

Terengganu



The east-coast state of Terengganu is, along with Kelantan to its north and west, one of the states richest in Malay culture. It is also one of the most beautiful, with some of the best beaches in the country, including those of Pulau Perhentian (the Perhentian Islands), Pulau Redang and Pulau Kapas. All of these islands offer great opportunities for diving and snorkelling. On the mainland, Terengganu boasts long stretches of superb sandy, and largely deserted, beaches along most of its coastline, although the sea can be very rough here. Inland the vast Tasik Kenyir (Lake Kenyir), the largest man-made lake in Southeast Asia, is a peaceful retreat, surrounded by lush rainforest.

Until the completion of the roads to Kuala Lumpur (KL) and the west coast, this part of Malaysia was fairly isolated from the rest of the country and didn't receive many Indian and Chinese migrants. Consequently, cultural influences came more from the north. Traditional activities such as kite-flying, top-spinning, boat-making, weaving of *kain songket* (fabric with gold threads) and batik printing are all alive and well here.

Terengganu has always been a conservative Muslim state and traditional, conservative values prevail here, especially away from the islands and other tourist centres. However, the people remain friendly and welcoming to travellers and the state is well worth lingering over for those keen to explore the real, off-the-beaten-track Malaysia.

HIGHLIGHTS

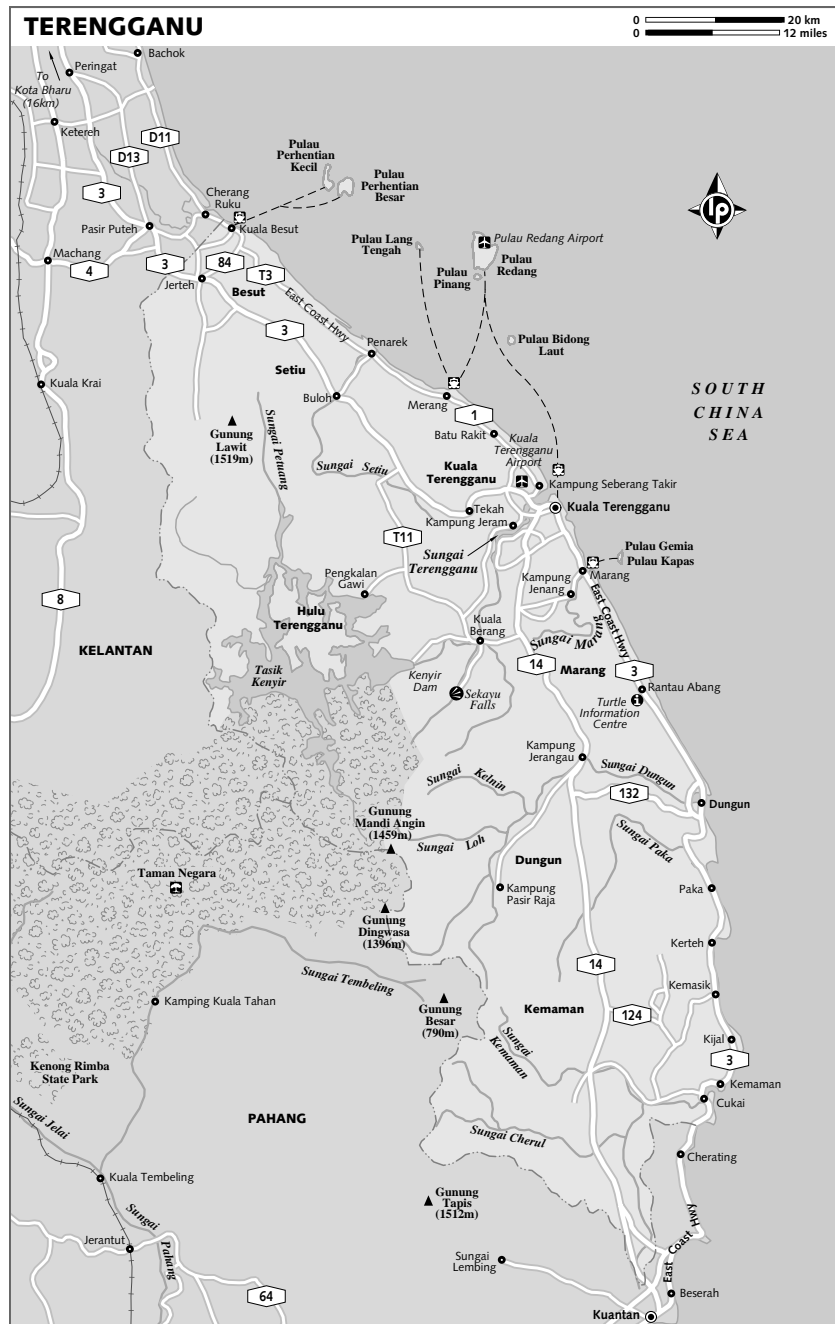
- Taking it easy on the sandy beaches of **Pulau Perhentian** (p313)
- Snorkelling over the colourful coral off **Pulau Redang** (p310)
- Getting a taste of traditional rural life in **Kampung Jenang** (p307)
- Exploring the lakeside and jungle at **Tasik Kenyir** (p304)
- Helping turtle conservation at **Ma' Daerah Turtle Sanctuary** (p307)
- Casting an eye over the state treasures at the **Kompleks Muzium Negeri Terengganu** (p304)
- Watching traditional boat-builders at work on **Pulau Duyung** (p301)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 09

■ POPULATION: 898,825

■ AREA: 12,995 SQ KM



History

An Islamic state is known to have existed in Terengganu from at least the early 14th century, although by the following century it had become a vassal of the expansionist Melaka sultanate. However, Terengganu managed to retain a large degree of independence during the emergence of Riau (in Indonesia) and Johor as partners in the region, and was trading with Siam (now Thailand) and China.

Terengganu was formally established as a state in 1724. The first sultan was Tun Zainal Abidin, a younger brother of one of the former sultans of Johor. The close association with Johor was to continue for some years, and in fact, in the mid-18th century Sultan Mansur spent 15 years in Johor trying to rally support. After failing there, Mansur turned his attention to Kelantan and, after some fighting and shrewd manoeuvring, had his son installed as the ruler of Kelantan. The main legacy of Mansur's reign was that Terengganu became a vassal of the Siamese.

Terengganu was controlled by the Siamese for the duration of the 19th century. However, the Terengganu sultan Baginda Omar, a man renowned for his intelligence and energy, managed to keep the Siamese at arm's length and the state flourished under his rule.

In 1909 an Anglo-Siamese treaty saw power pass to the British. It was an unpopular move locally, and in 1928 a peasant uprising erupted. It was quickly put down and the British went about consolidating their power in the state until the Japanese arrived in WWII.

During the Japanese occupation, control of the state was passed back to Thailand, but this was short-lived and Terengganu became a member of the Federation of Malaya in 1948.

Terengganu remained a fairly undeveloped backwater of Malaysia until oil and gas revenue started to flow into the state in the 1980s. Kuala Terengganu was transformed into a bustling city, and tourist development continues to grow apace.

Climate

Terengganu has a tropical climate, with daily temperatures ranging between 21°C and 32°C. There is intermittent rain throughout

the year, with heavier and more prolonged rainfall during the east-coast monsoon (November to February). Humidity levels hover around 90%.

National Parks

Taman Negara (p285), most of which is within Pahang, includes a small section of western Terengganu, stretching from the Pahang border up towards Tasik Kenyir. Tasik Kenyir (p304), the largest man-made lake in Southeast Asia, is surrounded by virgin rainforest and a rich and varied flora and fauna. Protected marine parks include the islands of Pulau Perhentian, Pulau Redang and Pulau Lang Tengah.

Getting There & Away

Kuala Terengganu is the state's main transport hub, with bus links to most other major towns in Malaysia, and to Singapore. The East Coast Hwy runs the length of Terengganu, heading north towards Kelantan and the Thai border and south towards Johor Bahru. Kuala Terengganu has an airport, with regular flights to/from KL, while Pulau Redang also has an air link to KL and Singapore. See Getting There & Away in Kuala Terengganu and Pulau Redang.

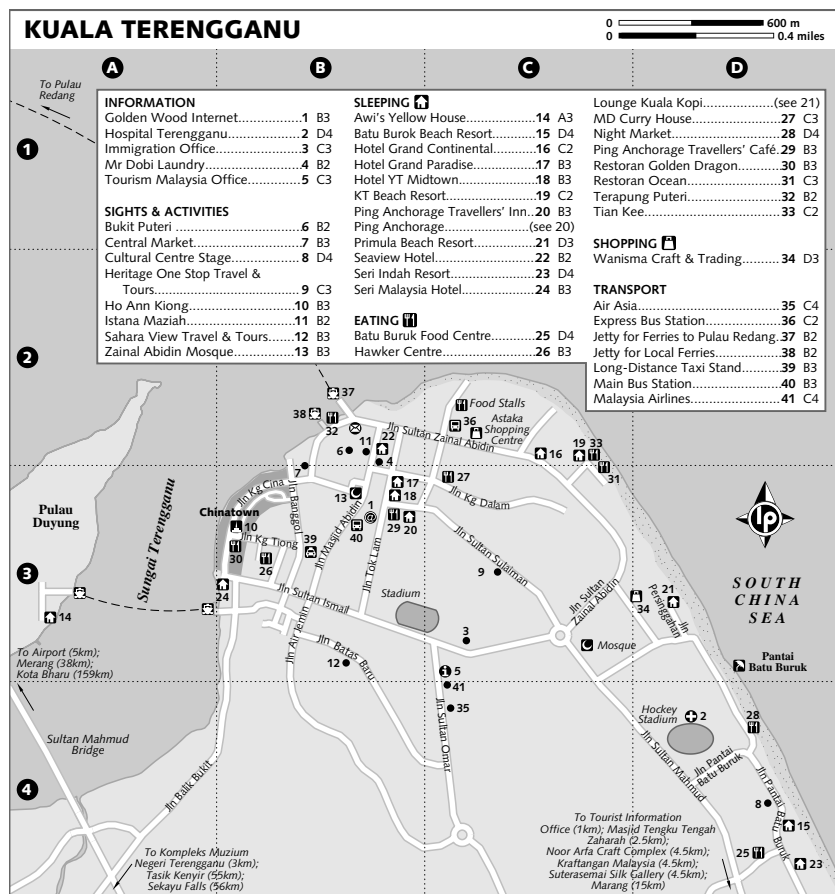
Getting Around

There are regular bus services linking the coastal towns of Terengganu with Kuala Terengganu, the state capital, while travelling into the interior is only practical if you have your own transport. Ferries leave from Kuala Besut for Pulau Perhentian, from Marang for Pulau Redang and Pulau Lang Tengah, and from Marang for Pulau Kapas.

KUALA TERENGGANU

Standing on a promontory formed by the South China Sea on one side and the wide Sungai Terengganu on the other, Kuala Terengganu is the state capital and the seat of the sultan. Oil revenue has transformed Kuala Terengganu from a sprawling, oversized fishing village of stilt houses into a medium-sized modern city.

At first glance Kuala Terengganu appears much like any other Malaysian city, but it remains a stronghold of Malay culture, with colourful markets and craft workshops, where you can buy handmade batik, *kain songket* and basketware, while just across the



river on Pulau Duyung, traditional fishing and boat-building methods are kept alive by the thriving *kampung* (village) community. The city's also a good place to sample authentic Malay cuisine, as well as some excellent Chinese seafood. Keep in mind that it remains a fairly conservative place and has a strong Islamic ethos – there's not much in the way of nightlife.

Kuala Terengganu is also convenient as a staging post to nearby attractions such as Tasik Kenyir, Pulau Kapas and Pulau Redang.

Information

Jln Sultan Ismail is the commercial hub of the town and home to most of the banks,

which are open 9.30am to 3.30pm, except Friday.

Golden Wood Internet (% 625 2039; 59 Jln Tok Lam; per hr RM4)

Immigration office (% 622 1424; Wisma Persekutuan, Jln Sultan Ismail)

Mr Dobi Laundry (% 622 1671; Jln Masjid Abidin)

Tourism Malaysia Office (% 622 1433; Menara Yayasan Islam Terengganu, Jln Sultan Omar; 9am–5pm, closed Friday) General information on Malaysia; a little out of the way.

Tourist Information Office (% 617 3553; Plaza Padang Negara, Jln Sultan Mahmud; 9am–5pm Sat–Thu) Located south of town towards the 'Floating Mosque', with an excellent range of brochures on Terengganu.

www.terengganutourism.com Useful online tourism portal for the state.

Sights

Kuala Terengganu's tiny Chinatown is a compact area centred on Jln Kampung Cina (also known as Jln Bandar). It's home to the usual array of small Chinese shops and restaurants, as well as Terengganu's oldest Chinese temple, the Ho Ann Kiong, dating from the early 1800s though much restored since. It's a good place to sit outdoors and enjoy an evening drink and some excellent food.

The central market (Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin) is a bustling bazaar, with all kinds of food on display. When they say the fish is fresh, they really mean it – the fishing boats dock right outside. Upstairs, there's a good collection of batik and *kain songket*.

Across the road from the market, look for the steep flight of steps leading up to Bukit Puteri (Princess Hill; admission RM1; 9am–5pm Sat–Thu), a 200m-high hill with good views of the city. On top are the scant remains of a mid-19th-century fort (the legacy of intersultanate warfare), some cannons and a bell.

East of the hill, you come to Istana Maziah (Jln Masjid Abidin), the sultan's palace, on your right. The palace is closed to the public, except for some ceremonial occasions. Nearby is the gleaming Zainal Abidin Mosque (Jln Masjid Abidin).

On the ocean side of town, Pantai Batu Buruk is the city beach and a popular place for kite flying and picnics during the day. It is an inviting stretch of sand, but swimming can be dangerous here due to riptides and strong waves. Across the road is the Cultural Centre stage; check with the tourist office to see if any shows are lined up.

From the jetty near the Seri Malaysia Hotel you can take a 60–sen ferry ride to Pulau Duyung, the largest island in the estuary. Fishing boats are built here, for both local and international clients, using age-old techniques and tools, and visitors are welcome to look around.

Tours

Ping Anchorage (% 626 2020; www.pinganchorage.com.my; 77A Jln Sultan Sulaiman) organises numerous tours around Terengganu, including day trips to Tasik Kenyir (RM125) and river cruises on Sungai Marang (RM110) and Sungai Terengganu (RM95). The latter takes in Pulau Duyung and the mangroves, and stops at the tiny village of Kampung

Jeram, with its exotic fruit trees and Chinese temple. Prices are per person for a group of two; prices decrease for larger groups. It's also the best place for package deals to the islands and Tasik Kenyir, and for discounted hotel rooms.

Sahara View Travel & Tours (% 631 5029; sahara-view@yahoo.com; 111 Jln Batai Baru; 1 closed Fri) is a much smaller operator, running city tours (RM55) taking in Chinatown, a batik factory, Pulau Duyung and more. It also offers day trips (RM120) and packages to Redang.

Heritage One Stop Travel & Tours (% 631 6468; www.heritageonestop.com.my; Blok Teratai, Jln Sultan Sulaiman) is another travel agency offering packages to Pulau Redang, Tasik Kenyir and elsewhere.

