



choice
TRAVEL

Destination Guide: Malaysia

What to know before you go
Essential preparation and planning tips
Accommodation and transport

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Who is CHOICE? Set up by consumers for consumers, **CHOICE** is the [consumer advocate](#) that provides Australians with information and advice, free from commercial bias.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

OVERVIEW

Best time to go, culture, language, health, safety, laws, watchouts, scams, emergency contacts and more.

Travel-size tips

- › [Flights from Australia](#) to Malaysia take as little as five hours.
- › Australians can visit for up to three months without a [visa](#).
- › The weather is hot and humid, with different wet seasons in different parts of the country.

Know before you go

- › Most areas of Malaysia are relatively safe, but [smartraveller.gov.au](#) advises against traveling to some areas of East Malaysia, where there is a risk of kidnapping.
- › Your doctor may recommend [vaccinations](#) before traveling to Malaysia.
- › Malaysia is a majority-Muslim country with [conservative values](#) and some aspects of [Sharia law](#) in place.

Best time to go

Malaysia sits just north of the equator, so temperatures are warm and humid all year round. The wet and dry seasons vary from one part of the country to the next. Check the [average temperature and rainfall](#) in the area you're planning to visit.

Peak seasons:

December/January: West coast Peninsular Malaysia.

June/July: East coast Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (Borneo).

- › The west coast of Peninsular Malaysia (including Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and the islands of Penang, Langkawi and Tioman) generally experience their monsoon rains between May and October. The rain tends to be heaviest towards the end of the season.
- › The east coast of Peninsular Malaysia experiences its monsoon from November to March. During the wet season, much of the accommodation on the eastern islands (including the Perhentian Islands) is likely to be closed or inaccessible due to rough seas.
- › East Malaysia (Borneo) generally experiences its

monsoon between October and March, with the heaviest rain in January.

- › Sudden downpours can come at any time, anywhere in the country - even during the dry season.
- › The Cameron Highlands are the only area of the country that gets particularly chilly, with temperatures dropping to around 15°C overnight.
- › Air pollution, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, can be bad at any time of year, but between June and October there's an increased risk of severe smoke haze caused by illegal slash-and-burn land clearing in nearby Indonesia.
- › During the month of [Ramadan](#) ([dates change](#) each year), many Malaysians fast throughout the day. Some restaurants and cafes may be closed, at least until the evening.
- › The festival of Hari Raya Puasa (Eid) marks the end of Ramadan and is when many locals take a week-long holiday. Expect crowded roads, higher hotel prices and more difficulty getting bookings.
- › Chinese New Year ([dates change](#) each year) is also a busy time as many Malaysians are ethnic-Chinese.
- › Malaysian [public holidays](#) and [school holidays](#) can

affect travel and accommodation bookings.

- › Christmas day is a public holiday and the season is a peak time due to the number of international visitors.

Culture

- › Malaysia is made up of a diverse mix of ethnic Malay, Chinese, Indian and indigenous cultures.
- › 60% of the population is Muslim, with Buddhists, Christians and Hindus making up most of the remaining 40%.
- › Malaysian people dress and behave conservatively. Outside of tourist resorts, showing too much skin is frowned upon. Long sleeves (at least to the elbow) and long trousers/skirts (at least to the knee) are standard for both men and women. Tight clothing is also considered quite risqué, particularly for women. Dress standards are more relaxed in the cities than in rural areas.
- › You should dress respectfully and remove your shoes when visiting mosques. Women will be asked to wear a cloak and headdress, which most mosques are happy to provide to visitors.
- › Public displays of affection (anything more than holding hands) are not appropriate.
- › Raising your voice or making a scene is considered extremely embarrassing for all involved, so try to keep your cool if you have a disagreement with someone.
- › Other cultural taboos include touching a person's head, eating with your left hand, pointing with your finger, and not removing your shoes before entering a person's home.
- › Many Malaysians don't drink alcohol, so limit your drinking to hotels, bars and clubs, particularly



during Ramadan.

