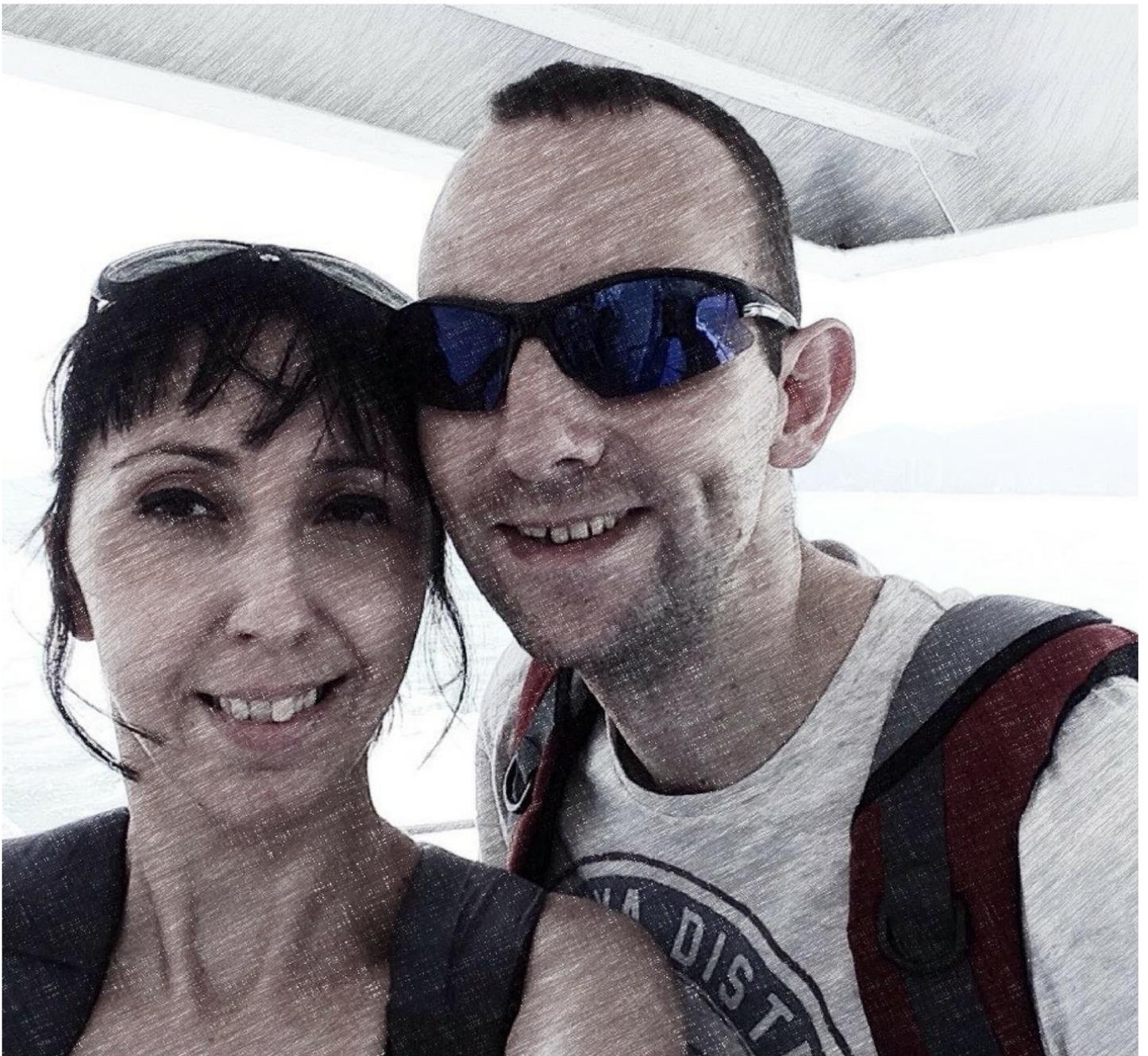


Wander&Lust's e-books

WANDER AND LUST IN MALAYSIA

Our tips to make the most of your time in Malaysia



MR WANDER & MS LUST

Chris Staines & Emma Becciu

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Introduction

Dear readers and followers,

We have decided to put together all our posts about Malaysia, with a few extra photos, to produce a handy e-book of our experience, a scanned version of the maps we used (they even have the places marked by us!), and some tips that could help you have a great time in this beautiful country.

We have kept the chapters divided by colour as they are in the blog and we have only put links to useful outside material such as the places we stayed and the tours we have done, and a few videos on our Instagram profiles.

This e-book is our experience in Malaysia, all opinions are ours and so are the pictures. We are happy for you to use it for your personal travels but we ask you please not to share all or part of this material for commercial reasons without our explicit consent. Please contact us if you wish to use all or part of this content for commercial reasons.

Happy travels,

Mr Wander & Ms Lust

Itinerary



We spent two weeks over Christmas and New Year's travelling around Malaysia, and now we've decided to share some practical tips we picked up from our trip. One thing that's always difficult to decide on when planning a trip like this is the itinerary, not only where to go but also the order in which to see places and how to get between them. So to help out with this matter, here are our suggestions for a two-week break in Malaysia.



Malaysia is split into two areas, the Malaysian Peninsula and Malaysian Borneo. With two weeks it is only really possible to explore one of these areas, so you will need to choose. We chose to dedicate our time to the peninsula, saving Borneo for another visit. It is also important to consider the climate for the time of year that you are planning to go, Malaysia has a more tropical than seasonal climate, but there are wet and dry seasons which are not always at the same time in all parts of the country. We visited during the wet season, at a time when it is usually worse conditions on the east coast rather than the west. As a result we focussed our plans on the western side of

the peninsula, again saving the places we would like to see along the east coast for a future visit.

So, this itinerary is aimed at trips to the Malaysian Peninsula, focussing on the west coast. We will however provide some advice for how to modify it for the east coast instead.

Days 1 - 4: Kuala Lumpur

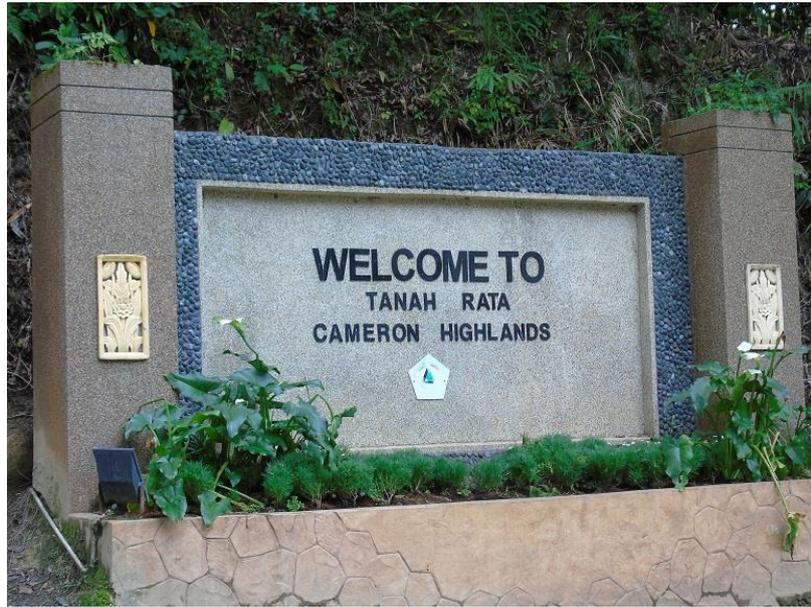


Unless you are entering Malaysia from Thailand or Indonesia, your point of entry is almost certainly going to be Kuala Lumpur. Take a few days to see what this eclectic city has to offer, and to introduce yourself to Malaysia and its culture. Use one of these days to travel to the Batu Caves and experience this unique place of worship, while the rest of your time should be spent exploring the city itself. The Petronas Towers, KL Tower and Eco Park, the Masjid Jamek and Sultan Abdul Samad building, and the Chinese Quarter are the main sights that should be on your list, with many more that can be added on. Check the chapter about Kuala Lumpur [here](#) for a more detailed tour of the city.



There is plenty of accommodation available to suit all budgets, we stayed at the [Orange Pekoe Guest House](#) in Bukit Bintang and can't recommend it highly enough if you're looking for accommodation nearer the budget end of the scale. For food, you can't beat the local vendors that have set up shop in many of the forecourts and shopping centres throughout the city. Jalan Alor is a popular place for eating and for good reason, the wide range of dishes on offer make it the perfect place to hone your tastebuds and find your favourite Malaysian foods.

Days 5 - 7: Cameron Highlands



After you've acclimatised and seen the best of Kuala Lumpur, it's time to head out of the city and start exploring the rest of the country. The best place to start is the Cameron Highlands, a mountainous area in the centre of the peninsula. A 4-5 hour bus journey is the only option for getting here unless you have your own transport, which will leave you in the main town of the area, Tanah Rata. It's entirely your choice whether to find accommodation here or in nearby Brinchang, we opted for the [Hillview Inn Guest House](#) in Tanah Rata and again it is highly recommended.



The Cameron Highlands are popular for two reasons; the tea plantations that cover vast expanses of the area, and the cooler climate that gives a bit of a respite from the humidity of the rest of the country. This provides a great opportunity to get out and discover the natural wonders of this region, there are many jungle treks and walks in the area for doing just that. A day should be reserved for the tea plantations as well, it's wonderfully romantic to sip tea while sitting on a verandah overlooking the very plants from which it was produced. The Mossy Forest tour offered by [Eco Cameron Tours](#) is a great way of ticking off both activities in just half a day, and the guides provide fantastic narrative along the way. The rest of your time can be spent seeing the many markets, temples, and natural wonders of the area, check the chapter [here](#) for more details about things to do in the Cameron Highlands.

Days 8 - 11: Penang



It is from this point that your plans will change depending on whether you have chosen to travel along the east or west coast. If you are venturing eastwards, the next logical place to visit is Taman Negara Malaysia, a vast national park in the middle of the peninsula offering even more chances to get in

touch with nature. If you are heading westwards, as we were, Penang is another popular destination for good reasons. Whichever route you choose, buses are again your only option for transport but there are frequent departures to both destinations.



Penang is an island just off of the west coast, home to the country's second city, George Town. We only spent two days here which really wasn't enough, so my advice is to stay at least one or two days longer than that. The city should keep you busy for a day or two, exploring the contrasts of the colonial and Chinese quarters is very interesting, especially the wall art found dotted all over George Town. The rest of your time should be spent exploring the rest of the island. A day can easily be spent seeing Penang National Park and Penang Hill, while an additional day spent travelling south from George Town will enable you to see the many temples in the area (the Snake Temple is one I wish we had had time to visit).

You will most likely be staying in George Town, we found accommodation at the [M Hotel](#) near the Komtar building. Not

only was it a convenient location for travelling to and from, the hotel itself was very clean and comfortable. Food vendors seemed to be a bit harder to find here than in every other place we visited, so my advice is to grab a bite when you see them! Some of our favourite good spots are in the chapter about Penang, along with more things to see and do, which can be found [here](#).

Days 12 - 14: Langkawi

After all that travelling around, you'll most likely be looking for a place where you can relax and unwind. For those on the east coast, I've heard wonderful things about the Perhentian Islands and I can't wait to visit them myself. For west coast travellers like us, there are a number of islands to choose from such as Langkawi and Pangkor, we opted to head north and visit Langkawi. The best option to travel between Penang and Langkawi is the ferry, which takes about two hours. We used www.easybook.com for all our long-distance bus and ferry bookings, it is incredibly easy to use and train bookings can be made here as well.



There are a few towns on the island, and where you decide to stay needs to reflect your plans for your time on the island. We were looking for some beach time, so Pantai Cenang was an obvious choice for us. Kuah may be better suited for those wishing to spend more time exploring the island, while the resorts in the northern part of the island would be better suited to those looking to discover the island's natural wonders. We splashed out a bit and stayed at [Nadiaz Hotel](#), again highly recommended although a bit more expensive than the accommodations we stayed at in other places.

With the best beaches and water that we saw during our entire trip, this is the best chance you'll have for some sunbathing and swimming. Take as long as you want for relaxing, but if you do want to see some of the other sides to the island as well, [Dev's Adventure Tours](#) come highly recommended. There's tours to suit all budgets and desires, we opted for the Evening Jungle Walk and the Mangrove Boat Tour, both of which were excellent. Other options open to you for exploration days are the Langkawi Cable Car and Skyway, and the rice paddies in the middle of the island. The chapter about Langkawi has a more detailed account of what to see and do on the island, which you can find [here](#).



Final day: Kuala Lumpur

Unless you are carrying on your travels into one of Malaysia's neighbouring countries, you'll probably be leaving from Kuala Lumpur. We flew from Langkawi to KL, which is an option from almost anywhere on the peninsula. Use this last day to grab any last-minute souvenirs (the Central Market is a great place for that), or to indulge in your favourite aspects of Malaysian culture before jetting back home. I hope you've found this itinerary useful, we didn't follow it exactly due to New Year's but it is how we would have liked to have spent our time in Malaysia in hindsight. So now you know where to go and how long to spend in each place, it's time to start packing! Head over to the [chapter](#) about what to take on a trip to Malaysia, and you'll soon be ready to discover this fantastic country for yourself!

Kuala Lumpur



Prior to booking and planning our winter break in Malaysia, almost everything I knew about this country I had learnt from watching Catherine Zeta-Jones and Sean Connery wreak havoc in Kuala Lumpur in the film *Entrapment*. So I knew that Kuala Lumpur is the capital city, and that there's two tall, identical towers joined by a bridge, and that was about it. So this trip has been not only an amazing tour around this wonderful country, but also a very educational one. Now I'd like to share with you what I've learnt, but in order to keep the posts manageable we've decided to split them into individual locations. So let's start with the one place that I had heard about previously, and our starting point, Kuala Lumpur.

Due to New Year's, we went back and forth to KL during our trip, which made us waste a bit of time. We landed on 27 December and spent our first night there, we then went back on 30 December until 2 January to celebrate the new year, and then another night before flying home. If you can, plan three nights there and you will be able to visit enough.



Malaysia is a melting pot of cultures, with large populations of people originally from China, India, and many other Asian nations. Nowhere is this more evident than in Kuala Lumpur, being the capital city of Malaysia and the heart of the country. Kuala Lumpur also manages to mix both historic and modern features into a wonderful contrast, where beautiful mosques and temples sit perfectly in the shadows of huge, towering skyscrapers. In many other cities one or the other of these would look out of place, but the combination here seems to be just right and it almost feels like the entire city was built at the same time. Even the public transport seems to have been built to service every part of the city almost too well, a far cry from the chaos and disorganisation I had been expecting!

