

Perak



The old chestnut, 'What do you prefer, the mountains or the ocean?' goes over pretty well in Perak, peninsular Malaysia's second-largest state. If you're not exploring through limestone hills honeycombed with caves and sprinkled with Chinese temples, you're probably lazing along the Straits of Melaka on Pulau Pangkor. Smooth blue ocean versus jungle peaks patched with tea and strawberry plantations? Decisions, decisions.

There's quite a bit of stuff to see between these altitudinal extremes, though. Perak is one of Malaysia's most historically rich states: the country's former (and still significant) economic engines of tin mining and rubber tapping have their roots, as it were, in Darul Ridzuan, the Land of Grace. Perak's enterprising Chinese population has had a disproportionately huge impact on the evolution of modern Malaysia, while the state's geographic position along the Straits has put it at the centre of much of the national narrative. Thanks to all this heritage there are some pleasantly faded cities well worth your exploration: the royal seat of Kuala Kangsar; the garden metropolis of Taiping; Bukit Larut, the oldest hill station in Malaysia; and sprawling Ipoh, with its colonial architecture and Buddhist cave temples.

Still, with such a varied geography this is, unsurprisingly, a state made for experiencing physical beauty, from Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve to the Cameron Highlands (in Pahang state, but accessible from here), Malaysia's premier hill retreat.

'Perak' means 'silver' in Malay, but historians debate whether the word references the state's tin mines or the fish off its sandy coast. In other words, does Perak's identity come from the mountains, or the ocean? Why not check out both?

HIGHLIGHTS

- Polishing off strawberries and tea, and trekking in the **Cameron Highlands** (p159)
- Snacking on delicious street food in **Ipoh** (p157)
- Lazing on one of the fine beaches on **Pulau Pangkor** (p150)
- Soaking up the colonial charm of **Taiping** (p169)
- Getting lost amid the mangroves at **Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve** (p173)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 05

■ POPULATION: 2.4 MILLION

■ AREA: 21,005 SQ KM

History

Today's sultanate of Perak dates back to the early 16th century, when the eldest son of the last sultan of Melaka, Sultan Muzaffar Shah, established his own dynasty on the banks of Sungai Perak (Perak River). The state's rich tin deposits quickly made it a target of both covetous neighbours and foreign forces.

Dutch efforts in the 17th century to monopolise the tin trade were unsuccessful, but remains of their forts can still be seen on Pulau Pangkor (Pangkor Island) and at the mouth of Sungai Perak. In the 18th century the Bugis from the south and the Siamese from the north made concerted attempts to dominate Perak, but British intervention in the 1820s trumped them both.

The British had remained reluctant to meddle in the peninsula's affairs, but growing investment in the Strait settlements, along with the rich tin mines of Perak, encouraged their interest. The mines also attracted a great influx of Chinese immigrants, who soon formed rival clan groups allied with local Malay chiefs, all of whom battled to control the mines.

The Perak sultanate was in disarray, and fighting among successors to the throne gave the British their opportunity to step in, making the first real colonial incursion on the peninsula in 1874. The governor, Sir Andrew Clarke, convened a meeting at Pulau Pangkor at which Sultan Abdullah was installed on the throne in preference to Sultan Ismail, the other major contender. The resultant Pangkor Treaty required the sultan accept a British Resident, to be consulted on all issues other than those relating to religion or Malay custom. One year later, Sultan Abdullah was forced, under threat of deposition, to accept administration by British officials on his behalf.

Various Perak chiefs united against this state of affairs, and the Resident, James WW Birch, was assassinated at Pasir Salak in November 1875. Colonial troops were called in to fight a short war, Sultan Abdullah was exiled and a new British-sanctioned sultan was installed. The next British Resident, Sir Hugh Low, had administrative experience in Borneo, was fluent in Malay and was a noted botanist – he even had a pitcher plant (*Nepenthes Lowii*) named after him. He assumed control of taxes from the tin mines and practised greater intervention in state affairs. In 1877 he introduced the first rub-

ber trees to Malaysia, and experimented with planting tea and coffee as well. The sultans, meanwhile, maintained their status, but were increasingly effete figureheads, bought out with stipends.

The first railway in the state, from Taiping to Port Weld (now known as Kuala Sepetang), was built in 1885 to transport the wealth of tin; the result was rapid development in Taiping and Ipoh. In 1896 Perak, along with Selangor, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan, became part of the Federated Malay States. The Resident system persisted, however, even after the Japanese invasion and WWII, ending only when Perak became part of the Federation of Malaya in 1948. Perak joined the new independent state of Malaysia in 1957.

Climate

Perak has a tropical climate, and is hot and humid throughout the year; daily temperatures average between 21°C and 32°C, and humidity levels hover at a steady 90%. There are brief downpours and occasional lighter rain throughout the year, with June and July usually being the driest months. The Cameron Highlands are much cooler; temperatures rarely rising above 21°C. Rainfall is more frequent too.

