



## Travel costs for Malaysia

A holiday trip to Malaysia is generally not expensive; most of the costs derive from the return-flight plus accommodation. Hotels are relatively cheap, but considering the fact that most tourists stay in Malaysia for 2 to 3 weeks the eventual costs may turn out fairly high. Hotel prices in Malaysia have a great price/quality ratio. A luxurious stay at one of many fantastic 5 stars hotels start at around RM300 per room per night. A good 4 stars middle class hotel will on average cost RM200 to RM300 per night. However, there are more than enough guesthouses where you pay around RM70 per night.

One of the main reasons a trip to Malaysia is relatively affordable has to do with the costs of living. For a few euro's a day one can easily get by in Malaysia contrary to other popular destinations that over the years have only gotten more expensive regarding the costs of living. Of course you can make it as expensive or cheap as you wish. At least you have that choice in Malaysia. You decide yourself whether you eat a RM10 meal in the evening, or have an elaborate multiple course dinner. A backpacker can live there for very little money, while someone who likes luxury can spend his holiday in a very comfortable but still affordable way in luxury.

So besides the costs of your flight, the overnight stays and the daily costs of living there are other costs that you should take into consideration when traveling to Malaysia. There are costs related to travel like entrance fees and package tour prices, costs as a result of your shopping activities (as Malaysia is a great place to shop till you drop), costs related to vaccinations and numerous other costs. Below a list with the costs that are relevant when you're going to travel to Malaysia.

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## Customs and import regulations

Because of the fact that Malaysia is so well known as the shopping Walhalla of the world, a lot of people eventually buy lots of fun stuff in this country. Whether it is original, expensive clothing, jewelry or luxurious designer bags or imitation clothing, fake bags or illegal software and pirated CD's/DVD's; there are limits to what you can and are allowed to bring home to your own country. Check your own countries customs regulations before filling your suitcase to the max with your



purchases. There are some items that you can never take out of Malaysia. Obviously it is not allowed to bring along any living animals, (replica) guns and fresh products along in your hand luggage or checked in baggage.

You also cannot take any coral product home with you. So you always have to be on watch that you don't just buy a beautiful shell at the night market, because customs are very keen on this. Fines can turn out quite high.

If you buy a lot of clothing it is always best to make sure that you've already worn the clothing once, do make sure you always keep the receipts. If you happen to be checked and you cannot prove what you have paid for it, the customs office might charge you the regular prices for the articles. Do not give custom officers the impression you are bringing in products to resell it in your own country.

### **Hotel costs**

Hotels are relatively cheap in Malaysia. You can spend the night in a fine 3 or 4 stars hotel for reasonable prices ranging from RM150 to RM 250 per room per night. The quality of these hotels is always good. 5 stars hotels are very luxurious in Malaysia. Always take special events and holidays into account as hotel prices are often much higher. Besides you risk the chance of not being able to find a vacant room, so book well beforehand.

There are multiple ways to stay overnight at the hotel of your choosing in Malaysia. You can have your own travel agent (or travel agency) make the necessary reservations up front. You can also book your accommodations through a local tour operator (i.e. in Kuala Lumpur). Often the best way to book your stay at a hotel is through the internet. Prices are often very affordable at sites like Hotels.com, Expedia.com, Booking.com or Agoda.com. These sites keep an overview of all hotels in Malaysia, making it easy for you to find the best offers quickly.

A less sensible option is to walk into a hotel in Malaysia and arrange your accommodation on the spot (walk in rates or rack rates) as these walk in rates are seldom the most advantageous. I would always check all the booking possibilities in advance. Sometimes a hotel through a travel agency is the cheapest; most times internet prices are definitely cheaper. These higher walk in rates only apply to three stars hotels and above. The biggest difference in price is with 5 stars hotels. If you are backpacking in Malaysia; then there's no need to make reservations beforehand as there are enough guesthouses that always have a room available upon arrival.

### **Living costs**

One of the reasons why a vacation to a far away country such as Malaysia can be relatively cheap is due to the fact that costs of daily living are very low. With around RM100 per day you can already have a great time in this country. Of course you can spend as you want. If you want to eat according to Western eating habits, the costs will turn out higher, especially in the larger cities. We ourselves often look for the best balance. One day we eat delicious local meals along the side of the road or at the food courts, and the other day we enjoy a nice breakfast at The Coffee Bean, where you can buy a delicious Ice Blended Shake plus a lovely focaccia sandwich for around RM35.



