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12 Best Places to Visit in Malaysia

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If countries were awarded for diversity, Malaysia would top first place. Not only is Malaysia a melting pot of ethnic cultures, but it is also a blend of many different customs, cuisines and religions all coexisting peacefully together. From large island groups to mountains, fertile highlands and tropical rainforest, the country's geography is every bit as diverse.

What's more, Malaysia is a unique country in that is divided into two main landmasses. **West Malaysia** occupies the southern half of a peninsula shared with Thailand, while across the South China Sea is **East Malaysia**, situated on the Borneo island. This overview of the **best places to visit in Malaysia** concentrates on the cultural, historic and natural attractions combined. For an insight in Malaysia's most popular islands & beaches have a look at the **best island in Malaysia**.

12. Kota Bharu

[SEE MAP]



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Often used as a stopover by many travelers visiting the beautiful Perhentian Islands, Kota Bharu offers its own unique charm, attractions, shopping and cuisine. Located in Peninsular Malaysia near the Thailand border, Kota Bharu is the capital of the Kelantan State, a city easy to get around in.

Kota Bharu is well known for its many museums covering the history, culture and heritage of Kelantan. One of the most popular museums is the Royal Museum, which offers a peek into the state's royal family through many photographs and lavish artifacts. The Museum of Royal Traditions and Ceremonies is worth a visit just to see the unique timber palace it is housed within.

Much of Kota Bharu life revolves around the city's bustling marketplaces of which the Central Market is the largest. Surrounded by coffee shops and busy streets dotted with old trishaws, the Central Market is teeming in local women working food stands and selling colorful fruits and vegetables.

[Best Places to Visit in Southeast Asia](#)

Outside the city limits, the beach at Pantai Cahaya Bulan and the Mount Stong State Park offer outdoor activities such as swimming, river cruises, rafting and cave exploring. Scuba diving is available at the site of a Japanese shipwreck from the Pacific War.

11. Sipadan

[SEE MAP]

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Malaysia's only oceanic island, Sipadan lies off the east coast of Borneo, surrounded by the tropical waters of the Celebes Sea. Formed over millennia out of living coral reefs, it is now a mecca for scuba divers, who come to explore one of the world's richest marine habitats.

There are a dazzling array of dives for visitors to choose from; some take you through atmospheric underwater tunnels and caverns and others past steep coral walls and spiralling shoals of fish. Swirling about the island are all manner of marine life, with sea turtles, hammerhead sharks, and manta rays spotted here and there.

As the island has been closed since 2004 to protect its beautiful beaches and underwater riches, it is only accessible by boat from Mabul and Kapalai, both of which lie nearby. Once fought over by Malaysia and Indonesia, Sipadan is now one of the best dive destinations in the world.

10. Melaka

[SEE MAP]

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Commanding an important position on the busy sea route between India and China on West Malaysia's southwestern coast, Melaka was ruled and battled over for centuries between Indian, Portuguese, British and Dutch governments. As a result, this modern day

Malaysian city is now a popular tourist destination packed with architecture, culture, traditions and cuisine all reflecting its rich heritage.

Known as a cultural melting pot, Melaka comprises several districts that all feature their own distinct attractions. The Portuguese Settlement is characterized by charming villas, historic churches and the remains of an old fort. In the Chinese quarter is Malaysia's oldest Chinese temple, the Cheng Hoon Teng Temple, as well as one of the largest Chinese cemeteries outside the country of China. The Dutch district features some of the oldest Dutch architecture in the East. Additionally, each cultural zone features its own traditions and festivals such as the Portuguese "Intrudu" and Chinese New Year.

See also: [Top Melaka Attractions](#)

9. Cameron Highlands

[SEE MAP]

Providing a cool escape from the heat of the lowlands, the Cameron Highlands in the Titiwangsa Mountains are one of Malaysia's oldest [tourist destinations](#). Developed with an English garden charm, this beautiful tableland offers lush scenery, colorful flower farms, tea plantations, forests, lakes, wildlife and outdoor recreation.

Although lying in considerable distances from one another, several towns and settlements also dot the area, offering lodging, colorful markets and museums such as the Time Tunnel Gallery, which showcases the history, people and development of the Camerons. The most popular of these towns are Brinchang and Tanah Rata.

As Malaysia's chief tea and flower producer, the Cameron Highlands abounds in sprawling tea plantations and flower gardens as well as vegetable farms, fruit orchards, butterfly gardens and honey bee farms. Many of these establishments are open to the public. Several pictorial golf courses are available for golfers. A scenic car drive to Malaysia's highest point, Mount Brinchang, presents spectacular views, while the Mossy Forest features a boardwalk through untouched trees and plants as well as glimpses of birds, animals, reptiles and insects. Well-marked jungle trails lead hikers to beautiful waterfalls and panoramic overlooks.

