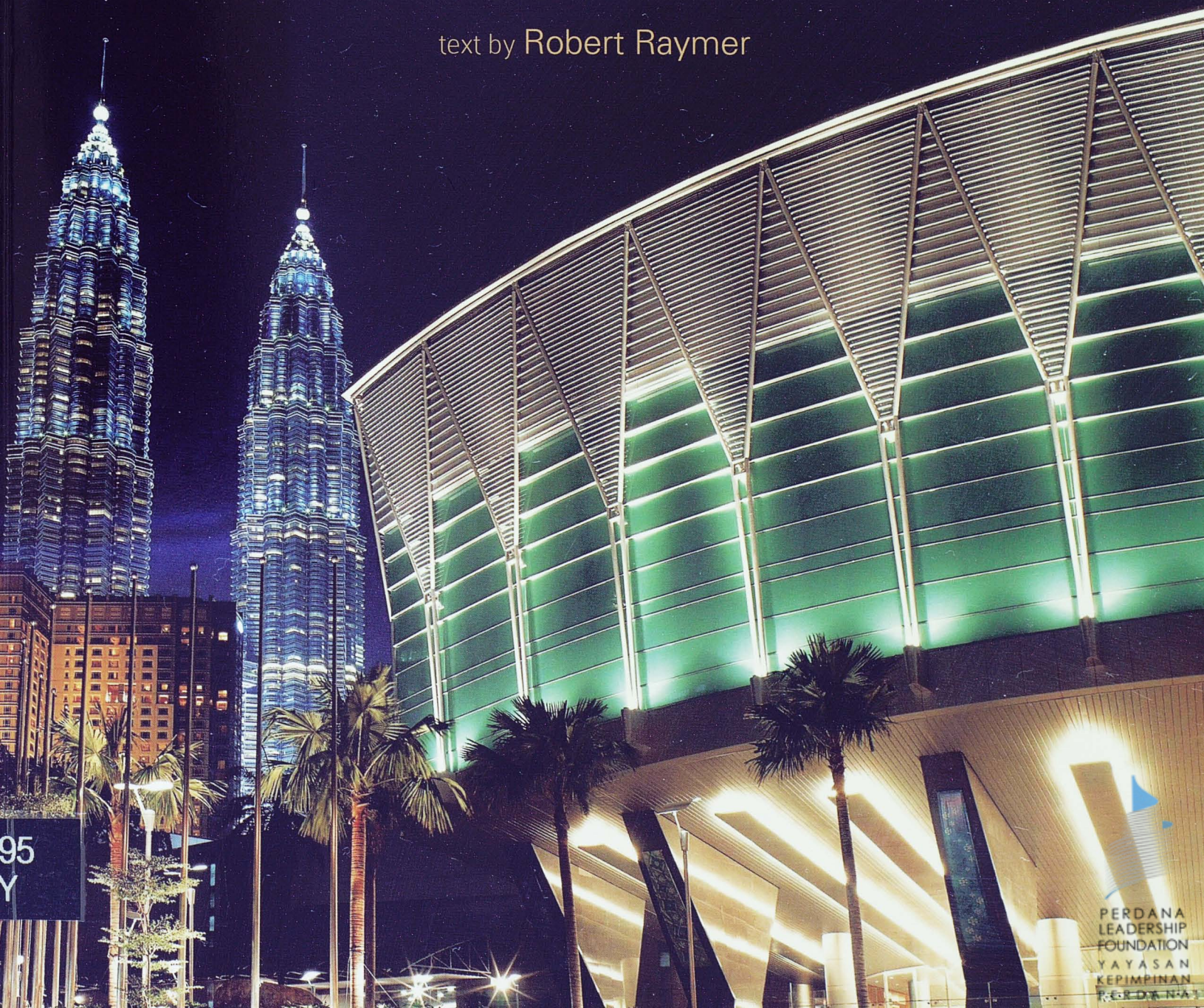


Spirit of MALAYSIA

text by Robert Raymer



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PERDANA
LEADERSHIP
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YAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

Peninsular Malaysia



THAILAND



Perak

Selangor

See Klang Valley inset (see back cover)

