

## When To Go

KL is hot and humid almost all the time. Although there is rain through the year, March to April and September to November are the wettest months. KL's wide ethnic diversity means that celebrations of one kind or another are usually going on somewhere around the city; these can make transport more crowded than usual. Public holidays are a surprisingly good time to be around, as most locals head for the beaches and hills. In more liberal KL, Ramadan doesn't pose the same 'where to eat?' problems that affect the more devout Muslim areas on the east coast.



During school holidays and the Chinese new-year internal flights can be difficult to book.

## North/Central: Taman Negara National Park

Taman Negara is billed, perhaps wrongly, as a wildlife park. Certainly this magnificent wilderness area is a haven for endangered species such as elephants, tigers, leopards and rhinos, but numbers are low and sightings of anything more exotic than snakes, lizards, monkeys, small deer, and perhaps tapir, are rare.

The birdlife is prolific, however, and chances are you'll see more insects than you've ever seen in your life. Traditionally, the park was only accessible by river. These days there's a road, but the boat trip is still recommended for the full Taman Negara experience.

## Peninsular Islands

**Penang** is affectionately known as the Pearl of the Orient. Its main centre, Georgetown, has impressive colonial architecture, temples, lively Chinese culture, great shopping and food. But there are many other attractions, including the north-coast beaches, charming Penang Hill with its funicular and colonial hill station and amazing Kek Lok Si Temple.

Central Georgetown is a sprawling, largely Chinese city, steeped in history, with old-fashioned character that's fast disappearing. The beaches along the north coast are the most visited and most accessible. You can make a circuit of Penang Island to discover a varied landscape of jungle and coast, farmland, plantations and fishing villages.

**Langkawi**: Busy / more to do than on some islands. Some larger dive centres.

**Perhentian / Redang**: Quieter than Langkawi with less to do – more tranquil, especially Redang.

### **Tioman**:

For nightlife see Salang / ABC – relatively cheap areas.

For nice beaches / resorts (slightly pricier than Northern resorts) see Nipah and Muket.

For solitude consider Juara. (To get there takes a 45 min 4 wheel drive taxi trip or a tough 7 KM trek through on a well-marked footpath through the jungle over two hills). Once there is little to do and only a few basic places to eat / shop. Accommodation is mainly in the form of beach huts. No large hotels at all. Cheap location.

A flight from KL to Tioman using Berjaya Airways is about 450 RM. There is also a ferry from Peninsular Malaysia.

## Central: KL **Sight Seeing Places in K.L**

### **City tour**

1. Petronas Twin Towers & KLCC (To visit inside you need to go yourself with your passport at about 8.00 AM – you will need to queue)
2. K.L Tower
3. Mid Valley City (for shopping)
4. Berjaya Times Square (for the most amazing indoor theme park and Imax(3D)theatre)
5. Low Yat Plaza (for cheap DVDs)
6. Night Life – The Walk (Bukit Bintang) pubs, cafes, disco places
7. Experience a Balinese massage at a Spa (several in the city) and feel relaxed.

### **Outskirts tour**

1. Batu Caves (climb 273 steps to see a Hindu Temple in the caves – 20mins from K.L)
2. FRIM Canopy Walk in the Forest Reserve of Malaysia (walk in the rainforest) 20mins from K.L
3. Genting Highlands (theme park, cool weather, casino) 45mins from K.L

### **Beaches (in order of scenic beauty)**

1. Langkawi Island (by flight)
2. Cherating Beach (Kuantan) (by car)
3. Penang Feringgi Beach (by flight or car)

## **Central: Cameron Highlands**

The Cameron Highlands, in the centre of Peninsular Malaysia, comprise a series of hill stations at altitudes between 1500-1800m (4920-5904ft). This fertile area is the centre of Malaysia's tea industry and it's the place where locals and visitors come to escape the heat of the plains.

Attractions include jungle walks, waterfalls, tours of tea plantations and beautiful gardens. The cool weather tempts visitors to exertions like golf, tennis, and long walks, normally forgotten at sea level - but this is really Malaysia's R 'n' R capital par excellence for those who don't like the beach and enjoy a bout of colonial nostalgia.

## Central (Near KL): Batu Caves

The huge Batu Caves are among KL's best-known tourist attractions. Used for Hindu festivals and pilgrimages, the caves also form an intense backdrop.