- Many Muslim Malaysians fast from sunrise to sunset during the month of [Ramadan](#) ([dates change](#) each year). Some cafes and restaurants will shut during the day but the streets usually liven up in the evenings when people break their fast. **Tip:** Chinese Malaysians don't observe Ramadan, so you'll always be able to find Chinese food during the day.
- Tipping is not expected, but it's appreciated. Restaurants often add a service charge of 10%.



Official language: Bahasa Malaysia

Most Malaysians are multilingual, with English, Mandarin, Cantonese or Tamil likely to be their second language. In cities and tourist areas you should have no trouble finding people who can speak English. The Malaysian language is written in the same alphabet as English, so you'll be able to read street signs and maps.

Health and safety

- Most areas of Malaysia are relatively safe, but [smartraveller.com.au](#) advises against traveling to some parts of East Malaysia (Borneo) and to the region beyond the Thai border, where violence and kidnapping are a risk.
- Public hospitals are run by well-trained staff, but wait times are likely to be long. Quality health care may be hard to find in remote areas. Private hospitals with English-speaking staff are available in the cities and tourist areas (see contacts below). You'll need to pay a deposit up-front or show proof of [travel insurance](#).
- Medical tourism, particularly for [dental](#) and [cosmetic procedures](#), is becoming increasingly popular because of the lower hospital fees in Malaysia.
- The tap water in Malaysia is not safe to drink. Stick to bottled or boiled water and ask for no ice in your drinks.
- To avoid traveller's diarrhoea, opt for fresh, fully cooked food, wash your hands regularly and pack anti-diarrhoeals just in case.
- Mosquitoes can spread dengue fever, malaria and Japanese encephalitis. Take steps to avoid bites and speak to a travel doctor about whether or not you need a [vaccination or prophylactic](#). The risk of malaria is greater in rural areas than in the cities or coastal areas.
- Air pollution can be a problem in Kuala Lumpur. Smoke haze caused by illegal slash-and-burn land clearing in nearby Indonesia sometimes creates dangerous conditions across the whole country, particularly between June and October. Check the [Malaysian Environment Department](#) website for air quality reports.

- › Safety standards aren't always up to scratch when it comes to buses, cars, motorbikes, jet-skis, boats and scuba diving equipment.
- › For the latest health and safety advice about Malaysia, including disease outbreaks, natural disasters and civil unrest, check smartraveller.gov.au

Do I need [vaccinations](#) to travel to Malaysia? > [Page 8](#)

Tip: Have you registered your travel plans with [smartraveller](#) and checked the latest safety advice on the region you're travelling to?

Laws and watchouts

Laws

- › Drugs are strictly illegal and traffickers face a mandatory death penalty. It's even illegal to have drugs in your system, and travellers have occasionally been subjected to urine tests on arrival in the country.
- › Some aspects of Sharia (Islamic) law are in place throughout Malaysia and are particularly enforced in Kelantan and Terengganu states. Some of the religious laws only apply to Muslims, others apply to all people, including foreigners.
- › Anyone caught preaching a non-Islamic faith or distributing non-Islamic religious materials could be imprisoned.
- › Homosexual acts are illegal, and convictions can result in prison time or corporal punishment. Fortunately, the law is rarely enforced, but gay travelers should still be cautious.

- › Public acts of sex are highly illegal.
- › Prostitution is illegal (despite being quite readily available).
- › Possession of pornographic material is illegal, but there are no laws (currently) against viewing it online.
- › Alcohol can only be purchased by non-Muslims over the age of 18. There are restrictions on the sale of alcohol in areas with a high Muslim population.

For road rules, see [Driving in Malaysia > Page 17](#).