Negeri Sembilan

Malacca

Johor

SINGAPORE

Key

	State capital		Expressway/Highway
	International border		Federal Road
	State boundary		Railway
	Mountain		Rivers
	Featured location		National Park

0 300 km

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PERDANA
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Introduction

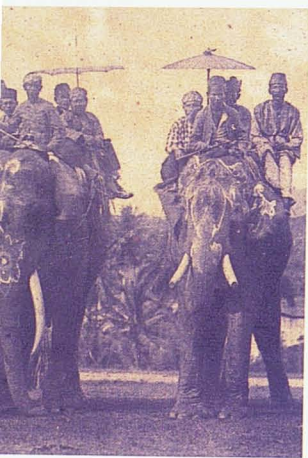
To think of the spirit of Malaysia is to conjure up images of celebration and festivity, a sweeping panorama of kampongs and longhouses, temples and mosques, sleepy provincial towns and modern cities. A fascinating fusion of tradition and modernity is set amidst a tropical backdrop of lush rainforest, languid rivers and stunning beaches. Here too are to be found an alluring mix of peoples, religions, customs, architecture and experiences – with Malay, Chinese, Indian, European, Arab, Thai and indigenous influences blending to create a truly unique nation, rich in culture and heritage.

Fireworks adorn the Kuala Lumpur skyline as Malaysia celebrated its 50th anniversary of Independence in 2007. This celebration was held in the historic venue of Dataran Merdeka.





History and heritage



4 ABOVE The chieftain of Kinta, Perak, Enche' Yusoh, with his men riding elephants, a common form of transportation then, c. 1886.

TOP Panoramic view of the humble beginnings of modern Kuala Lumpur, just a tin-mining outpost in 1884.

The oldest known evidence of human habitation in Malaysia is a skull from the Niah Caves in Sarawak carbon-dated to be some 37,000 years old. On the peninsula, Stone Age tools and implements from about 10,000 BCE have been found. Settlement of the Malay archipelago owed much to the importance of the maritime trade, which flourished as early as the first century CE. Located strategically at the crossroads between the East and West, Peninsular Malaysia attracted early travellers from different parts of the world in search of gold, tin, aromatic wood, and spices.

Traders from India brought with them Hindu and Buddhist practices. The Bujang Valley in Kedah, Malaysia's most extensive archaeological site, contains the ruins of an ancient Hindu kingdom dating back to 300 CE. From the fifth century CE onwards a succession of ports were created along the Straits of Malacca. These became part of the Srivijaya empire, the first great maritime kingdom in the Malay Archipelago, which endured until the 13th century CE.

The Golden Age of Malacca

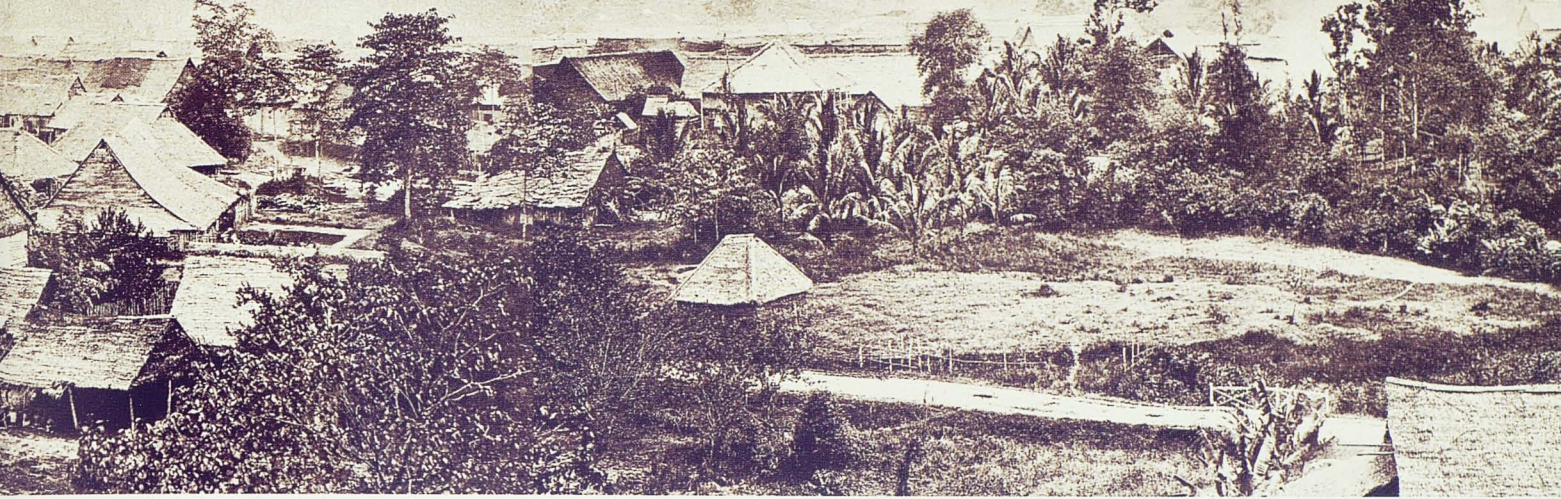
The founding of the Malacca Sultanate at the beginning of the 15th century CE by Parameswara is widely held to mark the beginning of the history of Malaysia. Within 50 years Malacca had become the most

