

ASIA · FOOD · BEACHES · ISLANDS · WILDLIFE · DIVING · CITY BREAKS



Malaysia

Malaysia splits into two very different halves. On the peninsula, Kuala Lumpur's towers and hawker stalls, George Town's shophouses and street art, and the tea hills of the Cameron Highlands sit a few hours apart. Across the South China Sea, Malaysian Borneo has orangutans, Mount Kinabalu and the vast caves of Gunung Mulu.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all but essential travel to parts of Malaysia.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 19 March 2026.

 CAPITAL Kuala Lumpur	 CURRENCY Malaysian ringgit (MYR) £1 ≈ MYR 5.45	 LANGUAGE Malay, English Mandarin, Tamil	 BEST TIME Feb–Mar, Jun–Jul
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type G 240V · UK plugs fit	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 13h direct ~£550–£1,050 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+8 standard time

Malay, Chinese and Indian communities, plus the indigenous peoples of Borneo, give Malaysia a food culture and street life unlike anywhere else in the region; you can eat nasi lemak, dim sum and banana-leaf curry on the same street. A first trip on the peninsula usually runs from Kuala Lumpur north via the Cameron Highlands to Penang and Langkawi, or south to Melaka, with the Perhentian or Tioman islands on the east coast. Borneo needs its own week: Sabah for Kinabalu, Sepilok and the Kinabatangan River, Sarawak for Kuching, longhouses and Mulu's caves.

Costs are low for the standard of infrastructure: excellent hawker meals cost a few pounds, roads are good and English is widely spoken, so independent travel is easy. The heat and humidity are constant, and the monsoons split the country: the east coast islands largely shut from November to February, when much of Borneo is also at its wettest, while the west coast's heaviest rain falls around April and October–November. Malaysia is Muslim-majority but diverse, and alcohol is easy to find in cities and tourist areas, less so on the conservative east coast. It suits first-timers to Asia, families, food lovers, divers and wildlife watchers.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

WILDLIFE

Kinabatangan River and Sepilok

Malaysia's second-longest river winds through Sabah's floodplain forest, where dawn and dusk boat trips from Sukau find proboscis monkeys, hornbills, crocodiles and sometimes pygmy elephants. Combine it with Sepilok's orangutan rehabilitation centre near Sandakan.
- 2

ADVENTURE

Mount Kinabalu

Malaysia's highest peak (4,095 m) is a two-day climb via the Laban Rata huts to a dawn summit on bare granite. Climbing permits and guides are compulsory and limited, so book months ahead; the park's botanical trails suit non-climbers.

3

BEACH

Perhentian Islands

Two small islands off Terengganu with clear water, reef snorkelling, and turtles and blacktip reef sharks close to shore. Kecil suits backpackers and Besar families; most resorts close during the November–February monsoon.

4

HISTORY

Melaka

A UNESCO-listed port shaped by Portuguese, Dutch and British rule: the red Stadthuys, the ruined church on St Paul's Hill, Peranakan townhouses on Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock and the Jonker Street night market at weekends.

5

NATURE

Gunung Mulu National Park

A UNESCO-listed karst wilderness in Sarawak, reached by small plane from Miri. Deer Cave's evening bat exodus, the vast Clearwater cave system and the razor-edged Pinnacles trek make it Borneo's most spectacular park.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Kuala Lumpur

≈ 10 million people

Ride up the Petronas Towers, eat your way along Jalan Alor and Brickfields' Little India, then take the train to Batu Caves, where a giant golden Murugan statue guards Hindu cave shrines.

2ND LARGEST CITY

George Town

≈ 2.8 million people

The UNESCO-listed core of Penang's capital is many Malaysians' idea of food heaven: clan houses, shophouses and murals by day, char kway teow and asam laksa at hawker centres by night.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Johor Bahru

≈ 2.5 million people

Mostly a gateway across the causeway from Singapore, with Legoland Malaysia on its outskirts and a small heritage quarter around Jalan Tan Hiok Nee; few visitors stay long.

Figures are for conurbations (2020 census): Greater Kuala Lumpur, the George Town conurbation around Penang and the Johor Bahru conurbation. Kuala Lumpur city itself has about 2 million people.

