



ASIAN TIGERS
GROUP

Settling-in Malaysia



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The Basics

About Malaysia

Malaysia is a dynamic and fascinating country in Asia, with an abundance of natural resources, great connectivity to the region and world, with plenty of things to see and do.

Malaysia's diversity of cultures has constructed a colorful and vibrant society. Malay, Chinese, and Indian are the three largest ethnic groups in Malaysia following distinctly different cultures, religions, and philosophies. The differences in ethnicity and religion have led to some friction, yet, the social integration is successful in general.

Malaysia, whose official religion is ISLAM, shows great respect for other religions. For example, the Chinese can practice Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism freely in Malaysia. Many religious and secular festivals, therefore, derive in Malaysia and become a fascinating addition to Malaysian life. With such diverse cultures, Malaysia actively promotes itself as a tourist destination. Its beautiful beaches, colorful cities, and leisurely pace of life also seem ideal for exploration and relaxation.

At the same time, the economy of Malaysia is improving. It has transformed its economy from a low-income producer of raw materials to a middle-income exporter of manufactured goods, including high-tech products. Malaysia has developed its industrial and manufacturing capability and encourages foreign investment. This development, combined with abundant natural resources, has allowed the Malaysia economy to be one of the Tiger Cub Economies. Malaysia has become an excellent choice for many international companies to relocate or establish facilities in Asia.

The infrastructure in Malaysia is also developed; its telecommunications system and extensive transport system, which continue to be upgraded and are modern and efficient. Housing, sanitation, and general health conditions continue to improve, making the country a better place in which to reside and to travel.

Malaysia's Facts & Figures

Official Name	: Malaysia
Head of State	: Yang di-Pertuan, Agung
Type of government	: Constitutional Monarch/Parliamentary Democracy
Head of Government	: Prime Minister
Capital City	: Kuala Lumpur
Official language	: Bahasa Melayu
Land Area	: 328,500 sq. km
Population	: 62 million
Religion	: Official religion is Islam. Other religions include Hindu, Buddhist, Confucius and Christian.
Currency	: Ringgit Malaysia (RM)
Time Zone	: GMT + 8 hrs., EST + 13hrs
Weather	: The climate is tropical hot, and humid all year, but the nights are a little cooler. Humidity is between 85 and 95 percent.
Weights and measures	: Metric system

A large, ornate mosque with a prominent golden dome and minarets, situated on a body of water. The text "Let's Talk About Culture" is overlaid on the image.

Let's Talk About Culture

Local Culture

Malaysia offers an extensive variety of scenic, cultural, and historic attractions. The Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board has offices in many locations and distributes numerous publications on Malaysia. One of the most interesting features of Malaysian life is its many festivals. Learning about the background and meaning of the festivals, and watching and/or participating, in the celebrations will help the visitor understand the various Malaysian cultures and appreciate their various heritages. Festivals are joyous occasions in Malaysia that reinforce the different cultures and religions of its people. Traditional costumes are worn, and visits to friends and relatives are important parts of the celebrations.

When interacting with Malaysians, you better bear in mind that it is a multicultural country so practices vary between the different cultural groups.

Shoes are commonly left at the front door of houses. A collection of shoes at a door means you should remove your shoes also.

Religion

The constitution guarantees freedom of worship. Islam is the official state religion, and Muslim practices pervade much of Malay life and culture. Stricter observance of Muslim customs, such as the head covering for women, is increasing, especially on the East Coast. Almost all ethnic Malays are Muslims; other ethnic groups are Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Confucianist, and Christian. Various religions in Malaysia follow definite dietary and social restrictions and customs; visitors to Malaysia should become familiar with and respect these customs.

Public holidays

Few countries in the world enjoy the breadth and the sheer number of public holidays as Malaysia. The nations' many cultures and religions ensure residents never go too long without a break.

A scenic sunset over a body of water. In the foreground, a wooden pier with a railing and a tall, modern street lamp is visible on the left. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and purple. The water reflects the warm light of the setting sun. In the distance, there are several small islands and a few boats on the water. A semi-transparent white box is centered over the image, containing the text "Settling in Tips" in a white, sans-serif font.

Settling in Tips

Daily Needs

Housing

Housing is not difficult to find and rates are reasonable, even in metropolitan areas. There are many high-rise apartment buildings built to Western standards with spacious flats that include air-conditioning and accommodation for live-in helpers. Apartments for rent are often in condominium complexes that usually offer a swimming pool, 24-hour security, a gym, a squash court, and other facilities. However, many expatriates prefer to live in villas / semidetached houses or townhouses, or two-story detached houses. Malaysia takes great pride in its gardens, and houses generally have a fenced or walled garden of some sort. Most rental apartments and houses are fully equipped, although it is becoming more common to find housing with air-conditioning, it is not standard.