Watchouts

- › You're a little less likely to be scammed in Malaysia than you would be in some other south-east Asian countries, but theft is still a problem, particularly in the cities.
- › 'Snatch and grab' robberies are committed by thieves driving motorbikes. To avoid being targeted, walk on the inside edge of the footpath and carry your bag on the arm that's away from the curb.
- › 'Smash and grab' attacks are also made on slow-moving cars. Keep doors and windows locked and





don't leave valuables on the seat.

- By law, all taxis should have a working meter. Unfortunately, many drivers refuse to use them and will insist on negotiating a flat (and often inflated) fare. If your taxi is metered, watch out for unscrupulous drivers who may take the scenic route or even have a hidden button that adds a few extra ringgit to the fare.
- Always cover the keypad when using ATMs, and never let your credit card out of your site when paying at restaurants.
- Some tourists have reported being searched by 'tourist police' only to discover their money has gone missing, or worse - they've had drugs planted on them and are made to pay a fine (ie. bribe). If anyone tries to search you, insist that they take you to a police station or get straight on the phone to the actual police.
- Some not-so-street-smart tourists have fallen victim to gambling scams after being convinced by friendly card sharks that they can't lose.

Tourist traps are many and varied, and often quite

creative. Read our article on [scams around the world](#), or search travel forums such as Tripadvisor for the latest warnings from travelers to Malaysia.

Making a complaint

If you fall victim to theft or any other serious crime, contact the police (numbers below).

If you have a dispute with an accommodation or tour provider and you're unable to come to an agreement, you can lodge a complaint with the [Ministry of Tourism and Culture](#).

For complaints about other goods and services, try the [National Consumer Complaints Centre](#) (you'll need a Malaysian-speaker to help you with the website).

If you have a problem with a taxi driver, take down their ID and licence plate number and contact the taxi company.

If your gripe is with an Australian or international tour operator, airline, or booking site, see CHOICE for the [usual procedures](#) for making a complaint or seeking compensation.

Emergency contacts

Malaysia country code: +60

➤ **Police/Ambulance:** 999 (112 from a mobile)

➤ **Fire:** 994 (112 from a mobile)

➤ **Tourist police hotline:** + 60 3 2149 6590 / Enquiries +60 3 2149 6593

Operators may not speak English. If you don't have an interpreter, call your hotel, your insurance provider, an English-speaking hospital or the tourist police. Public

ambulances may be slow and ill-equipped so consider catching a taxi to hospital if you can.

Hospitals and clinics

Public hospitals have well-trained staff, some of whom may speak English, but wait times are likely to be long. There are many private hospitals and clinics throughout Malaysia you'll find one in most cities and tourist centres.

Kuala Lumpur

Gleneagles Kuala Lumpur
286 Jalan Ampang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur
+60 3 4141 3000
Emergency: +60 3 4141 3131

Columbia Asia Hospital - Setapak
1, Jalan Danau Saujana, Off Jalan Genting Klang,
53300 Kuala Lumpur
+60 3 5521 5151 / +60 3 4145 9999

Global Doctors Clinic
B1-C6, Jalan Kiara 3, Mont Kiara
+60 3 6203 8999

[See more private hospitals and clinics in Kuala Lumpur.](#)

Penang

Gleneagles Penang
1, Jalan Pangkor, 10050, Penang
+60 4 227 6111

[See more private hospitals and clinics in Penang.](#)

Langkawi

Langkawi Hospital (public hospital)
Bukit Tekuh, Jalan Padang Mat Sirat, Kuah 07000,
Langkawi
+60 4 966 3333

[Private clinics](#) are also available on the island.

Sarawak

Columbia Asia Hospital Bintulu
Lot 3582, Block 26, Jalan Tan Sri Ikhwan, Kemena
Land District, Tanjung Kidurong,
97000 Bintulu, Sarawak
+60 86 251 888

[See more private hospital and clinics in Sarawak](#)

Sabah - [Private hospitals and clinics](#)

Johor - [Private hospitals and clinics](#)

Malacca - [Private hospitals and clinics](#)

The US embassy has a [full list](#) of English-speaking doctors and hospitals in Malaysia, which includes some public hospitals.