Prices of most super market products are about 25% cheaper than European prices; though western (imported) products often are much more expensive. Alcohol is more expensive in Malaysia, considering the fact Malaysia is an Islamic country. There are also daily costs related to traffic. Do you take the bus instead of a taxi, Air Asia instead of Malaysia Airlines at domestic flights, do you eat by the side of the road at a Hawker instead of in a restaurant, then you will probably not spend that much during your complete in Malaysia.

## Other costs

A right assessment of the remaining costs is hard to make as it mainly depends on how much you spend during your holiday in Malaysia. There are many ways to make your holiday more or less expensive. For example if you clean out your mini bar every day, then your final hotel bill will probably be pretty high. If you eat and drink a lot each day; then costs will rise too. Also the amount of attractions (that have an entrance fee) that you visit will result in more costs during your holiday. Same goes for the hotels; if you upgrade your hotel room upon check in then costs will rise. If you take a taxi everyday instead of a local city bus, or buying a digital camera in Plaza Low Yat, branded clothing at Pavilion KL; total costs will increase.

A place to buy affordable branded clothing is the F.O.S. (Factory Outlet Store). Here you will find many popular brands at a fraction of the original price. Some people are under the impression that everything which originates from Asia is imitated. This is however not always the case. Clothing at F.O.S. is genuine (though sometimes rejected, but not fake). The location of where you buy your goods always matters as a shirt of a hip brand in Chinatown does often not really resemble the clothing of the same brand which is sold at Suria KLCC (luxurious shopping mall beneath PETRONAS Twin Towers). Watch out with what you buy from night markets, the quality usually isn't all that great.

When you visit tourist attractions you sometimes have to pay admission. This does not apply to common sights and attractions. Visiting temples is usually free of charge though there will always be a donation box. For the real attractions you usually have to pay an admission fee of about RM10 to RM25.

## Costs of transportation

### *Flying to Malaysia*

The most comfortable and easiest way is probably a direct flight to KLIA (Kuala Lumpur International Airport) in Kuala Lumpur. In this case you fly with Malaysia airlines (MAS) or some of the other airlines that offer a direct flight to Kuala Lumpur without a stopover. With Malaysia Airlines the costs of flight tickets are usually around €800 including airport taxes (departure from numerous European cities). We personally think Malaysia Airlines by far the best option; as staff on board the plane will see to it that you arrive rested in Malaysia. Prices are prone to fluctuate, but often this depends on the season. A flight ticket for instance often costs a few hundred euro's more during peak season compared to low season prices. Peak season usually falls between June and September and in December and January.



Travelers that want the cheapest tickets to Malaysia should look for flight tickets to neighboring (or nearby) countries. Many travelers grab their chance to visit a metropolis on their way to Malaysia. Popular stopover cities on route to Malaysia are Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. For example a ticket to Bangkok is often much cheaper than a ticket to Kuala Lumpur. From Bangkok you can fly low budget to Kuala Lumpur with Air Asia. The same goes for Cathay Pacific (stopover at Hong Kong airport). Cathay Pacific was voted the best airline company in the world in 2009.

One of the best airlines in the world is Singapore Airlines (SIA). SIA offers many daily flights to Kuala Lumpur (and also to numerous other destinations within Malaysia). Flying with Singapore Airlines means you will have a short stopover in Singapore; a great country to visit for a few days. On the internet you can find tickets to Singapore starting from around €700 including airport taxes (departure from numerous European cities). We always find the onboard service one of the best in the world; overall service is also fantastic. So far we have never had any reasons to complain about SIA. Besides travelling from Singapore to Malaysia by air you can also opt to take the bus, (night) train or a rental car.

The last few years the Arab airlines have become more and more popular. For example both Emirates and Etihad Airways fly with an ultra-modern fleet, with many luxuries provided onboard. With Emirates you have a stopover at Dubai and with Etihad Airways you have a stopover at Abu Dhabi. If you wish you can choose to visit these modern Arabic cities for a longer period of time. Both airlines cater the US and Europe with numerous departure cities.

