

REGARDS

MALAYSIA



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REGARDS



# MALAYSIA

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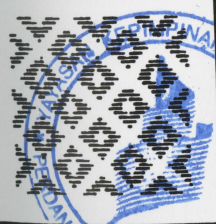
Malaysia, a country of many facets and cultures	4
The great pages of Malaysia's history	16
A dynamic and fast changing economy	36
Kuala Lumpur, the garden city	48
The peninsula's great mountain resorts	72
Malacca, the keeper of the Straits	80
Penang, The mosaic island	96
Kedah and the 99 islands of Langkawi	112
The East coast	121
Johor	136
Sarawak	148
Sabah	176

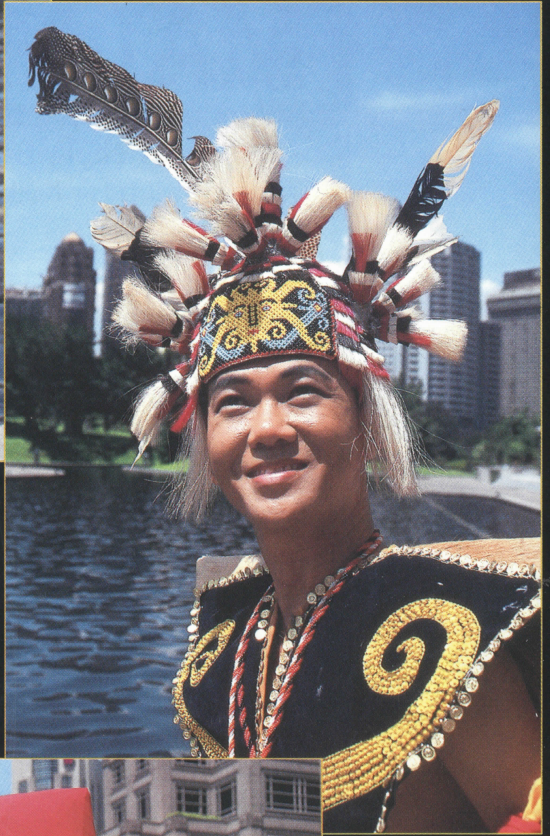
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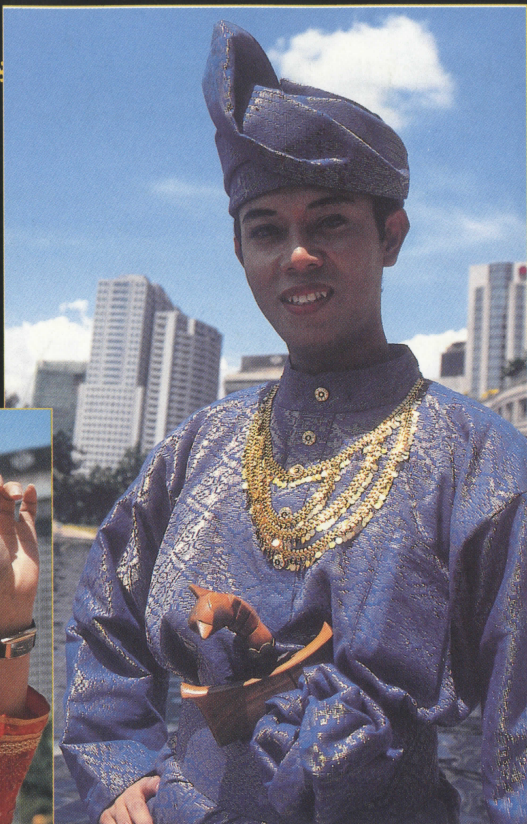
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# MALAYSIA