Getting There & Away

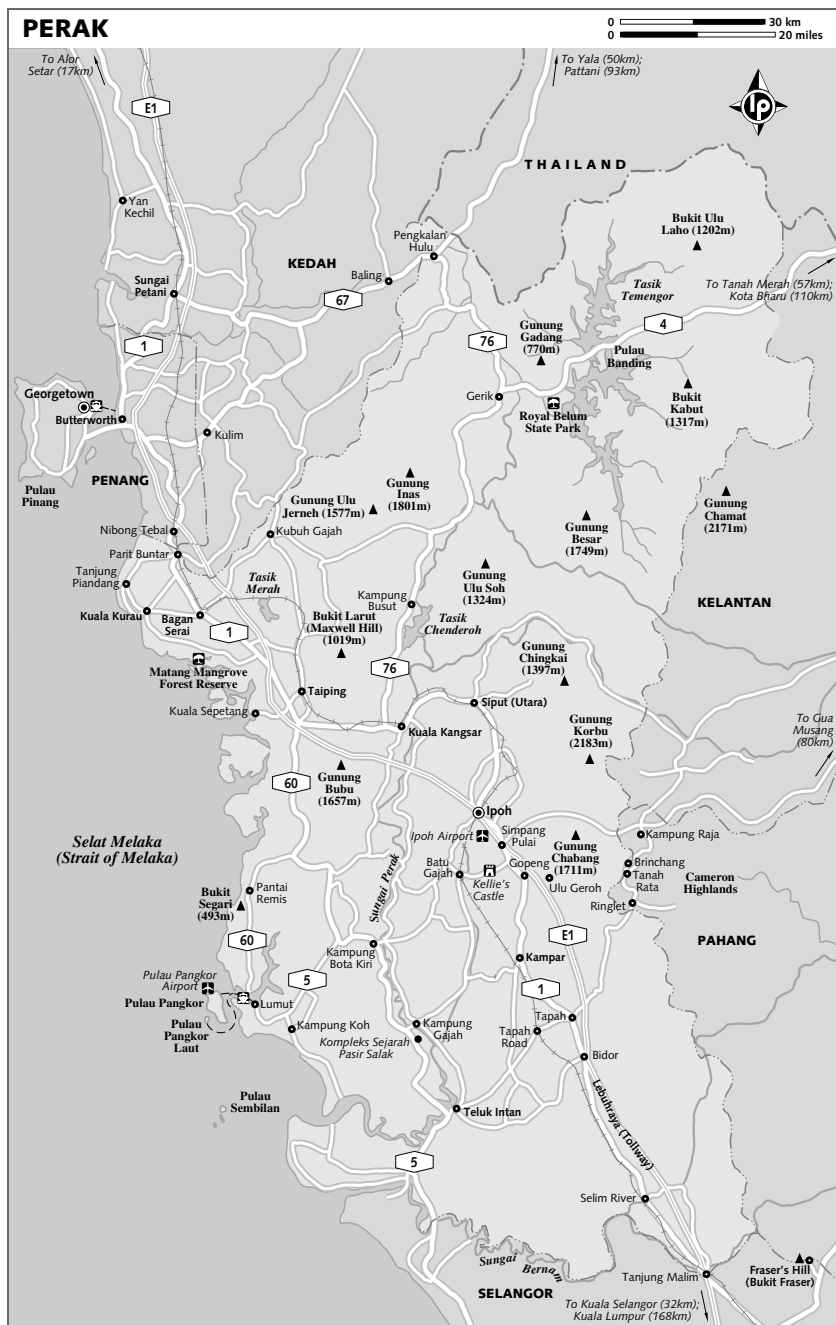
Both the main rail line and the Lebuhraya (E1; North–South Hwy) run the length of the country, from Johor Bahru in the south to the Thai border in the north, giving easy access to the Perak state capital, Ipoh, and other major towns. Ipoh is the state transport hub, with bus connections to most major towns on the peninsula, and has an airport with regular flights to/from Kuala Lumpur.

Getting Around

Almost everywhere in Perak is accessible by bus from Ipoh. Trains are not particularly useful for travelling within the state. Lumut is the departure point for ferries to Pulau Pangkor, and is well served by bus connections.

SOUTHERN PERAK

The road north from KL crosses the state border from Selangor into Perak at Tanjung Malim. If you have your own transport, you



THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

A complex power play for state government in Perak has followed 2008's general elections, when the national opposition bloc, Pakatan Rakyat (PR), took over by a slender majority from the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, which rules at the federal level.

On 25 January 2009, Nasaruddin Hashim, a BN member, made public his desire to cross the floor to PR. One good defection deserved another, or three: three PR representatives then declared their seats were 'independent,' but that they intended to support BN in confidence matters, thus tipping the balance of power in BN's favour. Nasaruddin went back to his old party in the name of preserving the peace. Even so, state Sultan Azlan Shah dismissed the PR government led by Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin, and asked BN to form a government.

That decision led to protests around the state. State Assembly Speaker (and PR member) V Sivakumar tried to hold an emergency sitting of the assembly on 3 March 2009; when BN ignored the meeting, Sivakumar held a session anyways under a tree, which has since become known as the Democracy Tree, complete with website (www.democracytrees.org).

On 11 May 2009, the Kuala Lumpur High Court ruled Sultan Shah was not constitutionally permitted to dismiss Nizar, which raised questions from BN as to how much power the courts could exert over the democratic process. In the meantime, PR supporters have called for the dissolution of the state assembly and new snap elections.

As of June 2009, the legitimacy of the state government of Perak still remained in doubt. However most commentators agree on one point: the way the Perak Constitutional Crisis is handled will be a benchmark for the viability of Malaysian democracy.

can get off the Lebuhraya tollway at Tanjung Malim and take the old Hwy 1 through a number of small towns, although there is little to detain you for long. The first of these towns is **Selim River**, where British forces made an unsuccessful last-ditch attempt to halt the Japanese advance through the peninsula during WWII.

The first main town is **Bidor**, famous for its guava and odoriferous *petai* beans, where you can turn off for Teluk Intan, 42km to the southwest. **Kampung Pasir Salak**, 25km north of Teluk Intan, is a small village of some historical interest (see opposite). From this village, you can follow the valley of Sungai Perak to **Kampung Bota Kiri**. This river valley was the original home of the Perak sultanate and is dotted with royal graves. From Kampung Bota Kiri, you can take the road to Lumut on the coast or travel northeast through a series of *kampung* (villages) to Ipoh.

TELUK INTAN

☎ 05 / pop 62,320

There are two things a traveller can do in Teluk Intan: catch a bus to the next town and clap eyes on a Malaysian rival to Pisa's famous tower.

Well...maybe not so much, but that's what the locals would like you to think after seeing their pride and joy: the **jam besar** (dock tower;

admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Thu, 8am-12.15pm & 2.45-5pm Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun). Located near the bus station, the 25.5m-high tower was built in 1885 as a potable-water storage tank. A pesky underground river gives the tower a lean (although it's not quite Pisa), and its designer, Mr Leong Choong Cheong, gave it its eight-storey, pagoda-esque appearance (there are actually only three floors).

Colonial buildings and Chinese temples and shophouses are found throughout town; most look on the verge of collapse. The **Istana Raja Muda Perak** is the crumbling palace of the next in line to the sultanate of Perak.

If you're staying the night, the standard midrange option **Hotel Anson** (☎ 622 6166; Jln Sekolah; s/d from RM75/100; 🍽️), on the main road south of the bus station, is the best place in town (not saying much).

The usual stalls line the streets around the clock tower and bus station. **Keng Heng Kopitiam** (mains around RM3; ☎ lunch & dinner), a small Chinese cafe stuffed with old photos that rival the small exhibit inside the *jam besar*, serves locally famous *nasi kandar* (rice with small side curries).