No matter which route you eventually decide to take to Malaysia, it eventually always comes down to a choice between costs and comfort. When you travel for 25 hours non-stop, you won't be arriving totally fit in Malaysia. We personally think the extra costs of a direct flight absolutely outweigh a budget ticket as it takes much more time to get to Malaysia.

### *Domestic flights*

There are multiple ways to travel in Malaysia. Since the rise of budget airliners in Southeast Asia you can fly nearly for free though the whole country. These domestic flights rarely take over an hour (with the exception of Sabah and Sarawak on Borneo) and are an excellent way to see the whole country, without spending too many valuable days on traveling.

Within Malaysia it is best to fly with Malaysia Airlines (MAS). The national carrier is a bit more expensive than the low cost alternatives; but the overall service is better. Because most locals fly with the cheaper solutions typical Malaysia Airlines domestic flights are usually not that crowded. There is usually less delay with MAS flights.

By far the cheapest airliner is Air Asia. Air Asia flies to nearly every noteworthy city within Malaysia, and also to numerous destinations outside Malaysia. The costs of ticket are extremely low; for example you can fly for around RM80 from Kuala Lumpur to Penang (one way). Air Asia keeps the costs low by executing the administrative processes as computerized as possible. This means you book tickets directly online, and pay them directly with your credit card. You can also go to the



special Air Asia ticket counter in all the cities where Air Asia flies to. If you want the best prices you need to book as early as possible. Air Asia often has special promotions; sometimes you only pay for the administration costs. You must however always take special events and holidays into account. Prices of tickets can suddenly be tripled, and the availability of seats is not guaranteed as everybody wants to take a short trip at the same time. If you travel with checked baggage Air Asia charges an extra RM25 for 15kg. This is the main downside of flying with Air Asia; there are many hidden charges that often eventually lead to a similar ticket price compared to the same flight with Malaysia Airlines.

Another low budget airliner is FireFly (subsidiary of Malaysia Airlines). The great thing about FireFly is that they depart from Subang Airport; which is only a 25 minute drive from Kuala Lumpur city center. If you fly from KLIA or LCCT it takes around one hour to get there plus travel costs are also higher.

### *Metro, taxi or bus within the cities*

In Kuala Lumpur you can easily explore the city by metro or bus. Apart from that you can of course always take a taxi. Best way is to just get in the taxi and tell the driver where you need to go. In Kuala Lumpur taxi drivers will turn on the meter in most cases. Some drivers try to agree on a fixed price. Within the city of Kuala Lumpur no taxi ride will cost more than RM20. No point in taking the taxi for a small trip; taxi drivers either don't want to do those short rides or they try to earn something extra by asking a high fixed price. Make sure you know your way around KL a bit; this will make it easier to use the taxi in the city. On Penang Island it is best to use the bus, which covers the entire island and an average bus ride will never cost over RM5. Do take into account that some routes are not driven in the evening or at night, in that case you usually have to resort to the taxi. Taxis on Penang are very expensive as drivers do not use the meter. Fixed prices are usually extremely high (sometimes drivers try their luck and ask RM50 for a 10 minute ride), so you would avoid using the taxi altogether.

Tip: There are times when it is not that wise to try and grab a taxi. Usually when it rains everybody wants to travel by taxi instead of walking to the metro station. As a result there are long queues and taxi drivers will often not want to use the meter. Same goes for closing time at the shopping malls, as then too everybody is in need of a taxi to get back home or to their hotels. When demand is too high; taxi drivers do not want to use their meters (they will try to earn a bit extra).

### *Train*

Over larger distances you can take either the train or the bus. The train is comfortable but this depends on the class in which you travel. Tickets for the train can be booked online in advance via the national railway of Malaysia; [KTMB](http://www.ktmb.com.my) or bought at the ticket counter at KL Sentral, the central train station of Kuala Lumpur. On the official website of KTMB Malaysia you will be able to find all information on the prices; you can already buy a ticket from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore at only RM40. This is a normal 2nd class ticket. If you want to travel a bit more comfortable you are better off with a 1st or VIP ticket. Prices are higher, but you get your own sleeper at the longer train rides.



Train tickets for the long distances (for example to Singapore or Bangkok) can be purchased at the KTM InterCity ticket counter at KL Sentral. From the main area you take the escalator up one level (lvl 2) and then turn right. You will pass the taxi counter and after that you will see the seats in front of the ticket counter (left side; Ekspres Antarabangsa) for international and other long distance tickets. Make sure you bring along your passport. You can pay by cash or credit card; we would advise you to just bring enough cash.