## A country of many facets and cultures but so authentic

In recent years, Malaysia's great economic development has often been mentioned and the country has taken its place amongst the Southeast Asian Tigers, a position it is very proud of. A great number of western businesses are choosing Kuala-Lumpur as their regional office to win the Pacific-Asian markets. They are attracted by Malaysia's efficiency, multilingualism and its high tech skills, the corner stone of the country's modern economy. Malaysia, a key trading centre between East and West, has developed remarkable infrastructures: thoroughly modern ports, huge international airports, an impressive road network linking north and south, Thailand to Singapore in just a few hours. Malaysia is relentlessly marching forward with all the dynamism and will it can muster to achieve its dream, its vision for the year 2020, to become a member of the developed nations. But Malaysia is not willing to compromise its identity. Now more than ever, it is proud of its three civilisations, Malay, Indian and Chinese, the oldest in Asia. It is also pleased at having integrated in its culture the traditions of the indigenous tribes of Sarawak and Sabah. It has not forgotten either, its Portuguese, Dutch and British connections which at the time of the trading posts developed its merchant vocation.

*Selamat datang ke Malaysia*  
**Welcome to Malaysia**

A nice greeting heard everywhere in this country with the smile and colours of Asia.

Let us discover together the Malaysia that has successfully given itself a multicultural identity, an advantage it is proud of. It brings is great tolerance, open-mindedness, charm, uniqueness, colours, perfumes, celebrations and a rich architectural heritage. The local cuisine reflects all the flavours of its origins and the spices of Asia.

Islam is the official religion in Malaysia. However, each community has its sanctuaries. Mosques, Buddhist or Hindu temples, churches are all more beautiful than the others.

Malaysia respects all creeds and celebrates all feasts: the Muslim Hari Raya at the end of the Ramadan, the Chinese New Year, Dipavali, the Indian feast of Lights, Christmas...The Malaysian calendar is a succession of holidays. The Malaysians love to celebrate and

dance, to sing traditional songs and to go to the theatre to see the great Indian and Thai myths played.

To welcome its increasing number of visitors, Malaysians put on exquisite gold and silver embroidered costumes and gold jewellery, to the image of their many cultures. They wear sarongs and songkets and an extraordinary turban, the *tengkolok*. The wrapping of the turban is an art full of meaning. The Chinese wear silk tunics and the Indians saris. The traditional costumes of the indigenous tribes are also very colourful and varied as we will see when we discover Sarawak and Sabah.

One of Malaysia's greatest feast day is beautifully called, *citrawarna parade* or the colour parade. Colours in Malaysia are splendid. Yellow is the colour of royalty, green is that of the jungle, the paddy fields and the mountains, red is the colour of the houses and the Chinese temples, gold and saffron are the Thai and Buddhist temples and blue is the colour of the seas and lagoons which are so magnificent in Malaysia.

Malaysia also likes to celebrate, with great pomp and ceremony, nature and its wonders: the gene-

rous waterfalls and rivers, the emerald paddy fields and the harvests. Nothing has been forgotten of the myths and mysteries of the forest, of the traditions, the know how and the superstitions of the indigenous tribes. Their way of life is respected while they are eased gradually into modern society.

Many have become keepers in the marvellous national parks, the real jewels of Malaysia. Better than anyone, they can guide the tourists who have come to discover, observe and explore the jungle, its animals, its trees and unique vegetation. Trekking, climbing, canoeing and rafting are only some of the ways of discovering the jungle. One can be an explorer at heart without wanting to take unnecessary risks. However, those keen on adventure can go on jungle challenges (the Trans Borneo or the Rainforest International Challenge), climbing expeditions, rapid shooting and potholing.

Malaysia offers a variety of less strenuous activities to suit all tastes, and one can safely go camping, fishing or for a simple picnic. A sensible programme of eco-tourism was set up to allow tourists and Malaysians to discover with their family the natural environment, the life in the villages and the plantations.



## The Oldest Forests in the World



One of Malaysia's major concerns at the moment is the preservation of its natural environment, rightly considered by scientists and Malaysians as a true sanctuary. Malaysia has the oldest rainforests in the world (130 million year old), a jungle where thousands of unknown species grow and live.