Getting There & Away

The central bus station is just south of the clock tower. There are direct buses to/from Ipoh (RM5.80, three daily) and KL's Puduraya

bus station (RM10.90, three hours, every 30 minutes), as well as express buses to Lumut (RM6.20, five daily), Kota Bharu (RM34, one daily) and Johor Bahru (RM35, one daily). Local buses to Klang in Selangor (RM9, three daily) depart from the side street next to the post office, just west of the clock tower.

KOMPLEKS SEJARAH PASIR SALAK

Kampung Pasir Salak is both a sleepy riverside village and the birthplace of Malay nationalism, a site steeped in symbology and patriotic myth-making. This was where James WW Birch, the first British Resident of Perak, was speared to death in 1875 while taking a bath. The event is memorialized in the **Kompleks Sejarah Pasir Salak** (Pasir Salak Historical Complex; ☎ 631 1462; adult/child RM3/1; 🕒 10am-5pm Sat-Thu, 10am-noon & 2.45-5pm Fri) museum.

Birch's killers, Maharaja Lela (a local chief), Dato' Sagor and Pandak Indut, have since been enshrined as national heroes (the truth is a bit more murky, see below), and the memorial dedicated to them takes the shape of the traditional *sundang* (knife). Replicas of Maharaja Lela's **fort** and **house** are nearby.

There are several restored traditional houses-cum-museums in the complex; the two most interesting ones feature, respectively, exhibits on traditional Malay weddings and an only slightly cheesy 'time tunnel' of historical dioramas depicting Perak from prehistoric times to independence.

Pasir Salak is a remote and awkward place to get to, with no direct public transport links. A chartered taxi from Teluk Intan to Pasir Salak costs roughly RM80 return, though you'll need to negotiate if you want the driver to wait while you look around.

TAPAH

☎ 05 / pop 80,000

The only reason to come to the small town of Tapa is for bus connections to the Cameron Highlands (p159). If you have to overnight, **Hotel Utara** (☎ 401 2299; 35 Jln Stesyen; r RM30-45; 🚽) and **NH Hotel** (☎ 401 7288; 24 Jln Stesyen; r RM50; 🚽) are decent options with private bathrooms – luxury by Tapa standards. Local buses make the corkscrewing journey to Tanah Rata in the Cameron Highlands roughly every hour from 8am to 6pm (RM5.70, two hours). Taxis to Tanah Rata (RM80) leave from the taxi station 100m further down Jln Raja, away from the main road.

From the bus station there are a few departures to KL and Penang, but most express long-distance buses leave from **Restoran Caspian** (9 Jln Besar) to Ipoh (RM15.50, two hours, hourly); Johor Bahru/Singapore (RM82/102, nine/10 hours, three daily); KL (RM33, 2½ hours, hourly until 6.15pm); Kuala Terengganu (RM65, nine hours, 9pm); Kuantan (RM54, seven hours, 10am and 9pm); Lumut (RM23, three hours, 11am); Melaka (RM44, 3½ hours, 10am); and Penang (RM70, five hours, five daily). All these buses can also be booked at **CS Travel & Tours** (☎ 491 1200; www.cstravel.com.my; 47 Jln Besar) in Tanah Rata.

The nearest train station, known as **Tapah Road** (☎ 418 1345), is 9km west of town, with one daily service in each direction to KL (RM15, three hours) and Butterworth (RM18, seven hours). A taxi to Tapah Road station from Tapa is around RM20.

LUMUT

☎ 05 / pop 31,882

Most visitors see little beyond the bus station and the ferry terminal, which is the

THE MURKY MURDER OF JAMES BIRCH

In Pasir Salak, James WW Birch, first British Resident of Perak, is widely portrayed as an intolerant man, unable to speak Malay and insensitive to Malay customs. His killers, a Malay nobleman and his helpers, are depicted as nationalist heroes. The truth is far murkier. At the time, Birch 'resided' under the terms of the Treaty of Pangkor, which still granted local Perak monarchs nominal autonomy. Birch, sensing (rightly) that he had the power, if not the support, to do as he pleased in Perak, went ahead and reorganised elements of the kingdom's judicial and revenue-collecting system; written accounts from the time suggest he held traditional Malay customs in low regard. This sounds insufferably arrogant, but one of the 'customs' Birch abolished was the then-existing practice of slavery, going so far as to actively help slaves escape and shelter them, thus depriving local sultans of a major source of income. This practice technically violated the terms of the Pangkor Treaty, and that violation, more than latent nationalism, was the justification a group of Malay conspirators needed to plot Birch's death.

departure point for Pulau Pangkor. If you do stay, the waterfront recreation park on the northern side of town, near the yacht club, is an agreeable spot for picnics and relaxing, and there are some decent out-of-town beaches, but not much else. Teluk Batik, around 7km out of town, is one of the more popular beaches. There is no bus service, but a taxi will cost you RM18 one way. Otherwise, this town is primarily populated by Malaysian sailors; the nation's principal naval base is nearby.

Information

Maybank (Jln Sultan Idris Shah)

Moneychanger (Jln Sultan Idris Shah) Next door to the Tourism Malaysia office. You'll get better rates here than on Pulau Pangkor.

Tourism Malaysia office (☎ 683 4057; Jln Sultan Idris Shah; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1.45pm Sat) Midway between the jetty and the bus station.

Sleeping & Eating

If you're marooned on your way to Pangkor, Lumut has a few decent hotels.

Era Backpackers Hotel (☎ 013-598 3005, 683 8910; 7-9 Jln Raja Muda Musa; dm with shared bathroom from RM15, r with shared bathroom RM25-50; ♿) Opposite the bus station, this hostel, sporting bright, spotless rooms, is Lumut's best budget choice.

Swiss-Garden Golf Resort & Spa Damai Laut (☎ 683 5555; www.damailaut.com; Jln Damai Laut; r/ste from RM230/600; ♿) North of the centre, this is the top place to stay, with over 300 posh rooms overlooking the sea, a golf course, a spa, etc. That said, why shell out the money when you could stay on Pangkor? Nonguests can putt on the hotel's golf course (nine/18 holes RM100/150).

Getting There & Away

BUS

The most frequent buses take the highway to/from Ipoh (RM5.70, hourly). Direct buses run roughly hourly to/from KL (RM18.80). Other destinations include Butterworth (RM12.70, five daily), Johor Bahru/Singapore (RM40/RM42, six daily), Kota Bharu (RM29.40) and Taiping (RM7, five daily).

TAXI

Long-distance taxis from Lumut can be scarce late in the day. Typical fares per car

are Butterworth (RM300), Ipoh (RM200) and KL (RM320).