influential port in Southeast Asia. At any one time, ships from a dozen nations, including China, could be seen in the harbour. Arab and Indian Muslim traders brought with them Islam, and Malacca's ruler was styled "sultan". The sultan headed a highly organised municipal government, the main purpose of which was to facilitate trade. Importantly, Malacca was able to control what had always been the bane of trade in the Straits area – pirates.

In 1511, a Portuguese fleet led by Afonso de Albuquerque sailed into Malacca's harbour. After a month-long siege, the Portuguese captured the city. Malacca's golden age had come to an end, and so began a colonial legacy that would last well into the 20th century.

Colonial Malaysia

The Portuguese constructed A'Famosa, a massive fort, in Malacca which the Dutch later captured in 1641. This gave the Dutch an almost exclusive hold on the spice trade until 1786, when the British East India Company convinced the Sultan of Kedah to allow it to build a fort on the island of Penang. Then, in 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles established a trading post in Singapore for the British. After acquiring Malacca from the Dutch (in a trade for Bencoolen, now Bengkulu, Sumatra), the three British territories of Penang, Malacca, and Singapore came to be known as the Straits Settlements.



New independent Malay States were also emerging. By the end of the 19th century, there were nine Malay Rulers in power – seven sultans, a raja and a yang di-pertuan besar. But gradually the British extended the reach of their administration, ruling not only the Straits Settlements, but also indirectly the four Federated Malay States of Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak and Selangor and the five Unfederated Malay States – Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu.

Meanwhile, in Borneo, Sabah became a British protectorate in 1888 under the British North Borneo Company while the Brooke family ruled Sarawak as White Rajahs for a century, from 1841 to 1941.

Then the Japanese invaded and occupied the Peninsula and the Borneo states which they ruled until their surrender to the Allied forces in 1945. With the end of World War II the growth of nationalism and anti-colonial sentiment accelerated, particularly in the Peninsula.

Independence and beyond

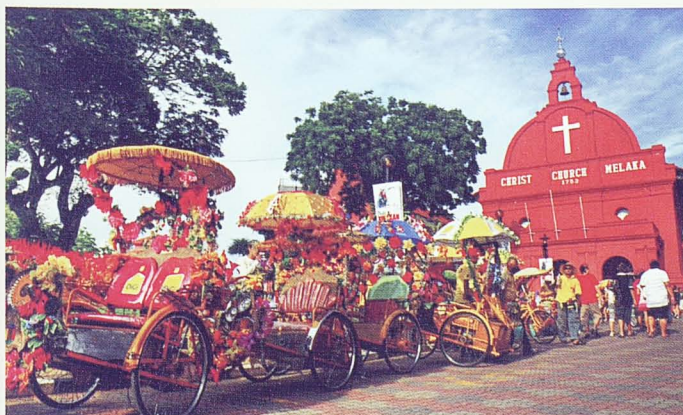
When the British returned to power, they attempted to change the status of the Malay States and their Rulers. This greatly upset the Malays and inadvertently unified them politically. The British also faced a communist insurgency determined to unseat the colonial regime. While the communists were ultimately defeated, the 12-year Emergency outlasted the colonial regime.