The mix of cultures also provides a fantastic introduction to Malaysian cuisine, which is in fact a combination of many other Asian cuisines into a mixture of everything that again just seems to work. It also means that whatever your taste, there will always be something to suit, from noodles and satay from a street vendor through to Starbucks and McDonald's for the culinarily squeamish. Everything here just seems to work well together, even if on paper it looks like it shouldn't, and it is possibly the perfect place to introduce yourself to Malaysia. So now I'll take you through the main sights and places that we visited, but first here's some practical information to help get the best from Kuala Lumpur.

Accommodation

For me it has been a bittersweet experience as I had a fond memory of my first visit in 2012 and it somehow didn't manage to live up to it. The first night we stayed in a budget hotel near Ain Arabia in Bukit Bintang, the [Orange Pekoe Guest House](#), that was extremely basic but very clean and easy to travel to and from. The guys at reception are very friendly and helpful, with great suggestions for visits and moving around. So much so that for the last night before flying back we cancelled the place we had booked and stayed here again. Breakfast is included and you have toast with butter and jam, bananas, cereal, tea and coffee: Also basic but definitely nice.



For the rest of the nights we had another place booked, Q Hotel, in Chow Kit, but it was a horrible idea. We booked because it was the same place where I stayed before, although it had changed name. Well, it must have happened for a reason, as the quality was horrible, it still had all the furniture from the previous management, which means old, dirty, damaged carpet and curtains, damaged furniture, and old bathroom appliances. In addition to that, the walls were crumbling and the cleaning was non-existent, hardly hoovered, infested, stained bed linen, all the bad things that you can imagine. We skipped breakfast until the last morning even if we had paid for it and it was not worth to pay the extra for, watered-down jam for the toast and very little choice on the rest. We are talking of a hotel that is still marked as a 3-star, and is below standards for the cheapest hostel!

But enough of the bad things, let's move on to the fun. Transport in KL is pretty good, just a bit chaotic at times. You have a metro service, a monorail, and many buses, including some free ones that take you around all the touristy places. In some cases it might be a bit of a challenge to catch a free bus, but the service is pretty good. You have a map of the free buses and of the trains at the end of the next section.

Airport transfer/public transport

Kuala Lumpur will be most travellers' entry point into Malaysia, as it is the capital city and home to the biggest airport in the country. Nearly all long-haul flights to Malaysia arrive at Kuala Lumpur, as did ours. After arriving the first task is to find transport from the airport to the city centre, over 50 km away, and for this you have a number of options. The quickest option is by train, and more specifically the KLIA Ekspres. This service stops only at the two airport terminals and the central station in the city centre, KL Sentral. The trains run once every 20 minutes, more frequently during peak times, and take around 30 minutes to reach the city centre. It costs RM55 (approximately £10) one way or RM100 (£18) return but it is possible to get these tickets discounted, 10% off if purchased using an automated ticket machine or 15% off by using a contactless credit or debit card at the ticket gates. This is the option we choose for our transfers and I would definitely recommend it, the trains were quiet, comfortable, and clean, and it was incredibly easy to find and use. Just look for the purple signs in the terminal buildings and they'll take you straight to the ticket machines and kiosk.

There is another train option available, the KLIA Transit service. This is slower than the Ekspres, because it makes a few extra stops along the way. This may make it more suitable if you are staying in the southern suburbs of the city, and it is an excellent option if you are leaving straight away on one of the many regional bus services as it stops at the station that serves them (Bandar Tasik Selatan). To use this service to go to KL Sentral currently costs the same as the Ekspres train, although it is cheaper if you are disembarking at one of the earlier stations, and a trip to KL Sentral will take about 40 minutes. The trains seem to be the same as those used for the Ekspres service, so I imagine they are just as clean and comfortable. They are less frequent however, with only one train every 30 minutes or one every 20 minutes during peak times. They can be found in the same area as the Ekspres trains, on the opposite side of the platform.

Bus services also operate between the airport terminals and the city centre, which are suited for those on a shoestring budget. It costs RM10 (£2) one way and RM18 (£3.50) return and takes approximately one hour to reach KL Sentral, although I would allow for extra time due to potential traffic jams in the city centre. Again follow signs in the airport buildings directing you towards buses. Taxis are also available and possibly suited more for larger groups and families, and have the added bonus of taking you direct to your accommodation. Make sure you agree a price at the start to avoid being scammed, and again these are liable to be held up in the city's traffic. Once you arrive at KL Sentral, getting around Kuala Lumpur and to your accommodation using public transport is a doddle. There is an integrated network of trains,

monorail, and buses with maps at all the stations to assist with planning your route. Tickets are cheap as well, with most journeys costing only a few ringgit.



The trains, the metro, and the Monorel (you will love how Malaysian language kept English words with a phonetically simplified writing) work with a system of tokens that is extremely easy, although they sometimes roll out of your pocket or your hand, on the platform and down onto the tracks (it happened in front of us but the lady caught it before it fell, although she must have hurt her knees pretty badly!). The

tokens are valid for single trips and you can buy them at the machines in every station. Always try to have small notes if you are in a rush, but remember that if you ask at the windows they will have change ready for you although they don't sell tickets. As I said, it is a pretty simple system, you scan your token when you go in and drop it in the machine to get out of the station.



Lastly there is also a free bus service, operating throughout the city centre. It runs in one direction only along four routes, annoying if you need to go in the opposite direction but handy for getting around the city. Each route is denoted by a colour; red, blue, green, and purple. Most tourist maps include a route map for both the free buses and the train and monorail network, which also include the locations of the main sights to aid in journey planning. Just be aware that these buses can get very busy at times, which makes them unsuitable for travelling with luggage or backpacks. They are also very prone to getting stuck in traffic, as they run along some of the busiest roads in the city.

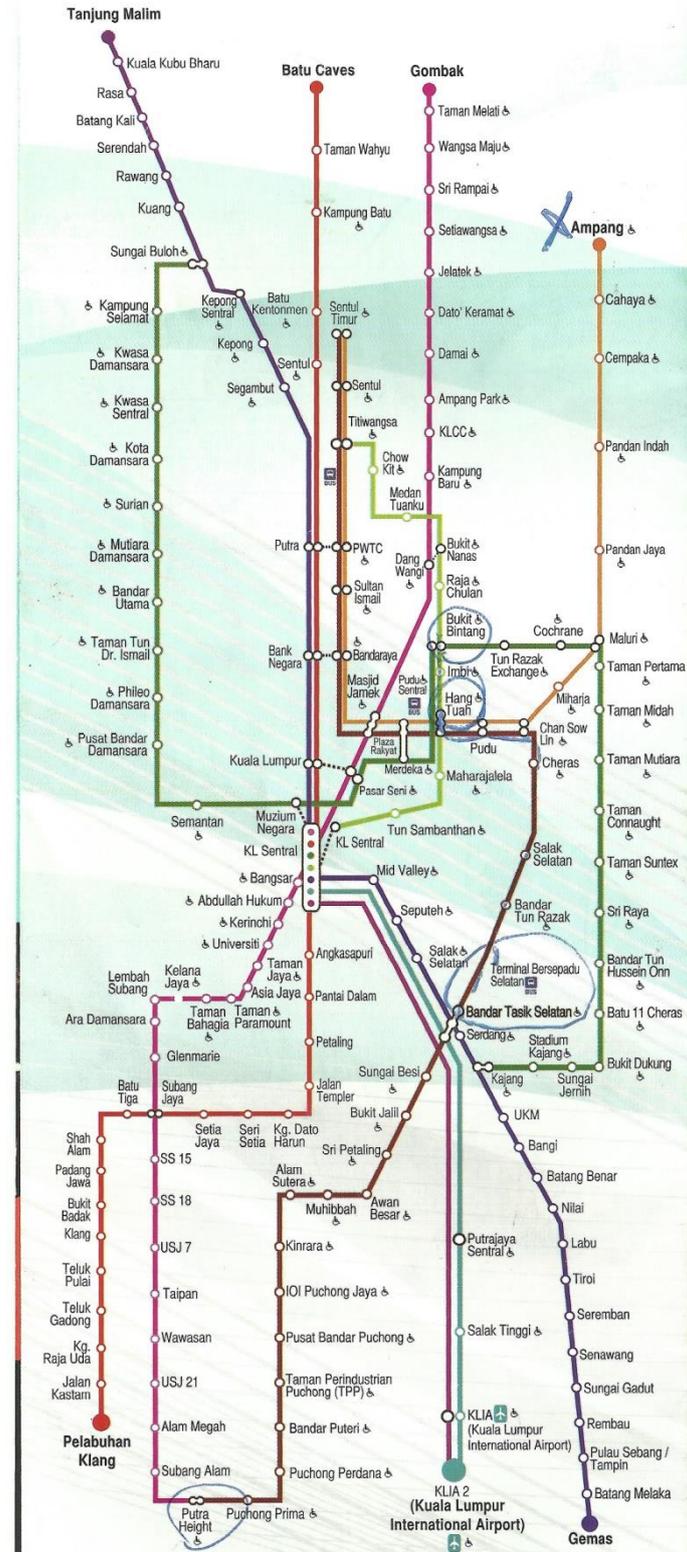
What Mr Wander says is especially true if, like us, you stay near Bukit Bintang. You must know that the buses will always get stuck just before arriving, as they go along the Pavilion Shopping centre and the traffic there is horrible, it is a lot easier to get off and walk from there. If you do, don't miss out

on the Pavilion Crystal Fountain, a beautiful fountain in front of the shopping centre. I have the most bizarre memory of this place: One of the days I was on the bus and a gentleman gestured for me to sit on the empty seat next to him as I was the only woman around and they were priority seats. It was nice enough and I felt a bit bad when I almost fell on him because I am too clumsy. I apologised and I thought that was all as he fell asleep again. Instead, as it was obvious that we were tourists, he woke up a couple of times to point at things and tell us what they were, starting with the shopping centre. People are just amazingly nice in Malaysia and I loved having my personal tour guide for a few stops!



Now that we've gotten the practical stuff out of the way, it's time to talk about what we actually did and saw in Kuala Lumpur. So now you know how to get around the city, read on to find out where you should be heading!

Kuala Lumpur's Transit Rail Map



LEGEND

- Seremban Line
- Port Klang Line
- Ampang Line
- Klia Express Line
- MRT Sungai Buloh - Kajang
- KLIA Transit Line
- KL Monorail Line
- Sri Petaling Line
- Kelana Jaya Line
- Connecting Station
- Interchange Station
- Rail Terminal
- Airport Terminal
- Park And Ride

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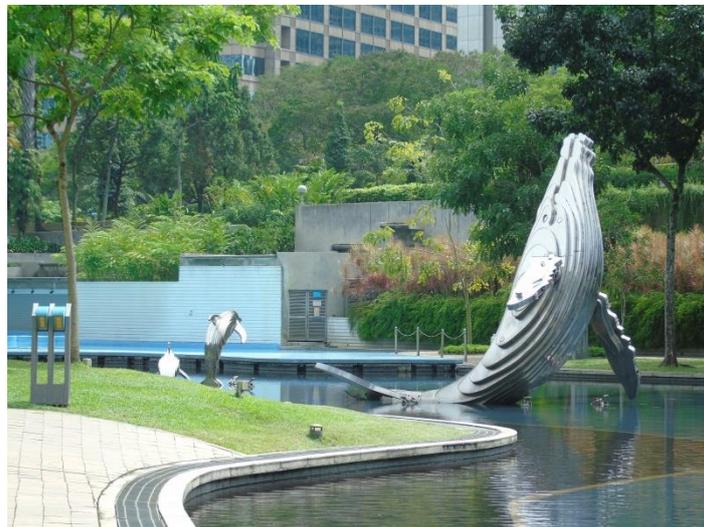
Petronas Towers and KLCC



The Petronas Towers are the iconic symbol of Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia, and a good place to start your sightseeing. Once the tallest buildings in the world, and still the tallest twin towers in the world at 452 metres, they stand proudly over the city and are visible from all over Kuala Lumpur. I must admit that I wasn't too impressed with them for their height, I guess having just seen the Burj Khalifa can be blamed for that, but I was impressed by their architectural beauty. They are probably the most striking skyscrapers I have seen, with their star shape being a welcome change from the usual square or pointed buildings in cities all over the world. The area around the towers is also a welcome change from the rest of the city, with

the large KLCC (Kuala Lumpur City Centre) Park starting just behind them. This includes a lake that sits in the shadows of the towers, and where you can watch water fountain displays similar to those we saw in Dubai. The park is also an enjoyable place for a stroll and an excellent vantage point for photos of the Petronas Towers. This was where we came to watch the [fireworks on New Year's Eve](#) (to satisfy my *Entrapment* pilgrimage!), although we didn't realise that the fireworks would be going off from behind us instead!

The main attraction here is the Skybridge that joins the two towers together, the world's highest at 170 metres. It is possible to visit the Skybridge to enjoy the views of the city, although it is highly advisable to book tickets online to avoid the infamously long queues that will greet you at the ticket kiosk if you don't. One other piece of advice I have to give you is to check the opening hours. The Skybridge is closed on Mondays, something we didn't realise until it was too late and meant that we wouldn't be able to fit a visit in. Also included in the tour is a trip up to the 86th floor of one of the 88-storey towers, for what I imagine are even more impressive views of Kuala Lumpur.



Also inside the towers is a shopping mall, where you will find shops for many European and American brands as well as local shops and stalls selling crafts and souvenirs. The mall was surprisingly quiet in comparison to the throngs of tourists that we usually found outside, and it actually turned out to be a

good place to find souvenirs and somewhere for a meal. There are also a number of bars and restaurants located in the vicinity of the towers, and the ones we saw in KLCC Park seemed to offer the best views to enjoy while having a drink or a bite to eat. They are aimed purely at tourists however, so prices are much higher than in other parts of the city.

You have two entrances to the shopping centre, one from the park where the music fountains and the light show is, and one coming from Jalan Ampang where you have a small set of jet fountains as well. If you go for NYE as we did, you have to consider what you want to do and see: If you want to see the fireworks through the gap in between the towers, stay around Jalan Ampang; if you prefer to see the concert and enjoy the fountain show laying on the grass while you wait for count down, stay on KLCC Park and you will find yourself between the towers and the fireworks.

About our New Year's Eve celebration, we went out at around 10 p.m. and we got the metro to KLCC. It was packed but we got on the first one, which was pretty easy. On the way back, on the other side, we thought that we would have been trapped in the metro for ages while the walk back was just 45 minutes top, so we chose that option with a stop for dinner. Nasi Kandar Sayeed is open 24 hours and serves a mix of cuisines in different stands all run together as a restaurant. It is extremely messy as everyone does everything, so your chef might be around cleaning tables when you want to order or your waiter somewhere making drinks or preparing food, but it is an interesting experience, especially at 2 a.m. when you barely understand the language. If you prefer to eat and drink during the show, to enjoy it in the park is not the best option, most of the stands are on the other side.