Utilities

Tenants may have to apply for their own utility services however commonly a utility deposit is held by the landlord as a half months rental. The utility deposit is refunded at the end of the tenancy period, provided proof of settlement of the utility bills is furnished to the landlord.

The municipal water and electrical systems are adequate, but water pressure is low by U.S. standards. Occasional water shortages do occur, Interruptions in utility services due to public works are listed in the daily newspapers and social media. Although bills are not transferred to the new tenant's name, the new tenant is responsible for paying them. Because of possible power brownouts and surges, it is advisable to consider a surge protector for sensitive items such as computers, stereos, televisions, and VCRs.

Banking

The banking system in Malaysia is fairly advanced, and most banks provide premier banking services to customers. There are a large number of banks to choose, including local banks and international banks. Some local/regional banks include Maybank & CIMB international banks include Citibank, HSBC, Standard Chartered & OCBC.

Telecommunications

Mobile phones are easily obtainable, the GSM service is extensive and reliable. Competition between service providers has made the voice call, SMS messaging, data plans and other services quite economical. All service providers offer both pre-paid and post-paid accounts Malaysia fully supports the 4G LTE protocol.

Household Help

Household help is readily available throughout Malaysia, although it may take some time to search someone who is suitable for your household. Babysitters are challenging to find, and children usually accompany parents when eating out. For those who do not wish to hire live-in or full-time household help, cleaning and gardening services are widely available in major cities.

Appliances & Electronics

Electrical current is 220V - 50 Hertz; North American appliances cannot be plugged directly into the outlet. Some North American appliances can be made to work with transformers and adapters.

School

There are international schools in Kuala Lumpur and in other cities or areas with a concentration of expatriates. Many schools have extensive waiting lists; begin inquiries and reserve places as soon as possible after confirmation of relocation to Malaysia.

In Kuala Lumpur there are several International schools; some provide education through to the high school years. There are British schools, French school, German, Australian and Japanese schools within the area to name a few.

No aspect of a move overseas is more important for most families than the education of school-age children.

When making a choice between local and international schools, you may consider the pros and cons thoroughly. The former may provide the advantages of acquiring a new language and broader acquaintanceships with host-country culture. It has been the experience of many expatriate parents that adaptation, particularly of the younger children, is much easier than expected. Most often, however, the key consideration is the effect a year, or more in a foreign system may have on the child's reintegration into schools at home or qualifications for college entrance. If there are serious questions on this point, an international school will be the safer choice.



Health & Safety

Sanitation conditions

Sanitation services in the cities are efficient. Tap water is safe to drink in the major cities, but boil water or drink bottled water in other areas. Food served in the major city restaurants and sold in urban food stalls is safe and subject to health inspections, but avoid local delicacies sold at roadside stalls and in small centers.

Diseases & other health concerns

Health standards in Kuala Lumpur and other major cities are generally good and continue to improve. Diseases that may be encountered in Malaysia are Japanese encephalitis, malaria, and dengue fever.

Crime

Major crimes against foreigners are rare; however, petty crimes in tourist areas, such as pickpocketing and purse snatching, are not uncommon. Be especially careful in street markets, and do not carry documents or large amounts of cash, if not absolutely necessary; it is advisable to avoid deserted streets at night in Kuala Lumpur. "Boys," anywhere in age from mid-teens to the early sixties, will offer to guard your car on the road. Although it is an unnecessary service, it is wise to allow them to provide it and give them some change; if you decline, you may return to a scratched or damaged car. Malaysia has one of the highest rates of credit card fraud in the world; check your monthly statements carefully. Emergency telephone numbers are the same throughout Malaysia with all operators speaking English.

Medical Care

There are many Western-trained doctors in Malaysia, and government and private hospitals are of good quality. Medical costs are reasonable, yet, travelers should arrange for health insurance before departure since Malaysia does not have reciprocal health insurance agreements with other countries.