There are 7,000 different species of insects and 15000 different flowers including many orchids, the *rafflesia*, the biggest flower in the world, and the *nepenthes*, this incredible carnivorous flower which traps the insects that land attracted by its water reserves. There are also 290 species of mammals, some of which are extremely rare. It is home to many amazing birds like the hornbills, thousands of butterflies flutter over the rivers (281 different species). Here, at the heart of the rainforest, the trees are 200 m tall.

There is an amazing biodiversity and profusion of life due, quite probably, to the isolation it has

enjoyed for so long. The forest which covers two thirds of the Malay Peninsula and the Island of Borneo where Malaysia has its two largest states, Sarawak and Sabah, had seen no intrusion until the last two decades. The first explorations in many of the Malaysian forests were carried out between 1975 and 1985.

Between Malaysia's East and West coasts there is the jungle and a mountain range that culminates at Gunung Kerbau at 2,182 m. Two roads were built quite recently to link east and west. The roads from Kuala-Lumpur to Kuantan and from Kota-Bharu to Grik run beautifully across the forest and mountains. The best way of discovering the Borneo rainforest is by sailing down the rivers. On the Peninsula as well as on the island of Borneo, the indigenous tribes continue to lead a traditional life contributing to the authenticity of Malaysia and its many charms which we will discover throughout the book.



Exporting wood has always been one of Malaysia's thriving industries. Now, however, the country is really concerned with protecting its rainforest and has decided to preserve more than half of its territory as Permanent Forest Estates, national parks and nature reserves. The rubber and palm tree plantations represent 14% of the territorial surface. Malaysia is today the world's main exporter of palm oil.

The mountains also form a natural sanctuary with their high, needle-like, pointed peaks. The strange limestone rocks were eroded by the ocean waters millions of years ago and then by the monsoon rains. Whole tribes used to live in their gaping deep caves. Most of the caves dates from the Stone Age,

some at Sarawak are over 60 million years old. Deer Cave in the Mulu National Park at Sarawak is one of the biggest in South East Asia and Clearwater Cave is the longest at 51.5 km. The caves in Malaysia have some of the most beautiful natural sculptures with huge stalactites and stalagmites, the results of the forest's high humidity levels. There are also wall paintings at Niah, fossilised animals in the walls at Gua Harimau (Kinta Valley), temples and statues of Buddha and other gods built in the rocks.

Batu Caves, near Kuala Lumpur, is very impressive with its long staircase leading to the temple. It is the annual venue for the Thaipusam pilgrimage, an extraordinary experience!

## The National Parks A Paradise for Nature and Adventure Enthusiasts

In Malaysia, it is possible to walk at the top of the jungle, on metal gangways that look like bridges suspended 200 or 300 m high. Perched at the top, we see the trees' struggle for light and watch their green, and tawny blue hill-like tops. In the national parks, even the forest floor is protected from the shuffling of feet.

Miles and miles of wooden foot bridges follow the banks of the rivers, cross over the falls and dive into the huge green microcosm of the forest.

At Sepilok in Sabah, or in the Semenjooh Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in Sarawak, we sometimes meet on a footbridge a dewy eyed female orang utan holding her baby. This encounter can last a long time, one observing the other, without any animosity. Further along a much larger male specimen, often called the King, jumps from branch to branch with surprising agility for its size, without seeming to rush towards the fruit left by the gamekeepers to supplement its diet.

Malaysia's largest national park is Taman Negara. In the centre of the Peninsula, its 4 343 km<sup>2</sup> straddles three states: Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang. The visitors can indulge in various activities. Many observation posts have been set up above clearings, near rivers or drinking holes to watch the animals quench their thirst or restore their salt reserves by eating the salt loafs left nearby by the keepers.



*An orang utan mother and baby*

Those keen on thrilling sensations can go rafting on the Sungai Tembeling, a magnificent river with seven turbulent rapids. Anglers will enjoy the large and peaceful lakes of Sungai Kenyan so full of fish.