KL Tower and Eco Forest Park

Another building that can be seen from all over the city is the KL Tower, a purpose built communications tower similar to the CN Tower in Toronto, Canada. The tower stands at 421 metres (30 metres shorter than the Petronas Towers) with an observation deck at 276 metres, an open-air deck, and a

revolving restaurant at 282 metres. We only visited the observation deck as the open-air deck was closed due to the weather conditions, yet the views were still good and partly made up for missing out on the Skybridge tour. The observation deck is a doughnut shaped walkway with gift shops and photo kiosks on one side and large windows looking out over the city on the other, allowing views of the city from every angle. There's also plenty of fixed binoculars (similar to those once found at the seaside all over the UK) which seemed to be free to use, if you would like a closer view of the surroundings. Once you've had your fill of the views, there are plenty of express lifts available to whisk you back down to the main lobby. Here you'll find even more gift shops and photo kiosks, as well as more attractions such as the F1 simulator which was unfortunately not in operation at the time of our visit.



Outside of the tower there are yet more tourist shops in case you forgot to buy that Ferrari merchandise you've always wanted while you were inside. It was raining consistently when we came out so we didn't linger about here for too long, and I'm not sure we would have anyway regardless of the weather. We were more interested in the attraction that predates the tower and which makes the tower more unique, which is the Eco Forest Park that the tower was built inside of. This is an area of rainforest within the city centre, which has been created as an escape from the pollution, noise, and commotion of the city.



It is free to enter and there are many walkways through the park, each clearly signposted and well-maintained. There is also a canopy walkway made of a number of towers and suspension bridges, which enables you to enjoy viewing the rainforest from above. We only walked along a short section of this, but we found that to be enjoyable and the information boards describing the species in each area were very informative. Back on terra firma, we followed the main walkway through the rainforest which winds its way from the top near the KL Tower all the way back to the city streets at the bottom.



The path can be walked in either direction, but I'd definitely recommend going from top to bottom as it is quite steep in places and the heat and humidity makes it even more of a challenge. Having already been on a forest trek in the Cameron

Highlands (more on this soon!) I can say that the Eco Forest Park is a great example of a rainforest in the city. It is easy to forget where you are while walking through the dense undergrowth, surrounding by tall, towering trees of a huge variety. It was raining whilst still being warm when we visited, which added even more to the authenticity of the environment, so much so that it was almost a surprise to find ourselves straight back into the city once we'd reached the bottom. It's definitely a great place to spend an hour or two, and a fantastic contrast to the rest of the city. I'd actually say that I enjoyed the Eco Forest Park more than visiting the KL Tower, but it's still worth doing both if you are in the area.

Batu Caves

The Batu Caves were the first place to be put on our 'must-see' list, as it was somewhere that Ms Lust had missed out on during her previous visit to Kuala Lumpur. Batu Caves is the name given to a collection of cave systems that have formed in a limestone hillside, now located within the outer suburbs of Kuala Lumpur. They have become a popular tourist attraction, mainly due to the Hindu temples, statues, and shrines that have been built here.



A short train ride from the city (26 minutes from Sentral), the station itself is called Batu Caves, you can go from Sentral via Komuter train, and the line is Perlabuhan Klang-Batu Caves. We boarded in Bank Negara and at the moment only one of the two platforms was working both ways, therefore the traffic is a bit slowed down. Although the trains are fairly often, be careful as if they are delayed their name disappears from the screen when the scheduled time is gone, so don't trust the screen so much and read the name on the front and side of the train itself. Also remember that the two middle carriages are women only and try to respect them (we have seen too many men not caring and staying in these carriages and we would have liked it to work as well as in Dubai!).



The main draw is the Temple Cave, where the first temple was built. Type Batu Caves into any search engine and the first item you're likely to find is the iconic view of the huge statue of Lord Murugan standing in front of the staircase heading up to the Temple Cave. The statue is the largest of Lord Murugan in the world, incredibly impressive to see, and was only unveiled in 2006. This too was where we headed first, to tackle the 272 steps leading up to the cave.

This part of the caves is free to enter, I had read about people being scammed into paying for tickets or tours that aren't required but we didn't see anything like this happening. To be honest, we didn't come across any attempts to scam us throughout our entire trip, so I think a few incidences may have been blown out of proportion on the internet. This is where we discovered the other thing that Batu Caves is famous for, their resident Long-tailed Macaque (also known as Crab-eating Macaque) population. Known as 'The Mafia' by the locals, these cute-looking monkeys really can't be trusted. Luckily I had read about them beforehand and, as they say, forewarned is forearmed, so we had already made sure not to have any food with us or to have any valuables secured in our bags. These monkeys can see food a mile off, and once they do you will have to be very lucky or very brave to keep hold of it. We saw countless unsuspecting victims having shopping bags of food stolen by macaques, even water bottles were prized items for them. This has been partly caused, and continually not helped, by tourists feeding the monkeys. We even saw one woman handing a bottle of Sprite to a macaque just so she could get a cute photo for Instagram, although it was quite pleasing to see the monkey toss it away and then screech at the woman when she tried to tell it off! Now they have become used to this way of finding food, and taken to grabbing whatever they can from tourists rather than getting their nourishment from the surrounding forest. Unfortunately this habit is only likely to get worse as people continue to provide their food, either unsuspectingly or otherwise, so no matter how cute these monkeys may have seemed, we had to be wary of them!

To sum up: Be careful, do not hold your phone in your hands if possible, close your bag, and do not have your water in the outside pockets of your backpack, but the monkeys are not all aiming at you, common sense is enough not to be bothered. Also, remember that they are territorial and they interpret a smile as a threat because you show your teeth.



The climb to the top wasn't too strenuous, just long and seemingly never-ending with the humidity making it seem worse than it should be. My tip is to take short breaks when you need to, the steps are very wide and you won't be causing an obstruction if you stay to one side, whilst keeping an eye on those cheeky primates! Once at the top, you enter into the Temple Cave. Fully enclosed to begin with, with an extremely high ceiling, this area houses a few shrines and construction of a temple was ongoing when we were there. After walking through here we reached the main attraction, the temple built to worship Lord Murugan. Before leaving the UK, I had formed images in my head of a huge, ornate temple, similar to those that Thailand is famous for, nestled at the bottom of an equally huge cave. I had already learnt in the Cameron Highlands that Hindu temples are not like this at all, yet I still felt a little disappointed when we saw the temple here. Hindu temples, or those that we saw in Malaysia anyway, are small, open, pagoda style buildings, intricately decorated with colourful statues of animals, gods, and characters from Hindu stories. When you

look at the detail closely they are incredibly impressive, however when viewed from afar they can be a little underwhelming compared to temples from other religions. The cave itself was similar to what I had been expecting, a large opening in the cave with magnificently high walls leading straight up to an open ceiling. I have to be honest and say that I was more impressed by the cave than the temple, but it is easy to see why this place has become so sacred for Hindus.

Women are not allowed shorts and, before you start climbing, you have security officers stopping you if you do, but you can easily buy pashminas at the bottom of the staircase and wear them as sarongs if you forget to wear something long. My favourite part of our visit to this cave was the wall where all the macaques were climbing and hiding, and from which they were throwing the occasional coconut to crack it open.



As we made our way back down the steps, we decided to stop and have a look at another attraction, the Dark Caves. This is another cave system located quite close to the Temple Cave. This area has been left more or less how nature intended, probably due to them being so much more enclosed and

inaccessible without artificial lighting. They were originally discovered and visited by Chinese traders who had found it as an excellent source for guano, a form of bat droppings that make an extremely good natural fertiliser. Nowadays the caves are protected and can no longer be harvested for guano, and the only activities that take place are organised tours of the caves.



You have two types of tours, the [Educational Tour](#) which we did, and the Adventure Tour, also called Crawling Tour, which gets you even closer to the inhabitants of the cave, namely centipedes and spiders. The Educational tour costs RM35 (about £6.50) and the groups are of 15 people maximum. They provide a helmet and torch and you will learn a lot about bats (I wouldn't have minded getting closer to those cute inhabitants) and the rest of animals that thrive in this cave thanks to the guano, including the rarest spider in the world which takes its name from the caves (the *Liphistius batuensis*, a species of trapdoor spider). The cave is formed in limestone and the tour takes you around part of it to also learn about several types of rock formations such as stalactites and stalagmites, rock flow, and rock curtains, and then takes you to a spot where there is no light at all and you can experience complete darkness.



We were lucky enough to see a number of creatures, most notably some of the types of bat that live here. We also saw a long-legged centipede (above) and a cave snail, although I don't think Ms Lust was too pleased when we saw the cockroaches that have found a home in the guano pits. I'm sure she was also relieved that we didn't see a trapdoor spider, the rarest spider in the world, as these can only be found in areas visited on the Adventure Tour. Another feature of the cave that we were able to experience was being in total darkness. Once we had walked far enough into the caves and away from any natural light sources, we were told to turn off our torches. With absolutely no natural light being able to penetrate this far into the caves, we then found out how they got their name. It felt like I had gone blind, as there was absolutely no difference between having my eyes open or closed. I could feel that Ms Lust was standing right next to me and I knew there was a rock face just in front, but I could not see anything except complete darkness. It was a very eerie experience, coupled with the bats chirping in the distance, and certainly not one I would want to have without knowing our guide was with us, especially after having seen what the residents of the caves looked like! The final stop of our tour was another opening in the ceiling which allowed a shaft of light to enter the caves and illuminate the area. This was a great place for some photos of the caves before we turned around and made our way back to the entrance. The tour

lasted about 45 minutes and I would highly recommend it to everyone, you don't need to be super fit or athletic to be able to do it and it is a wonderful experience and insight into the caves' natural beauty.



After the Dark Caves tour we made our way down the rest of the steps, and we were a little relieved to find that the macaques were no longer to be found. We were about to head back to the station when we spotted another cave system housing a Hindu shrine, the Ramayana Cave, with the large statue of Hanuman guarding the entrance.

Here, as the name suggests, the cave hosts a reconstruction of the *Ramayana*, an Indian epic poem in which Rama's wife is

kidnapped by a god and Rama goes to her rescue. The cave has huge statues along the walls telling the whole story and at the far end from the entrance you have a very steep staircase to the top of the cave. There is nothing there but you can admire part of the statues from above. A tip: You can skip this last climb and just admire the statues from the floor of the cave, we climbed after visiting the rest and we were exhausted but it really is not worth anyway.

There are small boards with short descriptions of each scene, so it is possible to follow the story with a little imagination. This was more similar to what I had been expecting from the Temple Cave, and it made a wonderful end to our day at Batu Caves and definitely worth the RM5 (£1) entrance fee.



The whole visit is quite demanding, especially the climb, so have plenty of water, and consider if you are fine visiting the dark cave, animals won't crawl on you but you will see more insects that you would like to, sometimes from not too much of a distance. I am pretty scared and yet I was glad I visited, I hope you will too.

Chinatown and Little India

Chinatown and Little India are situated just west of the modern city centre, in an older part of the city. This area is famed for its markets and temples, but unfortunately I was a little underwhelmed by both. Petaling Street, the main market in Chinatown, was simply a street packed full of market stalls selling nothing but fake clothes and accessories and tacky souvenirs. I had been expecting something much more authentic with local arts and crafts on offer, and I think we both left quite disappointed. The temples were nice, but mostly squeezed in between houses and shops which took a lot of their beauty away. I think it's hard to make anywhere look nice if the surrounding buildings all look as if they are about to fall down.



The only redeeming factor for me was the Central Market, a huge covered market housed in what appeared to be an old warehouse building. Whilst there were still plenty of tacky souvenirs on offer, there also seemed to be a lot more arts and crafts available, ranging from clothing and accessories through to antiques and collectibles. It also had a large food court with a great variety of dishes available, and it is where we discovered Hokkaido baked cheese tarts (very tasty!).

Pasar Seni/Central Market.

It is worth spending a few hours here both if you are planning to buy some souvenirs or not. You have an open area along the

Kasturi Walk that is the entrance, but you also have plenty of stands inside and you can find the usual tacky souvenirs but also some nice handmade objects and a food court on the first floor. The area itself is pretty busy and you can easily reach Chinatown and Little India on one side and Masjid Jamek on the other.

Masjid Jamek



Masjid Jamek is a large mosque situated at the confluence of the Klang and Gombak rivers. We were unfortunate on both occasions that we were in the area, in that we arrived during prayers and we weren't able to visit the inside of the mosque. Nevertheless it is an impressive building from the outside and a fantastic contrast to the skyscrapers in the background. Fountains have also been placed along the banks of the rivers at this point, which come on at certain times of day and flow into the rivers. The first time we visited was at night, when the mosque is lit up and the lights of the city create a wonderful scene. The second visit was during the day, when the Sultan Abdul Samad building can be seen behind to create a completely different style of scene. From the other direction, the Petronas Towers and the KL Tower can be seen in the

background, with all of Kuala Lumpur's icons seemingly coming together for a photo opportunity!



Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad



The Sultan Abdul Samad building is truly beautiful, built in the 19th century by the British to house the local government. It was built in a Moorish style of architecture which is evident by the copper domes that adorn the top of the building, complementing the yellow tone of the masonry. A clock tower

stands as the centrepiece to the building, flanked by towers housing open spiral staircases. Unfortunately it isn't possible to visit the inside of the building, with the exception of the tourist information office on the ground floor, but it is possible to walk all around the outside and admire the architecture. Just across the road is Merdeka Square, a large field that looks like a cricket ground but is actually home to a 96-metre flagpole, where the Malaysian flag was first raised following independence.



Food attractions

As I love Asian food in general, I fell in love with Malaysian cuisine and I could talk of it for hours, and I thought I should write a separate chapter about Malaysian food and [here](#) is the link to it. There you will find it to learn all about these discoveries and our most loved dishes.

In this chapter, instead, is just a short list of a few places to go and eat. Shopping centres are usually easy if you want to eat different things, but the experience is less authentic. Nonetheless, I will tell you what we tried: You have a pretty varied food court in the Petronas Towers and also some restaurants just outside in the park. The Japanese stand in the lower floor next to the supermarket is not bad. For a more sophisticated place, [Duddha](#) is just outside with an open terrace overlooking the lake and extremely friendly staff. We just had a drink to celebrate Mr Wander's birthday (a bit late) but the food seemed nice.

[Sogo](#) is a shopping centre in Chow Kit and has the usually big American chains but outside also what seems to be different stands of local food, although in the end it just seemed all the same restaurant as our food came from the opposite corner. You have plenty of pictures and the guys at the till speak English or at least tried to explain to us the dishes we were ordering, although by that time I had pretty clear in my mind that Bihun Goreng (fried rice noodles) was my new favourite.



[Lot 10](#) is another shopping centre and is near Bukit Bintang. We went there because we saw the ad for Soong Kee's place while on the KLIA Ekspres but in the end I couldn't force myself to eat beef, their specialty, and we went to other stalls. Penang Corner deserves a 6/10, good luck if you don't like spicy but the food was not bad; Thai Corner deserves a 3/10, low quality ingredients.