Australian High Commission - Kuala

Lumpur malaysia.highcommission.gov.au
6 Jalan Yap Kwan Seng, 50450 Kuala Lumpur
+60 3 2146 5555
Email: ahckl.consular@dfat.gov.au

Australian Consulate - Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

Suite 10.1, Level 10, Wisma Great Eastern, 65 Jalan
Gaya, 88000 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah
+60 88 267 151
Email: andrewsmk@yahoo.com

Australian Consulate - Sarawak

E39 Level 2, Taman Sri Sarawak Mall,
Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman, 93100 Kuching, Sarawak
+60 82 230 777
Email: philipting66@gmail.com

24-hour Australian Consular Emergency Centre: +61
2 6261 3305 or 1300 555 135 or SMS +61 421 269 080

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Visas, vaccinations, phone roaming, SIM cards, internet, power adapters, money, travel insurance, handy apps and more.

Visas and passports

Australian passport holders do not need a visa to visit Malaysia for up to three months.

You'll need:

- a passport valid for at least six months on arrival
- a confirmed return or onward international ticket

Visa rules may change, check with the [Malaysian Embassy](#) for up-to-date advice.

Vaccinations

Your doctor may recommend vaccinations before you travel to Malaysia, depending on your health status and your travel plans. The Travel Doctor recommends you make sure your routine vaccinations are up to date, and that you consider vaccinations for typhoid, hepatitis A and B, rabies and Japanese encephalitis, and consider a prophylactic for malaria. See their [Malaysia health planner](#) for more information or speak to your doctor.

Tip: Some vaccinations need to be given four to six

weeks before departure, so get in early.

More about [health and safety](#) in Malaysia.

Phone and internet

Global roaming and coverage

Malaysia operates on a GSM network, so Australian mobile phones should work anywhere there's a signal. Rural areas and islands won't always get great coverage, but the cities will. If you use your phone overseas, particularly to access the internet, be prepared for sky-high bills. Check global roaming rates with your telco:

- [Telstra](#)
- [Vodafone](#)
- [Optus](#)
- [Virgin](#)

Tip: Switch off data roaming on your phone before you leave Australia. Likewise, switch off your voicemail and ask friends and family to text you rather than calling (you'll be charged if you answer incoming calls).

[Beat global roaming bill shock](#) - our guide to unlocking your phone and changing your global roaming settings.

Local SIM

A pre-paid Malaysian SIM card is a much cheaper option than paying global roaming rates on your Australian SIM, provided your handset is unlocked. The main telcos are [Maxis](#), [DiGi](#), [Celcom](#), and [U Mobile](#) - all websites are in English, so you can compare pre-paid deals for calls and data. There are phone stores at Kuala Lumpur Airport, or you can buy your SIM from a convenience store. Ask the person who sells you the SIM to help you set it up. You may need to show your passport as ID.

Tip: U Mobile has a [Traveller Sim](#) and DiGi has a [Traveller's Pack](#) - both available at the Airport.

Travel SIM

If you'd prefer to be organised before you leave Australia or if you're travelling through a number of countries, a pre-paid travel SIM is an easy option, although the rates probably won't be as cheap as with a local Malaysian SIM. Travel SIMs are available online and from some travel agents and post offices.

Remember: Your phone will need to be unlocked to accept a SIM from another network.

Wi-Fi

You'll find free Wi-Fi hotspots in many hotels, cafes and shopping malls. If you need to do more than just check your emails every now and then, consider buying a local data SIM or renting a USB modem or portable 'pocket hotspot'.

Internet connections may be sketchy or non-existent in remote areas.

Tip: U Mobile rents MiFi devices from its store at Kuala Lumpur Airport, which you can return to them before your departing flight.