Sleeping

Budget accommodation is in short supply in Kuala Terengganu, so you'd be wise to book ahead. Most of the midrange hotels are around the compact city centre, while there are also a couple of good places out on the beach at Pantai Batu Buruk, on the southeastern edge of town. The top end of the market is dominated by a couple of high-rise chains.

BUDGET

Awii's Yellow House (% 624 5046; dm/r RM6/15) This unique guesthouse is built on stilts over Sungai Terengganu, on Pulau Duyung. It may be a little rustic for some, and you'll need a mosquito net, but it's a friendly and relaxed place. The island is linked to the mainland by the Sultan Mahmud bridge, or you could also jump on one of the infrequent ferries from the jetty near the Seri Malaysia Hotel, then ask for directions upon arrival.

Ping Anchorage Travellers' Inn (% 626 2020; www.pinganchorage.com.my; 77A Jln Sultan Sulaiman; dm/r from RM8/26; a) Spread over two floors above the travel agency of the same name, this is the best budget option in town. Rooms are simple but spotless, and there's a rooftop terrace and downstairs café. Rooms with bathroom go for RM38.

Hotel Grand Paradise (% 622 8888; 28 Jln Tok Lam; s/d/f RM40/60/140; a) This slightly worn chain hotel has basic, unremarkable rooms, all with shower and toilet attached. Not quite heavenly, but a reasonable option for the price.

MIDRANGE

KT Beach Resort (☎ 631 5555; 548E Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin; s & d/tr RM65/80; a) In a quiet location off the main road, this place has neat chalet rooms facing the beach. There's also a couple of rooms that aren't quite as attractive, in a dingy building opposite.

Seaview Hotel (☎ 622 1911; svhotel@yahoo.com; 18A Jln Masjid Abidin; s/d/f RM65/75/85; a) Despite the name, this older establishment has no sea views, but it does overlook the Istana Maziah, right across the road. It's a basic, family-run establishment with clean, simple rooms, which are OK at the price.

Seri Indah Resort (☎ 622 2633; 898 Jln Haji Busu; r RM90-110; a s) A little further along Pantai Batu Buruk is this whitewashed, vaguely Spanish-style complex. Rooms all come with two single beds, and it's worth paying the extra for the sea view. There's a sun deck and a separate pool for children.

Batu Buruk Beach Resort (☎ 622 1410; www.batuburokbeachresort.com; 906A Jln Pantai Batu Buruk; r/ste from RM90/199; a s) Enjoy beach life in the city at this attractive seafont resort. Rooms are small but comfortable, and those with a view of the waves cost slightly more (RM115). It's on a wide, uncrowded stretch of sand, while pool tables and dartboards provide indoor amusement.

Hotel YT Midtown (☎ 623 5288; ythotel@streamyx.my; 30 Jln Tok Lam; r/ste from RM90/225; a i) The YT is a big, modern hotel in the centre of town with neat, good-value rooms that come with the regular mod cons such as TVs, minifridges and kettles. There's a decent restaurant downstairs.

Seri Malaysia Hotel (☎ 623 6454; www.serimalaysia.com.my; 1640 Jln Balik Bukit; r RM120; a) A popular chain with branches all over Peninsular Malaysia, this is a reliable, squeaky-clean place offering the standard, comfortable, could-be-anywhere setup. It boasts an attractive riverside terrace restaurant, too.

TOP END

Hotel Grand Continental (☎ 625 1888; 4023 Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin; r from RM225; a i s) Modern high-rise chain in the centre of town with large, comfortable rooms, great service and all the amenities you'd expect.

Primula Beach Resort (☎ 622 2100; www.primula-hotels.com; Jln Persinggahan; s/d/ste from RM250/290/900; a i s) Kuala Terengganu's most luxurious option is this large seafont hotel with

spacious, attractively furnished rooms, including some outstanding suites with four-poster beds and multiple balconies. It's perched on a wide stretch of white sand, and is particularly popular with young families. It has a few very good restaurants and the best coffee bar in town.

Eating

Naturally enough, fish plays a big role in local cuisine, and Kuala Terengganu is a great place to try regional specialties such as *nasi dagang* (rice and glutinous rice with coconut milk, served with fish curry, usually eaten for breakfast), *laksa Terengganu* (rice noodles with fish gravy, tamarind and shrimp paste), *ketupat sotong* (squid stuffed with rice) and *kerepok* (a grey concoction of deep-fried fish paste and sago, usually moulded into sausages, called *lekor*, or crackers, called *keping*). You can sample these at the food centres listed.

QUICK EATS

One of the best food centres is Batu Buruk Food Centre, in a pleasant outdoor location near the beach; don't leave without trying the famous *ais-krim goreng* (fried ice cream). There's a night market along the beachfront nearby every Friday evening; it's a great place to sample delicious snacks, including *kerepok*, satay and a huge array of sweets. Also worth trying is Chinatown's outdoor *hawker* centre (off Jln Kampung Cina), which is divided into Chinese and Malay sections and serves up cheap and tasty meals. Try *Lounge Kuala Kopi* (Jln Persinggahan; 11 3pm-late) inside the Primula Beach Resort for an excellent range of coffees, including its unique house blend, *kopi de ganu*.

RESTAURANTS

Restoran Golden Dragon (☎ 622 3034; 198 Jln Kampung Cina; mains from RM5; 11 lunch & dinner) This excellent, and regularly crowded, restaurant serves a wide array of Chinese food; the fish is particularly good, and beer is also available.

Ping Anchorage Travellers' Café (☎ 626 2020; 77A Jln Sultan Sulaiman; mains from RM6; 11 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Inviting little café under the same management as the neighbouring travel agency. Noodles, omelettes, and burgers and chips are on the menu, and it's also a good place to relax with a drink and meet up with fellow travellers.

Tian Kee (☎ 622 4375; 136 Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin; mains from RM5; 11 5.30pm-1am) Halal Chinese restaurant, serving very good seafood. Buttered prawns, steamed fish and bean curd are the specialties of the house. It also serves beer.

Restoran Ocean (☎ 623 9156; 2079 Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin; mains from RM6; 11 dinner) A very good Chinese restaurant specialising in seafood. It's a big place, with big, family-sized tables, though it seldom gets too crowded. It's also a good place to enjoy a few beers.

Terapung Puteri (☎ 631 8946; Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin; mains from RM5; 11 lunch & dinner) This is a busy Malay restaurant perched on stilts, *kampung*-style, on the seafont next to the jetty. There's a huge menu, with fish, prawns and crab featuring heavily, as well as local items such as *kerepok* and a few 'Western' dishes.

MD Curry House (☎ 013-902 6331; Jln Kampung Dalam; mains from RM4; 11 lunch & dinner) Popular travellers hang-out offering tasty, traditional banana-leaf curries and other Indian specialties.

Shopping

Batik and *kain songket* are particularly good buys in Kuala Terengganu. The **Noor Arfa Craft Complex** (☎ 617 5700; www.noor-arfa.com; 11 9am-7pm Sat-Thu) is a handicraft centre on the Chendering industrial estate (about 4.5km south of town, not far from the 'Floating Mosque') selling a large stock of batik shirts and dresses, *kain songket*, basketware and glass. Printed cotton batik pieces start at RM15 for 2 sq metres. There are on-site demonstrations. The **Kraftangan Malaysia** (☎ 622 6458; 11 9am-5pm Sun-Thu) outlet nearby sells high-quality *kain songket* costing as much as RM12,000 for 2½ sq metres. There's also a tiny 'Songket Heritage Exhibition' showing varying designs. Also on this estate is the **Suterasemai Silk Gallery** (☎ 617 1355; www.suterasemai.com.my; 11 8am-6pm Sun-Thu, 9am-4pm Sat) with a collection of handwoven silk, with both hand-drawn and printed designs. Hand-painted silk shirts go for around RM250. Minibus 13 from Kuala Terengganu will drop you outside (70 sen).

Closer to town, **Wanisma Craft & Trading** (☎ 622 3311; 32 Ladang Sekolah, Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin; 11 9.30am-6.30pm) is a batik-dyeing and brass workshop where you can watch the skilled

craftsmen at work. The shop here sells their products.

Handicrafts are also sold upstairs at the **central market** (Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin). Bargaining is possible here – and necessary to get fair prices.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

Malaysia Airlines (☎ 622 1415; 13 Jln Sultan Omar) has direct flights daily to/from KL (RM184). **Air Asia** (☎ 631 3122; Jln Sultan Omar) has two flights daily to KL (RM89 to RM129).

BUS

The main bus station on Jln Masjid Abidin serves as a terminus for all local buses. Some long-distance buses depart from here as well, but most use the express bus station in the north of town (ask at your lodgings or when buying your ticket if you're unsure of which station to go to).

At the local bus station there are services to/from Marang (RM2), Rantau Abang (RM4), Dungun (RM6) and Merang (RM2).

From the express bus station there are regular services running to and from Kuantan (RM13), Johor Bahru (RM34), Singapore (RM36), Melaka (RM34), KL (RM30), Ipoh (RM43), Kuala Besut (RM10) and Kota Bharu (RM11). There are two daily buses to Penang (RM32).

TAXI

Kuala Terengganu's main taxi stand is near the bus station. Regular taxi destinations include Marang (RM15), Kota Bharu (RM80), Kuala Besut (RM30), Rantau Abang (RM40), Merang (RM65) and Tasik Kenyir (RM60). Some long-distance taxis leave from a stand on Jln Masjid Abidin.

Getting Around

A taxi to the airport costs around RM20. Local buses leave from the main bus station in the town centre. Taxis around town cost a minimum of RM5, but there are not many of them about; try at the long-distance taxi stand.

Kuala Terengganu was once the trishaw (bicycle rickshaw) capital of Malaysia, and although numbers have dropped, they are still a popular form of inner-city transport. Prices are highly negotiable.

AROUND KUALA TERENGGANU

Kuala Terengganu makes an excellent base for exploring many of the state's top attractions. The fascinating Kompleks Muzium Negeri Terengganu is on the southwestern outskirts of the city while to the southeast you'll find the Masjid Tengku Tengah Zaharah (Floating Mosque). The Sekayu Falls and Tasik Kenyir, Asia's largest man-made lake, are southwest of the city.

To the north, Merang is the gateway to the picturesque islands of Pulau Redang and Pulau Lang Tengah, and Kuala Besut is the departure point for Pulau Perhentian. Boats to Pulau Kapas leave from Marang, south of Kuala Terengganu.

Sights

KOMPLEKS MUZIUM NEGERI TERENGGANU

A few kilometres southwest of town in Losong is the excellent Kompleks Muzium Negeri Terengganu (Terengganu State Museum Complex; % 622 1444; www.muzium.terengganu.gov.my in Malay; adult/child RM5/2; h 9am-5pm Sat-Thu). The museum, allegedly the largest in Southeast Asia, consists of several buildings spread over vast landscaped grounds on the banks of the wide Sungai Terengganu. In the main building (a vast concrete reproduction of a traditional Malay house) are displays of textiles, crafts, Islamic artefacts and natural history and a gallery devoted to the state's petroleum industry. In the grounds you'll find a collection of traditional Malay boats, as well as several wooden east-coast houses, while a small maritime gallery houses displays on ship-building and fishing. However, the real highlight of the museum is Istana Tengku Long, a wooden palace that dates from 1888 and contains displays of royal artefacts. Take minibus 10, marked 'Muzium/Losong', from the main bus station (70 sen). A taxi from Kuala Terengganu will cost RM7.

MASJID TENGGU TENGAH ZAHARAH

The so-called 'Floating Mosque' is located 4.5km southeast of Kuala Terengganu, set in a large park. The huge, gleaming white building combines modern and traditional Moorish-style designs, and projects over the water, giving the illusion, some claim, that the whole thing is floating. Bus 13 from Kuala Terengganu will drop you outside (70 sen).

SEKAYU FALLS

These waterfalls, 56km southwest of Kuala Terengganu, are part of a large park popular with locals on Friday and public holidays. The falls extend quite a way up a mountain-side; the main falls are 15 minutes from the entrance. A further 20 minutes' walk brings you to the more attractive upper falls. There's also an orchard with a huge variety of seasonal tropical fruit.

There are three daily buses from Kuala Terengganu to the park entrance (RM4.40), 2km from the falls. The first leaves at 9am, and the last bus comes back at 3pm. Ping Anchorage in Kuala Terengganu offers day trips taking in the falls and Kenyir Dam for RM99 per person, including lunch.

TASIK KENYIR

Tasik Kenyir (Lake Kenyir) is the largest man-made lake in Southeast Asia. It was formed by the construction of Kenyir Dam in 1985, covers over 260,000 hectares and contains 340 islands. The lake has been developed as an 'ecotourist' destination and there are several resorts dotted around the shore. These are mostly very quiet, low-key places that seldom get very crowded. There's not a lot going on, but you'll be surrounded by wildlife; expect wild pigs and lizards scampering around your chalet and a variety of tropical birds providing a dawn chorus. The surrounding jungles harbour some 8000 species of flowers, including 800 different orchids.

Information

There is a small tourist information office (% 626 7788; h 9am-5pm) near the jetty in Pengkalan Gawi, the lake's main access point. Also at the jetty you'll find a café, a shop, and a few kiosks where you can book boat trips. **MAZA Boat Service** (% 681 2509) offers four-hour fishing trips for RM500.

Sights

Waterfalls and caves are high on the list of Kenyir's attractions, as well as a number of fish farms. These are reached by boat, either as day trips from the lake's main access point, Pengkalan Gawi, or from the resorts themselves. Perhaps more interesting are trips up the rivers that empty into the lake. Among these, a journey up Sungai Petuang, at the extreme northern end of the lake, is a real

highlight of a visit to Kenyir. When the water is high, it's possible to travel several kilometres up the river into beautiful virgin jungle.

Fishing is a popular activity and the lake is surprisingly rich in species, including *toman* (snakehead), *buang* (catfish), *kelah* (a kind of carp), *kelisa* (green arowana) and *kalui* (giant gouramy). You will need a permit (RM10) to fish here; this will be arranged for you if you book onto a fishing trip.

Because the lake is a reservoir, the water level varies considerably, peaking at the end of the rainy season in March or April and gradually descending until the start of the next rainy season in November. When the water is high the lake takes on an eerie atmosphere, with the tops of drowned trees poking through the surface; when the water is low the lake is reduced to a series of canals through partially denuded jungle hills. Needless to say, the lake is at its most beautiful when the water is high, in late spring and early summer.

Note that at the height of the rainy season there is a risk of flooding, and some areas and communities can become inaccessible as poorly maintained roads and bridges are submerged or damaged by rising water.

Sleeping

Most of the accommodation in the area is in resort chalets or floating longhouse structures built over the lake. There are no budget options. The resorts usually offer packages including meals and boat transport from Pengkalan Gawi.

Kenyir Sanctuary Resort (% 019-824 4360; r from RM85; a) Offers some of the cheapest rooms on the lake. There are 40 rustic wooden chalets, including some pricier air-con rooms.

Uncle John's Resort (% 626 2020; r RM150) This older place is one of the more basic lake operations. It's a wooden longhouse jutting out over the water, with 12 plain fan rooms and shared facilities. There's a communal TV lounge, and fishing trips are available.