If you are in Bukit Bintang, you will have plenty of stalls around serving Arab-inspired food and you just have to choose, but you really should not miss is a trip to [Jalan Alor](#), a whole street taken over by restaurants and food stalls offering a mix of

Chinese, Thai, and local food. You will find it hard to choose and to resist everyone offering you their menus. Walk to the end if you want some satay and banana fritters or stop anywhere if you prefer noodles and rice. You also have several stalls with ice cream and various sweets. I hope rats don't scare you because you will see them running overhead in the metal covers of the stalls, I can't deny that. It is open until 2 a.m. so you can have a bite even if you arrive to KL pretty late. Here everyone seems to speak English, which is not the case in Nasi Kandar Sayeed where we went on NYE.

Two of my food discoveries in KL: Roti canai and murukku, they were so good and I was so hungry that I didn't take pictures, learn more about them in the food supplementary!

We had a great few days in Kuala Lumpur, especially with New Year's Eve having been one of them, and I'm definitely glad that we chose to see the city as more than just a base from which to explore the rest of the country. The sight of such an eclectic mix of cultures intertwining so seamlessly is a welcome one, and the benefits of this are abundant (not just the huge range of delicious food!). Also the mix of ancient and colonial buildings with the modern skyscrapers provides another element of contrast to the city, and ensures that it doesn't become just another concrete jungle. The only aspect I didn't like was the pollution from the city traffic combined with the unwavering humidity, which left me feeling like I had been smoking heavily when I woke each morning. But there are places where you can escape this, such as the Batu Caves and the Eco Forest Park, and it is worth enduring to be able to see the best from this wonderful place.

The Cameron Highlands



As the name suggests, the Cameron Highlands is a mountainous area on the Malay Peninsula, located roughly halfway between Kuala Lumpur and Penang (and further inland). It is an incredibly beautiful landscape of forest-covered peaks and valleys filled with the greenness of tea plantations, and thanks to its altitude the climate is also a lot more welcoming. It is a great place to come to escape from the heat and humidity of most other parts of the country, as well as to take a break from the pollution of the big cities. This is also a very rural area, and the hustle and bustle of places like Kuala Lumpur seems like it's a million miles away. So let us now whisk you away to laid back country life as we take you through all the fantastic places we discovered in the Cameron Highlands.

The first impact with Malaysian tea is a bit of a shock even for someone born and raised in Italy with not so nice blended tea. If you open your mind and let your taste buds enjoy the experience, however, you are going to find that blended tea can also be nice, although a bit blasphemous to traditional British standards. As our first stop outside the capital city were the Cameron Highlands, the first few days were going to be all about tea and plunging into Malaysian culture which is sometimes a bit missing in Kuala Lumpur.



You don't have to be a tea addict to want to visit the Cameron Highlands. However, if you love tea, there you will feel like you are in heaven. As the name says, the region is in the hills, which is needed for growing the tea bushes. Malaysian tea is not known abroad for its quality both due to the altitude of the plantations and due to the lack of a real tea etiquette such as the British one. We stayed in Tanah Rata, one of the largest towns in the region located in one of the few flat grounds in the Cameron Highlands. As you can imagine for an area famous for its tea, rain is the main component of the local weather, but it is a nice, refreshing break from the humid heat of most of the country.

Practicalities

The first thing to worry about is how to get here. There are no train stations or airports in the Cameron Highlands, so if you don't have your own transport then the only option open to you is bus transportation. There are buses available from all over the country, with Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Taman Negara being the most popular departure points. We travelled from Kuala Lumpur with CS Travel, a Cameron Highlands' company that specialises in transport to this area. The journey took approximately four and a half hours, with a stop halfway for refreshments. The buses were very clean and comfortable, with the most legroom and best reclining seats I have seen on any form of transport. If you are also travelling from Kuala Lumpur, try not to be discouraged by the scenery during the first half of the journey. After the refreshment stop in Bidor, the seemingly endless miles of motorway gave way to a winding road through the mountains that provided wonderful views of the highlands and across the valleys. No matter what direction you arrive from, the buses terminate at the bus station in Tanah Rata and there are always taxis on hand here to take you to your accommodation if needed.

We stayed in the Cameron Highlands for two nights, arriving on 28 December around 3 p.m. and leaving again on 30 December at about the same time. We planned it that way to be back to the capital for New Year's Eve but it is enough time anyway. This region is easily reached by bus from KL, we

booked via [Easybook](#) with CS Travels. The trip takes about five hours and the bus is extremely comfortable. You don't have a toilet but you have an extremely comfortable and spacious seat that reclines more than I had ever seen before!



There are three towns in the Cameron Highlands; Ringlet at the beginning of the highlands, Tanah Rata which is the main town of the area, and Brinchang which is famed for its weekend night market. There is one main road that runs through all of these towns, which is usually quite busy with all the tourist traffic. If you need transport then your best bet is to take a taxi, just remember to agree the price before getting in. I read about a bus service that connects the three towns, but we didn't notice any local buses during our stay so they may be a bit of a rarity! Your accommodation is likely to be in either of the two bigger towns, Tanah Rata or Brinchang, both of which provide excellent bases for exploring the area. Brinchang is closer to the main tourist attractions such as the tea plantations and temples, whereas Tanah Rata has better access to the local jungle walks and better amenities. Regardless of

which of these towns you are staying in, it's quite quick and easy (traffic depending!) to travel from one to the other.

Now that we've gotten the boring, albeit useful, stuff out of the way, let's move on to the real purpose of this post, and all of the marvellous things there are to see and do in the Cameron Highlands.

Tanah Rata

I fell in love with the Cameron Highlands for two reasons; firstly for the beautiful landscapes and scenery, and secondly because it felt like we had found a place where we could experience authentic Malaysian culture. And for the second reason, really I'm talking about the town where we were staying, Tanah Rata. Although we had only spent one night there, Kuala Lumpur didn't feel too far removed from most European cities, especially around the financial district and city centre. Tanah Rata couldn't be more different. While it has had to grow and develop in order to satisfy the demands of the perpetual flow of tourists through the area, it has managed to do this without losing any of its traditional charm. Instead of the huge hotel buildings we found in Kuala Lumpur and Penang, here your choice is limited to small hostels and guesthouses (We stayed at the Hillview Inn Guesthouse and it was excellent). Likewise you won't find any fast-food chains or fancy restaurants (with the exception of the new Starbucks on the main street, something which the locals are not happy about and which I dearly hope isn't the start of a new trend), so your dinner choices are a great mix of local restaurants and street food stalls. We ate at the food stalls at every opportunity we could, and we discovered a wonderful array of dishes which started our love affair with Malaysian cuisine. My particular favourite was banana balls, which is essentially just deep-fried balls of banana bread, and chicken satay was the obvious choice for my dinners. Check the chapter about Malaysian food for more details.

About the [Hillview Inn](#), it is a house in colonial style on the hills a few minutes from the town centre. The inn is a family business and it is very nice. The accommodation doesn't

include breakfast but on the ground floor there is a cafe where you can order food at certain times of the day. We chose an en-suite room and it was of a nice size even if a bit chilly as the doors have a good five cm gap from the floor and the bathroom window would not close completely, but with the spare blankets and our backpacks against the door we were quite comfortable anyway. The family who runs the inn speaks English while the rest of the staff doesn't therefore you may have a bit of a struggle to ask for what you would like (and sometimes you end up without it), but you usually are given pen and paper to write down your order for the kitchen and that makes it easier. Some of the tours are quite muddy so you may be happy to know that the inn offers a laundry service for RM12.



Talking about food, Tanah Rata is quite traditional, with only a Starbucks, as Mr Wander mentioned, ruining the unspoiled image of the place. All along the main road you have porches on both sides with restaurants and food stands. Nearer our accommodation, there was another food area with some food places on the lower floor of a building. The markets are other options if you want to eat in a different place every time. We enjoyed a few places in particular and became regulars for the little time we spent there. We divided ourselves between the stands along the river with curry puffs, banana fritters, and Indian food, and the satay and noodle place near the Hillview

Inn. Only once we went to a restaurant under the porches before leaving and we were not disappointed anyway. Fruit Delight is a noodle and juice place run by young guys who are extremely friendly and serve scrumptious food. If you can resist the smell coming from the stands, give Fruit Delight a try as well.



In way of attractions in Tanah Rata, it would be easy to spend a day or two here without needing to venture out of the township. There is a network of jungle walks in the area, most of which have a starting point in Tanah Rata, which I will tell you more about later on. Another ideal place for nature lovers is Tan's Camelia Garden, which is just on the southern outskirts of town. This is essentially just the garden of a local house, but one which has been transformed into a botanical garden showcasing much of the region's native flora. It wasn't really our cup of tea, yet it still made for an enjoyable place to stroll around for 20 minutes or so. There are also a few religious temples in Tanah Rata, most of which are located at the northern end of town. We visited Sri Maha Mariamman Temple,

which is where I discovered what a Hindu temple is truly like and why I wasn't disappointed by what we saw when we visited the Batu Caves in Kuala Lumpur. The temple is quite small, but it is still a beautiful building and well worth the climb up the hill to get there.



Some things that you could include in your itinerary if you have more time is a visit to the surrounding villages and their night markets, but we just stayed in Tanah Rata and had a quick walk through the night market there. As we were leaving late in the afternoon the third day, we went exploring the other end of the village that we didn't see the first evening. There, you have another shopping area with many clothes and souvenir stands, and a food area. Our main objective, though, was to visit Tan's Camellia Garden, a little jungle created from a house garden. The entrance is free and you have a few paths to follow.

But after a while, you'll need to venture outside of the town's limits to experience everything that the Cameron Highlands has to offer. A great way to do this is by booking a tour, which are advertised and can be booked at most accommodations in the

area. We opted for the half-day Mossy Forest tour, and we were not disappointed. This tour combines a visit to one of the region's tea plantations with a jungle trek through an area known as the Mossy Forest. Read on to find out more!



Tea plantations

We were picked up fairly early in the morning from the guesthouse, and we piled into the back of the Land Rover Defender along with the six other people who were joining us on the tour. The itinerary seemed to be somewhat flexible to facilitate changes in weather and traffic, so we were to head for the tea plantations for our first stop. The Cameron Highlands is the biggest tea producing area in Malaysia, helped by the high altitudes and corresponding cooler temperatures. The area also sees quite a high amount of rainfall, which further aids the growing of tea here. We visited the Sungei Palas Tea plantation, which is owned by the largest Malaysian tea company, BOH (stands for Best of Highlands). Stepping out of the Land Rover on a misty morning and seeing the plantation stretching out across the valley was a sight I will never forget. Everything was such a beautiful shade of green (with the brilliant blue flowers of the tea plants dotted around), and the uniformity of the vegetation emphasised the contours of the land perfectly.



We were given thirty minutes to explore the area and to take photos, during which the weather cleared a little to enable even better shots of the landscape. We were given a short lesson by our guide about tea production in Malaysia, which is a lot quicker and easier than in most other tea producing countries. This is because Malaysians drink their tea with a lot of sweet condensed milk, which renders the quality of the tea a moot point. Therefore less care can be taken over picking the tea, which means it can be done using mechanical tools rather than by hand. This makes the picking process a lot quicker, which is very beneficial as, because Malaysia has no real seasons and conditions are perfect for growing all year round, the tea is picked every two weeks.



After discovering a lot about tea production, we continued along the road to the processing plant and visitor centre of the plantation. Our guide stayed at the entrance where the workers accommodation is, and gave us some time to walk up and enjoy a cup of tea. First though we walked through the processing plant, where information boards describe what is going on in each area and large windows allow viewing of the processes in action. This only took up about five minutes, and then we went across the road to the visitor centre. Here there are more boards explaining the history of tea production, a gift shop, and a cafe. We headed more or less straight for the cafe where we enjoyed an authentic Malaysian tea and a cake, while looking out over the very plantation where our tea had been grown. A very unique experience, and a nice slice of cake too!



The tour was booked with [Eco Cameron](#) and our guide, Satya, was extremely nice and taught us a lot about the environment and the wildlife. He told us he was a nature photographer before and it was extremely interesting to learn all he knew about Malaysian animals. Malaysia has a huge production of tea but it is only for internal consumption and it is extremely

different from the neighbouring countries. As Mr Wander said, the leaves are not handpicked, which means that the three varieties that they usually separate in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh for example are just mixed here to give you blended tea. The leaves are also collected more frequently than in other countries and the bushes are a lot shorter so the workers can use their harvesting machines on them. This kind of tea is obviously of a less refined quality but that is not a problem because in Malaysia there is no tea etiquette as in the UK. The most famous Malaysian drink is teh tarik, which is an extremely sweet beverage made of tea and condensed milk. The tour includes a visit of the plantation, of the factory, and of the cafe and tea shop. Although it is quite busy, I suggest you take some time to savour a cup of tea at the cafe as you can sip it overlooking the plantation and it is an experience that cannot be explained.



If you are interested in more tours, you have some that take you to the different farms, as the Cameron Highlands are famous for their tea but also their strawberries and their honey.

Mossy Forest



We then rejoined the rest of our group and continued onto the main attraction of the tour, the Mossy Forest. After a short drive we unloaded once again and were told that we would be going on a short jungle trek. Before coming to Tanah Rata, jungle trek had been synonymous for me with the walks and hikes I had completed while in New Zealand. Although the intensity of the treks may have been similar, the conditions and the environment couldn't have been more different and challenging. We were to climb up to the top of one of the highest peaks in the area, and therefore Malaysia, and almost instantly it was obvious that it wouldn't be a simple walk. The first obstacle was a farmer's field which had been turned into a mud bath by the frequent rain and constant trampling by us and fellow tourists. After negotiating this without drama, we then dived into the jungle. From here on in the path was made up of footholds in the mud, the odd rock or tree root to use as a stepping stone, and a few ladders that had been lain over the muddiest sections. Ropes had also been hung as a handhold along the steeper parts, and they were often the only thing that made the scramble up the mountainside possible. But despite the difficulty and strenuous nature of the trek, I found it extremely enjoyable to be battling our way through an environment that was so new to me. Although we didn't have

much time to stop and take in the surroundings during the climb, it was clear that this was very different to any forest I had been in before. The whole area is essentially saturated, which is why it is such a wonderful place for moss to thrive in, and I couldn't help but imagine it to be like the tropical rainforests of the world. But here the climate isn't tropical, which is what makes it so unique by being somewhere in between tropical and temperate.

As Mr Wander said, our second stop was the hike to the Mossy Forest. Plan your outfit wisely, as the path is quite steep and muddy. I would say it is slightly demanding, as in some parts you have to climb wooden ladders holding onto loose ropes or branches, but it is worth the challenge. At the top, you will have a spectacular view of the area and you will learn a lot about the plants and animals. The most incredible are the pitcher plants and, obviously, the moss, although I was really impressed with the spiderwebs which are incredibly thin and dance in the wind like a silk scarf. When they catch the drops of rain, they look like diamond jewels and they invite you to get close to admire them; even someone as arachnophobic as me couldn't resist getting close for a picture! We did the half-day tour but there is also one that is for the whole day; what you do is go back to Tanah Rata, have some time for lunch, and then meet again in the afternoon for another hike.