Power plugs

Standard voltage: 220-240V

Frequency: 50Hz

Malaysia's frequency is the same as Australia's, and the voltage range is similar enough to Australia's 230V that you can use your appliances without fear of frying them.

Power sockets:



Malaysia uses the British-style type G plugs and sockets, so you'll need an adaptor to use your Australian appliances.





Money

Currency: Malaysian ringgit (MYR / RM) - one ringgit is made up of 100 sen

Check [xe.com](https://www.xe.com) for the latest exchange rates.

Tip: Malaysians often refer to ringgits as 'dollars'.

Important: Tell your bank about your travel plans two weeks before you leave. Card activity in a foreign country could be mistaken for fraud and you could find your account frozen.

Credit cards

Credit cards are accepted at almost all Malaysian hotels, restaurants and shopping centres. Fraud is a risk, as it is in all countries, so never let your credit card out of your sight when making payments. For everyday purchases and taxi fares, you'll need cash.

ATMs

ATMs are easy to find in cities and towns and most will accept foreign cards. Some may have a low withdrawal limit. Remember you'll be charged a withdrawal fee and a conversion fee. If you're travelling to remote

areas, ATMs will be harder to find, so stock up on cash (and hide it well).

Money changers

Currency exchange booths, including FOREX, are common in tourist areas, shopping centres and airports. There are no fees to change money in Malaysia - just variable exchange rates. You'll get a better rate if you avoid changing money at the airport, KL Sentral and at hotels. It's best to wait until you're in Malaysia to change your money, but if you want to be organised you could always buy a small amount of ringgit before you leave Australia.

Scam alert: Ignore unofficial money changers on the street and in shops. Stick to licensed outlets or banks.

Tip: Most banks are open from 9.30am to 4.00pm, Monday to Friday. In the Muslim states of Kedah, Terengganu and Kelantan, the banks are closed on Fridays and open 9.30am to 4.00pm Saturday to Wednesday and 9.30am to 11.00am on Thursday. Currency exchange booths will be open longer hours and on weekends.

Money security

Travellers' cheques are becoming a thing of the past and you may have trouble finding places in Malaysia that will cash them. If you're concerned about money security, consider a travel money card or 'cash passport'. They can be pre-loaded with a foreign currency and used like a credit or debit card, and cancelled if lost. Read more about the pros and cons of [travel money cards](#).

Tip: Carry at least two cards and more than one cash currency (Australian and Malaysian). Split your money and cards between separate bags. That way if you lose one, you have a back-up.

For more advice on overseas spending see our [travel money guide](#).

Foreigner fee

Expect to pay a higher price for many things in Malaysia, simply because you aren't Malaysian. Foreigners are often charged [more than twice as much](#) as locals for entry to tourist attractions. There's no point in complaining as there's no law against this kind of price discrimination.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance is essential. Buy insurance at the same time as you book your trip, that way you'll be covered if you have to cancel for some reason before you go.

For more information read our [buying guide](#) and to choose the best cover, see CHOICE's [travel insurance reviews and comparisons](#).

Check with your insurer about exclusions that may affect you, including sports, car hire,

[medical tourism](#) and pre-existing medical conditions. Be aware that anything that happens to you [while under the influence](#) of drugs or alcohol is unlikely to be covered by insurance.

Tips:

- Keep a printout of your travel insurance details with you at all times while on your trip.
- Share your insurance details with family or friends before you leave.

Handy links and apps

Consider adding these links and apps to your phone, tablet or laptop before you go.

Tip: Try to find apps that work offline so they won't chew up your data or stop working when you don't have an internet connection.

- [Travel apps](#) such as [City Guides](#) (Kuala Lumpur) and [Triposo](#) (Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Penang and more) offer maps, hotel search, restaurant





recommendations and other travel tips.