PULAU PANGKOR

☎ 05 / pop 25,000

Sometimes the name of a destination has a bit of mystery. Not Pulau Pangkor, the 8 sq km 'beautiful island'. As descriptions go, that's as succinct and accurate as it gets. Just a skipped stone (OK, 40-minute ferry ride) from Lumut, this is white-sand paradise par excellence, low-key, very friendly, and if developed in places, still quiet enough to feel untethered to the rat race. The jungly interior, in particular, is wild, unexplored and isolated. Although the beaches get swollen with domestic tourists on weekends, during the week you've got the sand to yourself, and when it's raining on other islands, it somehow stays sunny here.

Pangkor has been a pirate hideout and bit-player in the battle to control the Selat Melaka (Strait of Melaka). In the 17th century, the Dutch built a fort here in their bid to monopolise the Perak tin trade, but were driven out by a local ruler before returning briefly some 50 years later. In 1874 a contender for the Perak throne sought British backing and the Pangkor Treaty was signed, ushering in British Residents and the colonial period.

Orientation

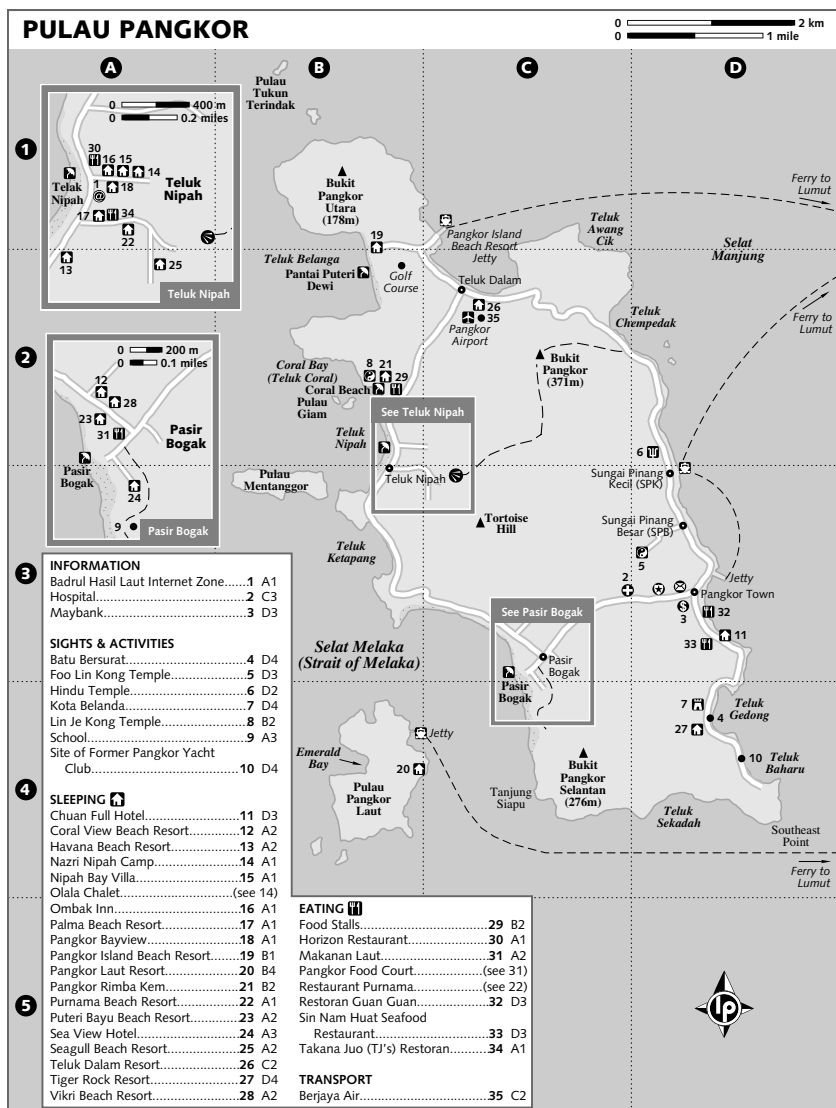
The island's east coast is a continuous village strip, comprising Sungai Pinang Kecil (SPK), Sungai Pinang Besar (SPB) and Pangkor Town, the main population centre. Fishing and dried-fish products are a major industry here; tourism is not.

The road that runs along the east coast turns west at Pangkor Town and runs directly across the island to Pasir Bogak. From there it runs north to the village of Teluk Nipah, where you'll find most budget accommodation. It then goes to the northern end of the island, past the airport, to Pangkor's luxury resorts. The road from there back to the eastern side of the island is winding and steep in parts, but it's sealed all the way.

Information

The island's hospital and police station are just west of Pangkor Town, on the road towards Pasir Bogak.

Badrul Hasil Laut Internet Zone (Teluk Nipah; per hr RM6) Most budget hotels at Teluk Nipah also provide internet access.



Maybank (Pangkor Town) In the same building as Min Lian Hotel, it's open the usual hours and has an ATM. For travellers cheques and cash, the moneychanger (see opposite) in Lumut offers better rates.

www.pangkor.com.my For online information on the island.

www.pulau-pangkor.com Another source of information.

Sights

Pulau Pangkor lends itself well to exploration by motorcycle, bicycle or foot. Spend a day doing a loop of the island, following the sealed road all the way around. By motorcycle it takes about two hours with stops, around three or four hours by bicycle, or you could walk it in a very long day. Locals on motorcycles seem ob-

livious to road rules, and accidents are not uncommon. The road from Pasir Bogak to Teluk Nipah is hilly and has several blind corners, so be careful if you decide to walk.

Along the western side are the main beaches of Pasir Bogak, Teluk Nipah and Coral Beach, and most of the tourist accommodation. On the northern edge of Coral Beach, look out for the small, psychedelic **Lin Je Kong Temple**, adorned with statues of giant mushrooms, a turtle, a mermaid and, of course, Donald Duck. From here, the road heads inland past Pangkor airport and, to the north, the Pangkor Island Beach Resort at Teluk Belanga. Continuing eastwards, the road skirts Teluk Dalam, with its luxury resort, and crosses over the headland. This is a steep and twisting road through some superb **jungle**. It's quite deserted and travellers have been robbed here – though thankfully this is rare.