8. Kota Kinabalu

[SEE MAP]

photo/[Flanegan](#)

The capital of the Sabah State in Malaysian Borneo, Kota Kinabalu is a fast-growing tourist destination due to its close proximity to tropical islands, rainforests, wildlife refuges, national parks and Malaysia's tallest peak, Mount Kinabalu.

Commonly called KK by locals, Kota Kinabalu has a small city center, boasting a number of landmarks, memorials and an observatory, which offers splendid views of the city. Most of **KK's main attractions** lie outside of the city such as Lok Kawi Wildlife Park, Kota Kinabalu Wetland Centre and Kinabalu National Park, which offer wildlife such as proboscis monkeys, tigers, orangutans and elephants as well as outdoor adventure like camping, jungle trekking, mountain climbing, whitewater rafting and river cruises.

Just minutes from the city, the Tunku Abdul Rahman Park features five small islands that are ideal for diving, swimming and sailing. A visit to the Monsopiad Cultural Village is a must-do to experience the traditions and culture of the Kadazan indigenous tribe and to see the trophy skulls claimed by a legendary warrior more than 300 years ago.

7. Perhentian Islands

[SEE MAP]

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The Perhentian Islands are a small group of beautiful, coral-fringed islands off the coast of northeastern Malaysia, not far from the Thai border. The two main islands are Perhentian Besar (“Big Perhentian”) and Perhentian Kecil (“Small Perhentian”). Kecil attracts more travellers as it has cheaper accommodation, while Besar is a little more expensive and caters more to families and those who want to avoid the backpacker party scene.

The **Perhentian Islands** offer some great diving and excellent snorkeling. In addition to coral and fish, the Perhentians are home to sea turtles and several species of shark. The islands are also crisscrossed by small paths connecting one beach to another, but be prepared to sweat and swat off bugs if you tackle any of these.

There is very little luxury accommodation on the Perhentian islands. with the top of the line being air-conditioned chalets and the bottom being a bunk in a longhouse. Discounts are usually negotiable in the off season but the better accommodation can get snapped up fast especially on weekends and holidays.

6. Kuching

[SEE MAP]

flickr/Peter Gronemann

The largest city on Borneo Island, Kuching is a popular base for exploring Borneo's rainforest and the state of Sarawak. However, Kuching offers plenty for tourists **to see and do** during their stay, from sightseeing historic landmarks to bustling markets and outdoor recreation.

Kuching presents a unique setting with its skyscrapers and modern architecture surrounded by lush jungle. The city is situated on the banks of the Sarawak River with a

beautifully landscaped waterfront offering views of historic landmarks such as Fort Margherita and Astana palace as well as impressive modern structures like the DUN complex. The busy waterfront is where tourists will find an array of food vendors, musical fountains, an observation tower, an open-air theater and a number of river cruise operations.

A walk down Kuching's oldest street, Main Bazaar, reveals historic Chinese temples, markets and many antique and handicraft shops. Numerous museums in the city exhibit local history and art works, while an aquarium displays fish species from the Sarawak River. Distinct for its umbrella-shaped roof, the Kuching Civic Center contains a planetarium and a viewing platform presenting outstanding aerial views. Picturesque gardens and nearby national parks all offer lakes, waterfalls and recreational activities like nature trails, jungle trekking and cave exploring.

5. Penang

[SEE MAP]

flickr/Schristia

Located in the Strait of Malacca off West Malaysia's northwestern coast, Penang Island is a popular tourist destination due to its historic George Town and rich culinary diversity. Its position along one of the world's most traveled shipping routes has infused Penang with a colorful array of cultures, architecture and cuisine.

Whether by car or public buses, Penang Island should be explored to see and experience its **many attractions** like the Botanic Gardens, Bird Sanctuary, Butterfly Park and the white sandy beaches of Batu Ferringhi along the north coast. Numerous temples dot the island including the must-see Snake Temple with its viper residents and the huge Temple of Supreme Bliss. Formerly a leper and prison colony, Jerejak Island, on Penang's southeastern tip, is now a tropical paradise offering outdoor adventure as well as spa and pampering services.

No visit to Penang would be complete without a trishaw ride or walk around the island's capital city, George Town, to see its British colonial architecture and historic Chinese and Indian temples. Additionally, George Town is filled with markets, restaurants and bars. Also not to miss here is Little India, a district rife with aromatic spices and lively Bollywood music.

Widely regarded as Malaysia's food capital, Penang is famous for its culinary mixture of all the world's major cuisines, making it a unique cuisine in and of itself. Delicious choices abound from upscale seafood restaurants to Chinese Dim Sum stalls, bakeries and roadside vendors serving the local specialty, Char Koay Teow, a stir-fried dish of rice noodles, cockles and bean sprouts.