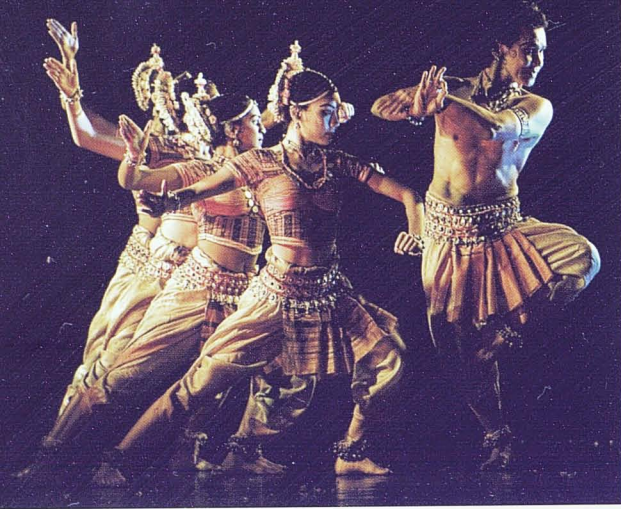
When the Union Jack was finally lowered and the Malayan flag raised in Kuala Lumpur’s Dataran Merdeka (Merdeka Square) on 31 August 1957, the nation’s first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman read the Proclamation of Independence and declared that the Malay States of Malaya “with God’s blessing, shall be for ever a sovereign democratic and independent State”.

On 16 September 1963, Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore joined to form Malaysia. Singapore separated from the federation in 1965.

BELOW LEFT Garlanded trishaws await passengers in front of Christ Church, Malacca.

BELOW The ornamental fountain, brought from England and assembled in the city’s heart in 1897, at Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur where in 1957 Tunku Abdul Rahman declared independence.





People and culture



ABOVE Dragon dance performance, popular during Chinese New Year.

6 TOP LEFT Indian classical Odissi dance performed by the Malaysian Sutra Dance Theatre at New Delhi, India, led by Ramli Ibrahim.

TOP RIGHT Joget Negeri Sembilan; Joget is Malaysia's most popular traditional dance.

Malaysia has an ethnically diverse population. The dominant ethnic group, the Malays, account for more than half the population, followed by the Chinese (24%) and Indians (7%). Then there are the other indigenous groups (11%), who collectively represent a majority in Sarawak and Sabah. In the Peninsula, the earliest inhabitants of the country are the indigenous Orang Asli. In Sarawak, the dominant groups are the Dayak, who typically live in longhouses and are predominantly Iban (Sea Dayak) and Bidayuh (Land Dayak). In Sabah, the largest groups are the Kadazan-dusun and the Bajau.

When Chinese merchants settled in Malacca in the 15th and 16th centuries, they intermarried with local women, combining Malay and Chinese traditions to create a new culture known as Peranakan or Baba-Nyonya. There is also a community of Eurasians, a small number of whom in Malacca still speak the creole language known as Kristang, a hybrid of the Portuguese, Malay and English languages.

Although each of these cultures has maintained its traditions, they have all blended together to create contemporary Malaysia's uniquely diverse heritage. For example, the Malay wedding ceremony incorporates elements of the Hindu traditions of southern India, and during Hari Raya, celebrated at the end of Ramadan, Muslims have adopted and adapted the Chinese custom of

giving *ang pow*; instead of little red packets, they use green ones with Islamic motifs and often bearing messages in Jawi (Malay written using Arabic characters).

Music and dance

Traditional Malay music is centred around the gamelan, an ensemble of bronze percussion instruments that has a pleasant, lilting tone and a hypnotic beat. Traditional dance, however, is often performed to livelier music. The popular traditional dance, Joget, is performed by couples who combine fast, graceful movements with rollicking good humour. Joget has its origins in Portuguese folk dance, introduced to Malacca in the 16th century. Silat, one of the oldest Malay traditions and a deadly martial art, is also a danceable art form, commonly performed at weddings and other festivals. Its graceful body movements are accompanied by drums and other musical instruments.