Trekking and climbing enthusiasts will need nine days to reach Gunung Tahan, one of the highest peaks in Malaysia. It is a long walk across the jungle and along the crests where they can discover many animals: *seladangs* (wild buffaloes), tapirs, boars, *muntjacs* (a kind of deer) and the many monkeys that will deafen them with their screams and tireless games, especially in the morning (long tailed macaques, gibbons and siamangs...). They

can also discover the calaas, one of the most extraordinary birds amongst the 280 different species present in the park. There are also tigers, leopards, elephants and Sumatra rhinos in the park, although they are seldom seen.

Kenong Park, close to Taman Negara but much smaller, always attracts visitors with its wonderful waterfalls, especially the spectacular Tujuh Tingkat. Along the river Kenong, that has given its name to the park, there are many caves screened by trees or bamboo. A very special orchid hangs on these screens, the *pokok ara*, as well as other climbers, parasite plants of course, that make the valley a fantastic setting. In the flooded paddy fields, water lilies add a touch of magic to this timeless landscape. Fairies are supposed to have made it

their kingdom by bringing up on the foothills of Bukit Batu Kapur, whose ascension is a challenge even for the most experienced, a mysterious creature, Kambing Gunrun. It is often mentioned, although very few have seen it. The Kenong Valley is full of myths and legends.

Endau Rompin is the third national park on the Peninsula. Straddling the Pahang and the Johor, its jungle was not explored until the mid 1980s. It is a haven for many unique species of animals and plants, like the fan palm tree, the *phychorapia singaporensis* whose fronds look like feathers, the climbing bamboo and colourful toadstools. In the rivers, at the foot of the waterfalls, we can swim amongst the myriad of butterflies and catch a glimpse of some beautiful dwarf deer.

### **The island of Borneo has some of the most beautiful national parks in Malaysia, the most amazing caves and a truly authentic tribal life**

In Sarawaka, the parks are all very different. Mulu National Park can be reached by plane from Miri. It is an interesting flight that reveals these strange sharp peaks at the top of Gunung Api, carved by 5 million years of rain. Mulu is also known for its caves, the largest in Asia: Deer Cave with its 190 m waterfall and Clearwater Cave.

The hills of Lambir that look more like craggy cliffs form another national park near Miri, where ornithologists have set up many observation posts. Nearly one hundred different species have been counted. From the elevated pathways and suspended footbridges we can see the waterfalls, gibbons, magnificent palm trees such as the lincuala or the eugeissona with its striking roots, arums, wonderful ferns, ground orchids and vines. The park has the most amazing flora. There is yet another national park in the Miri area, the Loagan Bunut National Park set around the largest lake in Sarawak.

Niah Caves, between Miri and Bintulu, is one of the largest and oldest set of caves in the world. The skeleton of a prehistoric man was found there. Paintings were discovered on the walls of the great cave where local inhabitants still come to find the bird nests



they sell at exorbitant prices to the Japanese. They also collect bats', insects and animals droppings to make guano. On the footbridges we often see the men with their heavy sacks, full of the precious harvest, on their back.

Similajau Park stretches from the coast to the heart of the forest. It has a different flora and fauna. There are storks and mangrove crocodiles. In the distance we guess the dolphins and porpoises, green turtles come to lay their eggs on the beaches.

Those who like waterfalls must go to the Ganung Gading National Park or to Kubah National Park, also rich in orchids and palm trees. Malaysia continues to open parks and the latest is Tanjung Datu National Park, near the border between Sarawak and Indonesia, with wonderful beaches and beautiful rivers.

But it is Bako National Park that offers the most spectacular cliffs, carved by erosion, their foot in the sea, the light filling them with the most amazing figures and colours. By sailing round the bays or from the top of the cliffs covered by strange trees and plants that grow through the sandstone, we can see the



*Nepenthes*



wonderful mangrove edge. The monkeys make light of tourists by crossing at full speed the 30 km of marked tracks that lead to the Telok Tajor waterfalls or to the splendid deserted beaches.