Finally we reached the summit and, after catching our breath, we took in the amazing views from the top. It was possible to see for miles and miles in every direction, with only a few small clusters of buildings interrupting the blanket of vegetation covering the entire landscape. There were also some wonderful things to see close at hand, as our guide now showed us the flora and fauna that made up this environment. The highlight for me was seeing pitcher plants, a carnivorous plant that uses a pitcher-shaped trap filled with a sweet liquid to ensnare and digest its insect prey. They were a lot smaller than I had imagined, which then made sense as our guide explained that they can grow much bigger in more tropical climates. We also saw a few of the native spiders to the area, and the main reason for coming here, more moss than I have ever seen in my life! It is the moss that enabled such a rich environment to

have formed, by trapping the water and maintaining suitable conditions for other plants to thrive in. It also creates a very prehistoric feel to the forest, and you never know quite what to expect around each and every turn. This was a fantastic way to get in touch with nature in the area, and the climb to the top made it feel like a great accomplishment to have made it up there at all. The journey back down to the bottom was no less of a challenge, and each step had to be carefully planned to avoid falling and taking a more direct route down!



Jungle walks

As I mentioned before, there is a network of jungle walks across the Cameron Highlands, many of which have a starting point in or near Tanah Rata. Most of these walks lead to local nature attractions such as waterfalls and mountain peaks, and some can also be used as a more scenic route between towns. The Cameron Highlands' tourist map, which you can buy from your accommodation for a few ringgit, includes a map of these walks with their starting points also shown on the main map. If you are planning to do a lot of these walks, there is also a more detailed map available dedicated solely to them. I have one tip for anyone planning to go on these walks, one which I

failed to heed myself and learnt my lesson the hard way! The walks can be quite tough in places, and they don't seem to be maintained too much which means even more care is required. Take note of the warnings in the descriptions of each walk, most will be shown as being steep or overgrown, if not both. That way you can be more prepared for what awaits you and also you will be able to choose which walks would be more suitable to your abilities.



We went on two of these walks, firstly walk number 9 to Robinson Waterfall and then walk number 4 to Parit Waterfall. Both walks were fairly short, taking only about 30 minutes to reach the waterfalls in both cases. It was on the way to Robinson Waterfall that I learnt my lesson about taking more care. The majority of the walk has been paved, however they used paving slabs which become very slippery when wet (and as it rains so much here, they're always wet!). Add to this the fact that they either didn't worry about levelling the ground beforehand or the ground has since subsided, and you soon find yourself tiptoeing across slippery stones which now sit at precarious angles pointing you down towards the valley floor. This requires a lot of care and attention to traverse safely, which I wasn't giving it. Before I knew it, my feet had slipped out from underneath me and I came crashing down to earth

with only my camera to cushion my fall against the hard paving. Needless to say, my camera didn't appreciate being used as a crash mat and my overconfidence had been punished by breaking the viewfinder. I was certainly a lot more careful after that!



The waterfalls were nice endings to the walks, especially Parit Waterfall which had viewing spots that were a lot more accessible. The walk to Robinson Waterfall is a bit overgrown so viewpoints are limited to gaps in the vegetation. At Parit Waterfall there was a dedicated viewing area, and it was easy to climb down onto the rocks to view it from another angle. One thing which did surprise me at the time, but which I soon learnt was a common feature in Malaysia, was how dirty the water is. Every river and waterway that we saw was filled with murky brown water, and the eddies below the waterfalls had turned into a collection point for all the litter that is thrown into the water. This was particularly noticeable at Parit Waterfall, where the view of this natural wonder was somewhat ruined by the swirling rubbish just in front. We managed to take our photos from angles that blocked this out, but it will forever remain in my memory.



I would definitely recommend either of these walks, especially as they are two of the easiest walks in the area, and they make a great way to spend an hour or so. Tackling some of the longer walks is only suggested for the very fit and sure-footed, and I expect some path clearing and self-navigation may be necessary. Definitely not something to be taken lightly!

The first afternoon, we went exploring by ourselves around Tanah Rata to see the Robinson Falls, a short walk outside the town on the left just after the bus station. You will pass a bridge and see a few signs but, as Mr Wander also said, I would suggest you get a map anyway, we bought one at our hotel for RM4 and it came with a plastic cover, which is a great idea in a place where the rain is perennial. The falls are just after a short path between houses and a greenhouse and are strong but not as impressive as you can imagine. You have a

first glimpse of them and can go back if you want. If you decide to go further, be aware that the path is quite slippery due to the paving more than the water and leaves. The path is made of flat, smooth stone tiles that are painted in green and red to make them visible but that also makes them extremely slippery. We walked a little bit further, on the muddy side after the first slip on the tiles, up to a less smooth part of the path, but as it almost costed us a brand new camera, so I think I can safely suggest you see the fall from the side and then head back to visit the Hindu temple we saw on our way to the falls. For me it was the first visit to a Hindu temple (we visited the Batu Caves just after the Cameron Highlands) and probably it was strange as it was just opening when we arrived and it was empty and quiet. The building is nonetheless impressive and its decorations eye-catching with the hundreds of deities over the entrance and the main part of the temple.

Without even walking out of the town, you can take a shorter path from the gardens and reach the Parit Waterfalls. When we went, this path seemed a bit abandoned and not used much as the vegetation was everywhere, but when we arrived near the falls we found a restaurant and a car park and we understood that probably most people reach them by car or hiking from the other direction. This hike is not hard at all and it takes you to the pretty covered bridge over the falls.

So this just about sums up everything we did and saw during the three days we spent in the Cameron Highlands, which we found as a fantastic introduction to Malaysia and its natural beauty. As it is also the place where we discovered our love for Malaysian cuisine, I am certainly glad we decided to come here and feel it should be on everyone's itinerary when visiting peninsular Malaysia.

Penang



We only spent a couple of days in Penang, and in truth it wasn't enough and we really should have stayed for an extra day or two. However this wasn't the case and we had to try and cram in as much as we could, and we still managed to do quite a lot in the short time that we were there. So here's what we did for two days on the island, and some tips for other places that we didn't have time for.



Part of this was written on the ferry from Penang to Langkawi just after spending a few days in Penang. The experience has been a blast although a bit messy for food as many places seem to only be open for lunch. Don't get me wrong, there are still plenty of food stalls and restaurants serving at night, but it seems that the city is a lot more active up to 6 p.m.

We arrived by bus on 2 January from Kuala Lumpur and I can't avoid thinking that three nights there were just too many. The city is interesting, but this country has so much to offer outside of the capital that I keep feeling that we should have stolen one of those days for either Cameron Highland or Penang, probably Penang.

Getting there and around

There are many options available for getting to Penang from all over the Malay Peninsula, and also from other islands on the west coast. The most popular form of transport, and the most readily available, is by bus, with very frequent arrivals from all over the peninsula. We took this option also, and our bus from

Kuala Lumpur took approximately five hours including a refreshment stop along the way. When taking the bus there are two options for points of arrival, Butterworth or Penang bus terminals. The terminal on Penang is about 8 km from George Town, the main city on the island and most popular place for accommodation, and will require getting another bus to take you into the city.

You may want to do what we did and get off at Butterworth to get the ferry there. It will take less time and it will get you to the jetty where all the buses are. There is a free shuttle bus that takes you from Butterworth bus station to the jetty, which is not far away but just hard to reach. The ferry takes about 15 minutes and payment is not required for your return journey. This was the option we took, and seeing the city grow as the ferry chugged ever closer was a nice introduction to the island.

It is also possible to take a train from Kuala Lumpur to Butterworth, although it takes just as long as the buses yet at around double the cost. Normally I would say it might be worth the higher cost for a more comfortable journey, but in this case I can't find any fault with the long-distance buses we used in Malaysia and therefore can't think of any reason not to use them. As the train terminates at Butterworth as well, a ferry trip across to the island is again necessary.

Penang also had its own international airport, so flying here is another option. Although flights here are cheap, both domestic and from neighbouring countries, I feel it should only be considered when time really is a scarce commodity. It is possible to see so much more of the country when travelling by road, albeit out of a window, and I would much rather spend an extra hour or two to get there and not miss out on the views. The final option is to arrive by ferry, which can be taken from Langkawi Island and Belawan in Indonesia. These ferries arrive at Swettenham Pier, located at the northern end of George Town.

Once you have made it to Penang by whichever means of transport you have chosen, the next task is to get to your accommodation and around the island. If you don't have your

own car, the bus network on the island is an excellent substitute. There are buses heading out to all corners of the island, the vast majority of which originate from one or both of the bus terminals in George Town. These can be found near to the jetties at the eastern side of the city, and underneath the Komtar building at the western side. They are frequent and cheap, just make sure you have plenty of small notes and coins as the drivers are not able to give change. The buses run until 10pm on most routes, although the frequency is much reduced after 8pm. There is also a free bus that takes a route around George Town, which has CAT displayed instead of a route number. Taxis are your only other option, although we found that the buses were able to satisfy our needs very well.

We booked at the M Hotel and that was a pleasant change after the nasty place in KL. The hotel is small but seems quite new. The room is nice and of a decent size. You can choose a Hello Kitty or a Doraemon themed one for a higher price, but we just got a normal one with window. You don't get bottles of water or breakfast but the bathroom is nice and clean, and has a comfortable shower. All the bedding and the towels are clean and the guys at reception are very friendly. The bus 101 takes you very near to the hotel and you are not too far from Komtar, where most of the buses stop.



As our accommodation didn't include breakfast, we went both days to a Chinese pastry shop that serves delicious pastries, [Ming Xiang Tai Pastry Delights](#). You have a few in town and

luckily one was near where we were staying. They are famous for their egg tarts as they started their business selling them on a rickshaw in the '70s, but many pastries are just wonderful, the Pandan Kaya Puff is definitely my favourite.

George Town



Now that we've covered how to get to Penang and how to get around once you're there, it's time to move on to what to see on the island. For almost all travellers, George Town will be the first place you will see on Penang. This is the second largest city in Malaysia, dwarfed only by Kuala Lumpur, and a true melting pot of cultures that have shaped and changed the city over time. George Town achieved a listing as a UNESCO World Heritage site due to the buildings and history from its colonial past, as it was the first place in Malaysia to be settled by the British. Although Malaysia is now independent, many of the buildings remain and its foundations as a far-flung outpost of

the British Empire is not forgotten. This is most evident in the northeastern corner of the city, where many of the old administration buildings are although we didn't find time to explore this part of the city fully. We did see the Jubilee Clock Tower on our way back to the ferry terminal, which is found on a roundabout. Built in a Moorish style in recognition of the local culture, it was commissioned in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The tower is 60 ft tall, one foot for every year of her reign, and it serves as a wonderful reminder of the city's colonial past.

The Jubilee Clock Tower, also called Queen Victoria Memorial Clock Tower, is not the only monument in the area. Next to it is a modern sculpture that looks like an avocado but is actually a betel nut. This sculpture, the Pinang Fountain, symbolises Penang Island as its names comes from *pinang*, Malay for betel nut.



Further south, it soon becomes apparent that you have entered the Chinese quarter of the city. The best way to explore this area is by a self-guided walking tour of the local street art, which can be found all over Chinatown. Most tourist maps show the locations of the most popular murals, and we also found a map dedicated to these alone. Many of them use props to bring the artwork to life, such as bicycles or swings that have been attached to the wall. Seemingly a more recent addition, there

are also a lot of wire sculptures in the same area, which have been placed just in front of the walls to allow for their silhouettes to be projected onto the masonry. As I said, this is a great way to explore the area, so it's important not to focus too much on the murals alone. The area is full of wonderful oriental temples and Kongsis, which are Chinese clan houses that are often just as ornate as temples and can be easily confused for them. Khoo Kongsi is the largest of these in George Town, and Malaysia, as can be visited for a small entrance fee. We didn't have time as it was on our last morning before leaving that we came across it, but it was certainly impressive from the outside and I imagine the interior is no less stunning.



Our first night on the island we just went exploring the city centre following the street art map and we found most of the murals and the steel rod street art. We have also scanned our map in the following page for you to have something handy here, apologies if it is a bit funny as it is huge. The murals were painted by different artists, but some of the most famous are those commissioned to Ernest Zacharevic in 2012, you can see more pictures of them in our Instagram account. The steel rod street art is a set of iron caricatures describing the life of the city. For better quality images, you can also find a comprehensive guide [here](#). Unfortunately, due to the light, our pictures of them are not the best as the shadows are in the way of the image. At some point, we stopped at an Indian street restaurant before keeping exploring.



Other Popular Street Art



Other Popular Street Art



Marking George Town Street-Red Sculptures



Marking George Town Street-Red Sculptures



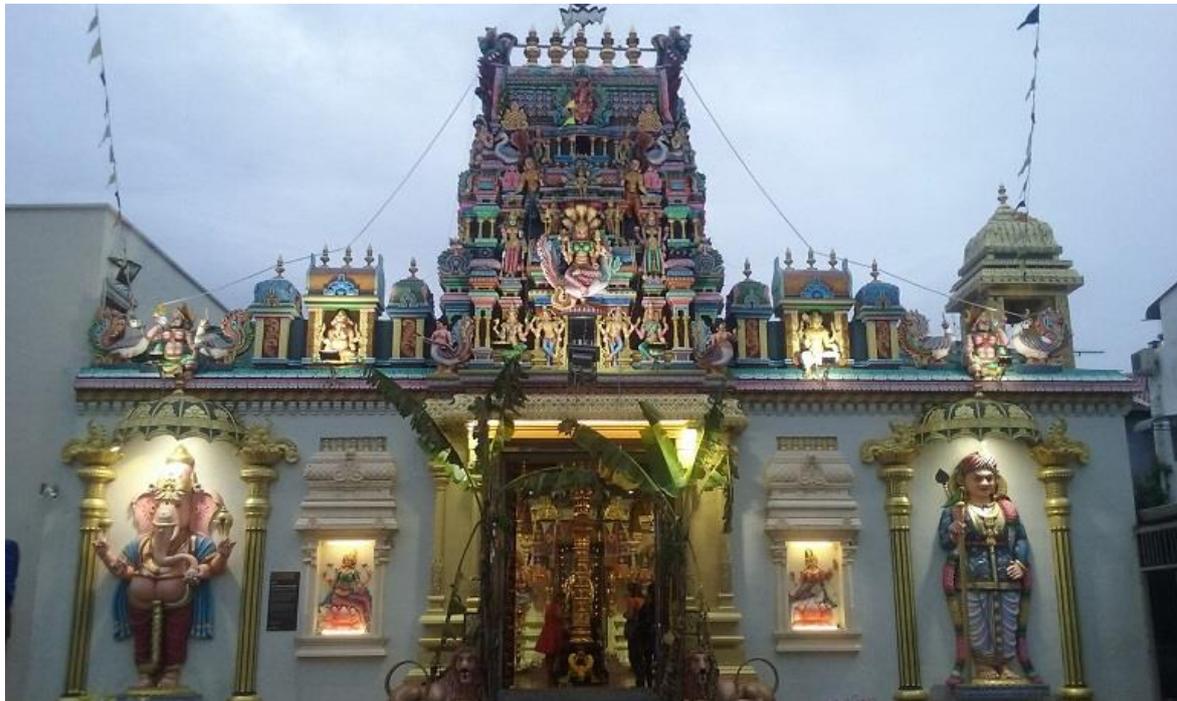
Marking George Town Street-Red Sculptures

- Marking George Town Street-Red Sculptures
- The Marking George Town Street-Red Sculptures are a series of public art pieces created by the artist, Marking George Town Street-Red Sculptures, in 2011. The sculptures are made of red-painted metal and are placed along the streets of George Town, Penang, Malaysia. The sculptures are designed to be interactive and to engage the community. The sculptures are made of red-painted metal and are placed along the streets of George Town, Penang, Malaysia. The sculptures are designed to be interactive and to engage the community.