Kenyir Lakeview Resort (% 666 8888; www.lakekenyir.com; r/ste from RM220/330; a s) One of the more upmarket options, this peaceful resort has spacious and well-equipped chalets with balconies overlooking the lake or the rainforest. There's a restaurant, tennis courts and a gym, and plenty of organised activities.

Petang Island Resort (% 822 1276; www.pirkenyir.com.my; r RM280; a s) On its own little island in the middle of the lake, this is a quiet retreat with a choice of comfortably furnished single- or double-storey chalets and longhouse rooms. Chalets have kitchens if you want to cook for yourself, but there's a good restaurant here, too.

Another option is to explore by houseboat, which allows you to reach remote regions of the lake. The only drawback is that you generally need a large group to make a trip on a houseboat economical.

Most visitors come to Kenyir on all-inclusive packages, which can either be arranged directly with the resort or with a travel agency in Kuala Terengganu, which will probably work out cheaper.

Getting There & Away

Tasik Kenyir is 15km west of Kuala Berang and 55km from Kuala Terengganu. The main access point is the jetty at Pengkalan Gawi, on the northern shore of the lake. To get there, take a taxi from Kuala Terengganu (RM60 per car each way). If you book a package in Kuala Terengganu with Ping Anchorage (p301), it can provide minibus transport; it also does day trips to the lake. There are no buses to the lake from Kuala Terengganu.

Getting Around

Travel around the lake is expensive as you will have to charter a whole boat, either from Pengkalan Gawi or from your resort. Boat hire costs around RM100 per hour and a half-day fishing trip costs about RM500. The resorts offer various trips around the lake, but prices depend on the number of passengers, so again this can be rather pricey. Cruises are sometimes included in package deals. An organised day trip from Kuala Terengganu (p301) is your best bet if you just want a quick scout around.

SOUTH OF KUALA TERENGGANU

Kemaman & Cukai

About 25km north of Cherating, Cukai and Kemaman are the first towns of any size north of Kuantan, and also the first towns you reach in Terengganu state when travelling up the coast. The two towns have merged into one long developed strip, with little of interest to hold passing travellers.

If for some reason you do wish to stop, **Hotel Tiara** (☎ 859 1802; K-353 Jln Kampung Tengah; r RM45-55; a) has basic rooms. It's down the street roughly opposite the bus station (turn at the 'Masjid Jamek' sign).

There are several Chinese restaurants along Jln Sulaiman serving local specialities such as stuffed crab.

Buses to/from Cherating or Kuantan both cost RM7. Express buses cost RM9 to/from Marang and RM11 to/from Kuala Terengganu. Taxis (per car) cost RM20 to/from Cherating, RM40 to/from Kuantan, RM40 to/from Dungun and RM70 to/from Kuala Terengganu.

Kemasik

☎ 09

Kemasik's palm-fringed beach has some of the clearest water on the east coast. The nearest accommodation is at the gargantuan, five-star **Awana Kijal Golf, Beach & Spa Resort** (☎ 864 1188; www.awana.com.my; r/ste from RM245/450; a i s) on the beach around 1km south, towards Kijal. Among other things it has a golf course, tennis courts and a spa, as well as numerous organised activities. Discounts are often available. Without your own transportation the best way to visit the beach is to take a local bus running between Kemaman-Cukai and Dungun. If you're driving, turn off Route 3 at the 'Pantai Kemasik' sign.

Paka

☎ 09

The beach here is almost as good as the one at Kemasik, but the view is somewhat marred by the refinery a few kilometres down the coast. The village is a little run-down but quite picturesque.

The modern **Residence Resort** (☎ 827 3366; r/ste from RM250/460; a i s) on the beach just north of the village offers a high standard of accommodation, including luxurious beachfront suites. It also offers organised activities for children. The best way to visit Paka is to take a local bus running between Kerteh and Dungun. If you're driving, turn off at the 'Pantai Paka' sign.

Dungun

☎ 09

Dungun, together with the port of Kuala Dungun, forms the largest town on the coast between Kemaman-Cukai and Kuala

Terengganu. The main reason to come here is to catch a bus or taxi out again; the main bus station is here.

If you decide to stop over, there are a few standard hotels; try **Hotel Kasanya** (☎ 848 1704; 225 Jln Tambun; r RM42-63; a), a reasonable option, around five minutes' walk from the bus station; cross the sports field and take a left on the main road.

There are buses to/from Kuala Terengganu (RM5) and Kemaman-Cukai (RM4). Kuala Terengganu-bound buses will drop you at Rantau Abang (RM2); the same bus heading in the opposite direction will stop at Dungun.

On the coast around 8km east of Dungun is the gorgeous **Tanjong Jara Resort** (☎ 845 1100; www.tanjongjararesort.com; Batu 8 Jln Dungun; r/ste from RM805/2415; a i s). It's a peaceful and secluded place set on a long, sandy stretch of beach, with a choice of spacious and luxurious traditional-style chalets, some with private verandas and sunken baths. There's also a spa, a tennis court and an excellent restaurant.

Rantau Abang

☎ 09

Rantau Abang once attracted large numbers of tourists who came to see the giant leatherback turtles coming ashore to lay their eggs. Now that the turtles have all but disappeared, tourist numbers have dwindled, and the village has a faintly desolate air.

However, the beach is still lovely and is perfect for long walks and picnics. Swimmers should beware of the often savage undertow.

TURTLE INFORMATION CENTRE

Run by the Department of Fisheries, the **Turtle Information Centre** (☎ 845 8169; h 8am-4.30pm Sun-Thu, 8am-noon Sat) is a small showroom with a few information boards but not much else. Staff will run a 10-minute film (in English) on request.

August is peak egg-laying season for the leatherbacks, but they've also been known to come ashore in June and July. With so few turtles appearing, however, you'd have to stay for all of August for the chance of a sighting, although you may well encounter the more common green turtle. For now, it's better to think of Rantau Abang just as a quiet beach resort. You can help with turtle

ADOPT A TURTLE

Turtles were once a common sight all along Terengganu's coastline, but sadly their numbers have diminished significantly over recent years. However, green turtles remain relatively abundant and the **Ma' Daerah Turtle Sanctuary** (☎ 845 8169; <http://madaerah-turtle-sanctuary.org>) on the coast between Kerteh and Paka was established by the fisheries department to ensure their survival here. The turtles nest on this protected site between April and September, and although not open to casual tourists, volunteers are very welcome. In the summer months you can spend a weekend helping to monitor turtle landings, collecting eggs for transfer to the hatchery and releasing hatchlings. A minimum donation of RM250 (RM150 for children) is required, and accommodation and meals are provided; book your place two weeks in advance. You could also 'adopt' a nest (RM100) or a turtle (RM150) or help with cleaning up the beach, which usually takes place around April.

Local buses running between Kerteh and Dungan stop nearby, but you will need an advance reservation to visit. Ping Anchorage in Kuala Terengganu runs night-time trips here in summer (RM129).

conservation at the newer Ma' Daerah sanctuary further south (above).

SLEEPING & EATING

There are fewer places to stay these days. One of the more attractive is **Dahimah's Guest House** (☎ 845 2843; s & d RM50, f RM80-120; a), about 1km south towards Dungun. Some of the best rooms are over the lagoon that separates the hotel from the beach. All have air-con and hot showers. It's a pretty spot and makes a quiet getaway for beach lovers.

There are a few food stalls next to the Turtle Information Centre.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Dungun-Kuala Terengganu buses run in both directions every hour from 7am to 6pm and there's a bus stop near the Turtle Information Centre. To/from Dungun costs RM2; to/from Kuala Terengganu costs RM5. A taxi to/from Kuala Terengganu costs RM50.

Marang

☎ 09

Marang, a fishing village on the mouth of Sungai Marang, was once a favourite stop-over for travellers making their way along the east coast. Unfortunately, much of the town's traditional charm has fallen victim to an ill-planned modernisation programme, and the once-picturesque waterfront area is now dominated by characterless concrete structures.

While there are a few good beaches north and south of town, the main reason to come

here is to catch a ferry to Pulau Kapas (see p308), which is just 6km offshore.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

If you'd like to get a glimpse of what Marang used to be like, you can travel up Sungai Marang to **Kampung Jenang** to observe traditional rural activities including the weaving of *atap* (roof thatching) and the making of coconut sugar, as well as the gathering of coconuts by trained monkeys. It's especially attractive in summer, when the numerous exotic fruit trees are in season. It's possible to visit the village as an easy day trip from Marang or Kuala Terengganu.

If you are in town on Sunday be sure to check out the excellent market, which starts at 3pm near the town's jetties.

SLEEPING & EATING

Island View Resort (☎ 618 1707; Jln Kampung Paya; s & d/ RM40/65; a) This place has a clutch of ageing and pretty shabby rooms, an option if everywhere else is full. The gardens house several large cages full of chirpy birds, including budgies and peacocks, so oversleeping won't be a problem.

Kamal Guesthouse (☎ 618 2181; 1B Jeti Pelancongan; r RM40-70; a) This sleepy guesthouse on the main road has some reasonable rooms with attached showers and toilets. Only the pricier ones have air-con.

Angullia Beach House Resort (☎ 618 1322; angullia_resort@yahoo.com; r from RM60; a) Across the bridge to the southeast is this peaceful resort. There's a variety of chalets spread out under the palm trees on a stretch of coarse golden



sand, with a good view of Pulau Kapas. There are also larger chalets housing up to six people (RM140) and a garden restaurant. It's popular with school groups.

Hotel Seri Malaysia (☎ 618 2889; www.seri-malaysia.com.my; 3964 Jln Kampung Paya; r RM120; a s) The best place in town is this bright modern chain hotel on the coast north of the centre, offering very good value.

There are a couple of basic *kedai kopi* (coffee shops) in the town centre, near the bus ticket office, and you can also find some food stalls (Jln Kampung Paya) near the jetties.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are regular local buses to/from Kuala Terengganu (RM1.80) and Dungun/Rantau Abang (RM4/3). For long-distance buses there's a ticket office (☎ 618 2799; Jln Tanjung Sulung Musa) near the town's main intersection. There are two daily buses to/from KL (RM30.40), two to/from Johor Bahru (RM33.90) and five to/from Kuantan–Cherating (RM13.70).

There are four bus stops on the main road. Southbound express buses usually stop in front of the mosque, and northbound services

will pick you up just north of the post office. This is not a hard and fast rule, however, and it's best to ask the owner of your guesthouse or someone at the ticket office first.

Pulau Kapas

☎ 09

Offshore from Marang (6km) is the beautiful little island of Kapas, fringed with clear water and beaches of powdery white sand. You'll find all the accommodation on three small beaches on the west coast, but you can walk around the headlands to quieter beaches. There's a rough track running across the middle of the island to the rocky eastern shore, though swimming there is dangerous. Just off the north coast of Kapas is tiny Pulau Gemia; it's not usually possible to visit, unless you're staying at the island's exclusive resort (see opposite).

Pulau Kapas is best avoided during holidays and on long weekends, when it is over-run with day-trippers. Outside of these times, the island is likely to be very quiet. It shuts down during the east coast's monsoon season (November to March).

DIVING & SNORKELLING

Kapas is billed as a snorkelling paradise, though coral is scarce on the most accessible beaches facing the coast. Some of the best snorkelling is found around the northern end of the island and around Pulau Gemia. North of Gemia, a sunken WWII Japanese landing craft, now carpeted in coral, is a popular dive site.

All of the resorts listed can arrange snorkelling and diving trips. **Aqua-Sport Divers** (☎ 019-983 5979), attached to Duta Puri Island Resort, charges RM90/170 for one/two dives, including equipment. Snorkelling costs RM25 for a session.

SLEEPING & EATING

Many people visit Kapas on a day trip, but there are several places to stay, including budget beach chalets and a couple of midrange resorts. They all have their own restaurant and most offer reasonable all-inclusive package deals.

Lighthouse (☎ 013-959 8734; dm/r RM20/40) On the southernmost tip of the bay, this is the cheapest and most atmospheric budget spot on Kapas, with all rooms in one elevated longhouse under the trees. It's rustic, but very sociable, and is popular with diving groups.

Kapas Island Resort (☎ 631 6468; www.kapas-islandresort.com; dm/r RM20/80-150; a s) The best option is this resort just south of the jetty. Set among pretty landscaped gardens, the freestanding timber chalets all have two single beds and verandas. The cheaper ones, facing the jungle, are more secluded. There's also a longhouse dorm sleeping up to 30, with mattresses on the floor; a bargain if you can get it to yourself.

Duta Puri Island Resort (☎ 624 6090; r RM80-120; a) A vaguely *kampung*-style resort with some spacious fan and air-con chalets. The grounds are a bit shabby but rooms are clean and attractively furnished.

North of the jetty, a stone walkway leads to another beach with a couple more options.

Kapas Beach Chalet (☎ 019-968 2331; r RM25-60) Also known simply as KBC, there's a choice of rooms here, ranging from very basic 'backpacker' rooms with outside (but private) toilets to more-comfortable A-frame huts with TVs. The friendly Dutch owner can arrange fishing trips and barbecues.

Mak Cik Gemuk Beach Resort (☎ 624 5120; r RM40-120; a) This scruffy, older place has a variety

of unmodernised rooms; take a look at a few before deciding. It's overpriced, though, and nobody seems to speak any English.

Gimi Chalet (☎ 019-648 1714; r RM60) Another walkway leads to this small, northernmost collection of huts, on its own beach. Basic indeed, and isolated, but it has a certain castaway charm.

Gem Wellness Spa & Island Resort (☎ 624 5110; information@gemisle.com; r from RM207; a) Perched on tiny Pulau Gemia, 800m north of Pulau Kapas, this resort is worth a try for those in search of something more sophisticated. It's a peaceful spot, with airy wooden chalets, a couple of small private beaches and, between May and October, guests can watch baby green turtles emerging at the resort's own turtle hatchery. The spa offers the usual pampering services, and all-inclusive package deals are available.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Boats to Pulau Kapas leave from Marang's main jetty and tickets can be purchased from any of the agents nearby. Boats leave when four or more people show up, and charge RM30 return. Be sure to arrange a pick-up time when you purchase your ticket. You can usually count on morning departures at around 8am and 9am. The same boats will continue to Pulau Gemia if requested.

NORTH OF KUALA TERENGGANU

North of Kuala Terengganu the main road (Route 3) leaves the coast and runs inland to Kota Bharu, 165km north, via Jerteh. The quiet coastal back road from Kuala Terengganu to Kuala Besut runs along a beautiful stretch of coast and is popular with cycling travellers.

Batu Rakit

☎ 09

The small fishing village of Batu Rakit lies 27km north of Kuala Terengganu. It's a quiet place with a very pleasant beach and views of Pulau Redang on a clear day.

The best place to stay is the family-oriented **Gem Beach Resort** (☎ 669 5910; www.gem-resorts.com; 2135 Mukim Batu Rakit; r/st from RM184/320; a s), a large, modern complex on a stunning stretch of sand, with pretty landscaped gardens. There are numerous organised activities and excursions available, and some good restaurants.