Getting Around

Driving in Malaysia

Driving in Malaysia, despite its generally excellent roadways, can be a challenge. Outside of the major cities driving in Malaysia can be quite enjoyable. It may take time and practice for drivers to become accustomed to the system of inner-ring roads and traffic circles in Kuala Lumpur. Some local drivers can be aggressive, and you can be easily be surrounded by motorbikes while waiting at the traffic lights. Most driving regulations are similar to those of the British road system; drive on the left. Traffic signs in Kuala Lumpur are in English. Vehicles may be imported duty-free within 90 days of arrival if entering into Malaysia under MM2H visa, (Malaysia my 2nd home). All cars must have front seat belts, and these must be worn at all times. Malaysia has 2 good quality local car manufacturers, and some foreign brands have assembly plants in Malaysia. However, purchasing a car in Malaysia involves a higher expenditure than in many Western countries. An international driver's permit or a valid license from your home country is required to drive in Malaysia for the first three months. After that time, you will need to sit a Malaysian driving test and apply for a local license.



Food & Groceries

Food

Malaysian cuisine encompasses many different cuisines - Malay, Indian, Chinese, Nyonya, Portuguese, Thai, and Western dishes. Malay and Indian dishes are spicy and delicious. The best Malay food is often found served at roadside stalls, although caution should be used when purchasing meals from these spots - patronize only stalls crowded with customers, as Malaysians avoid a stall with questionable hygiene. Indian Muslims (known as Mamaks) blend Indian and Malay food. Chinese cuisine includes a large variety, from Cantonese to more spicy dishes, combining with some Malay and Thai flavors. Rice is the staple grain, and fish and chicken are the most widely consumed sources of protein. A wide array of tropical and unusual fruit is available. Locally grown coffee and tea are popular beverages; local beer is considered excellent. Juices, prepared from Malaysia's wide variety of fresh fruits, are accessible and refreshing.

Shopping

There are several large modern shopping centers in Kuala Lumpur. Supermarkets, particularly in the expatriate neighborhoods, sell most products and ingredients you should require. Convenience stores, such as 7-11, can be easily found in most areas. Open-air wet markets selling fresh produce, fish, and seafood, and other perishables, are found in all towns and cities. Neighborhoods in major cities are served by the "van man," who travels a set route, selling fresh provisions daily, and dispensing news of the neighborhood. Prices on some goods and services, including basic food items, are controlled by the government.

A group of young women are gathered at a social event, possibly a school dance or party. In the foreground, a woman with long blonde hair is seen from behind, wearing a dark, patterned dress. To her right, a woman with dark hair is blowing a bubble with gum. Other women in the background are smiling and talking. The setting appears to be indoors, with large windows and brick walls. A semi-transparent yellow banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text "Let's Have Fun".

Let's Have Fun

Meeting New People

One of Malaysia's strong points is the friendliness in the culture. However, when you are new, you may feel challenging to build a network of friends. Get started on getting to know the locals and be open to new experiences. Consider contacting your local expat association to meet fellow people from your homeland who can help you to adjust and settle in.

Clubs & Organizations

There are many clubs and associations that expatriates can join to meet other expatriates and Malaysians. Golf clubs are especially popular; as in the West, business is often discussed during a round of golf. Most expatriates find a club necessary for making a smooth transition to social and professional life in Malaysia. Malaysia also has a growing number of pubs and restaurants where friendships can be made in a relaxed and familiar environment.

Sports & Fitness

Favorite spectator sports are soccer and badminton. Many expatriates can join rugby and cricket teams. There are also many private golf and tennis clubs that expatriates join; a growing number of golf clubs are becoming accessible to non-members. Recreation areas on the peninsula include national parks and broad, sandy beaches. Opportunities are excellent for jungle-trekking, bird watching, water sports, and hiking.



Need Help?

What if I get sick?

The possibility of becoming ill and requiring medical attention is a common concern in preparing for a move abroad. Most relocation assignments are to developed countries where the quality of care and facilities is comparable to that at home. In areas where medical resources may be limited or substandard, there are usually arrangements already in place for transporting expatriates who become seriously ill to facilities in other countries where appropriate care can be obtained. It is a good idea to check out emergency facilities beforehand. Besides, before leaving home, every member of the family should have a thorough checkup to detect any early health problems. This should be far enough in advance to permit any necessary treatment before departure. Follow-ups should be scheduled during home leaves.

Health and other alerts

It is helpful to be informed in advance as to any endemic or short-term health problems in areas to which you may be traveling. Agencies of the expatriate's own government regularly issue country-specific advisories available to citizens traveling or relocating abroad. Similarly, in times of political instability (e.g. the situation in Indonesia in early 1998), governments will sometimes advise their own citizens to evacuate. For these reasons, it is essential to register with your own Embassy or High Commission upon arrival in the country of assignment.

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We make every effort to ensure the information contained in these destination guide is accurate and up-to-date. However, do keep in mind that the rules, regulations and other material in these guides change from time to time, so we cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions. We suggest that you contact the appropriate Asian Tigers office if you have any questions. They will be glad to help you.