- The Travsit Kuala Lumpur app ([Apple](#) or [Android](#)) helps with navigating Kuala Lumpur's public transport system.
- Moovit ([Apple](#) / [Android](#)) is a public transport planner app covering Kuala Lumpur and many other world cities.
- [Currency conversion apps](#) help you work out costs in Australian dollars.
- [Translation apps](#) help with communication.

Tip: To save a map onto your mobile device for offline use, select the area on Google Maps then select 'Save offline map' from the menu and follow the directions on the screen. Your GPS positioning will still work on the saved map, even when you don't have access to the internet. Alternatively, go to 'Offline maps' in the menu

and select a city.

Websites

- tourism.gov.my (Malaysia's official tourism website).
- ktmb.com.my for booking long-distance trains in Malaysia.
- easybook.com for booking Malaysian buses and trains, including inter-country transport.
- myrapid.com.my Kuala Lumpur's public transport portal.
- wikitravel.org/en/Malaysia for crowd-sourced information on culture, travel tips and more (may not always be accurate).

ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Flights to Malaysia, airport guides, key destinations, transport, car hire, accommodation, tours and more.

Flights

Flight time from Australia: 5+ hours

- › Airlines that fly directly between Australia and Malaysia include Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia, Qantas and Emirates.
- › **Direct flights** are available to Kuala Lumpur from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Darwin and the Gold Coast.
- › Malaysia Airlines operates a direct flight from Perth to Sabah in East Malaysia (Borneo).
- › Domestic flights connect Kuala Lumpur with Sabah, Langkawi and other destinations.
- › Flights from Singapore also serve many Malaysian airports beyond just Kuala Lumpur.
- › Malaysia can also be reached by land from Singapore (a short journey by bus) or from Thailand (but check smartraveller.gov.au for the latest advice on conflict in the border regions).

At the airport

If you're entering Malaysia on your Australian passport, you won't need a [visa](#). However, you'll need at least six months' validity on your passport and proof of a return or onward ticket.

Most international flights arrive at Kuala Lumpur Airport. This is a major Asian hub, so queues can sometimes be long at immigration.

Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KUL)

- › 55km south of the city centre.
- › The **KLIA Ekspres** train takes 28 minute to reach the city centre. See the [timetable](#).
- › **Taxis** leave from outside both terminals. You'll need to pre-pay and collect a coupon at one of the Airport Limo counters in the Arrival Hall. There are different classes of taxi available, so make sure you ask for a budget taxi if you want the cheapest price.
- › An **express coach** runs every 30 minutes, 24 hours a

day, and takes an hour to reach the city centre.

➤ [Other buses](#) run to the local area and to major hotels.

➤ [Car hire](#) is available from Hertz, Avis and a number of local companies. You'll find the counters in the arrival hall.

➤ Airport website: klia.com.my

Scam alert: Ignore anyone who approaches you at the airport offering a lift. The best way to avoid being overcharged is to catch an official taxi.

Airport tax (or 'passenger service charge') should be included in the price of your air ticket, so there's no need to worry about setting cash aside.

Key destinations and how to get there

Peninsular Malaysia	
Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia's capital)	Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KUL)
Malacca / Melaka	World Heritage coastal town 150km south of Kuala Lumpur. Accessible by car, taxi, bus or train.
Cameron Highlands	Picturesque tea plantations, strawberry farms and volcanic landscapes 150km north of Kuala Lumpur. Accessible by car, taxi or bus.
Taman Negara National Park	One of the world's oldest rainforests, 235km north-east of Kuala Lumpur. Car, taxi or bus to Kuala Tembeling, then boat along the river (or hike) into the national park.
Islands	
Penang	Penang International Airport (PEN). Accessible by plane, or by bridge/ferry to the mid-west coast of Peninsular Malaysia.
Langkawi	Langkawi International Airport (LGK). Popular tourist island west of Peninsular Malaysia near the Thai border. Accessible by plane. Ferries to the island depart from the mainland ports of Kuala Kedah, Kuala Perlis and Penang, or from Satun in Thailand.
The Perhentian Islands	Two small islands off the north-eastern coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Ferries to the islands run from Kuala Besut (closest airport: Sultan Ismail Petra Airport in Kota Bharu).