See also: **[Top Attractions in Penang](#)**

4. Kuala Lumpur

[SEE MAP]

dreamstime/© Joyfull

Less than 200 year ago, Kuala Lumpur was just a quiet tin-mining town in West Malaysia. Today, this same sleepy village has flourished into the country's federal capital and largest metropolis. Commonly called KL by locals, this vibrant city is a cultural melting pot, noted for its impressive skyscrapers and buzzing scenes of shopping, dining and nightlife. When compared to other major world cities, KL is one of the more affordable travel destinations.

Like many large cities, Kuala Lumpur suffers from heavy traffic, so getting around is best by monorail. From sightseeing historic landmarks and British colonial buildings in the Old City to viewing the iconic Petronas Twin Towers in the modern district, and browsing the colorful street stalls in Chinatown, there is no shortage of **things to see and do in KL**.

Accommodation: **[Where to Stay in Kuala Lumpur](#)**

See also: **[Top KL Attractions](#)**

3. Taman Negara

[SEE MAP]

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Encompassing three states across the northern part of West Malaysia, Taman Negara is reputed to be the oldest tropical rainforest in the world. A popular ecotourism and adventure destination, this national park is teeming in in wildlife from rare plants to exotic birds and scarce animals like the Malayan Tiger, Asian elephant and Sumatran Rhinoceros.

Most visitors access Taman Negara through the town of Kuala Tahan, which is located across the river from the national park headquarters. From the visitor's center, jungle hikes and other adventures can be arranged. There are a variety of exciting ways to experience the park's natural attractions such as hiking, fishing and cave-exploring. One of the most **popular things to do is in Taman Negara** the Canopy Walk, a long suspension bridge high above the treetops where visitors can walk and glimpse exotic birds.

Guided night safaris are also available to see plants that only bloom at night, glow-in-the-dark fungi and nocturnal creatures like owls, leopard cats and water dragons. Climbing Teresek Hill also provides opportunities to see rare birds, wild boars and beautiful panoramic views. Visiting the settlements of indigenous groups, known Orang Asli, are worthwhile to learn about their traditions and tips for surviving in the jungle. For food choices, the floating restaurants along Kula Tahan's riverside are not to be missed.

2. Langkawi

[SEE MAP]

flickr/trekker308

Located off Malaysia's northwestern coast in the Andaman Sea, Langkawi is an archipelago of 99 islands boasting picturesque beaches, rainforest, mangroves and forest-clad mountains, making it one of Malaysia's most popular destination. In recent years, resorts, hotels, restaurants and other tourist facilities have developed in Langkawi, offering visitors the opportunity to experience the archipelago's exceptional natural beauty.

By far the largest of the islands is the eponymous Pulau Langkawi with a population of some 65,000, the only other inhabited island being nearby Pulau Tuba. The island's natural splendor is its **number one attraction**. Beaches offer powdery white sands, crystal clear waters, limestone cliffs and water sports. The most popular beach, Pantai Cenang, is busy with restaurants and bars. The beaches of Pantai Tengah and Pantai Kok are more isolated, offering peace and tranquility.

Several protected parks offer jungle trekking and mangrove tours where visitors can experience breathtaking views of the Telaga Tujuh Waterfalls and exotic birds and animals like monitor lizards and macaque monkeys. Gunung Raya and Gunung Mat Cincang are Langkawi's tallest mountains with lookout points presenting outstanding views of the area and across to Thailand. Gondola rides and the SkyBridge are fun ways to ascend the mountains and survey the surrounding beauty.

Accommodation: [Where to Stay in Langkawi](#)

1. Gunung Mulu National Park

[SEE MAP]

Famous for its extraordinary limestone karst formations and phenomenal cave systems, the Gunung Mulu National Park is one of the most awe-inspiring natural attractions in all of Southeast Asia. Located in Malaysian Borneo in the Sarawak State, this national park features some of the largest and longest cave systems in the world. Included in these is the world's largest cave chamber, the Sarawak Chamber, which is estimated large enough to hold 40 Boeing 747 aircraft.

Situated among rainforest, crystal-clear rivers, rugged mountains and deep ravines, the park's other remarkable features include the Pinnacles, a concentration of pointed, limestone spires, a karst sinkhole known as the Garden of Eden, and two majestic peaks, Gunung Mulu and Gunung Api. The park is also home to a number of wildlife species such as hornbills, bats, gibbons, barking deer and bearded pigs. In addition to guided cave tours and hiking, a popular activity here is walking high above the treetops along the world's longest canopy walk.

Because Gunung Mulu National Park is located in a remote area, the best way to access it is by air into the Mulu Airport. However, it is also possible to reach it by a combination of road, boat and hiking from Miri, although this can take many hours or days. Arrangements with tour guides will provide transportation and lodging.

Map of Malaysia

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