When to go to Malaysia

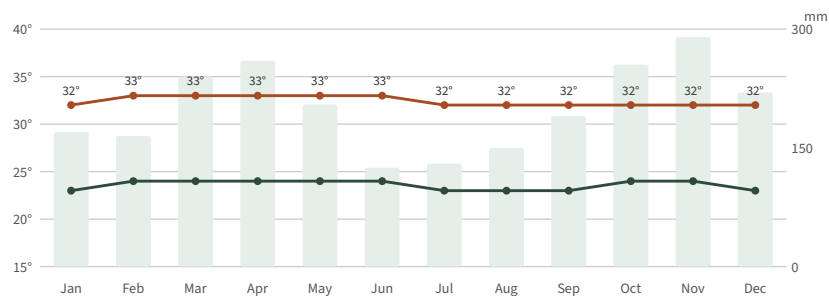
Best time: **Feb–Mar, Jun–Jul.**



■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Kuala Lumpur

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan–Feb	Chinese New Year Lion dances, firecrackers, red lanterns and open houses, especially in George Town and Kuala Lumpur's Chinatown; many Chinese-run shops and restaurants close for the first few days.
Jan–Feb	Thaipusam Hundreds of thousands of Hindu devotees climb the 272 steps to Batu Caves for Lord Murugan, many carrying ornate kavadi and with pierced cheeks; Penang holds its own procession.
Jun–Jul	Rainforest World Music Festival Three days of world and indigenous Bornean music at the Sarawak Cultural Village near Kuching, with workshops by day and stage shows beneath the rainforest by night.

How much does Malaysia cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ MYR 164 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £75 per person / day ≈ MYR 409 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £170 per person / day ≈ MYR 927 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Nasi lemak

Rice cooked in coconut milk and pandan, served with fiery sambal, fried anchovies, peanuts, cucumber and egg; eaten at any hour, often wrapped in banana leaf.

Char kway teow

Flat rice noodles wok-fried over fierce heat with prawns, cockles, Chinese sausage, bean sprouts and egg; Penang's hawkers are famous for its smoky 'wok hei'.

Roti canai

Flaky griddled flatbread from the mamak (Indian-Muslim) stalls, dipped in dhal or curry and eaten with teh tarik, frothy 'pulled' milk tea.

Getting around

KTM's electric ETS trains run quickly and cheaply from Kuala Lumpur north to Ipoh, Butterworth (for Penang) and Padang Besar. Comfortable long-distance buses cover the rest of the peninsula, and Grab is the standard app for cars and taxis everywhere. AirAsia and Malaysia Airlines connect KL with Penang, Langkawi, Kota Kinabalu, Kuching and Miri. Ferries serve Langkawi, Penang, the Perhentians and Tioman.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



G

240V — UK plugs fit

DIALLING CODE

+60

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Police and ambulance: **999**

Fire: **994**

Ambulance (from a mobile): **112**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONE

UTC+8 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the left

TIPPING

Not customary. Many restaurants add a 10% service charge, so check the bill; round up taxi fares and give hotel porters a few ringgit.

ETIQUETTE

Remove shoes before entering homes and mosques, dress modestly at religious sites, use your right hand to eat and pass things, and point with your thumb rather than a finger.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KUL), Kuala Lumpur; Penang International Airport (PEN), George Town; Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI), Kota Kinabalu

Visas & entry for Malaysia

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Malaysia without a visa for tourism. You will normally be allowed to stay for 90 days on arrival.

If you want to stay for longer than 90 days or are not a tourist, you must apply for a visa from the nearest Malaysian diplomatic mission before you travel.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Japanese encephalitis

Measles

Rabies

Tuberculosis

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

Low risk of malaria

- There is a low risk of malaria in mainland Malaysia: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Malaysia

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Sat 6 Feb 2027	Chinese New Year
Sun 7 Feb 2027	Chinese New Year (Second Day)
Mon 8 Feb 2027	Chinese New Year (Second Day) (observed)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr
Thu 11 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (Second Day)
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha
Thu 20 May 2027	Vesak Day
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year
Mon 7 Jun 2027	Birthday of HM Yang di-Pertuan Agong
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Prophet Muhammad's Birthday
Mon 16 Aug 2027	Prophet Muhammad's Birthday (observed)
Tue 31 Aug 2027	National Day
Thu 16 Sep 2027	Malaysia Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Malay

ENGLISH	MALAY	SAY IT
Hello	Apa khabar	<i>AH-pah kah-BAR</i>
Thank you	Terima kasih	<i>tuh-REE-mah KAH-seh</i>
Please	Tolong	<i>TOH-long</i>
Excuse me	Maaf	<i>mah-AHF</i>
How much is this?	Berapa harga ini?	<i>buh-RAH-pah HAR-gah EE-nee</i>

Know before you go

Download Grab before you arrive: it is the standard way to hail cars, order food and avoid haggling with taxi drivers in every major city, including in Borneo.

Plan around the monsoons: the east coast islands largely close from November to February, while Langkawi and Penang are at their driest from December to February.

Buy a Touch 'n Go card for KL's trains and buses and for motorway tolls if you drive; it also works in many convenience stores and car parks.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.