On the eastern side, from SPK it's a nearly continuous village strip on to grotty Pangkor Town. Mmm – smells like dried fish! Come to town for genuine Malaysian food, as in genuinely cheap and tasty, from the hawker stalls. A South Indian **Hindu temple** makes for a small, colourful Dravidian explosion, while in SPB, the **Foo Lin Kong temple**, on the side of the hill west of the main road, has a mini version of the Great Wall of China climbing behind it.

At Teluk Gedong, 3km south of Pangkor Town, is the **Kota Belanda** (Dutch Fort), built in 1670 (*danke*, Dutch) and sacked in 1690 (*terimah kasih*, Malay). The Dutch managed to rebuild the fort in 1743; only five years later they abandoned it for good after local warrior chiefs repeatedly attacked them. The old fort was totally swallowed by jungle until 1973, when it was reconstructed as far as the remaining bricks would allow, which wasn't much.

On the waterfront 100m beyond the fort, **Batu Bersurat** is a mammoth stone carved with the symbol of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; VOC) and other graffiti, including a faint depiction of a tiger stealing a kid. Supposedly, the child of a local European dignitary disappeared while playing near the rock; the Dutch liked the idea of a tiger abduction, although she was more likely nabbed by disenchanted locals.

The road ends just past the fishing village of Teluk Gedong and the defunct Pangkor Yacht Club.

BEACHES

The beach at **Pasir Bogak** is a lovely, if rather narrow, stretch of sand. It's fine for swimming, but during holidays it can get crowded. To the north, **Teluk Nipah** has a wider, better beach, with more water-sports activities to hand.

The best beach on this side of the island is at **Coral Bay**, just north of Teluk Nipah. The water is a clear, emerald-green colour due to the presence of limestone, and the beach is usually quite clean and pretty.

In May, June and July turtles used to lay their eggs at night on **Teluk Ketapang** beach, north of Pasir Bogak. Increasing numbers of gawking tourists have seriously affected turtle numbers, and sightings are increasingly rare. For more information on turtles, see p77.

At the northern end of the island at Teluk Belanga, **Pantai Puteri Dewi** (Golden Sands Beach) is pleasant, but access is restricted to Pangkor Beach Resort guests. Day-trippers have to pay a ridiculous RM50. In between, there are a number of virtually deserted beaches that you can reach by boat, motor-cycle or on foot.

On nearby Pulau Pangkor Laut, **Emerald Bay** is a beautiful little horseshoe bay with clear water, fine coral and a gently sloping beach. You'll have to be a guest at the exclusive Pangkor Laut Resort, though, to enjoy it.

Activities

Snorkel gear, boats and jet skis can be hired at hotels or on the beach at Pasir Bogak and Teluk Nipah. A small boat to take you **snorkelling** at small nearby islands costs around RM40 after negotiation, depending on how many of you there are. Boats can also be hired for trips to Pulau Sembilan, nine white-sandringed dots that are popular for **sports fishing**, about 1½ hours southwest of Pangkor.

There's good **walking** here, arguably better than on any other Malaysian island. A four-hour trail crosses the island from Teluk Nipah and emerges near the Foo Lin Kong temple; another trail goes from Teluk Ketapang to Bukit Pangkor before joining the east-coast road. Walking trails are often overgrown. Take a guide, a *parang* (bush knife) and water, and protect yourself against leeches and ticks (see p602 and p603). Most guesthouses have lots of information and can organise a guide. Don't be deceived by the relatively small size of the island; several visitors have gotten lost after attempting to traverse the jungle alone.

Sleeping

Teluk Nipah has the best beach and biggest choice of accommodation on Pangkor. Plenty of hostels are here, but they share space with blocky midrange hotels. To the south, Pasir Bogak has bigger, pricier midrange resorts, a few restaurants and not much else. It's especially busy on weekends. The other developments on Pangkor are luxury resorts on isolated beaches.

Rates at most places vary, often substantially, between peak (Friday and/or Saturday and Sunday, plus holidays) and off-peak seasons; the following prices quoted are 'off-peak', available from Monday to Friday (or Sunday to Thursday) and in the low season. Finding a bed at any price during major holidays, such as Chinese New Year, can be near impossible without advance reservations. Budget rooms have shared bathrooms unless stated otherwise, pricier places all have private bathrooms.

TELUK NIPAH

The most lively of Pangkor's beaches is Teluk Nipah. Hotels on the main road experience a fair bit of noise from local youths racing their motorbikes into the wee hours.

Budget

These options are pricier than elsewhere in Malaysia. There are dirt cheap chalets in Pangkor that run for around RM30 for a chalet, but we found conditions to be pretty dire; you've been warned.

Nazri Nipah Camp (☎ 685 2014, 012-5760267; rozie1982@hotmail.com; dm/r from RM10/40) At the edge of the jungle, there's (surprise) a chilled-out reggae theme going on here. Accommodation ranges from simple A-frames to more comfortable chalets with bathrooms. It also has a secluded beer garden and TV lounge.

Purnama Beach Resort (☎ 685 3530; www.purnama.com.my; r RM30-80; ☎ ☑ ☑) This spiffy complex of chalets includes some fairly simple (and simply lovely) fan huts and neat, motel-style doubles. There's a good restaurant, a very small pool and breakfast included – nice.

Olala Chalet (☎ 685 5112; s/d RM50/70; ☎) For chalets with air-con and TV these are pretty good deals, but some cabins are in worse shape than others, so ask to see a few. Attracts a lot of domestic tourists.

Midrange

Ombak Inn (☎ 685 5223; <http://ombakinn.tripod.com>; r/f from RM70/100; ☎) This quiet hotel has a variety

of options, including battered A-frame huts and sparkling fan/air-con bungalows with attached bathrooms that sort of look like the guest room in your grandma's house (and are just as cosy).

Seagull Beach Resort (☎ 685 2878; www.seagullbeachvillageresort.com; r RM70-100; ☎ ☑) You don't have to be on the beach to score good budget rooms on Pangkor. Seagull is set back in the jungle and is endowed with all kinds of backpacker goodness: simple, freestanding huts prowled by cheeky monkeys (seriously, watch your wallet), table tennis, a dartboard and karaoke. The owners have their stuff together, and book great trips throughout the island and beyond.

Palma Beach Resort (☎ 685 3693; r RM75-95; ☎) Reasonably priced midrange option, with attractive wooden chalets with TVs and bathrooms and somewhat blander, but probably more comfortable hotel style rooms.

Nipah Bay Villa (☎ 685 2198; www.pangkornipahbay.com; r RM80-160; ☎ ☑) One of the oldest accommodation options on the island. Mr and Mrs Sabtu, the owners, are incredibly friendly and have seen it all on Pangkor. There are lots of good chalets and the usual backpacker comforts: common room, laundry, etc.