At Batang Ali National Park, the Hilton Hotel towers over a large lake. It is well worth spending a couple of days there to visit the small Iban villages with their famous longhouses that grow with the family, up to 100 people sometimes. The Ibans' traditional hospitality is an experience never forgotten by any visitor who has crossed their threshold.

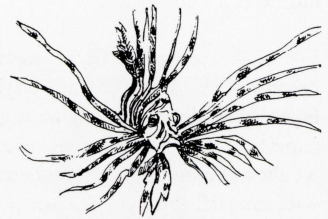
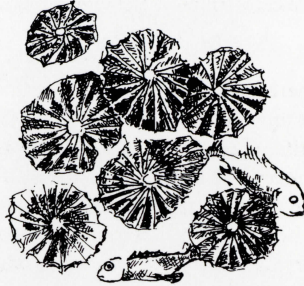
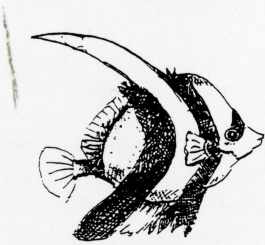
Sabah has two parks in the jungle. The Crocker Range, as indicated by its name, is made up of crag-

gy hills with dozens of rivers flowing down their sides. The Kinabalu Park reaches the top of the mountain, the highest in Southeast Asia at 4101 m.

Every year, thousands of visitors climb to the top (it takes at least two days) to discover the breathtaking landscapes and the unique vegetation.

However, by driving to the park's entrance, we can have a magnificent view of the Kinabalu in a wonderful setting of tree ferns. But this must be done early in the day, as it is quickly hidden by the rising mist. At the park entrance, the magnificent botanical garden is an initiation to the plants that make its beauty: rare orchids, rhododendrons and nepenthes.

### Islands, beaches and spectacular underwater havens



Sabah is also marine parks made up of paradise islands. There is the Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park with its five dream islands, its long white sandy beaches and sparkling water where magnificent fish swim. Pulau Tiga is a natural coral reserve. The Turtle Islands Park is a chain of little islands surrounded by coral reefs. They are well known for the turtles that come to lay their eggs on the sandy beaches where they were born; green turtles between August and October and shell turtles between February and April.

The Malaysian coastline is almost 5 000 km long. It is surrounded by several seas: the Andaman Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Straits of Malacca on the west coast, Sulu Sea and the South China Sea on the East coast. 600 km separates it from the Island of Borneo and Sarawak and Sabah. Lagoons and coral reefs line the East coast and surround the islands (*Pulau* in Malaysian), true paradise islands (the famous Tioman Island in the Pahang Marine Park, Sibul, Tengah, Tinggi, Besar, Rawa near

Mersing, Perhentian, Redang, Kapas and Tenggol on the coast of Terengganu, just to mention a few), destinations dreams are made of.

The coral reefs have generated a vast ecosystem where different life forms cohabit. Divers find sea horses, shellfish (huge clams), rocks, colourful fish and pink, green and brown coral and stony crimson coral or *tubastreas*, real coral flowers as delicate as sea fans. The *alycarian* is the size of a small shrub with many pink flowers where the rainbow coloured fish play a game of hide-and-seek. From the nearby madrepora, colourful coral cod, lip or squirrel fish dart out. Further out, there will be groupers, barracudas, manta rays. A wonderful world that needs to be preserved should we want to continue to help mankind. In the marine parks, scuba diving and underwater photography are allowed but fishing, coral picking, water-skiing or boating over the coral reefs are of course prohibited. Sipadan, in Sabah, is one of the best diving sites in Far East Asia and the world.

On the peninsula's west coast, along the coast of Kedah, there is also a line of beautiful islands transformed into a marine park around the island of Payar, very attractive to divers. Langkawi and the 99 islands surrounding it with rocks and forests on a lagoon background create a real setting of legends. They have, in fact, become a highly sought after tourist destination for those wanting to relax in a spectacular setting, to practise water sports, to play golf and to go on long walks.