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As I said, the streets are a lot quieter at night and most of what you see is other tourists going around with their map, until you go back near the pier where you have more bars and the food stalls stay open a lot later.



We only spent a few hours exploring George Town and it certainly wasn't enough, we could have easily filled another day or two just in visiting some of the temples and seeing more of the colonial side of the city. However we also wanted to see what the rest of the island had to offer, so we had to split our time to accommodate this as well. So please learn from our mistake, and give George Town and Penang the time they deserve if you are planning to visit.

Penang Hill

Penang Hill is situated just to the west of George Town and, as the name suggests, it is a large hill overlooking the city. There are hiking tracks that can be taken to the summit, but the much more popular option is to take the funicular railway to the top. If you are taking the bus from the city centre, route number 204 terminates just outside the bottom station of the railway. The ticket for the railway costs RM30 for non-

Malaysian residents, and the trains seemed to run approximately every half hour.

The weather when we visited was much less than ideal, with monsoonal rain that seemed like it would never end. Because of this, we didn't venture outside when we reached the top and the views were somewhat limited. The ride up the hill was still fun however, and I imagine it would be quite scenic in better conditions. The trip back down was less enjoyable, as we caught one of the last ones of the evening and we were crammed in like sardines! At the top is a large building that houses the visitor centre and many businesses such as food outlets and souvenir shops. We had dinner at one of the last few stalls to remain open, and I'm not sure if it was due to the tastiness of the dishes, our sheer hunger, or both, but we had to go back for seconds!



There seemed to be quite a lot to do at the summit, with the attractions all connected by walking tracks. We didn't have time, nor the inclination to get absolutely soaked, to explore any of these, our main reason for coming had been to see the views of the sunset over the city. The weather made sure that this would also not be possible, and the city only came into

view through the clouds as the lights started to come on after sunset. It was still a nice view however, despite the rain, and it was easy to see that it would be incredible with clear skies. I'd definitely recommend coming up here, just choose the timing of your visit carefully to coincide with good weather, and I can see that it would be easy to spend half a day exploring at the summit.

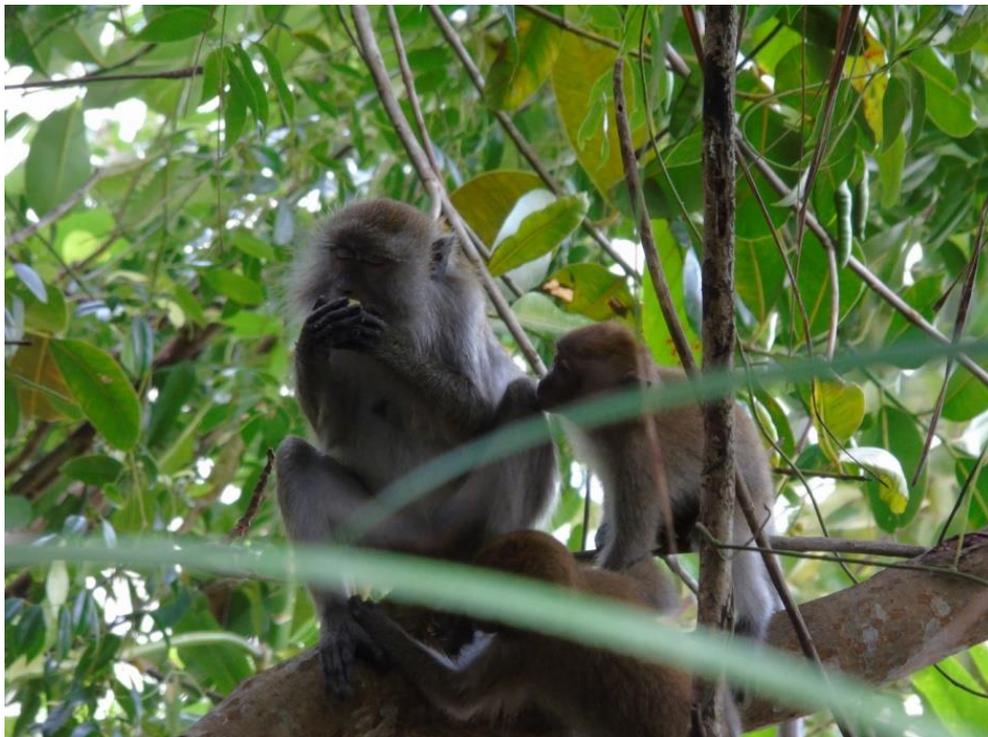
Penang National Park



The northwestern corner of the island is home to Malaysia's first, and smallest, national park, Taman Negara Pulau Pinang (Malaysian for Penang Island National Park). Again it is quite easy to get here using public transport, as bus route 101 terminates just outside the park entrance and can be taken from either the Komtar building or the terminal by the jetties. The national park is mainly an area of dense forest, which leads right up to the ocean and some wonderful beaches. The two most famous of these beaches are Turtle Beach on the western edge of the park, and Monkey Beach at the northwestern tip. Their names give subtle hints to why they are so famous, yes you guessed it there are turtles that can be found at Turtle Beach and Monkey Beach is a popular hangout for the local macaque population!



These two beaches are understandably the main draws of the park, and there are two options for getting to them. Walking is one, although the tracks are pretty serious and not for the faint-hearted. The track to Monkey Beach was closed when we visited as it had become unsafe, so our choice was limited to one! We started the walk, which quite quickly became a scramble up a steep wooded incline with only broken, and very unstable, steps to aid us.



With the high humidity adding even more to the challenge, it wasn't long before the reward of seeing wildlife and a couple of lakes along the way just wasn't enough and we turned back. Even though we only completed a small section of the walk, we still saw some beautiful creatures such as a huge butterfly that stopped for a photoshoot and the ever-present macaques.



So this leads us on to the second option that is open to you, and the one that we now fell back on. That is to take a boat, which will speed you around the headland and drop you at whichever location you desire. Although you won't get to see the lakes that are hidden within the forest, the views of the coastline are impressive enough not to be disheartened. It is a fun trip as well, as they certainly don't hold back and you'll be bouncing off of your seat as the boat launches itself off of the waves. The boats are, like almost everything in this country, cheap, and they will take you and pick you up and whatever location and time that you request. There are plenty of people offering boat trips at the park entrance, and they'll definitely make themselves known to you do there's no need for me to tell you where to go!



The boat ride to Monkey Beach cost us RM80 and, when we booked, the captain asked us at what time we wanted to be picked up to go back, which was quite nice. I would suggest something between three and four hours but no less. The beach has a few huts that serve food and drinks and we stopped at the Lazy Boys for a relaxed drink before hiking a bit more. The water was definitely cleaner in the afternoon when we left, but keep in mind that if you also want to have a swim you will need a bit more time. From the beach you have a 35 minutes hike to the lighthouse. This is also a pretty demanding trail as, of course, it takes you up the hill. The lighthouse is not big but you can visit it and it offers a pretty view of the coast. You have to leave your shoes outside and climb a pretty nice spiral staircase (I am serious, it is not bad at all) but then you have something like ten steps up a wooden ladder and those are pretty demanding if you are acrophobic, although I believe being barefoot made it a lot easier as I felt I had more grip. Once out I was still pretty shaken but I managed to go around the whole balcony to get you [this video](#). The way back was also a bit demanding as the path is quite natural and the steps

pretty worn out when they are there, but a rain shower kept us a bit cooler.



As Mr Wander said, you have a few monkeys going around on the beach but they seem pretty wild and not interested in humans. Other animals you will find for sure are some crabs that are the same colour as the sand and, at the beginning, they just look like dust moving around as they move so fast. We were lucky enough to spot a few eagles flying around as well. If you want to visit, the bus 101 also takes you up to the National Park and back. One thing to remember if you decide to go to Turtle Beach is that it is not allowed to swim in it, or it wasn't this time of year at least.



That was all we had time for at the national park, and after our boat ride back it was time to catch the bus back to George Town. Despite being the smallest national park in Malaysia, there seemed to be a lot more to explore than we managed and it would be easy to spend a lot longer here. Just bring plenty of energy!



So that's about it for our time on Penang, but there's certainly a lot more to the island than we saw. We didn't even manage to see everything that we had planned, mainly Kek Lok Si Temple and the Snake Temple which are both situated just south of George Town. We could, and should, have spent an extra day or two here, but now we have the perfect excuse for a return trip! So for now it's goodbye once again, but we won't keep you waiting too long for the final instalment of our Malaysian trip, living leisurely on Langkawi!

One last tip before leaving: If you book with Easybook like us, you will have to print your boarding passes at the office before you board and that is just behind the corner from the entrance but it is not clear or indicated. Once there, and before entering the terminal, you will receive a pass with your seat number. The trip is not long and it is comfortable enough, but the screens show "Need for speed" in a loop, so you may want to head out and enjoy the view for a while.

Langkawi



The island of Langkawi (Pulau Langkawi in Malay) is the last place that we visited. This was our chance for some relaxation on the beach after all the travelling we had done, and we also decided to indulge a little more on our accommodation.



Our accommodation was the [Nadiah Hotel Cenang](#), just in front of Pantai Cenang beach and it was an absolute treat. The room was big and comfortable, everything was clean, and the food was extremely nice, with an abundant buffet for breakfast. It is not just that they had endless dishes of noodles for breakfast, it is that they really cater for everyone and I was appalled by how complicated people can be even in this situation. I am not talking about allergies or dietary requirements in general, that is justified; I am talking about grown-ups wanting everything exactly as mum would cook it! For instance, there was a person cooking eggs on demand and to taste and nothing was good enough for some people. Sometimes we forget that people are not our servants or our moms just because we are on holidays and we are paying, and that they cannot cook exactly as our granny used to for us when we were kids!

Langkawi is the northernmost Malay island on the west coast, which makes it a popular destination for those travelling from

the nearby Thai islands in the north. Part of an archipelago of 104 islands which bears the same name, Langkawi is the biggest of these islands and one of only two that are inhabited.

Access to the island is only possible by sea or by air, with ferry services from Penang and Thailand arriving at the ferry terminal in Kuah (the biggest town on Langkawi Island) and flights from all over the region arriving at the international airport near Pantai Cenang. There are no public transport services on the island, so once there your only choices are to take taxis or to hire a vehicle if you want to get around the island. We used taxis to take us from the ferry terminal on arrival and to the airport when we left, and we found them cheap and easy to find. The main taxi rank in town had a price list displayed, so it's easy to find out how much the fare should be to eliminate any fears of being scammed.



There are a number of great beaches on the island, we stayed near Pantai Cenang (Cenang Beach), while the interior of the island is mostly covered in forest. The northern coast of the

island is also famous for its mangroves, which can be seen on guided boat tours. One of the most popular attractions on the island is the Langkawi Cable Car and Skybridge. Located in the northwest corner of the island, these give the opportunity to see the island and its natural features from above. We didn't have time to visit, but we heard from other travellers that it is often closed due to strong winds or poor visibility so it requires a bit of patience or luck to catch it on a good day!

Pantai Cenang



Kuah is the biggest town and capital of Langkawi, and also where we disembarked from the ferry from Penang. This wasn't where we would be staying however, and after a fifteen minute taxi ride we arrived at Pantai Cenang. This is possibly the tourist capital of Langkawi, and consists almost purely of hotels, restaurants, and gift shops, all lining the main (and almost only) street. This runs directly behind, and perpendicular to, the beach, which is a long stretch of soft white sand. The beach is the reason behind the town's name, which translates from Malay as Cenang Beach. This may bring thoughts of places like Benidorm or Surfers Paradise to mind, but happily Pantai Cenang has taken measures to avoid the transformation into an overcrowded high-rise tourist trap. Planning laws have been passed which ban any developments

that would be higher than a coconut tree, and as a result hotels have had to expand outwards rather than upwards. It also preserves the view from the beach and the traditional feel of the town.



There is no avoiding that this is a place built for tourists however, something which is not helped by Langkawi's duty-free status. There are large duty-free shops all along the street which are all very similar to those you would find at the airport, although the alcohol and tobacco areas are much more hidden and discrete. You will also find all the western brands you can think of here, from fast-food chains to clothes retailers and everything in between. These are all interspersed by gift shops which all seem to be selling the exact same things (mostly clothes and accessories), although there are some unique shops with local crafts hidden amongst them. Finally, the last few remaining plots are taken up by local restaurants, and every cuisine from all around the world seems to be catered for.

As I said before, despite all the tourist businesses here, it does still retain a traditional feel to the town and it is still very easy to eat local foods and to find local products. We found it very enjoyable to stroll up and down the street after dark and to try as much of the food that was available from the stalls (most of which only appeared after 6pm), as well as to see what else was on offer. It was here that we discovered the joys of deep-fried ice cream and Pandan leaf curries, both of which are compelling reasons to go back!

Our favourite place to eat was D'Khas Café, a place open 24 hours according to the big sign outside (Google doesn't agree but we didn't check personally if that were true). They serve an interesting mix of oriental food and had a very relaxed staff. We have eaten there at least three times and the best way to describe the place is with a picture of their wall.