Merang

09

Gateway to Pulau Redang, the sleepy little fishing village of Merang (not to be confused with Marang) is one of the few remaining villages of its kind where development hasn't gone ahead in leaps and bounds. There's little of interest in the village, but the beach is attractive if you have to spend some time waiting for ferry connections to Redang.

SLEEPING

Kembara Resort (06 653 1770; <http://kembararesort.tripod.com>; dm RM10 r RM30-60; a i) About 500m south of the village (follow the signs from the main road), this is a friendly place with a range of plain but homely chalets. There are organised activities and a common kitchen.

Merang Inn Village Resort (06 653 1435; r RM40-60; a) In the centre of the village, this place has decent fan and air-con chalets just across the road from the beach.

Sutra Beach Resort (06 669 6200; www.sutra.beachresort.com.my; Kampung Rhu Tapai; r/stg from RM180/650; a s) About 6km south of Merang, and 35km north of Kuala Terengganu, this big complex is set on a private beach and offers a choice of accommodation. Most attractive are the beachfront rooms with uninterrupted views of the South China Sea. There are numerous organised tours available, and various packages.

Aryani Resort (06 653 2111; aryani@tm.net.my; Jln Rhu Tapai; r from RM560; a s) One of Malaysia's most exclusive hotels lies on a secluded stretch of coast 4km south of Merang. The detached chalets show a mix of Malay and Javanese design, and are spread out in tranquil, landscaped grounds just off the beach. All have private gardens and sunken outdoor baths. Best of all is the sumptuous Redang Suite (RM1055), a traditionally furnished 150-year-old Malay house on stilts. The restaurants serve Western and Malay cuisine, while the spa, housed in a century-old timber building, offers indulgent body treatments and massages.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are daily buses from the main bus station in Kuala Terengganu to Merang (RM2). Taxis from Kuala Terengganu cost RM20 per car. Coming from the north is more difficult and it is easiest to go south

as far as Kuala Terengganu and then back-track. Otherwise, taxis from Kota Bharu cost RM50 per car.

Pulau Redang

09

One of the largest and most beautiful of the east-coast islands, Redang has, inevitably, been targeted by big developers, and there are few options for independent travellers; virtually all visitors come on all-inclusive package deals. These can be very regimented affairs, with arrival lectures, and set times for meals, snorkelling and 'leisure'. It's popular with groups of young Malaysians and weekenders Singaporeans.

Redang is one of nine islands that form a protected marine park, and it offers excellent diving and snorkelling. Silt and rubble from resort construction is said to have caused some coral damage, and there are ongoing problems with building waste, carelessly dumped on the beach. However, concerted efforts are being made to prevent further damage and at the time of research an artificial reef was being laid offshore.

Of most interest to travellers are the beautiful bays on the eastern side of the island, including Teluk Dalam, Teluk Kalong and Pasir Panjang. The huge Berjaya Redang Beach Resort and the airport are on the north shore and the island's main village is in the interior.

Note that Pulau Redang basically shuts down from 1 November to 1 March; the best time to visit is from mid-March to late September. There is a RM5 conservation fee for entering the marine reserve, usually payable at your resort.

SLEEPING

Accommodation on Pulau Redang is best organised as a package in Kuala Terengganu; tour companies such as Ping Anchorage (p301) sell packages for all the resorts, and several of the resorts have offices in Kuala Terengganu too, in particular along Jln Kampung China.

Note that package prices given below are for three days and two nights and are per person, based on two sharing, and include boat transfer from Merang, all meals and two snorkelling trips. Single occupancy normally carries a surcharge of anything

from RM50 upwards per night. Prices rise on school and public holidays.

Most of the small resorts are built on a beautiful stretch of white-sand beach known as Pasir Panjang, on the east coast of the island.

Redang Pelangi Resort (06 690 2902; www.redangpelangi.com; r from RM320; a) This is a casual, resort-style affair that offers fairly simple two- and four-bed wooden chalets. There's an on-site dive centre, a couple of shops and a beachfront bar. The price here also includes transfer from Kuala Terengganu to the jetty in Merang.

Redang Holiday Beach Villa (06 624 5500; www.redangholiday.com; r from RM329; a) At the northern tip of the beach is this welcoming place, with a series of smart duplex chalets climbing the rocks (chalets S13 and S14 have the best outlooks). Larger chalets sleep up to eight. Nightly rates are RM150 in the high season.

Redang Bay Resort (06 620 3200; www.redangbay.com.my; per person dm/s/d from RM300/500/450; a s) At the southern end of the beach, this rather characterless resort has a mix of concrete block-style accommodation and chalets. Rooms are neat and clean, if a little Spartan. The karaoke lounge is open till all hours, and there's a 'beach disco' on weekends, so don't come looking for a quiet island retreat.

Coral Redang Island Resort (06 630 7110; www.coralredang.com.my; per person s/d from RM685/540; a) Towards the northern end of the beach, this full-blown resort has slightly overpriced but very pleasant chalets that offer a bit more character than some of the cheaper places. There's a dive centre attached and diving packages start at RM750 per person, which includes four dives.

In the bay directly south of Pasir Panjang you will find several more places to stay strung out along an excellent white-sand beach.

Laguna Redang Island Resort (06 630 7888; www.lagunaredang.com.my; r from RM358; a i s) Redang's biggest resort dominates this beach, a vast, 222-room complex that is still being added to. It has luxurious sea-view suites with balconies, excellent restaurants, a diving centre and a full programme of children's activities. Buildings are in traditional Malay style, designed by the same architect who built the state museum in Kuala Terengganu.

Redang Beach Resort (06 623 8188; www.redang.com.my; r from RM399; a i) This place has an arrangement of modern double-storey chalets. It boasts a five-star PADI diving centre, a few shops and a regular beach disco.

Redang Reef Resort (06 622 6181; www.redangreefresort.com.my; r from RM360; a) On the headland, this friendly place is in a great location, though you'll get your feet wet going to and fro at high tide. The two-storey wooden chalets are very basic but popular with student groups. The better chalets on the rocks are more secluded and have fantastic views of the bay. It also has a tiny private beach.

Redang Kalong Resort (06 622 1591; www.redangkalong.com; r from RM340; a) At the secluded Teluk Kalong is this quiet place, set among the palm trees in a private little bay. Diving packages start at RM530 and include five dives. Turtles often come ashore along here to lay eggs.

Berjaya Redang Beach Resort (06 630 8866; www.berjayaresorts.com.my; r from RM700; a i s) On the north shore, and Redang's most luxurious resort, this quiet place has a wide choice of sumptuous wooden chalets in delightful, landscaped gardens, and an excellent private beach. Internet rates are good and there are several package deals available.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nearly all visitors to Redang purchase packages that include boat transfer to the island. If you choose to go independently, you'll need to hitch a ride on one of the resorts' boats (adult/child RM40/20), but in the high season (April to September) room-only deals will be scarce. Ferries run from the string of jetties along the river in Merang; the harbour has silted up and is no longer used.

Berjaya Redang Beach Resort ferries leave Kuala Terengganu daily at 10.30am and 3pm and cost RM80 return. In the opposite direction, boats leave Redang for Kuala Terengganu daily at 8am and 1pm (8am and noon on Friday). Note that priority is given to guests of Berjaya Redang Beach Resort and if its boat is full you will have to try to squeeze onto one of the other resorts' boats. You will have to hire another taxi boat from Berjaya's jetty once you arrive, so this is going to be an expensive route to Redang.

Redang's airport is near the Berjaya Beach Resort; **Berjaya Air** (% 630 8866; www.berjaya-air.com) has daily flights to/from KL (Subang Airport; RM269) and to/from Singapore (Seletar Airport; RM359).

It's also possible to visit Redang on a dive trip from Pulau Perhentian (see p314).

Pulau Lang Tengah

% 09

The small, idyllic island of Lang Tengah lies roughly halfway between Pulau Redang and Pulau Perhentian, and with only four resorts to choose from, it's a much quieter, less-developed place than its better-known neighbours, and there is no resident population. It's a hidden gem, with soft white-sand beaches, clean turquoise waters and reputedly some of the best snorkelling in Malaysia just offshore. Like Redang, almost everyone comes on package deals that include ferry transport and snorkelling or diving.

SLEEPING

The island's four resorts are spaced out on the west coast, and offer a bewildering variety of package deals; unless otherwise stated, those listed are for three days and two nights. The prices here are for the high season (June to September). **Ping Anchorage** (% 626 2020; www.redangisland.com.my; 77A Jln Sultan Sulaiman) in Kuala Terengganu can arrange reasonably priced packages.

D'Coconut Lagoon (% 03-425 6686; r from RM200; a) The newest and smallest of the resorts has fairly plain but comfy chalets with fridges, TVs and other mod-cons, set around an attractive pool. These prices are per night, and half- and full-board options are also offered.

Square Point Resort (% 623 5333; s/d from RM288/516; a) This collection of modern and very pleasant chalets just off the beach also has a restaurant and dive centre. Offshore, the pristine and extensive House Reef is one of the island's best snorkelling spots; as well as the colourful coral, turtles and nurse sharks are common sights.

Redang Lang Island Resort (% 623 9911; www.malaysiaslandresort.com; s/d from RM320/520; a) Offers basic but neat wooden chalets just a few steps from the beach, with a common TV lounge and karaoke bar. Snorkelling and diving packages are available, and prices are slightly higher from Thursday to Sunday.

Blue Coral Island Resort (% 626 2020; www.malaysiaslandresort.com; s/d from RM400/600; a s) This is the most luxurious of the island's four options, with a choice selection of comfortable chalets overlooking a beautiful stretch of unspoilt beach, and a good restaurant. It also offers nightly rates (RM175).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Between April and August, ferries to Lang Tengah leave from the jetty in Merang at 10am and noon, and return from the island at 8.30am and 2pm. From September to March they leave Merang at 12.30pm and depart from the island at 2pm. If you're travelling independently, the one-way fare for adults/children is RM40/20.

Kuala Besut

% 09

Kuala Besut, on the coast south of Kota Bharu, is a sleepy fishing village of little note itself; a visit here is usually just a preliminary to a trip to Pulau Perhentian.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Taxis and local buses run to and from the taxi stand in the centre of town, very near the seafront. Around the square formed by the taxi stand you will find a few small shops and restaurants. There are no banks here. There are numerous travel agencies around town that can arrange ferries to, and accommodation on, the islands, though all charge identical prices. Try **MD Traveller Enterprise** (% 690 4028; 3 Plaza MARA) or **Kuala Besut Connection Travel & Tour** (% 697 4367; Jln Pantai). Several of the resorts have their own agents' offices in town, too, which can arrange everything for you. There is a RM5 conservation fee for everyone entering the marine park around the Perhentians; buy your ticket at the jetty before you board.

SLEEPING & EATING

Kuala Besut's few hotels are mostly functional affairs.

Yaudin Guesthouse (% 697 4887, 697 4677 after 6pm; Jln Pantai; r RM20-40; a) This is the cheapest place in town, with a few drab rooms over the travel agency of the same name. Only two rooms have air-con, and bathrooms are communal.

Nan Hotel (% 697 4892; Jln Haji Mohammad; r RM40-60; a) Just down the road from the jetty,

not far from the bus station; all rooms here can accommodate three people.

Samudra Hotel (% 697 9326; Jln Pantai; r from RM65; a) Near the jetty, this renovated place is the best option in town, with large simple rooms and private bathrooms.

There are several *kedai kopi* around town, as well as a few shops where you can buy basic provisions.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Kuala Besut is best reached from Kota Bharu to the north. There is no direct bus – you will have to travel via Jerneh or Pasir Puteh for an onward connection. However, since a taxi to/from Kota Bharu costs only RM35 per car, most people choose this easier option. From the south, you can go to/from Kuala Terengganu by bus (RM7) or taxi (RM60 per car). There are also two daily buses to/from KL (RM30.80, nine hours).

PULAU PERHENTIAN

% 09

A short boat trip from Kuala Besut will take you to the beautiful islands of Pulau Perhentian Besar and Pulau Perhentian Kecil, just 20km off the coast. With their crystal-clear aquamarine water and white-sand beaches they are among Malaysia's biggest tourist attractions.

The smaller island, Kecil, has an abundance of cheap chalets and lively café-bars, and is popular with the younger backpacker crowd, while Besar offers higher standards of accommodation and a quieter, more relaxed ambience. The undecided can cross the strait from island to island for around RM10 (about five to 10 minutes).

The more-expensive resorts on Besar have excellent restaurants, with seafood and barbecues being particularly good; all are open to nonguests. Over on Kecil, there are a few reasonable cafés serving up the usual burgers, pasta, beach barbecues and fish and chips. Alcohol is available in cafés, shops and hotel restaurants on both islands, though it's not always advertised and you may have to ask for it. Prices are, naturally, higher than on the mainland.

Activities on the islands include snorkelling and diving, jungle walks and the always popular self-basting on the beach.

Note that many places on both islands charge 'high-season' prices, usually from late

May to September, and sometimes on week-ends year-round. Prices quoted here are for the high season. These islands basically shut down during the monsoon (usually from mid-November to mid-February) although some hotels remain open for harder tourists. However, a few of the cheaper places don't bother opening until April or even later.

Orientation

A narrow strait separates Perhentian Besar (the big island) from Perhentian Kecil (the small island).

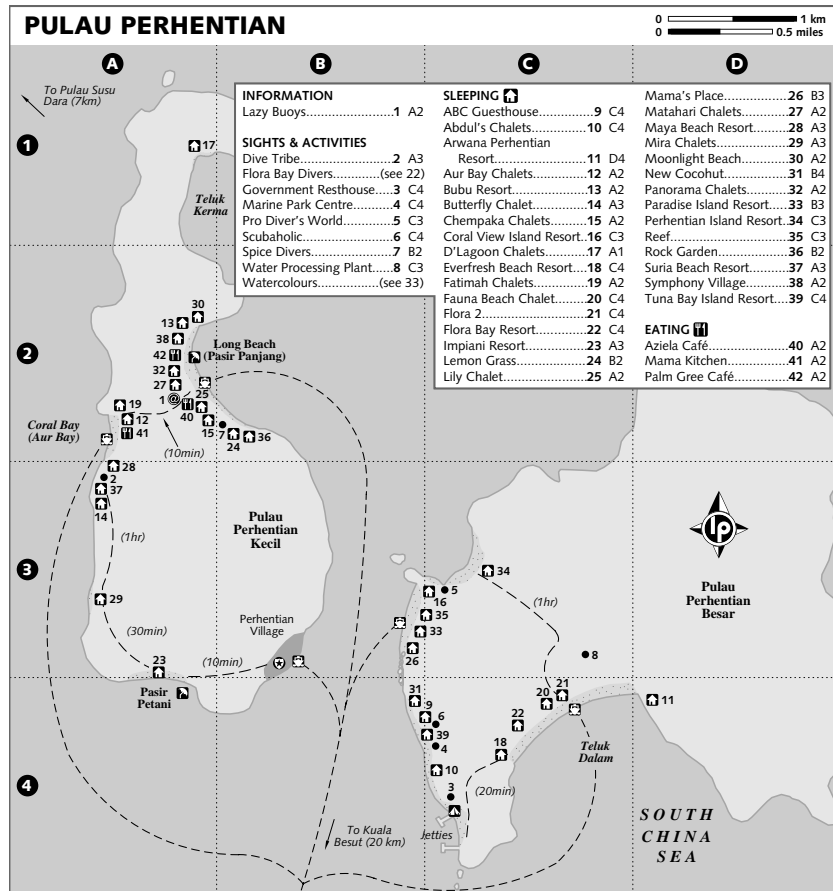
On Perhentian Kecil the most popular spot is Long Beach (Pasir Panjang), an excellent white-sand beach with a string of mostly budget chalets, cafés and a few tiny shops. Perhentian Kecil is also the administrative centre and has a fair-sized village with a few *kedai kopi* and shops, as well as a police station and basic clinic, though nothing to entice tourists. Across the narrow waist of the island, Coral Bay (Aur Bay) is another popular spot with an attractive stretch of beach and the best sunsets on the islands. The island also has several isolated bays with private beaches for those in search of solitude.