Havana Beach Resort (☎ 685 3333; www.havana.com.my; s & d from RM110, tr/ste from RM150/250; ☎) Havana has a glut of clean rooms in a compound at the southern edge of the beach strip. They're a little overpriced, but all have TV and hot showers.

Pangkor Bayview (☎ 685 3540; www.pangkorbayview.com; r from RM160; ☎) This more upmarket place has an assortment of accommodation as wide as an ocean; have a look around before settling and figure on getting what you pay for. Upstairs hotel rooms have balconies overlooking the lane, and there are chalets in the back garden.

PASIR BOGAK

The rest of Pangkor's accommodation possibilities are grouped at each end of the beach at Pasir Bogak. Most places are midrange, and compared to Teluk Nipah it's a very se-date place, primarily geared towards week-ending Malaysian families.

Vikri Beach Resort (☎ 685 4258; r RM90-170; ☎) Vikri has a dozen simple but cosy wooden and brick chalets located in scrappy gardens across the road from the beach. It's a peaceful, homely environment, with a kitchen

servicing up home-cooked Indian food and a very friendly, almost motherly staff.

Sea View Hotel (☎ 685 1605; svhotel@tm.net.my; r from RM130; ♿ ♿) This beachfront place has that old school, seafront holiday vibe you may recall from family vacations (and indeed, most guests are Malaysian families). There's an inviting, palm-fringed pool, though the spartan brick chalets have a somewhat institutional feel.

Coral View Beach Resort (☎ 685 5111; www.pangkorcoralbay.com.my/index.htm; r from RM130; ♿ ♿) One of Pasir Bogak's cheapest options, this is a dowdy and ageing place, though the simple chalet rooms aren't too bad for the price. They're set back from the beach, with views of the forested interior.

Puteri Bayu Beach Resort (☎ 685 1929; www.puteribayu.com; r/ste from RM170/310; ♿ ♿) This luxurious complex has a choice of standard hotel rooms and more appealing chalets set in landscaped gardens (the garden huts are quite nice, and have reduced prices) and on the beach.

PANGKOR TOWN

Chuan Full View Hotel (☎ 685 1123; 60 Jln Besar; r RM25-35; ♿) As the main attraction of Pangkor is its beaches, there is little point in staying in Pangkor Town. But if you get stuck, this place has dated but acceptable rooms, as well as a TV lounge and a verandah at the back overlooking the waterfront. The sign outside says 'Chuan Fu', and for the record, the views aren't all that.

ELSEWHERE ON THE ISLAND

Pangkor Rimba Kem (☎ 685 5523, 013-510 9384; r RM80-150) The only accommodation on Coral Beach is this small collection of standard chalets, which sleep up to four people. It also has tents (RM10), which can also accommodate four. If you bring your own tent, you can pitch it here for RM6. There's a restaurant on site, but annoyingly, it's only open to pre-booked groups.

Teluk Dalam Resort (☎ 685 5000; www.pangkorresorts.com; r from RM230; ♿ ♿) Fronting a wide bay at the northern end of the island is this peaceful four-star resort. The rustic wooden chalets and bungalows are set in landscaped gardens overlooking the sea. It's a little isolated and the beach isn't great, but there's a tennis court and a children's pool as well as organised trips and activities. Day visitors can use the hotel facilities for RM50.

Pangkor Island Beach Resort (☎ 685 1091; www.pangkorislandbeach.com; r/ste from RM480/900; ♿ ♿) This large, secluded resort is located on a private sandy bay at Teluk Belanga, at the northern end of the island, and is the most luxurious spot on Pangkor proper by far. The traditionally styled 'sea villas' at RM1100 are superb. Recreational facilities include two pools, tennis courts, and a spa, and there are organised activities for children.

Tiger Rock Resort (☎ 685 4154; www.tigerrock.info; full board from RM570/684; ♿ ♿) Rebecca Duckett and Owen Wilkinson are the creative geniuses behind this collection of three houses, each one decked out in the individual design tastes and assorted knick-knacks of the owners. The result is a lodgings that can come off as bohemian or tropical or colonial class, and sometimes all three at once. Whichever house you stay in, there's always a feeling of jungly isolation thanks to the secluded location of the 12.5 acre grounds. The inhouse meals are exceptional, and children are well looked after.

PANGKOR LAUT

The tiny, private island of Pangkor Laut, just opposite Pasir Bogak, is occupied by one of Malaysia's most exclusive tourist developments.

our pick Pangkor Laut Resort (☎ 699 1100; www.pangkorlautresort.com; r/ste from US\$350/900; ♿ ♿) Well, it's nice to have your own island, right? This ridiculously luxurious resort is speckled with hillside and seafront villas stocked with king-sized beds, balconies and huge bathrooms, and private 'estates' (uniquely designed houses, with two to four bedrooms, private pools and gardens, on a secluded bay away from the main resort). Every conceivable amenity is to hand, and the resort boasts several fine restaurants, tennis courts and a spa village.

Eating

TELUK NIPAH

Several of Teluk Nipah's guesthouses have restaurants, though these often close outside the high season. There are some basic food stalls along the beach.

Restaurant Purnama (mains from RM4; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) In the guesthouse of the same name, this restaurant offers a cheap menu

of Malay standard fare, seafood and a few Western dishes, as well as set breakfasts.

Takana Juo (TJ's) Restoran (mains from RM6; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A family-run Indonesian restaurant at the bungalows of the same name. TJ's serves delicious, cheap food, though the staff certainly take their time serving it. It's regularly full, so you'll need to get here early.

Horizon Restaurant (mains RM9-28; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This place has sunset views, alfresco dining and a mix of Chinese and Malaysian seafood and curries. Prices are relatively high and opening times can be unpredictable.

PASIR BOGAK & PANGKOR TOWN

All the hotels have restaurants and there are a few other places to eat. All are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, although usually only in the high season.

