The success of the high-speed rail link between KL and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) has encouraged Keretapi Tanah Melayu to increase its investment in extending this rapid and modern system. A high-speed service between KL and Ipoh is scheduled to start in 2011.

passengers to share without having to wait too long, but otherwise you will have to charter a whole taxi, which is four times the single-fare rate (in this book we generally quote the rate for a whole taxi).

As Malaysia becomes increasingly wealthy, and people can afford to hire a whole taxi, the share system is becoming less reliable. Early morning is generally the best time to find people to share a taxi, but you can inquire at the taxi stand the day before as to the best time.

Taxi rates to specific destinations are fixed by the government and are posted at the taxi stands; usually the whole-taxi rate is listed. Air-con taxis cost a few more ringgit than non-air-con, and fares are generally about twice the comparable bus fares. If you want to charter a taxi to an obscure destination, or by the hour, you'll probably have to do some negotiating. As a rule of thumb, you should pay around 50 sen per kilometre.

Taxi drivers often drive at frighteningly high speeds. They don't have as many head-on collisions as you might expect, but closing your eyes at times of high stress certainly helps! You also have the option of demanding that the driver slow down, but this can be met with varying degrees of hostility. Another tactic is to look for ageing taxis and taxi drivers – they must be doing something right to have made it this far!

TOURS

Reliable tours of both Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo are run regularly by international operators, including **Exodus** (www.exodus.co.uk), **Explore Worldwide** (www.explore.co.uk), **Peregrine Adventures** (www.peregrineadventures.com) and **Intrepid Travel** (www.intrepidtravel.com). Such

tours are often a good way to see the best of Malaysian Borneo in a short period of time and without having to worry about possibly problematic transport connections.

In contrast, getting around the peninsula under your own steam is rarely difficult, making a tour less necessary.

Also see the destination chapters for listings of local tour operators.

TRAIN

Malaysia's privatised national railway company is **Keretapi Tanah Melayu** (KTM; ☎ 03-2267 1200; www.ktmb.com.my). It runs a modern, comfortable and economical railway service, although there are basically only two lines and for the most part services are slow.

One line runs up the west coast from Singapore, through KL, Butterworth and on into Thailand. The other branches off from this line at Gemas and runs through Kuala Lipis up to the northeastern corner of the country near Kota Bharu in Kelantan. Often referred to as the 'jungle train', this line is properly known as the 'east-coast line'.

In Sabah the **North Borneo Railway** (www.northborneorailway.com.my), a small narrow-gauge line running through the Sungai Padas gorge from Tenom to Beaufort, was out of action at the time of research; check the website to see if tourist trips are up and running again.

Services & Classes

There are two main types of rail services: express and local trains. Express trains are air-conditioned and have 'premier' (1st class), 'superior' (2nd class) and sometimes 'economy' (3rd class) seats. Similarly on overnight trains you'll find 'premier night deluxe'

cabins (upper/lower berth RM50/70 extra), 'premier night standard' cabins (upper/lower berth RM18/26), and 'standard night' cabins (upper/lower berth RM12/17). Local trains are usually economy class only, but some have superior seats.

Express trains stop only at main stations, while local services, which operate mostly on the east-coast line, stop everywhere, including the middle of the jungle, to let passengers and their goods on and off. Consequently local services take more than twice as long as the express trains and run to erratic schedules, but if you're in no hurry they provide a colourful experience and are good for short journeys.

Train schedules are reviewed biannually, so check the **KTM website** (www.ktmb.com.my), where you can make bookings and buy tickets.

Train Passes

KTM offers a Tourist Railpass for five days (adult/child US\$35/18), 10 days (\$55/28) and 15 days (US\$70/35). This pass entitles the holder to unlimited travel on any class of train but does not include sleeping-berth charges on night express services.

Railpasses are available only to foreigners and can be purchased at Sentral KL, JB, Butterworth, Port Klang, Padang Besar, Wakaf Baharu and Penang train stations, as well as at Singapore station.

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