Peninsular Malaysia	
Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia's capital)	Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KUL)
Malacca / Melaka	World Heritage coastal town 150km south of Kuala Lumpur. Accessible by car, taxi, bus or train.
Tioman Island	Lies off the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia with stunning beaches and lush rainforests. Ferries depart from the mainland ports of Mersing and Tanjung Gemok.
East Malaysia (Borneo)	
Sarawak (western state)	Kuching International Airport (KCH)
Sabah (eastern state)	Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI) closest airport to south-east Asia's highest mountain, Mount Kinabalu.

Getting around

Tip: Check if you need to pre-book any tickets.

Trains

Peninsular Malaysia has a long-distance train service that runs the length of the mainland from the border with Singapore up to the border with Thailand, where trains continue to Bangkok. (Tip: Smart Traveller [advises against](#) travelling through certain areas of Thailand bordering with Malaysia.)



- The West Coast Line (also known as the North-South Line) takes in Kuala Lumpur and much of the west coast, linking with the islands of Penang and Langkawi.
- The East Coast Line (also known as the Jungle Railway) passes through scenic rainforest, farms and villages to Kota Bharu, near the Thai border and the ferry to the Perhentian Islands.
- Both lines converge in Johor Bahru in the south, which connects with Singapore.

Tickets can be bought at train stations or up to 30 days in advance at ktmb.com.my. You'll need to create an account on the website, but there's no charge and the instructions are in English. See train36.com for a step-by-step guide and some other handy booking tips.

- Some trains run express and others run at a more leisurely pace. Sleeper beds are available on some services.
- There are minimum distances that can be booked online. Short-distance tickets can only be bought at train stations.
- Fares for trains departing from Singapore will be charged in Singapore dollars and are likely to be much more expensive.
- Discounts for people aged over 60 aren't available online. You'll need to buy tickets at a station and show ID.

Tip: The [Eastern and Oriental Express](#) is a luxury private train service running between Singapore and Bangkok via Kuala Lumpur, the Cameron Highlands and Penang.

In East Malaysia there is only one short train line in Sabah and no trains in Sarawak.

Buses

If you can't get to your destination by train, chances are you can get there by bus. There are more than 100 bus and coach companies linking the majority of Malaysia's towns and cities.



Transnasional is the state-run service with the most extensive coverage of the country and a choice of seat classes. Competitors such as Konsoritum, Plusliner, Sri Maju, LionStar and Alisan Golden Coach offer extra luxuries such as blankets, pillows, refreshments, Wi-Fi and personal entertainment. The [Transtar](#) first class service between Singapore and Malaysia even has leather recliners with built-in massagers!

You can buy tickets at bus stations or from hotels or travel agents. The process for booking online varies depending on which service you want to travel with. If tickets aren't available through the bus company's website, try [easybook.com](#) or [busonlineticket.com](#).

Tip: If you need to go somewhere that isn't accessible by bus, long-distance taxi fares aren't unusual in Malaysia. In most towns you'll find taxi stands where locals (and some budget travellers) wait until there are enough people to split a long-distance fare.

Domestic flights

Domestic flights are the main way of travelling between Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia, and a faster way to connect with destinations a long way from Kuala Lumpur, for example Langkawi. For destinations accessible by air, see this list of [airports in Malaysia](#).

The main domestic carriers, [Malaysia Airlines](#), [AirAsia](#) and [Firefly](#), compete for low fares on common

routes. Smaller airlines run to resort islands and remote areas at a higher cost.

Transport tip: [rome2rio.com](#) is a great resource for working out how to get from A to B, anywhere in the world, by almost any means of transport.