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## Borneo: Sabah / Sarawak Regions

East Malaysia, on the island of Borneo, offers spectacular wildlife, longhouses and the awe-inspiring Mt Kinabalu.

Flights into Kota Kinabalu (Sabah) and Kuching (Sarawak) Malaysia Airlines  
<http://www.malaysiaairlines.com/uk/main.html>

Air Asia is cheaper option when available. Flight durations approx 1 hr.

### **Borneo: East: Sabah**

The main options in Sabah include:

- Climb the mountain
- Visit the Orang-Utan Rehab Ctr
- Mangrove swamp trip into the jungle (a boat trip clockwise to North East Sabah, then heading inland down a river heading South, then exploring the jungle on foot and perhaps visiting a long-house)
- Go direct to the jungle eg the Borneo Rainforest Lodge [BRL] (long overland trip into central Sabah, 2.5 hours of bumpy off-road driving and then daily guided hikes into the jungle from BRL)

### **Borneo: East: Sabah: Sepilok Orang-Utan Rehabilitation Centre**

One of only four orang-utan sanctuaries in the world, Sepilok is among Sabah's top tourist attractions - so much so that the atmosphere can be a bit like a circus or a zoo. Nonetheless, a visit to Sepilok can be a memorable experience. The orang-utans are impressive, young orang-utans particularly so, all ginger fur and intelligent eyes.



Hours: Sat-Thu 9:00am-12:30pm & 2:00pm-4:30pm; Fri 9:00am-11:30am

The Borneo Rainforest Lodge is a high quality hotel set in the middle of the jungle with well organised treks and a canopy walkway. Cost approx 1500 RM for 4 days 3 nights.

## **Borneo: East: Sarawak (South of Sabah)**

Like Sabah, Sarawak is known to international visitors primarily because of the extraordinary natural wonders of its national parks, including Gunung Mulu, the Niah Caves, and Bako. Sarawak's cultural treasures are also fascinating, reflecting the influence not only of the state's many ethnic peoples, but also the odd western influence of Sarawak's "White Rajahs."



Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia, an outback of sheer beauty rich in resources such as pepper, cocoa, palm oil, timber and oil. With an area of 124,450 sq. km, it is a region of endless fascination, possessing the largest cave chamber in the world, verdant jungles, unique fauna and flora, white beaches, and remote islands. Its population of 1.5 million people is as rich and varied as the land.

Flights into the capital Kuching (Sarawak) 250 RM (when booked locally)

Key options include:

- Day trip to Bako park for proboscis monkeys
- 3-4 day trip to a longhouse (ideally using Borneo Adventure)
- There are some nearby caves – for better cave systems see Miri

## **East: Sarawak: Mulu (Miri)**

For largest caves in the world see: Gunung Mulu National Park in Sarawak

Mulu has an airport but Miri may be an easier option in terms of getting tours organised.

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Example tours: [http://www.pinganchorage.com.my/sarawak\\_mulu\\_national\\_park\\_caves.htm](http://www.pinganchorage.com.my/sarawak_mulu_national_park_caves.htm)

**Mulu caves and park: Day 1** - Upon arrival Mulu Airport, transfer and check in Benarat Inn. A 3km hike through Mulu's amazing tropical rainforests. Discover Lang Cave, small but beautifully decorated. Walk through the World's largest cave entrance, the massive Deer Cave. Relax at the open-air observatory for an opportunity to witness thousand of bats emerge most evenings to hunt for insect over the forest. (L/D)

**Day 2** - Breakfast, by longboat through the winding rivers to Wind Cave and Clearwater Cave. The Wind Cave, with unusual calcite formations, including the tall, slender stalagmites in the King's Room. Clearwater Cave contains one of the world's major underground rivers, plus dry passage adding up to 107km, making it the longest cave system in southern Asia. The pool at Clearwater Spring is a nice place to swim and picnic (B/L/D)

**Day 3** - Breakfast, free at leisure until transfer to Mulu Airport (B)

495.00 RM

**Sabah: Base yourself in Kota Kinabalu [KK] (Fly there from KL 250 RM) and organise multiple tours from KK**

Rainforest treks 150 to 190 RM

[http://www.pinganchorage.com.my/day\\_tours/sabah\\_kinabalu\\_park\\_poring\\_hot\\_spring.htm](http://www.pinganchorage.com.my/day_tours/sabah_kinabalu_park_poring_hot_spring.htm)

### **Sarawak: additional info**

I also spotted a Hilton in the jungle near Kuching (Sarawak). Fly in from KL.