Over on Besar, most of the accommodation is clustered on the western side of the island along a series of beaches divided by rocky headlands. For those looking to get away from it all, a walk through the jungle, or a five-minute boat ride, leads to the isolated bay of Teluk Dalam, which has a wide, palm-fringed beach.

Information

There are no banks or ATMs on the islands, and changing money can be problematic. Some of the bigger resorts will cash travellers cheques, but at poor rates, and usually only for their own guests. So, bring plenty of cash over from the mainland, especially if you intend embarking on pricey diving excursions, as few outfits accept credit cards. The nearest bank is in Jerneh.

There are no public telephones. Hotels may allow you to make calls from their mobile phones, but it won't be cheap. Mobile phone numbers for resorts given here may change from one season to the next, and some have no phones, but travel agents in Kuala Besut will have the latest contact details. Where land-line numbers have been given, these



are for more reliable resort offices in Kuala Besut. Internet access is limited and expensive; expect to pay around RM20 to RM24 per hour. The cheapest is at the Lazy Buoys shop (RM17 per hour) on Long Beach.

The only medical facility on the islands is the very basic clinic in Perhentian Village. Dive operators and some of the bigger resorts can offer first aid if needed.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELLING

There are coral reefs off both islands and around nearby uninhabited islands, Pulau Susu Dara in particular. The best bets for land-based snorkelling are the northern end of Long Beach on Kecil, and the point

in front of Coral View Island Resort on Besar. You can wade out to a living coral reef right in front of Tuna Bay Island Resort. Most chalets organise snorkelling trips for around RM30 per person, and also rent out equipment.

For scuba divers there are several operations on both islands, though prices are pretty uniform.

Dive Tribe (☎ 019-967 5036; tippy@hotmail.com) Attached to the Suria Resort at Coral Bay on Kecil. Fun dives cost RM80, two dives go for RM145.

Flora Bay Divers (☎ 697 7166; www.florabaydivers.com) This outfit at Teluk Dalam on Besar is the only five-star PADI outlet on the islands. It offers introductory dives for RM125 and dive trips to Redang (RM270 for three dives).

Pro Diver's World (☎ 019-363 3695; www.prodiversworld.com) Behind Coral View Island Resort on Besar, this place offers two dives for RM160 and four-day PADI open-water courses for RM850.

Scubaholic (☎ 019-693 9247) On Besar; fun dives are RM80, night dives are RM110 and open-water PADI courses are RM900.

Spice Divers (☎ 019-985 7329) On Kecil; offers two dives for RM150.

Watercolours (☎ 019-981 1852; www.watercoloursworld.com) By the Paradise Island Resort on Besar, it offers two dives for RM160 and PADI open-water courses for RM950. It also run trips to Redang (three dives RM320).

HIKING

On Pulau Kecil, the jungle track between Long Beach and Coral Bay is signposted and takes around 10 to 15 minutes to walk. It's an easy, if humid, hike, but take a torch if going at night as there are plenty of low branches and raised tree roots. Longer and less clear tracks run between Coral Bay and Pasir Petani; ask at your guesthouse about current conditions. On Pulau Besar, a jungle track cuts across the island from near Perhentian Island Resort to Teluk Dalam. Again, check beforehand if it's clear the whole way.

Sleeping & Eating

PULAU PERHENTIAN BESAR

There are three main beaches on Perhentian Besar: the northern beach on the western side, which is dominated by Perhentian Island Resort; the main beach on the western side of the island; and Teluk Dalam, on the island's southern coast.

Perhentian Island Resort (☎ 697 7562; r RM250-350; a s) Approached via a rickety wooden walkway from behind Coral View Island Resort, this luxurious option overlooks perhaps the best beach on the islands – a beautiful half-moon bay with good coral around the points on either side. It's a public beach open to all. There's a huddle of comfortable bungalows and a first-class restaurant.

Perhentian Besar's main beach is reached over a headland from the resort. This beach stretches all the way to the southern tip of the island, interrupted by several rocky headlands – at low tide you can walk around them on the sand, otherwise you'll have to use a water taxi.

Paradise Island Resort (☎ 019-981 1852; www.watercoloursworld.com; r RM60-80; a) This friendly resort has clean chalets and a good restau-

rant. It's under the same management as the attached Watercolours dive centre and is about the best value on Besar.

Mama's Place (☎ 019-985 3359; r RM60-80) The most southern place on this section of beach has a choice of reasonably comfortable chalets with or without bathrooms.

Reef (☎ 019-981 6762; r RM80) This small place has a dozen very basic chalets set back from the beach. It has an equally basic café and a lazy, laid-back atmosphere.

Coral View Island Resort (☎ 019-981 3359; r/ste from RM100/280; a i) Enjoying a great location at the northern end of the beach, Coral View's accommodation runs from simple fan chalets up to rather smart beachfront suites. There are a couple of good restaurants serving Asian and Western dishes (lunch RM30), and shops.

On the other side of the headland to the south there's another stretch of beach with some quite varied accommodation.

ABC Guest House (☎ 019-906 4823; r RM50; i) This battered old two-storey longhouse has rudimentary fan rooms that only have electricity between 7pm and 7am. As the only real budget option on this beach, though, it's not too bad.

New Cocohut (☎ 697 7988; r/ste from RM100/150; a) This has a good choice of rooms including pleasant beachside chalets and a two-storey longhouse, which has some great views from the upstairs balcony.

Tuna Bay Island Resort (☎ 697 9779; www.tunabay.com.my; s & d/tr/f from RM160/200/340; a i) This gathering of pristine chalets perches on a lovely stretch of white sand, with others set in the pretty gardens or facing the jungle behind. It's worth paying the extra for a sea-view chalet (RM260). You can wade out to a living coral reef just offshore, and the resort also has the islands' best restaurant and only authentic cocktail bar – a great place to relax with a Long Island iced tea.

Clambering over the headland to the south brings you to a quiet beach with accommodation.

Abdul's Chalets (☎ 019-912 7303; s/d from RM40/80) The wooden beach huts at this popular place are pretty ordinary, but all have private bathrooms and there's a café too. Just beyond is the Government Resthouse, reserved for Malaysian government officials.

It is possible to camp on the beach south of the Government Resthouse, although

this area is far from quiet on long weekends. You'll need a permit (RM5 per night) available at a little café here, if it's open.

An easily missed track leads from behind the second jetty over the hill northeast to Teluk Dalam, a secluded bay with a long stretch of shallow beach, but it's easier to take a boat.

Everfresh Beach Resort (☎ /fax 697 7620; r RM30-80) at the western end of this bay is an ageing array of ramshackle A-frames and bungalows set around a pretty garden. It's quiet and just about OK, but it has certainly seen better days.

Fauna Beach Chalet (☎ 697 7607; r RM50-140; a) Sitting on an attractive stretch of sand, Fauna has a choice of the usual creaky wooden huts and more-comfortable sea-view bungalows. Only the pricier ones have air-con, and there's no hot water.

Flora Bay Resort (☎ 697 7266; www.florabayresort.com; r RM60-215; a i) This big place has a variety of options at the back of the beach, ranging from garden-view fan huts to 'deluxe' air-con beach chalets. Flora 2, an extension of Flora Bay, is a little further along the beach, with a smaller range of identical chalets.

Arwana Perhentian Resort (☎ 752 1741; www.arwanaperhentian.com.my; dm/s & d/sfe from RM25/140/580; a s) This huge upmarket resort occupies the eastern flank of Teluk Dalam, although it has no beach frontage itself. The broad array of rooms includes, surprisingly, two dorm blocks at the very back. The cheaper 'standard' rooms are a bit pokey, and it's worth paying more for a smart sea-facing chalet (RM240). Facilities include a snooker room, karaoke booths and a dive centre.

A trail leads from Fauna Beach Chalets around a water-processing plant over the middle of the island to Perhentian Island Resort.

PULAU PERHENTIAN KECIL

Accommodation on Perhentian Kecil tends to be simpler and prices generally lower, starting at around RM20 to RM30 for a standard hut with two beds and shared bathroom, or as little as RM10 in the low season. There are a couple of upscale developments if you crave more comfort.

With a picturesque swathe of white sand, Long Beach is the most popular place on the island. Unfortunately, it's becoming overdeveloped and can be quite noisy. Be aware

that swimming here can be very dangerous, though, especially during the monsoon and for a month or two after, when high waves and powerful riptides pose serious threats; there have been a number of near tragedies here. There are no lifeguards and no markers to tell you which sections of the beach may be safe.

Rock Garden (r RM25) Steep steps behind Lemon Grass will get you to this vertiginous, and scruffy, place on the rocks. It has an interesting location with wonderful sea views, and some of the cheapest huts around, though at this price you don't even get a fan.

Chempaka Chalets (☎ 012-955 6626; r RM20-50) Cheerful dive operator Musky runs this clutch of ageing but comfortable chalets. There's a relaxed, beach-bum ambience and the spontaneous parties and barbecues make it a good sociable option.

Lemon Grass (☎ 012-956 2393; r RM35) At the southern tip of Long Beach, Lemon Grass has 16 no-frills, fan huts with shared bathrooms. There are great views from the veranda at reception and some nice secluded spots to sit and gaze out to sea.

Symphony Village (☎ 013-979 9181; r RM35-55) You can choose between basic little A-frames with shared bathrooms and more-preferable chalets with private showers at the quiet Symphony. Rooms are closer to the sand than at many other places.

Matahari Chalets (r RM30-80) Set back among the trees with a concrete walkway to the beach, Matahari is one of the better chalet operations. It has a good range of accommodation, from simple huts with shared bathroom to spacious bungalows. There's also a restaurant, shop and moneychanger.

Moonlight Beach (☎ 019-9858 222; r RM30-150; a) This popular spot right at the northern end of the bay has had a makeover; as well as offering dated A-frame huts it now has some spruce modern chalets with attached bathrooms. The location is picturesque.

Panorama Chalets (☎ 697 7552; r RM65-150; a i) Another good choice is Panorama, which, again, has a variety of accommodation including A-frames and smarter chalets in a cool setting on the edge of the rainforest. There's a restaurant and game room with pool table and table tennis.

Lily Chalet (☎ 012-949 8631; s & d/f from RM160/220; a) This collection of so-so wooden chalets with private bathrooms offers reasonable

levels of comfort, but prices are way too high. There's a decent restaurant at the front.

Bubu Resort (☎ 697 8888; www.buburesort.com.my; r from RM250; a) At the northern end of the bay, this is the sole top-end option on Long Beach. It's a somewhat overpriced, modern three-storey hotel that looks out of scale here, but the rooms catch the sun, and most have balconies. There's a restaurant, bar and dive centre.

A sign-posted jungle trail over the narrow waist of the island leads from Long Beach to Coral Bay on the western side of the island. The beach is quite pleasant and gets good sunsets but, like Long Beach, it can get a little crowded.

Fatimah Chalets (☎ 019-944 1297; r RM45) At the northern end of the beach, Fatimah has 10 simple fan chalets with bathrooms and mosquito nets. There's no hot water, but it's a convivial place and a bargain if you're on a budget.

Aur Bay Chalets (☎ 013-995 0817; r RM45-50) Here you'll find a similar selection of regular fan rooms set back from the sea, with a small café attached.

Butterfly Chalet (r RM45-60) Reached by a steep clamber over the rocks next to Suria, this end-of-the-line place has a series of basic wooden huts perched precariously on the headland. They're all a bit tattered, but the situation, set in flowery gardens and with superb views across the bay, is beautiful.

Maya Beach Resort (☎ 013-988 8211; r RM50-70) Sea-facing and cheaper garden-facing wooden chalets are offered by Maya, as well as a rather scruffy longhouse at the back. It has a friendly vibe and there's a diving centre here.

Suria Beach Resort (☎ 697 7960; www.suriareorts.com; r RM50-100; a) At the southern end of the beach, Suria has sparkling modern chalets in a great location, as well as cheaper fan rooms and more-basic A-frame huts. Beachfront rooms have double beds and hot water, and there's also a restaurant.

There are a number of small bays around the island, each harbouring isolated chalets. Practically, these are only accessible by boat.

D' Lagoon Chalets (☎ 019-985 7089; dm RM10, r RM25-60) is on Teluk Kerma, a small bay on the northeastern side of the island. This is one of the better places on Kecil, with good coral and a tranquil, isolated location. There are longhouse rooms and chalets, as

well as a more unusual tree-house for all those budding Tarzans and Janes. Tracks lead to a couple of very remote beaches in the northwestern corner of the island.

Mira Chalets (r RM30-50) On the southwest coast, Mira is an adventurous choice, set on a small secluded beach with the jungle right behind. There are just eight rickety chalets set amid banana and coconut trees, in a location Robinson Crusoe would have been proud to call home. Meals are offered in the driftwood-bedecked restaurant. Walking tracks lead through the rainforest to Pasir Petani (30 minutes, about 1.5km) and north to Coral Bay (one hour, about 3km).

Impiani Resort (☎ 019-981 1852; www.watercolours.world.com; r RM170-210; a) This resort is on the south coast at the isolated beach of Pasir Petani. It's a peaceful, secluded setting, and the pricier chalets facing the beach have great views out over the open sea. There's an on-site restaurant and a diving facility.

There are a number of cafés on Long Beach, including Aziela Café (near Matahari Chalets), serving burgers, salads and chicken-and-rice-style dishes and set lunches and dinner (RM12 to RM15). Next to Panorama Chalets, Palm Gree Café serves a vegetarian/nonvegetarian barbecue set dinner for RM8/15, plus English breakfasts, pasta and lots of drinks. On Coral Bay, Mama Kitchen (next to Aur Bay Chalets) dishes up a nightly beach barbecue (RM15).

Getting There & Away

Both speedboats (adult/child RM60/30 return, 30 to 40 minutes) and slow boats (adult/child RM40/20 return, 1½ hours) run several times a day between Kuala Besut and the Perhentians from 8.30am to 5.30pm although you can expect delays or cancellations if the weather is bad, or if there aren't enough passengers. The boats will drop you off at any of the beaches. In the other direction, speedboats depart from the islands daily at around 8am, noon and 4pm; slow boats leave hourly from 8am to noon. It's a good idea to let the owner of your guesthouse know a day before you leave so they can arrange a pick-up. Tickets are sold by several travel agents around Kuala Besut (see p312).