The dances of the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak can be exotic and enchanting. The Ngajat is a traditional dance of the Iban, usually performed during Gawai Kenyalang or "Hornbill Festival". Wearing an elaborate headdress and holding an ornate long shield, the male warrior dancer incorporates dramatic jumps in his performance accompanied by a gong ensemble.

The Lion dance, performed during the Chinese New Year festival, is both energetic and entertaining.

accompanied by the deafening beat of the *tagu*, the Chinese drum, and the clanging of cymbals. Then there is the Dragon dance, usually requiring a team of over 60 people, a dazzling display of co-ordination, skill and grace, said to bring good luck and prosperity for the year to come.

There is also Chinese opera, mainly the Cantonese style of garish costumes, crashing music and acrobatic action, performed over several evenings.

Traditional entertainment

Malaysian leisure time has traditionally been filled with elaborate competitions. Kites, called *wau*, are crafted in vibrant colours and flown over dried paddy fields. What used to be a post-harvest diversion for farmers has now become an international event. Then there's top-spinning, a game requiring strength, timing, and dexterity. By no means a child's toy, a *gasing* or top the size of a plate can weigh five kilograms or more. The top is set spinning – typically for more than an hour – by being hurled forward while, at the same time, the rope wrapped around it is yanked back.

Wayang Kulit is a form of traditional theatre that uses puppets and shadow play to tell the epic tales of the

classical Hindu legends. The puppets, mounted on bamboo sticks, are handled by a master puppeteer known as the *tok dalang*. A traditional show can be a test of endurance, lasting up to eight hours!

There are also dragon boat races, crewed by up to 20 paddlers with a drummer dictating the rhythm.

Festivals

In Malaysia, each religion and ethnic group celebrates its own festivals. Those celebrating often open their homes to family and friends regardless of their faith and culture. Muslims celebrate Hari Raya Aidilfitri (Hari Raya Puasa), which ends the fasting month of Ramadan. Chinese New Year is the major festival for Malaysian Chinese. It is celebrated over a two-week period ending on Chap Goh Mei. Hindus celebrate Deepavali and also Thaipusam, where devotees undertake a pilgrimage along a set route while engaging in acts of devotion, including body piercing and carrying elaborate *kavadi* (burdens). The Buddhist community celebrates Wesak Day, marking the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha; Christians, Christmas and Easter; and in Sarawak, Ibans and Bidayus celebrate Gawai, the end of the paddy harvesting season.

Iban warrior dance or Ngajat performed at a longhouse in Sarawak.





Food glorious food



ABOVE Banana leaf rice: white rice served on a banana leaf with an assortment of pickles and vegetables, curried meat or fish, and poppadom – traditionally eaten with the hand.

8

TOP Hawker stall centre in Kuala Lumpur, where the food is varied, cheap and generally delicious.

Malaysia's gastronomic heritage is drawn from the many cultures of its inhabitants and neighbours, offering a unique blend of Indian, Chinese, Thai, Arab, and Malay cooking. Rice and noodles are the main component of virtually every dish, and rarely does a Malaysian meal come without chilli. Sauces tend to be highly developed, often incorporating local fruits and spices. The seafood is superb. Malaysia's most popular dish is arguably *satay*, skewered chicken or beef marinated in spices, grilled over a charcoal fire and served with a sweet and spicy peanut sauce.

Regional variety

Spices and coconut milk (squeezed from shredded coconut), are among the most common flavourings used in Malay cuisine. Dishes from the northern state of Kelantan have a particularly sweet taste due to the liberal use of coconut and sugar, while in Kedah and Perlis dishes are spicier thanks to the influence of neighbouring Thailand and the states' ancient Indian heritage. Dishes from Penang and Malacca reflect the intermingling of cultures in those states, especially apparent in their Indian Muslim, Baba-Nyonya and Eurasian cuisine.