Langkawi is also pretty famous for its seafood restaurants and you can see plenty of places with their aquarium at the entrance to show you their availability. Partly because of my origin and partly because of our favourite dishes, we skipped these places and stayed loyal to noodles and satay, but your hotel staff and your tour guides will definitely suggest the best seafood restaurants if you fancy that. One thing that we had a few times there and nowhere else in Malaysia is ice cream. Fried ice cream (*aiskrim goreng*), as Mr Wander said, is very popular, with a few stalls serving it, but you also have a very nice ice cream place near the beach, Gelato Cabana, definitely good quality, creamy *gelato*. As we were in Langkawi for Mr Wander's birthday, we also had a slice of cake from Leena Bakery. We passed in front of this place many times as it was

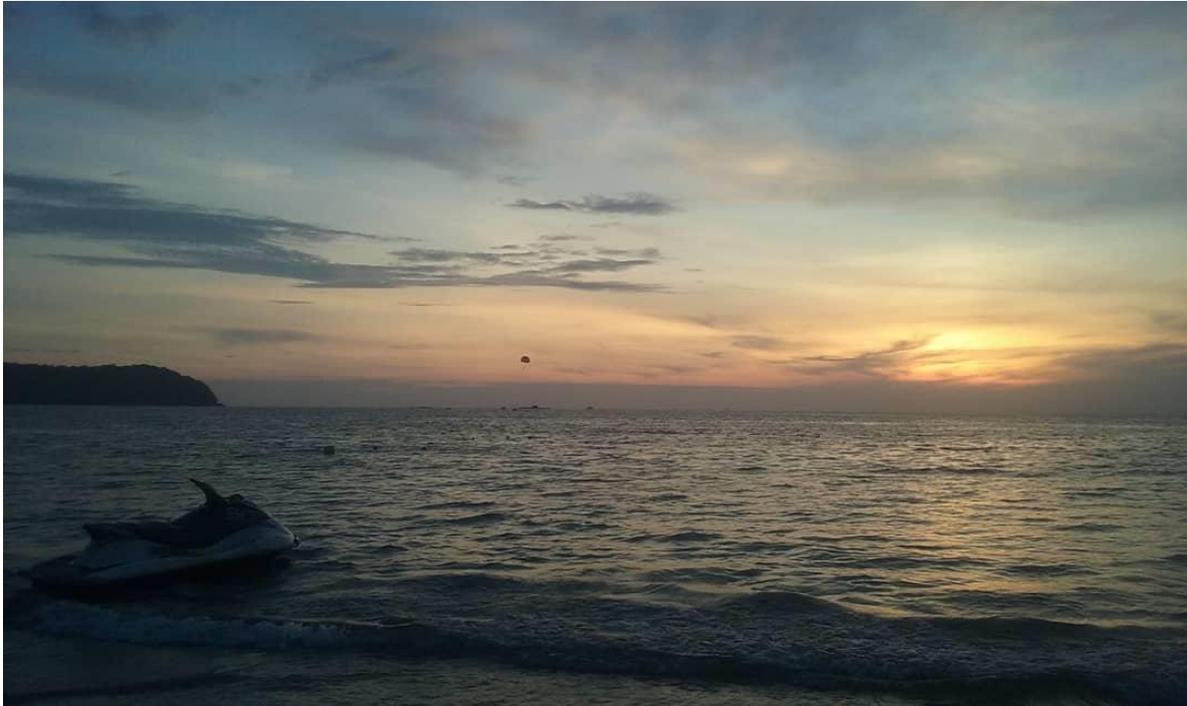
next to D'Khas Café, and we decided to try their desserts: Thumbs up!



Our main reason for coming to Langkawi, and for staying at Pantai Cenang, was to go to the beach. With all this tourist activity going on, I had some concerns that the beach was going to be similar to the one we went to in Egypt and that we wouldn't get a moment's peace without someone trying to sell us something. Walking on the beach we were confronted with signs advertising watersports and other activities, and the jetskis and inflatable boats all along the beach seemed to confirm my fears. I needn't have worries though, as this was the end of the sales pitch and at no point did anyone come over to try and sell us anything. We were able to relax and enjoy the beach and the water to our heart's content, and we did just that. The sand was very soft and reasonably clean, while the water was warm and certainly the cleanest we saw in Malaysia.

One of our favourite activities on the beach was to watch the tiny crabs busy at work both in the morning (video [here](#)) and at night (video [here](#)). You have quite a few restaurants on the beach but you can easily enjoy a mix from the food stalls that

start opening around 8 p.m. and have it on the beach while watching the sunset. Most of the places on the beach have a nice view but also a puzzling mix of western fast food that seems a shame to eat instead of the amazing local cuisine.



The only thing that did concern me was the number of boats and jetskis that were whizzing around on the water, coupled with the lack of lifeguards or segregation from swimmers. We didn't witness any incidents however so I was probably worrying for nothing! There wasn't too much else to do here, so it was the perfect place to relax and revitalise ourselves after all the travelling we had done over the last two weeks.

Of all the things that impacted me in these few days, probably the two main ones are those related to the trip to the airport before leaving. I had noticed a few times that the cows had all their companion cattle egret by their side. One actually had it on their head and not having my phone ready to immortalise that in a picture to show you is another big regret of this trip. I don't know you, but this symbiotic relationship always fascinated me since when, as a little kid at school, I learnt about it. I had never seen these two animals together and I don't think I had ever seen water buffaloes either.



Well, the reason why I love this pair has probably to do with language, what a surprise. In Italian, the name for the cattle egret is *airone guardabuoi*, which literally is look-after-cows egret or, as I usually translate it, cows' caretaker egret. I just find it incredibly poetic, that's all. Well, here comes the other impacting thing: I was looking out of the car window to get a better picture of this strange couple, and I saw a dead buffalo in the middle of a field, not abandoned there, it looked as if it had just happened, it was lying there, the legs up in the air. I got hit all of a sudden by the fact that in most fields there was only one animal, probably all that the families could afford, and I felt sad for this family. I know, it is a sad note, but sometimes we forget about the actual reality of the countries we visit as we only see the tourist side.

Not wanting to spoil your enjoyment of this post any longer, I will also say that we were lucky enough to many cute animals much more alive and jumping about. This last part of the trip included Mr Wander's birthday and he chose a few tours as presents. We booked them both with [Dev's Adventure Tours](#) and we highly recommend them. Their tours offer some of the main things we like: Respect for the environment and immersion in nature. Our first choices were the Jungle Trek Evening Walk and the Sea Safari, but the second one is only offered with a minimum of bookings and we had to change it for the Mangrove Boat Trip.

Evening Jungle Trek



The Jungle Trek is nice and relaxed enough, you get picked up at your hotel and the tour lasts approximately 3 h starting at 5 p.m. at the Berjaya Langkawi resort, and starts with a two-hour trek through the forest behind. Similar to the treks we had done in Penang and the Cameron Highlands, there wasn't a distinct path so our guide was most definitely appreciated! We walked up through the trees, with our guide stopping regularly to point out different species of plants and animals. Before the trek had even started we managed to spot a Dusky-eyed Leaf Monkey, along with our usual entourage of macaques.



We learnt a lot about the environment and the species of trees and animals, and we also saw a spiky tree that is still used for corporal punishment in Malaysia. But the most interesting thing of all (and I remind you that I had fluffy squirrels flying above my head) was to learn about the Bintangor Tree and its importance in trying to find a cure for HIV.



The last section of the trek was completed in ever-decreasing light levels as dusk started becoming night. Once back at the resort, we now spent another hour looking for the nocturnal inhabitants of the area and our reason for booking the evening tour.

In the tour description you are not guaranteed to see all the local animal stars but we were lucky enough to see them all: The colugo (also known as flying lemur despite the fact that it is neither a lemur nor flies), the red giant flying squirrel and the pygmy flying squirrel. Now, I'd love to show you photos, but my choice was between seeing them and trying to get a picture and missing them, so I have to admit I am not sorry I didn't get any shots!

It was such a wonderful sight to see them leap from branches and spread their legs to open the skin between them that allows them to glide, and it was very surprising to see the speeds and distances that they are able to glide for. Unfortunately it was too dark to be able to capture any photos or video footage, but it was so fantastic to see that I don't think I'll ever forget it.

Along with the squirrels and lemurs, we also saw a few other creatures of the night. A few geckos were spotted clinging to the outsides of the chalets, and bats could also be heard flying above our heads. This tour was an incredible insight into the flora and fauna of Langkawi, and an excellent chance to see two different environments at once. Trekking through the jungle really did feel like true exploring, and the accompanying commentary was very informative and entertaining. To then be able to see nocturnal life for animals on the island was a real privilege, something which we certainly couldn't have done without the help of our guide. I would recommend this tour to absolutely everyone that goes to Langkawi, and this alone was enough to make this a very special birthday present.

Mangrove Boat Tour

The Mangrove Boat Trip is a longer trip and a more relaxed one in some ways. The tour starts at 9:30 a.m. and finishes around

3 p.m. and includes a few stops. From your hotel you are transferred to Kilim Geoforest Park. Langkawi Island is all protected as UNESCO Geopark and Kilim Karst Geoforest Park is one of the three geoforest parks associated with the Langkawi Geopark. From there, you walk to where your boat is and start your tour.



The boat was a similar style to the one we had taken to Monkey Beach in Penang, just slightly larger to accommodate more people. Again it was an exhilarating ride, which was made all the more exciting by the narrower passageways through the mangroves. We stopped a few times along the way to witness some of the natural features and wildlife of the area.





The first one is the Bats' Cave, Gua Kelawar in Malay, where your tour guide will take you around and will explain a bit about the wildlife: The macaques, the mudskippers, and the crabs outside and the different kinds of bats inside.



You will also learn more about stalactites, stalagmites, and more rock formations, but after reading about the Batu Caves in our chapter about Kuala Lumpur you know enough already. Some of the stalactites have interesting shapes, such a frog or

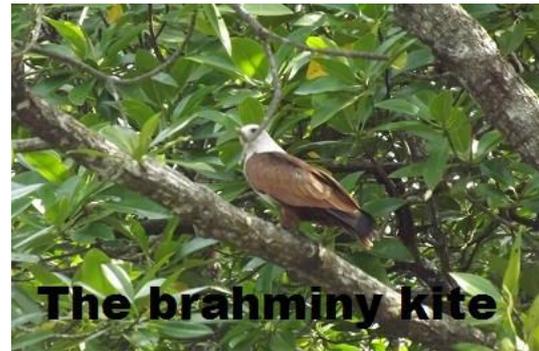
a snake, and you can also see a beautiful column formed by a stalactite and stalagmite joined together.



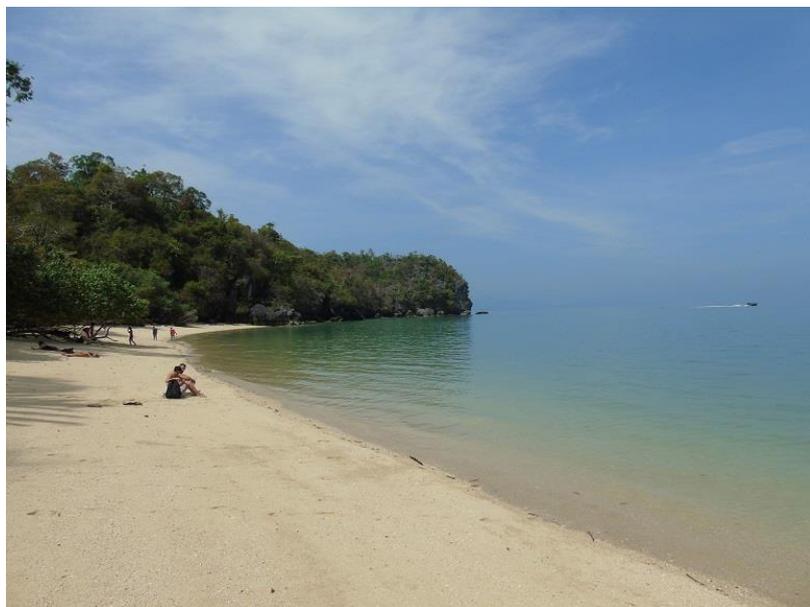
Outside the cave, you see the mangroves at their best at low tide with all the roots on sight, but you can also see the living fossil, a plant called cycad that exists since before the dinosaurs. After this stop, you get on the boat again to cruise along the river and see more wildlife, especially the monitor lizards which apparently, thanks to my growing up in a Campidanese house with massive garden, I am scarily good at spotting! We also saw a few snakes that we are not sure to this day whether they were real or not as they never moved during the 10 minutes we were there, with our guides under the branches they were on.



This tours also takes you to see the eagles but doesn't feed them, a main point for us when we booked. Now, this is a controversial point. For a long time, tour guides used to feed the eagles to attract them and, consequently, attract tourists. When this practice was deemed not environmentally friendly and the feeding stopped, it had gone on for too long and the birds were not able to hunt anymore because they hadn't done it for generations and the mothers couldn't teach the young ones. The birds started starving and now there is a set amount of food they can be provided. It is beautiful to see them, but our obsession with having this kind of experiences is nonsensical, what is the point if it is not natural at all anymore? By forcing animals, we are not enjoying them in their natural environment or learning how they live, we are just abusing them! Please always look up your tour companies and support those that respect the environment. The two species we saw are the white-bellied sea eagle and the brahmyny kite, and this second one is said to give the name to the archipelago, as *lang* is a contraction of the word eagle in Malay and *kawi* is the reddish colour of the animal's feathers.



After this we took the boat out onto the open sea in search of a secluded beach, which happily we found. Seeing the fishing boats at work with a few Thai islands in the background was a wonderful sight, especially as the water was so calm and clear. The beach was not too big, but thanks to its location it was not busy at all with just a few people there from another tour. The sand had a rich yellow hue and it was very soft and clean, and it's the first time I would have described the water in Malaysia as inviting. It was so calm, clear, and warm that it was impossible not to go for a swim. As always our macaque friends were on hand to remind us not to leave our belongings unattended for too long, and our boat only stopped for about half an hour, but I would have happily stayed there all day.



The final stop after a thrilling ride back into the mangroves was a floating restaurant and fish farm. We came around a corner to find a whole floating village, with a number of restaurants and what I assume were houses for the people that worked

here. We stopped at the Hole in the Wall for a traditional meal which, due to their proximity, had a definite Thai influence to it. We enjoyed our first tom yum soup followed by fried rice (*nasi goreng*) with choice of fish or chicken. The meal was very tasty although having the floor moving underneath was a little unnerving! Afterwards we were given the opportunity to have a look around the adjoining fish farm. This is something I could quite happily have missed, as seeing the fish swimming in circles and thrashing around in small enclosures was a bit depressing and not the best way to finish the tour. But it wasn't quite the end and we still had another wonderful ride with incredible scenery back to the jetty. Again this is a tour I would highly recommend, and all thoughts of having missed out on the sea safari tour were strictly behind us.



As the two tours are quite different, the dressing code also is: Long trousers and T-shirt, possibly white, with comfortable hiking shoes for the jungle trek; swimming suit under shorts and T-shirt, hat or cap, and flip flops for the boat tour. In both cases, plenty of insect repellent, and sunscreen and a towel for the boat tour. You always receive bottled water included and a nice tip is to spray insect repellent on your shoes so termites don't attack you. We are planning a post about what to bring on holidays and what to wear, so we will write more about that soon.

