



by **Patrick Chase** Malaysia Specialist

# Malaysia

*A melting pot of Malay, Chinese, Indian and European culture, Malaysia is a fascinating place to explore with a rich tapestry of colonial architecture, a vibrant, multi-cultural society and some of the best food on the planet. Patrick Chase gives his insider tips on what to see and where to go for that perfect trip.*



## Don't Miss

### Malacca

Centre of the historical spice trade and a UNESCO World Heritage Site

### Kuala Lumpur

Old world Asia meets new world sophistication

### Cameron Highlands

Colonial hill towns, jungle, trekking and vast tea plantations

### Georgetown

Colonial town with some of the best street food in the country

### Langkawi

Pristine white powder beaches and turquoise seas

I grew up in Hong Kong so from a young age I've been exploring Southeast Asia. Malaysia was always my favourite place to go as a child – I got to play on the beaches all day and eat ABC at night (a strange local desert consisting of shaved ice, syrup, corn and red beans – an acquired taste!).

Malaysia is best seen at a leisurely pace and my perfect trip would focus on the country's rich history and culture with some time built in to appreciate the natural beauty of its white sandy beaches and the cool, lush highlands.

One of my favourite things about visiting Malaysia is being able to get a real insight into its fascinating past by staying in hotels that really reflect their location and history. You can choose from restored Chinese/Malay town houses, characterful colonial retreats and boutique beach properties.

## Days 1 to 3: Malacca A step back in time

The impact of the spice trade is written all over Malaysia, but nowhere more so than in Malacca. It's the perfect place to start the trip both logistically and historically. Malacca was once a powerful trade hub and the prospect of vast profits ensured it quickly became a melting pot of East and West. For four centuries European, Malay and Chinese merchants made the city their home and left behind a rich architectural and cultural legacy.

Malacca's old town is compact and remains much as it was in the city's heyday. It's protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is easy to explore on foot. The winding streets are flanked by Dutch town houses, Portuguese churches and Taoist and Hindu

temples all crammed in between dusty antique shops, tin merchants and traditional blacksmiths. Of the dozens of museums and galleries in the city my favourite is the Maritime Museum. It's housed in a huge recreation of the Flora de la Mar, a Portuguese ship that sank off the coast of Malacca.

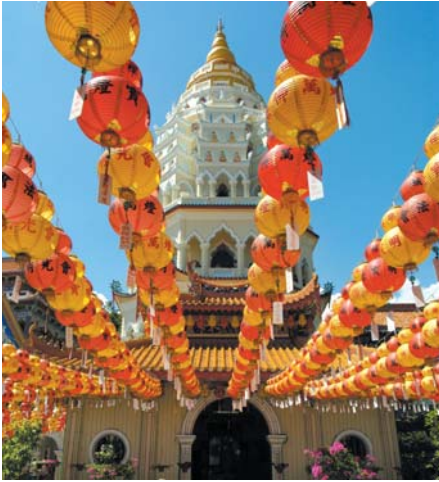
The city really comes to life at weekends though, so I would plan to stay a Friday or Saturday night when people spill onto the streets to explore the markets, restaurants and bars around Jonker and Harmony streets in the heart of the old town.

## Days 4 and 5: Kuala Lumpur Commercial hub and cultural melting pot

Prosperous, cosmopolitan and buzzing, Kuala Lumpur couldn't be more of a contrast. One of Southeast Asia's most important commercial hubs, KL's towering sky scrapers, excellent shopping and top class hotels reflect the nation's fierce ambitions.

It's worth having a local guide here to help you scratch under the surface and discover the lesser known areas of the city like Jalan Masjid India (known as Indian Mosque street) and the key sights in the colonial core like the Sultan Abdul Samad Building, an impressive example of Mughal style colonial architecture. If you're out early in the morning make sure you sample some roti canai on the streets. I love watching the skill that goes into making this wafer thin flatbread (almost like a pancake). It's served with a tasty curry sauce on the side, my favourite breakfast in Malaysia!

My favourite time of day in KL is the evening though; the temperature drops, the buildings are beautifully illuminated and the city's



Chinese temple, Penang

inhabitants spill onto the streets. KL has an enviable selection of superb restaurants, but you really can't beat the hawker stalls at the top of Bukit Bintang to really get a feel for the city.

### Days 6 and 7: Cameron Highlands A colonial retreat

Retreating from the heat and congestion of the city, it's worth making your way into the mountains of the Cameron Highlands. The journey here is beautiful as you ascend from the humid tropical plains into the mountains along a series of switchbacks. The cooler highlands were a retreat for the British in colonial times and remain a popular getaway today.

Rising early for a stroll through the mossy tropical forests in the hills is a perfect way to start the day. Then head for the Boh (Best of Highlands) tea estate. The plantations make for truly breathtaking views, especially in the morning when the light is perfect for photography. The highlands are also well known for their markets, a perfect opportunity to sample some of the fresh local produce. Be brave and try the infamous Durian, smells like hell, but tastes like heaven.



Fresh vegetables at a market in Georgetown



Children, Cameron Highlands

### Days 8 to 10: Georgetown A city lost in time

The island of Penang may be one of Southeast Asia's most popular holiday spots but for me the real reason to visit is not the beach but the enchanting city of Georgetown. Another World Heritage Site, Georgetown's historic centre is a mix of British colonial style and Peranakan (Chinese Malay) heritage.

This truly multi-cultural city is littered with magnificent temples and mosques, its streets lined with ancient shop houses many of which are still home to traditional traders. Many of Georgetown's most impressive buildings such as Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion are beautifully restored but others can be spied through rusting gates, covered in creepers and slowly succumbing to the ravages of time. Bicycle rickshaws stream by giving the city a rather redolent, evocative appeal.

Georgetown's other real draw for me is its food. It's worth trying Malaysia's unofficial national dish of chicken satay from a hawker stall on Jalan Kapitan. For the more adventurous a (small) portion of pig tongue, brain or intestines should suffice. Alternatively get a taste of colonial life with afternoon at the Eastern & Oriental Hotel.

### Days 11 to 14: Langkawi A tropical paradise

I like to end my trip with a few days R&R on the tropical islands of Langkawi. Just a short, scenic flight (or crowded local ferry) from the mainland takes you to one of Southeast Asia's most beautiful tropical island archipelagos. The white, velvety beaches are flanked by dense jungle, waterfalls and rice paddies and the sea is an irresistible turquoise.

Langkawi is all about rest and relaxation and a few nights here make a perfect end to one of the most diverse and rewarding countries on earth.



Twin towers, Kuala Lumpur



Buddha, Penang

## Where to stay

### Puri Hotel, Malacca

an atmospheric Peranakan town house.

### Clove Hall, Georgetown

a stunning, restored colonial mansion.

### The Lakehouse, Cameron Highlands

a quirky mock-Tudor pile.

### Casa Del Mar, Langkawi

beachfront rooms on a tropical island paradise.



Poolside, Casa Del Mar, Langkawi

## FACTfile

Tailor-made tours to Malaysia start from £1,775 per person. Patrick's 14 day tour cost from £2,250 per person including all the accommodation mentioned, private transfers and flights. For more information call our Malaysia team on 01993 838 130.

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