For caves (biggest in the world) go to Miri just south of Brunei or direct to Mulu. Fly in from KL.

In Kuching the best operator (according to a guide from another tour operator) is Borneo Adventure. Slightly more expensive than other operators but they go further and do more.

[www.BorneoAdventure.com](http://www.BorneoAdventure.com)

Their website is a good source of what to see in the region.

## **Transport**

Malaysian Airline System (MAS) is the main domestic airline, servicing both the peninsula and Sabah and Sarawak.

It's cheaper to fly to East Malaysia (Borneo) from Johor Bahru than from KL. In East Malaysia, flying is often the only quick way to get around. Note that flights in East Malaysia are frequently fully booked during school holidays and are prone to delays due to the vagaries of the weather.

Peninsular Malaysia has a fast, economical and widespread bus system, and this is generally the best way to get around. Sabah has excellent roads, and minibuses ply the main routes. Buses ply Sarawak's major trunk road, but hardly anywhere else. Peninsular Malaysia has a comfortable and sensibly priced railway system, but there are basically only two lines: one linking Singapore to Thailand via KL and Butterworth, and the other branching off this at Gemas and heading northeast to Kota Bharu. In Sabah, there's a narrow-gauge line through the Pegas River gorge from Tenom to Kota Kinabalu that is well worth catching.

In Peninsular Malaysia, long-distance taxis are twice the price of buses but they're a comparatively luxurious and efficient way to travel. If you want to get around by car, all major car-rental firms have KL offices. There are no boat services between Peninsular and East Malaysia, but fast boats ply the rivers of both Sabah and Sarawak.

Local taxis in Malaysia are metered. Rickshaws have all but disappeared in KL, but they are still a viable form of local transport in provincial areas. KL has a notoriously bad public transport system, and peak-hour travel in the city should be avoided at all costs.

Emergency return flight is £350-£450 (RM 2300 – 3000) Malaysian Airlines

## **Health**: Malaria: Malaysia

Malaria is rare in Malaysia but you are still advised to take anti-malarial drugs. The risk increases during the very wet months Nov-Dec +/- 2 months and when travelling in jungle areas.

There are only 2 viable medications:

(1) Malarone (£45-55 for 20 tablets – 1 a day – 2 before you go 7 after you return). This is the latest and arguably best option given lack of reported side effects.

(2) Doxycycline (£25 for 60 tablets – 1 a day starting 7 days before you leave stopping 1 month after). Doxy has the additional major benefit of reducing the probability of stomach complaints. Some reports of side effects (I have never had a problem with them).

Avoid Larium at all costs – very unpleasant side effects for most people including major shifts in personality, nightmares, hallucinations, psychosis, ....

## **Currency**

<b>£</b>	<b>RM</b>
1	6 to 7
5	35
10	70
20	135
50	340
100	680

The exchange rate when I left was 6.3 to 6.5 RM to the pound.

Changing travellers cheques was difficult / time consuming at times with a limit at some banks of £100 per day. Using Cashpoint machines may be less hassle if your cards allow this.

Visa / Mastercard transactions now require you to know your pin number.

# Thailand

Accessible by bus / air from KL. (Just North of Malaysia).

**Mainland: Central:** Bangkok (Cheap accom on Khaosan Road) – night life

**Mainland:** Pattaya City (Very 'lively', brash, OTT, wide range of night life, loud – outlying beaches / booze / shopping) [Hell for some – heaven for others].

**North:** Chang Rai / Chang Mai (Golden triangle area)

Jungle treks / elephant rides / rafting (sedate – not white water)

Chang Mai is less developed, Chang Rai is more 'touristy'

**South:**

Beaches / diving

Phi Phi island: South (affected by Tsunami – popular with back packers / divers – no large hotels as such)

Phuket island: South – sprawling in parts – good night life (Patong beach especially)

Koh Samui: Island: East – said to be nicer / quieter / idyllic than Phuket – East was not affected by the Tsunami