Malay favourites such as *rendang* (a spicy meat dish) and *nasi lemak* (rice cooked in coconut milk served with fried anchovies, hard boiled eggs, sliced cucumber and *sambal*, a chilli paste) can taste different from region to

region. Seafood is also a large part of the Malay diet, followed by chicken and beef, which have to be slaughtered and prepared according to Islamic dietary guidelines to make it halal. Naturally, no pork is used.

Chinese cuisine has many variants – including Cantonese, Hokkien, Hainanese, Hakka and Szechuan – but even these have undergone local assimilation, creating a style unique to Malaysia. Cantonese *dim sum* (teahouse snacks), Hokkien fried *mee* (noodles), Hainanese chicken rice (steamed or roasted chicken served with a chicken-flavoured mound of rice), *char kway teow* (stir-fried flat rice noodles), and *wan tan mee* (noodles served in soup with prawns and pork) are particularly popular and readily available. There is also Baba-Nyonya or Peranakan cuisine, a unique blend of Malay and Chinese cooking styles, characterised by sweet, sour, spicy and pungent flavours.

Indian food is generally spicy due to the generous use of chilli and spices. A less spicy alternative is *korma*, a mild meat curry, and *tandoori* chicken baked in clay ovens, which is ideally eaten with naan bread that comes in a variety of flavours. There is also *nasi briyani*, rice cooked in ghee with spices and vegetables. Southern Indian cuisine is generally spicier than Northern Indian and Mogul foods.

Mamak, or Indian Muslim, dishes reflect a true Malaysian style. Mamak stalls and restaurants are popular among Malaysians of all races; some outlets are open 24

hours. A must-try is *roti canai*, a thin pancake-like bread served with lentil based gravy or curry. *Murtabak* is *roti canai* stuffed with a mixture of minced meat, egg and onions served with curry. Then there's *mee goreng*, fried noodles fried with chilli paste, tomatoes, prawn and eggs. Some mamak restaurants also serve *nasi kandar*, rice served with special side dishes.

Peranakan favourites are *otak-otak*, fish meat marinated in spices, wrapped in banana leaves and grilled; *curry kapitan*, an unusual chicken curry; and *inche kabin*, a spicy deep-fried chicken. The quintessential Penang food has to be *asam laksa*, rice noodles served in fish gravy with shredded cucumber and pineapple with prawn paste.

Where to eat?

Eating establishments range from upscale restaurants through *kedai kopi* or *kopi tiam* (no-frills neighbourhood cafés) to ubiquitous hawker stalls by the side of the road. The quality of food at these stalls is usually just as good as in more upmarket venues and many offer regional dishes unavailable elsewhere. Of course, feasting at a

hawker stall may not be up to everyone's standard but they remain popular with those who enjoy the open-air environment, and they are open late at night when alternatives are closed.

Desserts, drinks, and fruit

For those feeling the heat there is *ais kacang* (a colourful pile of shaved ice with syrup, red beans, jelly, sweetcorn and evaporated milk). There's also *chendol* (shaved ice with coconut milk, green noodles and palm sugar).

A favourite drink is *teh tarik*, a sweet, milky tea that is pulled from one container to another. For those in Sabah or Sarawak, particularly around the time of the Gawai festival, there is *tuak*, a local rice wine.

Malaysia also boasts a variety of fruit – from mangosteens to rambutans to a breathtaking array of bananas. A favourite hawker stall food is *pisang goreng*, batter-coated deep-fried bananas. The most famous, or rather infamous, fruit of all is durian, with its tough spiky skin and thick, mushy flesh and a foul smell. So pungent, in fact, it's officially banned in most hotels!

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Lemang, glutinous rice wrapped in banana leaf cooked inside bamboo over a wooden fire; *teh tarik*, a tea drink made with sweetened milk and "pulled" from one container to another; *satay*, skewered beef or chicken cooked over charcoal and eaten with peanut sauce; *popiah* being filled with different vegetables and other condiments on thin spring roll skin and covered in sauce; *lou sang*, or tossing of the festive yee sang dish, during Chinese New Year; roasts of lamb and chicken accompanied by curries and korma served alongside local fruits; *roti canai*, eaten with curry, *sambal* and *dhal*, lentil gravy.