Opposite the Golden Beach Hotel, **Pangkor Food Court** (Pasir Bogak; mains from RM7) offers cheaper snack food, while next door **Makanan Laut** (Pasir Bogak; mains from RM10) is a popular restaurant specialising in fresh seafood. There are some great Chinese *kedai kopi* (coffee shops) in Pangkor town. **Restoran Guan Guan** (Jln Besar, Pangkor Town; mains from RM5; ☎ lunch & dinner) is an old favourite for seafood, and prices are posted on the wall-sized English menu. Opposite the Chuan Full Hotel, the friendly **Sin Nam Huat Seafood Restaurant** (☎ 685 2819; 51 Jln Besar, Pangkor Town; mains RM10-35; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a good place for crab, lobster and prawn dishes, and it serves beer late into the night.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Berjaya Air (☎ 685 5828; Pangkor Airport) has flights every day except Tuesday and Thursday between KL's Subang airport and Pangkor airport (one way RM275). Flights leave Pangkor at 10.30am.

BOAT

Mesra Feri (☎ 683 5800), which also runs Duta Pangkor Ferry (two boats, same operator) runs boats every 30 minutes/45 minutes on an alternating basis between 7am and 8.30pm. Boats leave Pangkor starting at 6:30am. Many ferries from Lumut stop at SPK before reaching Pangkor Town, so don't hop off too soon.

Return tickets cost RM10; just check which service is leaving first.

The Pangkor Island Beach Resort and Teluk Dalam Resort at the northern end of the island are served by their own ferry service from Lumut, running seven times a day in both directions (RM16).

There are four rather pricey ferries daily between Lumut and Pangkor Laut (adult/child RM50/25), though these are only for the use of bona fide guests.

BUS

There's a **bus agent** (Jln Besar, Pangkor Town) next to Chuan Full Hotel that handles bookings for express buses originating from Lumut on the mainland.

Getting Around

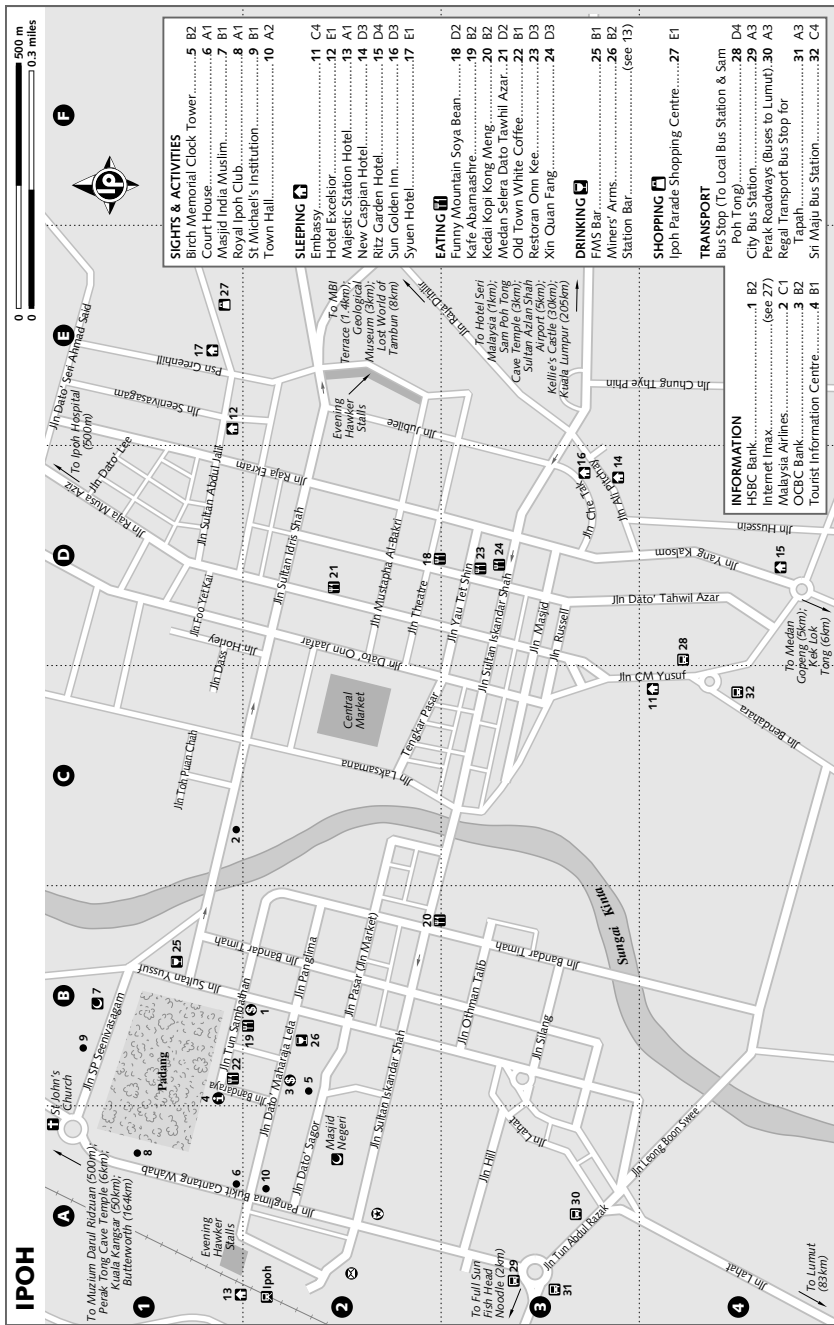
There are no public buses available to tourists, so you will be obliged to use Pangkor's candy-pink minibus taxis, which operate between 6.30am and 9pm. Set-fare services for up to four people from the jetty in Pangkor Town include Pasir Bogak (RM4), Teluk Nipah (RM10), Pangkor Island Beach Resort (RM18), the airport (RM18) and around the island (RM40). Travel between Teluk Nipah and Pasir Bogak will cost you RM10.

An ideal way to see the island is by motorcycle or bicycle (see p149). There are numerous places at Pangkor Town, Pasir Bogak and Teluk Nipah that rent motorcycles from around RM35 per day and bicycles for RM15 – look out for signs advertising bikes at the guesthouses in Teluk Nipah. Cars must be left on the mainland; there are a number of carparks in Lumut, all charging around RM10 per day.