The island of Penang, the Pearl of the East, is one of the leading destination in Malaysia. A state and an island, it is connected to the continent by a bridge, a real work of art. Its capital, Georgetown, is very lively with many visitors coming to see the seat of many cultures: Chinese, Indian, Malay and Nyonyan and the old districts with their elegant colonial buildings. There are many hotels along the coast welcoming tourists from all over the world.

## Hundreds of reasons to visit Malaysia

Tourism in Malaysia is diversified. We can discover one of the most wonderful natural sanctuaries with its ancient sites, amongst the oldest in the world, unique species, animals which have become masters of camouflage and mimicry, strange plants and flowers and longhouse villages where tribes still lead a traditional life.

We can visit magnificent marine parks, go to resorts at the heart of the jungle, on mysterious lakes shrouded in mist, at high altitude or on superb beaches and visit extraordinary cities. Kuala Lumpur, the capital whose skyscrapers rival with magnificent trees, the jungle still having pride of place in the city. Malacca, the sleeping beauty whose monuments and Chinese houses unveil centuries of history. Penang, the island that has grown but successfully managed to keep its historic district where the heart of the large Chinese community beats in the temples.

Johor Bahru, facing Singapore and whose wonderful palaces and mosques were built by Sultan Abu Bakar in a strangely baroque style with sparkling blue tiled roofs and white walls. Kuching, along the river, is full of charm, Kota Kinabalu lies in a marine park at the foot of the most beautiful mountain in Asia.

Malaysia is full of marvellous things: palaces, sanctuaries, history at the heart of the small royal cities that can be discovered along the motorway that runs across miles and miles of oil palm plantations or jungle where sign posts asks us to watch out for tigers or elephants!

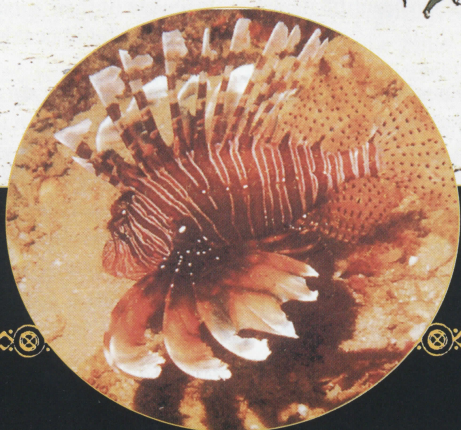
Malaysia is a large country with a surface of 330, 434 km<sup>2</sup>: a finger shaped peninsula, formerly

called Malaya, between Thailand and Singapore and two states in the north of Borneo : Sarawak and Sabah. There are 13 states in all in the Federation of Malaysia, the two we have mentioned and Johor, Pahang, Malacca, Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Perak, Penang, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu. In addition there are two federal territories: Kuala Lumpur, the capital and Lubuan, an island with a free port wide of Borneo.

Today, Malaysia has 22 million inhabitants. 58% are of Malay origin, 27% Chinese (Hakkens and Hakkas who came from southern China a few centuries ago), 9% Indian (mainly Tamils from southern India who came to work in the plantations during the last century). 6% are aborigines (the Orang Aslis) or indigenous (the Ibans, Dusuns, Bidayus, Kadazans, Melanaus, Bajaus and the Muruts from Sarawak and Sabah).

In spite of varied origins and identities, there is a very strong sense of unity. They are all Malaysian at heart but hold on to the cultural, religious traditions and crafts that make up the cultural heritage of Malaysia. They all speak Malay (the *bahasa Malaysia*) and English, but they also remember the language of their ancestors (Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien, Tamil or Punjabi).

All these cultures are so well integrated in the life of the country and in its architecture that mosques, Chinese temples, royal wood palaces, fortresses and Mogul style buildings dating from the time of the British colonies stand in perfect harmony next to each others, like the kris and the blowpipe, they have their natural place in Malaysian traditions. Malaysia has a wonderful architecture and a rich folklore that we will discover along with its history.



*Tunku Abdul Rahman Park*