You can board a speedboat in either direction with a slow-boat ticket, if you pay the difference between the fares.

Waves on Long Beach can be hazardous, and when the sea is particularly rough, boats drop off and pick up on the other side of the island at Coral Bay. Guesthouse operators on Kecil charge RM2 for ferry pick-ups and drop-offs.

Note that boats also run to and from the Perhentians from the tiny port of Tok Bali in Kelantan. There is only one operator (Symphony) plying this route and prices are the same as from Kuala Besut, though the journey takes slightly longer. Several readers have complained about the reli-

ability and condition of these boats and we recommend that travellers only use ferries out of Kuala Besut.

Getting Around

While there are some trails around the island, the easiest way to go from beach to beach or island to island is by boat. Chalet owners can arrange a taxi boat. From island to island, the trip costs RM10 per boat, and a jaunt from one beach to another on the same island usually costs about RM8. Prices double at night.

Kelantan



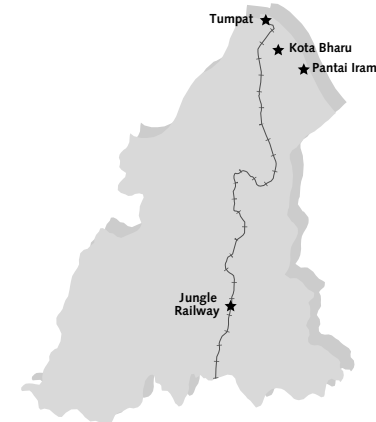
Kelantan, the 'Land of Lightning', is an overwhelmingly rural state with a relatively short coastline and only one major urban centre, the bustling capital, Kota Bharu. Kelantan is, however, a prime stronghold of traditional Malay culture, crafts and religion – a place to see batik being made, marvel at the skill of competitive top-spinners, kite-fliers and Malay martial artists, amble along deserted beaches and explore the jungles of the interior.

Sharing a border with Thailand, it's not surprising to find a strong Thai influence in Kelantan's cuisine, architecture and local population. Enter the Tumpat district, west of the capital, and you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd already crossed into Thailand. Elaborate Thai Buddhist temples sprout among the rice fields and you'll hear Thai spoken as much as Malay. Inland Kelantan is remote, thinly populated and thickly forested. This is off-the-beaten-track territory, best discovered on an organised excursion, while the so-called 'jungle railway' cuts through the state southwards. Kelantan is, however, the poorest state in Peninsular Malaysia and the economy still relies heavily on rice production, based mainly in the fertile plain of Sungai Kelantan. Fishing, rubber production and tobacco-growing are other important commercial activities. With the Islamic Party in government, Kelantan is also Malaysia's most conservative state.

The capital, Kota Bharu, with its clutch of museums, vibrant cultural activity and tasty culinary specialities, is a great place to begin your exploration of Kelantan and also makes the perfect base from which to explore the surrounding countryside.

HIGHLIGHTS

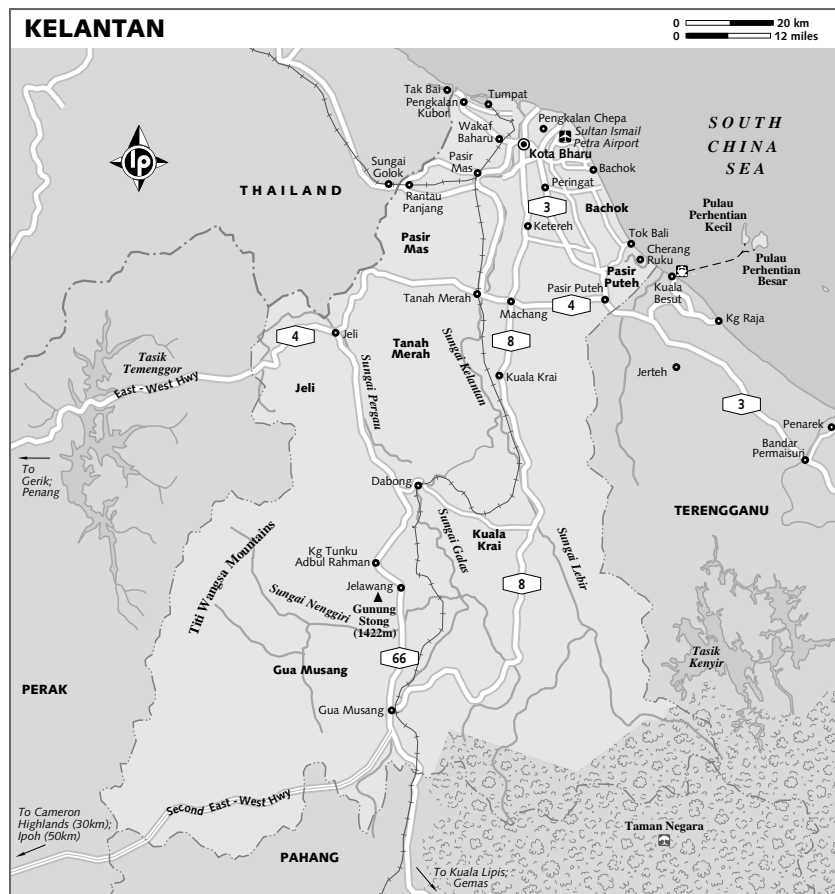
- Sampling local cuisine at the lively **night market** (p326) and exploring the **museums & palaces** (p323) in Kota Bharu
- Watching displays of traditional top-spinning, drumming and martial arts at the **Gelanggang Seni** (p324) in Kota Bharu
- Trundling through the mountainous, jungle-clad interior of Peninsular Malaysia on the **jungle railway** (p330)
- Visiting the colourful Thai Buddhist temples in the **Tumpat district** (p329) near the Thai border
- Walking along the deserted beach at **Pantai Irama** (p329)
- Learning the art of **batik painting** or **Malay cookery** (p324) in Kota Bharu



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 09

■ POPULATION: 1.31 MILLION

■ AREA: 15,024 SQ KM



History

Archaeological finds at Gua Musang and Gua Cha have turned up evidence of human settlements dating back to prehistoric times.

In the early Middle Ages, Kelantan was influenced by the Funan kingdom on the Mekong River, and there were strong links with both Siam and the Khmer Empire.

After being a vassal of first the Sumatran Srivijaya Empire, and then the Siamese, Kelantan came under the sway of the Melaka sultanate in the 15th century. After the demise of the Melaka sultanate in the 17th century, Kelantan was ruled by Johor and then in the following century, Kelantan was ruled by Terengganu.

By the 1820s Kelantan was the most populous and one of the most prosperous states on the Malay peninsula. As was the case in Terengganu, it managed to escape the ravages of the disputes that plagued the west-coast states, and so experienced largely unimpeded development. Also like Terengganu, Kelantan had strong ties with Siam (now Thailand) throughout the 19th century, before control was passed to the British following the signing of an Anglo-Siamese treaty in 1909. Kelantan's wealth and importance waned after the ties with Siam were cut, and as a northerly backwater of colonial Malaya the state declined. Kelantan was the first place in Malaya to be invaded by Japanese troops in WWII. During

the Japanese occupation, control of the state was passed to Thailand, but in 1948 Kelantan became a member of the Federation of Malaya.

Since 1990 Kelantan has been governed by the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), which has tried for years without success to impose *syariah* (Islamic law) on its citizens; single-sex queues in supermarkets and separate public benches for men and women in Kota Bharu now appear to have been abandoned.

Climate

Kelantan has a tropical climate, with average temperatures between 21°C and 32°C. There is intermittent rain throughout the year, and heavier, more prolonged rainfall during the east-coast monsoon season (November to January). Temperatures in Kota Bharu are often higher than in the surrounding countryside, and cooler temperatures are recorded on the coast. Humidity levels are highest in the jungled interior of the state, rarely dipping below 90%.

Dangers & Annoyances

While Kota Bharu is a generally safe city, travellers should be aware of crooked taxi drivers. Newly arrived foreign tourists are regularly approached at the bus stations by unlicensed (and uninsured) drivers offering lifts. Besides being illegal, this is potentially dangerous and you're pretty certain to be ripped off. Only get into an official cab, which will display the company name and phone number.

If you're going to Pulau Perhentian, be aware that some taxi drivers, working on commission, will take you to the tiny port of Tok Bali on the southern coast of Kelantan instead of the main departure point of Kuala Besut. Several readers have complained about the reliability of the sole ferry operator in Tok Bali and we recommend you take a boat from Kuala Besut.

Getting There & Away

Kota Bharu is the transport hub of Kelantan and can be reached by bus from most major towns in Peninsular Malaysia. The nearest train station is at Wakaf Baharu, around 5km southwest of Kota Bharu, with services to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. There is also an airport 9km northeast of the city, offer-

ing daily flights to Kuala Lumpur (see p327 for details). The main border crossing from Thailand is at Rantau Panjang, from where hourly buses run to Kota Bharu (see p328).

Getting Around

The so-called jungle railway runs from Tumpat, close to the Thai border, southwards through Dabong and Gua Musang to Gemas, where it meets the lines to KL and Singapore. The state-run bus company SKMK (% 748 3807) runs all regional buses and city buses in Kota Bharu, and also operates many long-distance routes.

KOTA BHARU

% 09

In the northeastern corner of the peninsula, Kota Bharu, which calls itself 'The Islamic City', is the termination of the east-coast road and a gateway to Thailand. At first glance, Kota Bharu, with its bustling modern centre and traffic-clogged streets, seems much like any other Malaysian city, but this is a city rich in Malay culture, with royal palaces, colourful markets and several museums to linger over; it's also a good base for exploring the surrounding region. Many travellers plan an overnight stop here en route to or from Thailand or Pulau Perhentian.

Orientation

The centre of town is a busy area northeast of the clock tower, bounded by Jln Pintu Pong, Jln Kebun Sultan/Jln Mahmud, Jln Hospital and Jln Temenggong. The central bus station is just off Jln Padang Garong, opposite a huge, fenced-off hole in the ground where the 25-storey Kota Bharu Trade Centre is to be built.

Information

Banks are open from 10am to 3pm Saturday to Wednesday and 9.30am to 11.30am Thursday, and are closed on Friday.

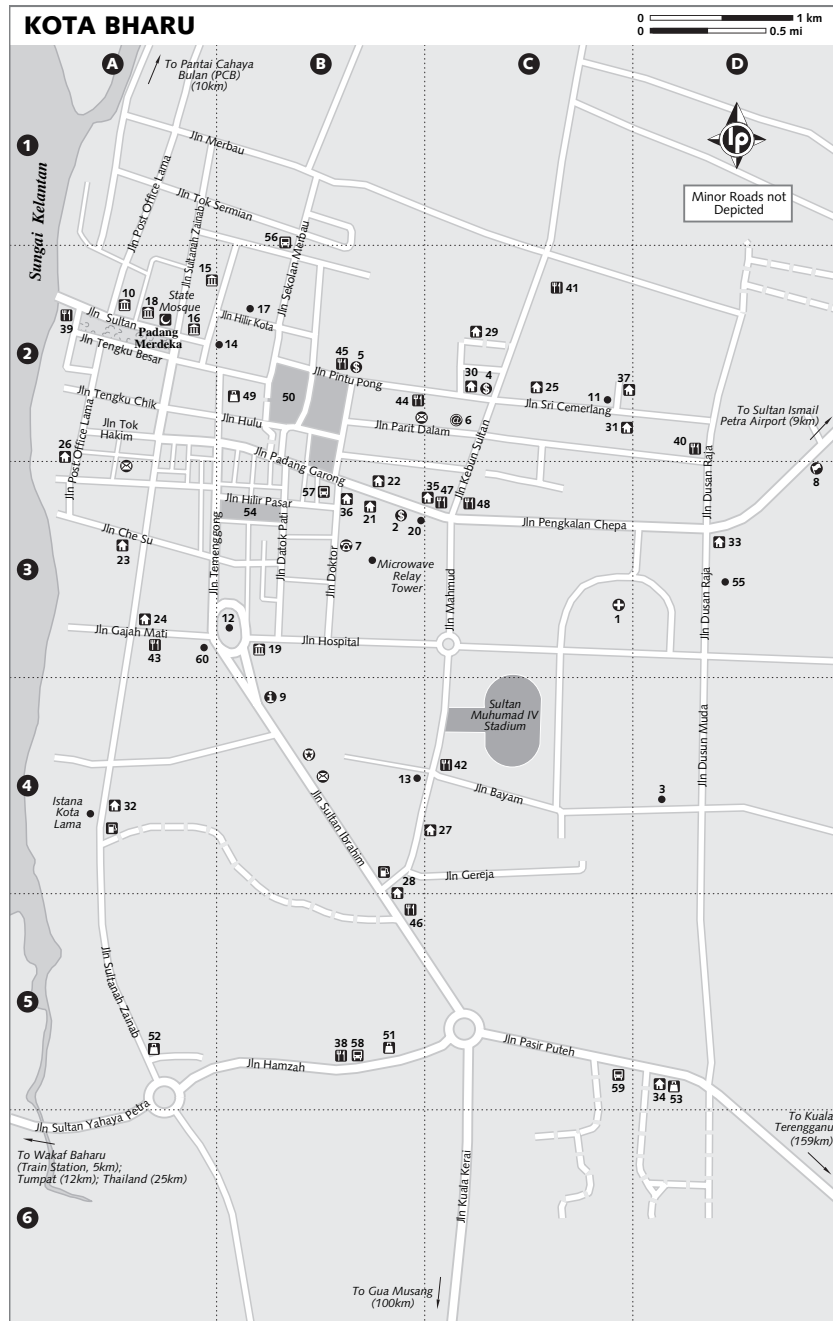
HSBC Bank (Jln Padang Garong)

Immigration office (% 748 2126; Wisma Persekutuan, Jln Bayam)

Maybank (Jln Pintu Pong) This moneychanger is near the night market and is usually open to 7pm.

Multimedia Internet (% 747 7735; 171 Jln Parit Dalam; per hr RM2)

Tourist information centre (% 748 5534; Jln Sultan Ibrahim; 11 8am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Sun-Thu) Has a pile of brochures and tour information.



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Sights

PADANG MERDEKA

Padang Merdeka (Independence Sq) is a strip of grass that was established as a memorial following WWI. It is best known as the place where the British exhibited the body of Tok Janggut (Father Beard), a respected elder who was killed at Pasir Puteh in 1915 after leading a 2000-strong uprising against British colonial land taxes.

MUSEUMS

The real attraction of the Padang Merdeka area is the cluster of museums close by. There is one central phone number (% 748 2266) for all museums.

Built in 1912 for the Mercantile Bank of India, the **Bank Kerapu** (WWII Memorial Museum; Jln Sultan; adult/child RM2/1; 8.30am-4.45pm Sat-Thu) building was used as the HQ of the Japanese secret police during WWII. Today it houses a collection of photographs chronicling the Japanese occupation and the 1948 Emergency, alongside some rusty guns and other militaria. Upstairs there's a small gallery devoted to the history of prewar Kelantan, and there's also a garden with a reconstruction of a WWII British pillbox.