The best way to get around towns and cities varies from place to place. Kuala Lumpur has an excellent [public transport](#) system, which is cheaper (and often less hassle) than catching a taxi. In smaller towns taxis may be the best option, and in some historical towns, such as Malacca, you can get around the narrow streets in a bicycle rickshaw. In remote parts of East Malaysia and on some remote islands, such as Tioman, options may be limited to walking or catching a boat.

Taxis

By law, all taxis should have a working meter. Unfortunately, many drivers refuse to use them and will insist on negotiating a flat fare.



Scam alert: If your taxi is metered, watch out for unscrupulous drivers who may take the scenic route or even have a hidden button that adds a few extra ringgit to the fare.

Tip: Always try to flag down a passing taxi rather than taking one that's waiting by the side of the road. Taxis that wait at tourist spots will usually charge more. Read [this blog](#) for some handy first-hand tips on catching taxis (and avoiding scams) in Kuala Lumpur.

Car hire

Car hire is available at most airports, cities and towns from Avis, Hertz and a range of local companies.



Tips:

- You'll need an [International Driving Permit](#) as well as your Australian license.
- Check that your [travel insurance](#) covers you for driving, and make sure the car is properly insured, either through your own insurance or through the rental company.
- You may get a cheaper rate from a local car hire

company, but international companies are likely to be easier to deal with if you get into a dispute.

- Malaysia has many toll roads, so make sure an electronic tag is included in your rental.
- If you're traveling from Singapore to Malaysia, wait until you're in Malaysia to rent a car - you'll get a better deal.

Driving in Malaysia

Peninsular Malaysia is covered by a network of good quality roads. The roads in East Malaysia aren't as well maintained, and many areas are inaccessible by car. Congestions can be quite bad at times, and Malaysian drivers aren't known for sticking to the speed limit or obeying the road rules.

- Vehicles drive on the left.
- Front seat belts must be worn at all times.
- The blood alcohol limit is .08%. The penalty for drink-driving is severe, and is likely to include jail time.
- You'll need an [International Driving Permit](#) if you're in the country for less than 90 days. Any longer than 90 days and you'll need to apply for a local licence.
- Police have been known to fine foreigners for driving on an international permit, despite the fact that they aren't breaking the law.

Accommodation and tours

Tip: Have you booked your accommodation for at least the first night?

Accommodation options range from five-star hotels to



cheap beach shacks. Prices will certainly be cheaper than in Australia, or in neighbouring Singapore, but you won't always find the kind of shoestring prices available in some other south-east Asian countries. Bookings can be made on the usual sites, such as [booking.com](https://www.booking.com), [hotels.com](https://www.hotels.com), [expedia.com](https://www.expedia.com) or [hostels.com](https://www.hostels.com), or you may find a more competitive rate through the hotel's own website (if it has one) or through local sites such as [marimari.com](https://www.marimari.com) or [asiarooms.com](https://www.asiarooms.com). Check customer reviews on Tripadvisor before you book.

Airbnb can be a good place to find a cheap apartment or B&B, or try the Malaysian website [go2homestay.com](https://www.go2homestay.com) for more homestay options, particularly in villages and rural areas.

Tours can be organised once you're in Malaysia, or in advance through a travel agent or travel booking site such as [intrepidtravel.com](https://www.intrepidtravel.com) or

[malaysiaholidays.com.au](https://www.malaysiaholidays.com.au).

Search Tripadvisor or Viator for recommendations from other travellers. For short tours and day trips, consider waiting until you're on the ground - you're likely to have greater choice and find better deals.

If you're travelling in a group, consider hiring a car, a taxi or a private driver as it may not cost you much more than joining a bus tour.

Warning: Vehicles and equipment such as mini-buses, boats and scuba diving gear may not be up to international safety standards. Beware of overcrowded boats in particular.

Package tours are a low-stress option for travellers who don't want to organise their flights, accommodation and on-the-ground transport separately. For deals, check airline and travel booking sites as well as travel agents. ■