### *Busses*

Taking the bus in Malaysia is very comfortable and cheaper than most other travel options. Busses drive between nearly every noteworthy city in Malaysia. Next to that the bus is generally faster than the train (as the train stops at the different villages and cities on route). The larger companies in Malaysia are Transnasiona, Plusliner, Nice and Aeroline. Especially the first-class busses of Aeroline and Nice are very pleasant. Bus tickets generally cost only a few euro's. For instance a bus trip from Kuala Lumpur to Johor Bahru in the south costs RM79 and a one-way trip to Penang in the north only costs RM60 with one of the VIP busses.

The great thing about Aeroline is that they have their ticket ordering process fully automated. You can simply log on their website and purchase your bus tickets. The only thing you need to take into account (this goes for all the bus operators) is that the busses do not always depart from main bus terminals but often from their own departure location (most of the times in front of a popular hotel). In case of Aeroline they depart from Corus Hotel in Kuala Lumpur instead of the main bus terminal Puduraya.

### **Travel Insurance Malaysia**

When you take a vacation, you are sometimes confronted with certain risks. The encountered risks depend on the destination, the means of transport and the activities during the vacation. To bear the financial consequences of these risks you can choose to get travel insurance as a way to make sure unfortunate events like illness, cancellations or lost luggage don't ruin your trip to Malaysia completely. There are two types of travel insurances; a single-trip, multi-trip and annual travel cover (continuous travel insurance). Contact your insurance company in advance to check what the possibilities are (this differs per country). There are also numerous online travel insurance companies; in many cases you can easily get your insurance online.

### **Vaccinations**

Two types of vaccinations are recommended if you travel to Malaysia: Hepatitis A and Tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis (DPT vaccine). If you travel through Southeast Asia for a longer period of time it is also recommended to get a Hepatitis B vaccine and a Typhoid vaccine. In some cases our insurance company will retribute the vaccinations; some insurers cover these costs entirely.

When staying in the jungle for a longer period of time Malaria prophylaxis is often compulsory but at least recommended. With a standard jungle trip of a few days it is recommended, but not compulsory. To be on the safe side, do contact your regional healthcare organization, your own HP or the Malaysian embassy in your own country. The two most common anti Malaria medicines are



Malarone and Lariam. Both have their own advantages and disadvantages. Symptoms of malaria sometimes do not occur for months or even years after exposure. Malaria prophylaxis is not necessary for the urban or coastal areas of peninsula Malaysia.

Travelers' diarrhea is quite common when traveling in Malaysia. You could get a Typhoid vaccine but this does not always protect you from getting diarrhea. If you get diarrhea it is important to drink huge amounts of water; preferably with O.R.S. added to it (oral rehydration solution). If diarrhea persists you should visit a 24 hours clinic (available in every big city and smaller towns). If you need to travel you can consider using an antidiarrheal drug such as loperamide (imodium) or diphenoxylate (Lomotil) as these medicines will slow down the frequency of stools.

Dengue is a deadly disease that yearly kills a few hundred people in Malaysia. During the day (especially in the cities) it is important to rub yourself in with Deet, for the mosquito which spreads Dengue is then especially active. Deet is a (fairly chemical) substance which protects you from the tropical mosquitoes; it comes as spray, lotion and gel. Fortunately there are good healthcare facilities in Malaysia where they can quickly tell if someone is infected with the virus. Acting quickly and a good treatment are very important. Deet is usually available at the pharmacy. In Malaysia you can buy the product OFF, this also contains the substance DEET.

### **Costs of visa and travel documents**

When you stay in Malaysia for less than 90 days, a visa is not compulsory. There are no costs of a visa associated with a vacation to this country. Your passport however is required to be valid for more than 6 months at your arrival in the country. For more information concerning a visa for a stay longer than 90 days, go to the website of the embassy of Malaysia in your own country. Visa regulations vary from country to country. Malaysia does not handle any tourist taxes or leave taxes. This means you do not have to pay anything upon arrival or departure.

Read more about [entering Malaysia on a Tourist Visa](#)

### **Questions and/or remarks?**

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