The **Muzium Islam** (Islamic Museum; Jln Sultan; admission free; 8.30am-4.45pm Sat-Thu) occupies an old villa once known as Serambi Mekah (Veranda to Mecca) – a reference to its days

as Kelantan's first school of Islamic instruction. Nowadays it displays a small collection of photographs and artefacts relating to the history of Islam in the state.

Istana Jahar (Royal Ceremonies Museum; Jln Hilir Kota; adult/child RM3/1.50; 8.30am-4.45pm Sat-Thu) is a beautiful wooden structure dating back to 1887. Inside, displays illustrate various royal rituals and ceremonies, including marriage, birth and circumcision. Particularly noteworthy are the grand wrought-iron staircases that lead upstairs to a wooden veranda. Outside you'll find the **Weapons Gallery** with a small collection of spears and kris (daggers).

The sky-blue building of the **Istana Batu** (Royal Museum; Jln Hilir Kota; adult/child RM2/1; 8.30am-4.45pm Sat-Thu), also known as the **Muzium Diraja**, was constructed in 1939 and served as the crown prince's palace until it was donated to the state. The richly furnished rooms give a surprisingly intimate insight into royal life, with family photos and personal belongings scattered among the fine china and glassware; even the late sultan's collection of hats is there for inspection.

Kampung Kraftangan (Handicraft Village; admission free) is a touristy affair in a pedestrian square opposite the Istana Batu, featuring a one-room museum (adult/child RM2/1; 8.30am-4.45pm Sat-Thu) with displays of woodcarving, batik-making and other local crafts. The complex

includes souvenir shops and a restaurant offering a good-value lunchtime buffet. Batik classes also take place here (below).

Nearby, surrounded by walls and closed to the public, is the Istana Balai Besar (Palace of the Large Audience Hall). Built in 1840 as the principal royal residence, it is now used only for formal state functions.

Muzium Negeri Kelantan (State Museum; % 748 2266; Jln Hospital; adult/child RM2/1; 11 8.30am-4.45pm Sat-Thu) is next to the tourist information centre. Here you'll find an assemblage of artefacts illustrating the history and culture of Kelantan, including traditional instruments, kites, shadow puppets and ceramics. There are regular temporary exhibitions.

GELANGGANG SENI

If you want to see *gasing uri* (top-spinning), *silat* (martial arts, see p56), kite-making, drumming, shadow-puppet shows and other traditional activities, the **Gelanggang Seni** (Cultural Centre; % 744 3124; Jln Mahmud) is the place to go. Free afternoon and evening sessions are held on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday from February to September, currently between 3.30pm and 5.30pm and 9pm and 11pm, but check with the **tourist information centre** (% 748 5534; Jln Sultan Ibrahim; 11 8am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Sun-Thu), which will have a full timetable of events.

Courses

Roselan (% 017-933 7242; engkusyed@yahoo.com.my), the ever-cheerful director of the tourist information centre, runs popular Malay cookery workshops at his home; prices vary according to the number of participants and the ingredients used. Contact the tourist information centre for details or call Roselan direct. He also runs tours (see right).

You can try your hand at a spot of batik-painting at **Zecsmann Design** (% 012-929 2822; zecsmann_design@yahoo.com; Kampung Kraftangan, Jln Hilir Kota; 11 10am-7pm Sat-Thu). Tutored four- to five-hour classes cost RM50 for work on cotton and RM70 on silk, and a full-day course costs RM100. You will need to book ahead.

Tours

Some hostels organise tours for their guests, but make sure you have a qualified and competent guide if you're going anywhere off the beaten track. **Azhar** (% 752 1921; malaysia4x4@yahoo.com), based at Zeck's

Traveller's Inn (opposite) runs three-day, two-night 4WD trips to the jungle (RM250 to RM350). Visits to an Orang Asli village and Gua Musang are included.

The **tourist information centre** (% 748 5534; Jln Sultan Ibrahim; 11 8am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Sun-Thu) keeps a running list of reputable tour operators, and its director, **Roselan** (% 017-933 7242; engkusyed@yahoo.com.my), conducts private tours, including a two-hour tour of the Tumpat temples (RM65) and a half-day river cruise (RM85).

Ping Anchorage (% 744 2020; www.pinganchorage.com.my; 1121-B Jln Padang Garong; 11 8am-5pm Sat-Thu) runs a variety of half-day tours including town tours (adult/child RM75/37.50) taking in a batik factory, silversmith and the main town sights; a river cruise (adult/child RM129/64.50); and a tour round the Thai temples of the Tumpat district (adult/child RM80/40). It also offers a day trip to the Jelawang jungle area by car, boat and train (RM159).

Festivals & Events

Each year around August, Kota Bharu has a **bird-singing contest**, when you can see Malay songbirds perform. Every Friday and Saturday morning there's also a bird-singing contest out near Zeck's Traveller's Inn. Here the locals hang their decorative bird cages up on long poles, then sit back and listen.

The spectacular kite festival (Pesta Wau) is held in June, and the **cultural carnival** (Karnival Kebudayaan Kelantan) involving drum and top-spinning contests takes place in September. The **Sultan's Birthday** celebration (March/April) involves a week of cultural events. The dates vary, so check with the tourist information centre.

Sleeping

Kota Bharu has long been a popular stop-over on the backpacker trail, and there's plenty of cheap hostel accommodation around town, including several along Jln Padang Garong. Midrange options tend to be geared towards business travellers more than tourists and are often pretty bland, although prices are usually reasonable. The luxury end of the market, meanwhile, is dominated by a handful of gigantic high-rises on the fringes of the city centre.

The budget options listed here all have shared bathrooms, unless otherwise stated.

BUDGET

Zeck's Traveller's Inn (% 743 1613; www.zeck-traveller.com; 7088-G Jln Sri Cemerlang; dm/s/d from RM7/12/15; a i) Zeck's is a long-standing backpacker favourite in a peaceful nook north of the centre, with an attractive little garden to lounge about in and light meals and drinks always at hand. The larger family rooms (from RM35) have air-con and hot showers. The friendly owner is a mine of information and can arrange tours and ferry tickets.

Ideal Travellers' House (% 744 2246; www.ugoideal.com; 3954-F Jln Kebun Sultan; dm/d from RM8/15; i) Another popular backpacker pad located down an alley off Jln Kebun Sultan, with a pleasant garden. Dorms are fitted with eight single beds, and rooms with private bathroom start at RM35. There's a midnight curfew.

Menora Guest House (% 748 1669; 3338-D Jln Sultanah Zainab; dm/s/d from RM7/15/16; a) This sociable place offers simple accommodation, including air-con rooms with shower (RM38). It's a bit out of the way but there's a comfy lounge, a breakfast bar and a fern- and flower-filled roof garden with river views.

Bunga Raya Backpacker Lodge (% 748 9866; 2981-B Jln Padang Garong; dm/r from RM10/25; a i) This friendly hostel right in the centre of town has a collection of small, boxy and mostly windowless rooms, though they're perfectly acceptable for the price. Air-con rooms go for RM35.

Sabrina Court (% 744 7944; 171-181 Jln Padang Garong; r from RM25; a) There's a variety of accommodation to choose from at this central hotel, ranging from musty rooms with tiny shared bathrooms (unflatteringly known as 'Lonely Planet rooms') up to more-tolerable options with private facilities, starting at RM75. It can be a bit noisy, though, especially with the loading bay at the back.

Kencana Lodge (% 747 7222; 316-324 Jln Sri Cemerlang; s & d/tr RM46/49.50; a) This is a bright, fresh-looking hotel located in a quiet spot just off Jln Sri Cemerlang. The rooms are a bit bare, but all have private bathrooms and TVs. There's a Chinese food court next door.

E 'n' E Inn (% 747 5990; 173 Jln Sri Cemerlang; s/d RM50/65; a) Down a dusty lane off Sri Cemerlang, the E 'n' E is basically a smart borderline-budget hotel. Rooms are small but comfortably furnished and all have satellite TV and private bathrooms. The bigger rooms sleep up to five (RM90).

MIDRANGE

Hotel Sentosa (% 744 3200; 3180-A Jln Sultan Ibrahim; s/d from RM60/70; a) A pretty basic option, but rooms are just about OK for the price and it's handy for the bus stations at the southern edge of town.

Crystal Lodge (% 747 0888; www.crystal-lodge.com.my; 124 Jln Che Su; s/d/tr from RM69/99/149; a i) This airy place offers the best value in its price range. Rooms are plain but clean and comfortable, and there are free in-house movies and daily newspapers, while the attractive rooftop restaurant has a great view over the river. There's a business centre and restaurant on site.

Suria Hotel (% 743 2255; suria.kb@tm.net.my; Jln Padang Garong; s & d/tr from RM75/90; a) A welcoming though slightly drab hotel set right in the heart of town. The cheapest rooms are windowless but there are some more appealing choices boasting natural light and 'wall to wall carpets', no less. Rooms overlooking the street may be subject to noise.

Azam Hotel (% 747 8800; 1872-A Jln Padang Garong; s & d/f from RM80/110; a) A couple of doors along from the Suria, Azam is another unadorned sleeping spot, this time without carpets. Again, noise might be an issue. It's above a photography shop of the same name.

Juita Inn (% 744 6888; hotel@tm.net.my; Jln Pintu Pong; s/d/ste from RM95/110/300; a) This centrally located hotel has some neat rooms and a decent restaurant offering live entertainment. Discounts are normally available, but it's still somewhat overpriced, especially as only the pricier rooms boast the grand luxury of private bathrooms.

Dynasty Inn (% 747 3000; dynasty@tm.net.my; 2865-D Jln Sultanah Zainab; r from RM100; a) Modern high-rise on a very busy road near the better-value Crystal Lodge. Rooms with a view of the river are overpriced at RM150, while cheaper rooms have a view of the car park.

New Pacific Hotel (% 745 6555; www.newpacifichotel.com.my; 26 Jln Pengkalan Chepa; r/ste from RM188/330; a i s) This towering chain hotel provides a good level of comfort and service, and the spacious rooms come with all the usual mod cons. However, it's awkwardly placed on a very busy junction east of the centre. There are regular promotional prices.

TOP-END

Renaissance Hotel (☎ 746 2233; www.renaissancehotels.com; Jln Pasir Puteh; r/ste from RM220/380; a i s) Part of the international Marriott chain, this gigantic hotel on the southern fringe of town offers all the business-class comforts and facilities you would expect. It's in the same block as the Kota Seri Mutiara shopping centre, but it's a long way from anything else.

Hotel Perdana (☎ 748 5000; www.hotelperdana.com.my; Jln Mahmud; r/ste from RM220/550; a i s) South of the city centre, this grey concrete box remains popular with domestic business travellers and offers some decent facilities including a gym, sauna and tennis court. Big discounts are normally available on the slightly ambitious published prices.

Grand Riverview Hotel (☎ 743 9988; www.grvh.com.my; 9 Jln Post Office Lama; r/ste from RM280/480; a s) Perched on the river edge, this huge hotel offers high standards at reasonable prices; long-term 'promotions' will shave around 40% off the published rates. Rooms at the back have some fine views across the water, and all have king-sized beds and big bathrooms with both showers and baths.

Eating

Kota Bharu offers a rich choice of Malay, Thai, Indian and Chinese cuisine, ranging from simple hawker snacks to upscale restaurant fare. No visit is complete, though, without sampling the exotic delights of the town's famed night market (below).

As Kota Bharu is a conservative Muslim city, alcohol is not widely available, but there are several Chinese restaurants around town that serve beer. Note too that some restaurants close on Fridays.

QUICK EATS

The best and cheapest Malay food in town is found at the **night market** (off Jln Pintu Pong); look for the yellow arch reading 'Medan Selera MPKB'. The stalls are set up in the evening around 5pm and there's a wide variety of regional specialities on offer, including *ayam percik* (marinated chicken on bamboo skewers) and *nasi kerabu* (rice with coconut, fish and spices). Unusual options include blue rice, squid-on-a-stick and banana *murtabak* (pan-fried dough packet). Bear in mind, though, that the whole thing closes down for evening prayers between

7pm and 7.45pm, and Muslims and non-Muslims alike must vacate the premises. The market closes around 2am.

The so-called **Chinese night market** (☎ 6pm-midnight) takes over much of Jln Kebun Sultan in the evenings, with numerous hawker stalls selling hot snack food.

More food stalls can be found next to the river opposite the Padang Merdeka and by the Jln Hamzah bus station, and there's a modern **food court** (Jln Hamzah; ☎ lunch & dinner) inside KB Mall.

RESTAURANTS

Medan Selera Kebun Sultan Food Court (☎ 746 1632; Jln Kebun Sultan; mains from RM3; ☎ lunch & dinner) A big, bright and bustling food court with a variety of standard Chinese dishes on offer, such as claypot chicken rice and *kway teow* (rice-flour noodles). Everything's in Chinese, but there are numbered photos you can point at. Beer is also available.

Medan Usahawan (☎ 743 4928; Jln Bayam; mains from RM3; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Sat-Thur) Near the Hotel Perdana, this modern food court has lots of stalls selling cheap Malay food on the ground floor, and shops upstairs.

Muhibah Aneka Cake House (☎ 748 3298; Jln Pintu Pong; mains from RM3; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Downstairs there's a bakery, while the upstairs restaurant, which calls itself 'vegetarian' serves mostly meaty fare like chicken chops, fish and claypot rice, although steamed tofu is also offered.

Noodle Station (☎ 744 1223; 3180-C Jln Sultan Ibrahim; mains from RM3; ☎ 8am-midnight) Next door to the Hotel Sentosa, this is a smart little café serving, naturally enough, lots of noodle dishes, plus Western meals and good coffee. English magazines are provided for customers.

Meena Curry House (☎ 743 0173; 3377 Jln Gajah Mati; mains from RM4; ☎ lunch & dinner) Another basic but good-value Indian restaurant, serving a wide range of curries, roti and soft drinks.

Sri Devi Restaurant (☎ 746 2980; 4213-F Jln Kebun Sultan; mains from RM4; ☎ lunch & dinner Sat-Thur) As popular with locals as it is with tourists, this is a great place for an authentic banana leaf curry and a mango lassi.

Restoran Golden City (Jln Padang Garong; mains from RM5; ☎ lunch & dinner) This basic but very good Chinese eatery in the centre of town has a big menu, in English, of the usual

steamed fish, chicken, bean curd, rice and noodle dishes. It's also good for light snacks and a cold beer on a hot day.

Ships (171-181 Jln Padang Garong; mains from RM10; ☎ lunch & dinner) Inside the Sabrina Court hotel, this nautically themed restaurant offers a menu of Western dishes including fish and chips, steak, and lamb chops.

Four Seasons Restaurant (☎ 743 6666; 5670 Jln Dusan Raja; set meals for 2 people from RM48; ☎ lunch & dinner) A little pricey by local standards, but there's an excellent range of Chinese dishes on offer, including steamed fish, buttered prawns and deep-fried chicken with mango. Just don't ask for a 'table for one' as the restaurant only serves set meals for a minimum of two diners.

Shopping

Kota Bharu is a centre for Malay crafts. Batik, *kain songket* (fabric with gold thread), silverware, woodcarving and kite-making factories and shops are dotted around town.