I think there is not much more to say about this trip apart from thanking our two guides, Jerome and Ciro (I hope I am spelling the names correctly, I apologise if I am not!). I definitely have a soft spot for Langkawi.



Well that's about all we got up to on Langkawi, but there is still lots of other activities and sights that we didn't have the chance to see or do. This also brings us to the end of our Malaysian adventure, as after this we took a flight back to Kuala Lumpur for one last day before catching our return flight to London. It really was an incredible trip with so many wonderful memories, and discoveries that we have brought back with us (such as our new-found love for fried noodles!). The contrasts of this country are what makes it so special, from changes in the landscape and nature to the varying mixes of cultures that are subtly yet noticeably different wherever you go. We are certainly not finished with Malaysia though, as there is so much more to explore and discover there. I cannot wait to go back to see the east coast of the peninsula (I've heard and seen great things of the Perhentian Islands) and a trip around Borneo is another on the wish-list. And now we know how friendly and welcoming the locals are, and how much we enjoy their culture and traditions, our appetite for more couldn't be stronger!

I love Malaysia and I am a bit sad about the contrasts I have seen, mainly related to environment and economy, and these contrasts were even more evident and impacting in Langkawi, but maybe also for that I have fell in love with this place so much.

Malaysian food



It seems to be that I have a problem of noodle addiction, but I say that the problem is that I don't have enough noodles! Now, trying to be serious, Malaysia was heaven for someone like me who loves noodles, but there is more to Malaysian food than just that. In this chapter, I will try and list what we think are the main dishes so you have a rough idea of what to expect.

First of all, and a bit of a rant, the word to learn is *goreng*, fried, as anything can be *goreng*. Once you know that, you just have to choose your dish:

Bihun goreng are rice fried noodles, sometimes also called glass fried noodles. The recipes may vary but it usually includes chicken, shrimps or other seafood, and veggies (usually carrots, beansprouts, and mustard greens). If they are topped with crispy onions, they are one of the best things in the world! In some cases you can choose between chicken, seafood, or beef.



The same recipe can be done with egg noodles, **mee goreng**, or with rice, **nasi goreng**. If you like flat rice noodles, **kway teow**, then **Char kway teow** is your dish, it is quite spicy and

has sausage, prawns, and blood cockles, together with the usual vegetables.



Nasi lemak is one of the Malaysian food icons, rice cooked in coconut water and pandan leaves to give it more flavour and wrapped in banana leaves. The street stalls serve them like that, wrapped in banana leaves only or sometimes also with some paper. The traditional recipe is with anchovies, egg, and peanut, but I had it with chicken and, once again, it is extremely spicy.



Satay is another Malaysian icon, usually chicken seasoned bites skewered, barbecued, and served with peanut sauce. It is usually served with cucumber, onion, and **nasi impit**, compressed sticky rice. Satay is Mr Wander's favourite and he even posed as a chef.



Another icon that is similar in the neighbouring countries as well and you can find with different names (and one of the two discoveries I named in the main post) is **roti canai**, a flatbread that is inspired by Indian cuisine and it is amazing to see in preparation as the dough is worked to a thin layer that looks like see-through silk, it is lovely by itself or to go with your meat. The other discovery is **murukku**, another Indian inspired recipe that kept us going for the 272 steps to the Dark Cave. It is a curly, crunchy dough deep fried and shaped like nests. It is made of a mix of flours and has several seeds although the main flavour you will taste is cumin; it is probably going to be one of the oiliest things you will ever try!



The street stalls offer you a big choice of snacks that you can easily buy and eat on the go such as **banana fritters** (battered bananas), **banana balls** (deep fried balls of banana bread dough), **curry puffs** (small pasties filled with curry vegetables), and all kinds of skewers: Sausages of all flavours, squid, fish, and so on.

Your dessert is also sorted: **Aiskrim goreng** is fried ice cream and it basically is a scoop of ice cream battered and deep fried.



You will find plenty of fruit in the street stalls, whole or already peeled and cut. You cannot miss the king of kings, the **durian**, apparently the nation's symbol and worst enemy at the same time. There are stalls that only sell durian as it is extremely loved, but due to its strong, sweet smell that stays for days, it is forbidden on buses and public transport, and in most accommodations. Many hotels fine you if you bring it in your room and, believe me, they will know. We saw a bit of agitation when we went back to the hotel in Langkawi one afternoon and we could smell durian as soon as we entered in the lift. We could smell it everywhere, including when we reached our floor, where a few staff members were walking about to find the guilty room.



Your drink is a no brainer: **Teh tarik**, an incredibly sweet tea mixed with condensed milk. The tea making is incredible, my biggest regret is not to have asked the guy in Penang if I could take a video of him preparing teh tarik, but Youtube always assists us in this and you can find a few videos where you can see how it is done. After preparing the tea, about a third is poured in the cup and then the rest is filled with water and a generous spoonful of condensed milk, then stirred, and transferred a few times from the cup to a jug and vice versa. It is amazing to see as they transfer the tea keeping the jugs apart to cool down the tea and to create the froth on the top.



As you can imagine, Tiger is one of the most popular beers, but alcoholic beverages are not too common and they are not generally served in food places. If they are, they are quite expensive compared to the rest.



One thing I would like to say to conclude, trying to avoid taking an activist position about what is good and what is bad for the environment and what products and brands to avoid, I will just say that it is quite hard to adjust your specific dietary requirements, both for allergies and for principles.

What to pack



How many times we have heard that, when packing for holidays, we should do a pile with all the clothes we want to bring and one with the money we think we will need, and then we should take half the clothes and double the money? Well, it is usually true, without piling the money, that is not handy at all. For most of our holidays in 2017 we have spent a lot more than our budget and we haven't packed too wisely, although our trip to Malaysia was not too badly planned. Let's see what to bring for a two-week holiday in Malaysia

Shorts



At least a pair, you will need them for the boat tours. If you like to wear them when visiting, pack two to three pairs, but remember that women will need them to cover their knees in some places like the Batu Caves. Capris are also fine, but choose them wisely, I bought a pair (see them in the following picture) that were just in between sizes for me and they were not too comfortable for some activities as they ended up being too tight on the knees when sitting.



Trousers



A few pairs of trekking trousers, joggers, or tracksuit bottoms, as to hike in the rainforest you will need long trousers. I was extremely comfortable with my old tracksuit bottoms as I

prefer to carry my stuff in a bag and I don't mind not having pockets too much; Mr Wander, on the other hand, prefers trek stretch trousers as they have plenty of pockets. Keeping in mind that it is muddy in many places and that not every accommodation offers a laundry service, you will need two (if you also use shorts) or three pairs (if you only use long trousers for your excursions) in order to have time to wash them if you get covered in mud as we did in the Mossy Forest.

Tops



It is hot and you won't be able to reuse the ones you used in your trekking trips. Pack eight or ten but be prepared to have to wash a few, I prefer that to over-packing. Choose white clothes when possible, mine are mostly purple, black, and blue, but it is better to have light coloured clothes in order not to attract insects, you don't want them to think you are a flower!

Smart-casual attire

I am always for packing a nicer shirt and a comfortable skirt that I know I can use a few times just to go around in the city. The classic little black dress will always come in handy, I have a stretchy LBD that doesn't need ironing and is pretty plain and can work during the day or for a nice night out. I had a jumpsuit and I also bought one there but, if you want to wear

it to travel, remember that it is comfortable but you need to undress completely if you need to use the ladies' room, and that may not be handy when carrying a few layers.

Underwear and socks

Pack many pairs, one per each day at least, and plan on having to wash them anyway as you may end up so soaked in mud that your underwear is also muddy! If you use your underwear depending on what clothes you are wearing (I couldn't see myself with a black bra showing from a white top for example), pack accordingly. I took with me three white and three black bras to have time to wash them after hiking and to swap them without stressing my little colour-obsessed brain!

Jackets



Plan for all kinds of weather but without overdoing it. You will need a warm jumper, hoodie, or cardigan for the means of transport and for the Cameron Highlands, and a rain jacket. I have a trench coat that looks like the one Inspector Gadget uses and I decided not to buy a new item; all in all, I am happy

with the choice, it is not lightweight or easy to pack as a rain jacket but it is long and covers most of my thighs if worn normally or my backpack and my bust if worn as a cape (this was my favourite way of using it as I wouldn't sweat and still be protected). We carried an umbrella just in case as we could also use it to protect us from the sun as well but I don't think we used it at all.

Swimming suits and accessories

Depending on how many days at the beach you have and on accommodations with swimming pools, I would say have at least two so you can have one drying while you use the other one. We took goggles as we knew we had a swimming pool and also we wanted to make sure we could have a look underwater if needed, they are pretty small and light, and won't affect your luggage allowance. Here I am, posing with my going-to-the-beach outfit:



Scarves and hats

Yes to both as the scarf can cover your shoulders when visiting a place of worship or just when getting sunburned outside or too cold in public transport. The hat, obviously, is great while

exploring as even in the forest the sun filters through the branches. Choose one with a wide brim to protect your neck as well.



Bags

Have a small backpack to carry your bottle of water, your sunscreen, and your insect repellent as you need to have those always with you. I had a smart handbag as well for the days out in the city as this one was light and easy to flatten, but I realised it was not the best quality of eco-leather as I ended up with brown marks around my shoulders; a tote bag is your best choice.

Now some serious piece of advice on bags: Pack wisely your daily bag, I am rubbish at that, I always carry a 50000 mAh power bank as if I were to take days of time lapse videos, a camera, my phone, the water and all the usual things I would have in my handbag at home. As a result, I have felt overwhelmed a few times as the heat was too much when combined with the weight of my backpack. Carry a bottle of water; a small power bank if you use your phone for pictures, the single charge ones are pretty light, although you will probably have enough with a full charge for most days; tissues and wet wipes or hand sanitiser as, I'll say it once again, you will end up covered in mud more than you would wish.

Shoes



Your trekking shoes will be your best friends, as they usually are when exploring. Do not buy new ones for your trip or, if you do, use them a few times before travelling, walk in them for a few hours in order for your feet to get used to them and for the shoes to adapt to your feet, you don't want blisters when climbing to reach the Mossy Forest. Trainers are also a good idea as most routes are not as hard as to require hiking shoes, but again use old trainers that you don't mind damaging, a couple in our Mossy Forest tour were wearing brand new tote trainers and we saw the horror in their eyes when they saw the mud in front of us.

Flip-flops are another unmissable item; as I don't like walking bare feet but most accommodations ask you to take your shoes off, I had a pair to use just indoors and one for going out. I also had a pair of sandals (see them in the picture above with one of my jumpsuits) to go with my smart-casual outfit but you can definitely use your flip-flops and pack one pair of shoes less. If you decide to bring this extra pair, try not to go for ballerinas or completely flat shoes as your back should always have the support of a 3-4 cm heel, especially when walking a lot.



Towels

One microfibre bath towel will take up little space and will save you in some cases, they are very light as well. We also brought a beach towel although our last accommodation provided towels for the beach and the swimming pool; it is handy to have one especially for the boat tour. Remember to pack your microfibre towel or a hand towel in your hand luggage as most airports have showers and you can refresh yourself if you have a long stopover.

Toiletries

Don't overdo it, I am guilty of that but I am improving and I took almost just what was needed this time. Most accommodations offer basic toiletries, so just pack a travel size shower gel and shampoo for the airport and emergencies,

toothpaste and toothbrush, deodorant and perfume although you can skip this one as it is not the best idea in the forest, sweet smells attract insects and you don't want it to conflict with the insect repellent anyway. I always pack a few emergency things such as plasters, disinfectant, manicure set, and sewing kit. If you wear make-up, make sure it is long lasting and with sun protection factor as the sweat will try its resistance. I don't use wipes anymore for removing my make-up as they are hard on your skin and create too much waste, but I have carried them on this trip as I had a few packs I bought before switching; your best choice is some detergent and cotton pads.

Sunscreen and insect repellent

It doesn't matter the colour of your skin, wear sunscreen every day, not just on holidays, as melanoma is one of the most common cancers. SPF between 15 and 30 is perfect and will provide you with the best possible protection; 50 SPF makes no real difference according to [this article](#). We usually buy the spray bottles as they are a lot handier and can be easily applied in a moment as the product is never too thick and can be spread evenly.

The insect repellent can be strong or extra strong, you don't have too many problems in the areas we have visited. Doctors still advise to apply sunscreen first and insect repellent after in order not to reduce the effects of the latter, but remember that this will lower the efficacy of the sun protection. The combo products with both, apparently, are not as effective as the two separate products.



More details: We use cruelty free toiletries and make-up and you can find many brands that suit your needs, but most of our toiletries are Superdrug own brand and we were quite happy even with their insect repellent. Talking about make-up, most of my products are produced by [The Green People](#) and I am quite happy with the foundation, the powder, and the blush as they let my skin breath, don't contain talc and SLS, and the first two have SPF 15; their mascara is not my favourite as it smudges a bit but I can't offer a good alternative at the moment; my eyeliner and eye pencil are not cruelty free as I bought them over two years ago, they last very long, and I don't want to throw them away and add to waste, I will keep you posted as soon as I finish them, almost there now.

Detergent

I have decided to carry a travel size toiletry bottle filled with clothes detergent and I suggest you do the same.

Tissues and wet wipes

Carry a few packs of tissues for your bags although you will have tissue boxes in the rooms, and a travel size hand sanitiser if possible, or wet wipes if not, as you may often find basins near the temples but it is for worshippers and you shouldn't use them to refresh yourself after a hike.

Small appliances



I usually don't go out without drying my hair even when it is hot as it only takes me 2 minutes. I brought a hair dryer with me and my hair straightener, both travel size, and I suggest you do the same as most budget accommodations don't include these kinds of appliances.

We didn't carry tablets or any other devices apart from our phones and our cameras but we carried a small extension lead as sometimes accommodations have few sockets. Malaysia have the same sockets as the UK, so no need for adaptors but you should consider carrying one if your appliances come from different countries.

It may sound like we had too much, but we each had a big backpack that weighted about 11 kg and a smaller one as hand luggage of about 7 kg, which were pretty easy to carry up and down the stairs when no lift was available. Our biggest worry was space but our 60 l bags were enough. My small backpack can be attached to the front of the big one but I found it too complicated to carry as I can't keep balance, I preferred to carry the small one in front instead.



One last suggestion, especially if your blood type is O, which makes you vulnerable to insect bites more than anyone else, try to avoid sugary drinks (I know you can't resist teh tarik but try to avoid it at least when hiking) and drink black tea and coffee without sugar as that makes your blood bitter and insects don't like that!

This brings us to the end of our travels and tips from Malaysia, we really hope you have enjoyed reading this e-book and that you have found it useful. We also hope that it has helped you to have an incredible time in this wonderful country, as we did. We'd love to hear your views and experiences of Malaysia, and your opinions of this e-book, so please feel free to get in touch with us.

Mr Wander & Ms Lust