One of the best places to see handicrafts is on the road north to Pantai Cahaya Bulan (PCB). There are a number of workshops, representing most crafts, stretched out along the road all the way to the beach. Unfortunately, it's hard to visit these without your own transport; an alternative is to join an organised tour (see p324).

Kelantan Malay Silverware (☎ 748 5661; 5406-C Jln Sultanah Zainab; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Sat-Thur) This is the best place in town to buy handmade silver jewellery and ornaments. Customers are also invited to watch the craftsmen beaver away in the on-site workshop.

Central market (Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah; Jln Hulu; ☎ 6am-6pm) Kota Bharu's market is one of the most colourful and active in Malaysia. It's in a modern building with traders selling fresh produce on the ground floor; it's at its busiest first thing in the morning, and has usually packed up by early afternoon. Upstairs, stalls selling spices, brassware, batik and other goods stay open longer.

Bazaar Buluh Kubu (Jln Hulu; ☎ Sat-Thur) Near the central market, this is a good place to buy handicrafts.

The **old central market** (☎ Sat-Thur) consists of a block of food stalls on the ground floor, and a selection of batik, *kain songket* and clothing upstairs. A **street market** (☎ 6-10pm) selling clothes, copy watches and DVDs takes over Jln Parit Dalam in the evenings.

Modern chain stores can be found in the huge shopping centres on the city fringes such as **KB Mall** (Jln Hamzah) and **Kota Seri Mutiara** (Jln Pasir Puteh).

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **Malaysia Airlines office** (☎ 744 7000) is opposite the clock tower on Jln Gajah Mati. There are direct flights to/from Kuala Lumpur (RM190). **Air Asia** (☎ 746 1671; Jln Dusa Raja) has two daily flights to KL from RM110.

BUS

The state-run bus company **SKMK** (☎ 748 3807) operates city and regional buses (and some long-distance buses) from the **central bus station** (off Jln Padang Garong), and most long-distance buses from **Langgar bus station** (Jln Pasir Puteh) in the south of the city. All other long-distance bus companies run from the Jln Hamzah external bus station. On arrival in Kota Bharu some buses will drop you at the central bus station, or just outside, but they don't depart from there.

SKMK has ticket offices at all the bus stations. Ask which station your bus departs from when you buy your ticket, and book as far ahead as possible, especially for the Butterworth and Penang buses.

SKMK has regular buses from the central bus station to Kuala Terengganu (RM10.90, three hours), Kuantan (RM24, seven hours), Ipoh (RM24.40, eight hours) and Gua Musang (RM10.20, three hours). The following SKMK buses leave from Langgar bus station: buses to Johor Bahru/Singapore (RM44.80, 10 to 11 hours) leave at 8am and 8pm and buses to KL (RM30.80, nine hours) leave at 5.30am and 9pm. 'Business class' buses (with fewer seats) are available for these routes as well, and cost roughly 30% more. Buses to Butterworth (RM25.10, eight hours) leave at 9am and 5pm and buses depart for Penang (RM27.90, 8½ hours) at 6am and 9.30pm. Other destinations include Alor Setar (RM26.60, eight hours) Lumut (RM29.40, eight hours) and Melaka (RM39.40, nine hours).

The other companies cover many of the same routes. Buy your tickets at the Jln Hamzah external bus station or from the numerous kiosks behind the central bus station.

Most regional buses leave from the central bus station. Destinations include Wakaf Baharu (buses 19 and 27, RM1.20), Rantau Panjang (bus 29, RM3), Tumpat (bus 19, RM1.30), Bachok (buses 2B, 23 and 29, RM3), Pasir Puteh (bus 3, RM5.10), Jerteh (bus 3, RM7.10) and Kuala Krai (bus 5, RM8.20). Note that some of these may be identified by destination rather than number.

Thailand

The Thailand border is at Rantau Panjang (Sungai Golok on the Thai side), reached by bus from Kota Bharu. Bus 29 departs on the hour from the central bus station (RM3, 1½ hours). From Rantau Panjang you can walk across the border; it's about a kilometre from the station. Share taxis from Kota Bharu to Rantau Panjang cost RM20 per car and take 45 minutes.

An alternative route into Thailand is via Pengkalan Kubor, on the coast. It's more time consuming and very few travellers go this way, especially since the unrest began in this troubled part of southern Thailand. This is also a notorious smuggling route from Thailand into Malaysia, and there are regular police roadblocks close to the border.

CAR

Travellers can hire cars from the following organisations.

Avis (☎ 013-902 0700; Hotel Perdana, Jln Mahmud)

Hawk (☎ 773 3824; Sultan Ismail Petra Airport)

TAXI

The taxi stand is on the southern side of the central bus station. Avoid the unlicensed cab drivers who will pester you here and elsewhere around town, and take an official taxi as these are cheaper and safer. If you're heading for Kuala Besut, en route to the Perhentians, the tourist office recommends calling Adi (☎ 013-985 8603), a reliable, English-speaking taxi driver.

Taxi costs per car include Butterworth (RM200), KL (RM250), Kuala Besut (RM35) and Kuala Terengganu (RM90).

Those who plan to catch an early morning train should arrange for the taxi to Wakaf Baharu the night before they plan to leave, as it's extremely difficult to find a taxi on the street in the early morning.

TRAIN

The nearest station to Kota Bharu is **Wakaf Baharu** (☎ 719 6986). There is a daily express train all the way to KL (RM38, 13 hours), stopping at Kuala Lipis, Jerantut and Gemas, and a daily express to Singapore (RM41, 16 hours).

A daily local train stops at almost every station to Gemas (RM19.20, 13 hours). There are also two local trains daily that only go as far as Gua Musang (RM7.20, five to six hours).

Note that the national railway company (KTM) schedule changes every six months, so check departure times with the train station at Wakaf Baharu. KTM has a ticket office (counter 5) at Kota Bharu's Jln Hamzah bus station.

Getting Around

The airport is 9km from town. You can take bus 9 from the old central market; a taxi costs RM15.

Most city buses leave from the middle of the old central market, on the Jln Hilir Pasar side, or from opposite the Bazaar Buluh Kubu.

Trishaws can still be seen on the city streets, though they are not as common as they once were. Prices are negotiable but reckon on around RM5 and upwards for a short journey of up to 1km.

AROUND KOTA BHARU Masjid Kampung Laut

Reputed to be the oldest mosque in Peninsular Malaysia, Masjid Kampung Laut was built about 300 years ago by Javanese Muslims as thanks for a narrow escape from pirates. Built entirely of wood, without the use of nails, the mosque contains some impressive woodcarvings.

It originally stood at Kampung Laut, just across the river from Kota Bharu, but each year the monsoon floods caused considerable damage to the mosque, and in 1968 it was moved to a safer location. It now stands about 10km inland at Kampung Nilam Puri, a local centre for religious study. Note that entry is forbidden to non-Muslims.

To get there, take bus 5 or 44 (RM2) from Kota Bharu's central bus station and get off at Nilam Puri. Try to go in the morning, when the mosque is least crowded.

AROUND KOTA BHARU



Beaches

PANTAI CAHAYA BULAN (PCB)

PCB is a Malay abbreviation that sounds far more appealing translated into English: the Beach of Passionate Love. At least that's what it was once called. Pantai Cinta Berahi is now known as Pantai Cahaya Bulan (Moonlight Beach), in keeping with Islamic sensitivities. Fortunately, the same initials apply and everyone refers to it as PCB.

PCB is 10km north of Kota Bharu, only 30 minutes by bus. It's a shabby place, though, and the litter-strewn beach isn't overly enticing. **Perdana Resort** (☎ 09-774 4000; r from RM99; a s) has comfortable beachfront chalets, if you do wish to stay, while there's a string of food stalls along the beach.

To get there, take bus 10 (RM1) from behind the Handicraft Village in Kota Bharu. A taxi costs RM20.

PANTAI IRAMA

Pantai Irama (Beach of Melody) at Bachok has landscaped gardens along the foreshore and is popular with day-trippers. It's one of the best beaches around Kota Bharu but swimming here during, or just after, the monsoon period (November to March) is hazardous. Strong currents, high waves and whirlpools off the beach have claimed several lives. Rapid coastal erosion continues to be a problem, too. **Motel Irama Bachok** (☎ 09-778 8462; r from RM75; a) offers reasonable accommodation.

To the south of Bachok is the more comfortable **Sudara Beach Resort** (☎ 09-778

8880; www.sudarabeachresort.com; 128 Mukim Telong; r from RM84; a s), which has a variety of modern chalet accommodation close to the beach. Prices rise substantially at weekends, though.

From the central bus station in Kota Bharu, buses 23 and 39 (RM2) run out to Pantai Irama.

PANTAI SERI TUJUH

Pantai Seri Tujuh (Beach of Seven Lagoons), just 5km from the Thai border, is an undeveloped stretch of beach on a long spit of land, with a quiet bay behind. Most visitors are locals who come here for picnics and to fish for water snails in the shallow waters, but it's a very quiet place and there's no particular reason to stay. If this serene scene appeals, there are some basic rooms at **Chalet Sri Tujuh** (☎ 09-721 1753; r from RM48; a) and a few food stalls near the beach.

Tumpat District

Tumpat district is a major agricultural area bordering Thailand, and the Thai influence is very noticeable, with striking Thai Buddhist temples such as Wat Phothisivhan and Wat Maisuwankiri speckled among the picturesque rice fields. Pengkalan Kubor is an exit point for Thailand, while Tumpat town is the terminus of the railway line, although it has no hotels or attractions.

The best way to see the temples is on an organised tour from Kota Bharu (p324). Visiting more than one or two places using

THE EAST COAST HOUSE

For centuries, the east coast of Malaysia was influenced by both Thai and Cambodian culture, and the most obvious legacy of this exchange can be seen in the distinctive architecture of the east-coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu. Traditional east-coast village houses have steep roofs, often with terracotta tiles, and curved gable ends, just like those found in Thailand. There are two kinds of village house, the so-called 'bachelor house' (*rumah bujang*), which has six posts holding up the roof, and the larger 'veranda house' (*rumah serambi*), with 12 posts. The posts raise the houses more than 2m above the ground, and they are often linked together and attached to the main village house, the *rumah ibu*. The interiors of the houses are divided by bamboo screens, while the carved wooden panels of the outside walls are fitted with finely cut fretwork windows. The entrance is reached by means of wooden steps, at the bottom of which there is usually a large urn of water and a ladle, for visitors to wash their feet.

public transport and walking long distances in the heat is likely to be a trying experience, and, with poor signposting, even local drivers sometimes get lost.

TEMPLES

Numerous Thai temples are found all over the region, and Wesak Day (a celebration of Buddha's life, which is usually held in April or May) is a particularly good time to visit these temples.

Claimed to be one of the largest Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia, Wat Phothivihan boasts a 40m-long reclining Buddha statue, erected in 1973. There are some smaller shrines within the grounds, as well as a canteen and a resthouse for use by sincere devotees, for a donation. The temple, along with others in the area, seems to have become a dumping ground for sick, mangy dogs but they are not aggressive.

To get to Wat Phothivihan, take bus 19 or 27 from Kota Bharu to Chabang Empat. Get off at the crossroads and turn left (southwest). Walk 3.5km along this road, through interesting villages and paddies, until you reach Kampung Jambu and the reclining Buddha (about one hour).

At Chabang Empat, if you take the turn to the right (north) at the light in front of the police station, you will come to Wat Kok Seraya after about 1km. This wat houses a modest standing female Buddha. Continuing north about 4km towards Tumpat you will come to Wat Pikulthong, housing an impressive gold mosaic standing Buddha. You can get to both wats on bus 19; continue past Chabang Empat and ask the driver to let you off.

Around 4km north of Chabang Empat near the village of Kampung Bukit Tanah

is Wat Maisuwankiri. Its most striking feature is the 'floating temple' – a richly decorated dragon boat surrounded by a channel of water. The bus from Kota Bharu to Pengkalan Kubor stops outside the temple.

Also worth a look is Wat Matchinmaram with its magnificent 50m-high seated Buddha, allegedly the largest of its type in Asia. Just across the road from here is the Sala Pattivetaya, a Thai temple and village complex with a series of colourful statues in the grounds. They are located about 2km south of Tumpat.

PENKALAN KUBOR

Right on the Thai border, Pengkalan Kubor is the immigration checkpoint for this little-used back route into Thailand. During the day a large car ferry (RM1 for pedestrians) crosses the river to busy Tak Bai in Thailand. From Kota Bharu, take bus 27 or 43 (RM2.40) from the central bus station.

JELAWANG JUNGLE PARK

The remote southern interior of Kelantan, which is often referred to as the 'Jelawang Jungle Park', makes for a fascinating excursion. The park can be accessed via the so-called Jungle Railway, which traverses Peninsular Malaysia's mountainous, jungle-clad interior.

Commencing in Tumpat, near Kota Bharu, the line runs through Kuala Krai, Gua Musang, Kuala Lipis and Jerantut (the access point for Taman Negara), and eventually meets the Singapore–KL railway line at Gemas. The local trains stop almost everywhere and don't strictly adhere to posted schedules; contact the train station for the latest timetable.

However, the area is usually visited as part of a tour organised in Kota Bharu (see p324). The small *kampung* of Dabong is on the jungle railway, though it's much more scenic to arrive by riverboat from Kuala Krai.

There are several caves in the limestone outcrops a few kilometres southeast of town. Of these, the most impressive is Stepping Stone Cave, a narrow 30m corridor through a limestone wall that leads to a hidden grotto and then on to Kris Cave. These two caves should not be attempted by those with claustrophobia. Gua Ikan (Fish Cave) is the most accessible of the caves.

From Dabong, you can cross Sungai Galas for 80 sen and take a minivan (RM2) out to the falls on 1422m-high Gunung Stong. The main falls are a 20-minute climb past the forgettable Perdana Satong Resort. A further 45 minutes of climbing brings you to the top of the falls and a camp site. From here you can make longer excursions to the summit of Gunung Stong and the upper falls.

Rumah Rehat Dabong (☎ 09-744 0725; r from RM25; a) is the only place to stay in Dabong; ask at the district office opposite the rest-house. There's the usual collection of food stalls near Dabong station.

Gua Musang

The town is named after the caves in the limestone outcrop towering above the train station. The musang is a native civet that looks like a cross between a large cat and a possum, but you're unlikely to see one as hunters have killed off most of these cave dwellers. It's possible to explore the caves, but it's a very steep, hazardous climb to the entrance, which is above the *kampung* next to the railway line, 150m from the train station (walk south along the train tracks). Don't attempt the climb in wet conditions and be sure to take a torch (flashlight). A guide is recommended.

Once you complete the dangerous climb to the caves, you'll have to shimmy through a narrow opening and do some scrambling to reach the main chamber, which extends some 150m before opening onto the opposite side of the mountain. There are no views, but the chamber is impressive.

There are several hotels on the main road that leads away from the train station. The best of these is Evergreen Hotel (☎ 09-912 2273; s/d from RM40/50; a) on the left just before the bend in the road.

Bus 57 to/from Kota Bharu costs RM10.10, and Gua Musang is also on the jungle railway.

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