IPOH

☎ 05 / pop 637,200

Ipoh is one of Malaysia's more pleasant mid-sized cities, chock full of colonial architecture, faded tropical mansions and a few pleasant green lungs. Even Ipoh's 'New Town', a chaotic outgrowth of ramshackle Chinese shop-fronts, has a bit of the romance of Old Asia, albeit with a fair bit of edge thrown in. The elegant layout and design of (old) Ipoh speaks to the wealth once generated here from the Kinta valley tin mine; in its day, the city was one of the wealthiest in Southeast Asia. Named for the poisonous ipoh tree (*Antiaris Toxicaria*) that once grew in profusion here, today Ipoh



- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**
- Birch Memorial Clock Tower..... 5 B2
 - Court House..... 6 A1
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 - Royal Ipoh Club..... 8 A1
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- SLEEPING**
- Embassy..... 11 C4
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- EATING**
- Funny Mountain Soya Bean..... 18 D2
 - Kafe Abamaashire..... 19 B2
 - Kedai Kopi Kong Meng..... 20 B2
 - Medan Selera Dato Tawhid Azar..... 21 D2
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- DRINKING**
- FRMS Bar..... 25 B1
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- SHOPPING**
- Ipoh Parade Shopping Centre..... 27 E1
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- Bus Stop (To Local Bus Station & Sun Poh Tong)..... 28 D4
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 - Sri Maja Bus Station..... 32 C4
- INFORMATION**
- HSBC Bank..... 1 B2
 - Internet Imax (see 27)..... 2 C1
 - Malaysia Airlines..... 3 B2
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 - Tourist Information Centre..... 4 B1

calls itself the 'Bougainvillea City', which much better captures the vibe of the place.

Give yourself a day at least to amble through this historic town before changing buses to rush off to Pulau Pangkor or the Cameron Highlands. Ipoh is also the sensible base for exploring nearby Buddhist cave temples, the royal town of Kuala Kangsar (p167) and Kellie's Castle (p158).

Orientation

The Old Town is where you'll find the bus and train stations, but otherwise this is a quiet area dominated by colonial architecture, government buildings and banks. Traffic-clogged New Town east of the river is home to most of the hotels and restaurants.

Information

HSBC Bank (Jln Tun Sambathan)

http://ipoh.com.my Useful resource for the city.

Internet Imax (3rd fl, Ipoh Parade Shopping Centre, Jln Sultan Abdul Jalil; per hr RM3; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Thu, 10am-2am Fri & Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun)

Ipoh Echo (www.ipohecho.com.my; 30 sen) English-language newspaper featuring good journalism. Arguably the only real community newspaper in the country.

Ipoh Hospital (☎ 253 2533; <http://hipoh.moh.gov.my>; Jln Hospital)

OCBC Bank (Jln Dato' Maharajah Lela)

Perak Tourist Newspaper Free monthly magazine with useful details on tourist attractions in Perak; available from the tourist information centre and some hotels.

Tourist information centre (☎ 241 2959, 529 0894; Jln Tun Sambathan; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

www.perak.gov.my Information on Perak.

Sights

COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

Ipoh's grand colonial architecture, a mixture of gleaming whitewash and romantic dilapidation, is found in the Old Town. Known locally as the 'Taj Mahal', the **train station**, dating from 1915, is a blend of Moorish and Victorian architecture designed in the 'Raj' style you see everywhere in India. It houses the wonderfully old-fashioned Majestic Station Hotel. Directly opposite, the **Town Hall** (Dewan Bandaran; 1916) and the **Court House** (Mahkanah Tinggi; 1928) are suitably impressive white neoclassical buildings of grand proportions. All three were built by government architect AB Hubbock.

Nearby on Jln Dato' Sagor, the **Birch Memorial Clock Tower** (1909) was erected in memory

of James WW Birch, Perak's first British Resident, who was murdered at Pasir Salak. The friezes on the clock tower are meant to illustrate the growth of civilisation, featuring figures such as Moses, Buddha, Shakespeare and Charles Darwin. A figure representing Mohammed has since been erased. The road on which this memorial stands has been renamed for one of Birch's killers, who are seen today as nationalists.

The mock-Tudor **Royal Ipoh Club** (1895) overlooks the playing fields of the *padang* (field), and is still a centre of exclusivity. On the *padang*'s northern flank is **St Michael's Institution**, a neo-Gothic three-storey colonial school with arched verandahs, founded by the Catholic La Salle brothers in 1927. Nearby, the green-and-white **Masjid India Muslim** (India Muslim Mosque; 1908) was built in the Mogul style for the local Indian population.

Old Town is also criss-crossed with rows of rickety **Chinese shophouses**, though those in the New Town area east of the river are actually in better condition. After Georgetown in Penang, Ipoh has one of the most extensive areas of later shophouse architecture in Malaysia.

CAVE TEMPLES

Ipoh is set among jungle-clad limestone hills that spectacularly jut out from the valley. The hills are riddled with caves that are believed to be a great source of spiritual power, and over the years meditation grottoes became large-scale temples. These still attract significant numbers of worshippers, but tourists are also welcome to look around. Remember these caves are regarded as holy by the pilgrims, so behave and dress respectfully.

Perak Tong

Founded in 1926 by a Buddhist priest, **Perak Tong** (☎ 546 5387; ☎ 8am-5pm) temple complex extends back into an impressive complex of caverns and grottoes with amazing murals on the interior walls, including some interesting juxtapositions of Theravada Buddhas from Southeast Asia and Chinese Buddhas and Buddhist saints. A staircase and a security guard were crushed by a rockfall here in 2009, but the temple has since reopened.

The cave is located 6km north of Ipoh. From the city bus station, Reliance Bus 141 stops at Perak Tong and then continues on to Kuala Kangsar.

Sam Poh Tong

A few kilometres south of Ipoh, **Sam Poh Tong** (☎ 605 3120; ☎ 8am-5pm) is the largest cave temple in Malaysia, although it's less popular than Perak Tong. The main attraction here is the turtle pond, where locals bring turtles to release in the hope of balancing their karma.

Inside the temple is a huge cavern with a small reclining Buddha, and smaller vases set about it. The ornamental garden in front of the temple is quite scenic, and pomelo (a citrus fruit) stalls line the highway.

The temple can be reached by Kinta bus 66 (bound for Kampar) or 73 from Ipoh's local bus station (70 sen).

Kek Lok Tong

To get off the beaten path, you can visit the smaller, more serene **Kek Lok Tong** (☎ 7.30am-7.30pm; donations requested). From Sam Poh Tong backtrack to the T-junction and turn right. Walk for 15 minutes, then turn right again before the first traffic light and follow the signs for Kek Lok Tong. At the cave temple's entrance, climb up to the Three Sages in the central cavern. At the back is a fat Chinese Buddha of Future Happiness sitting in the company of three other Bodhisattvas. Behind the cave is an ornamental garden with ponds and pagodas.

MUSEUMS

North of the *padang*, the **Muzium Darul Ridzuan** (☎ 242 6906; 2020 Jln Panglima Gantang; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) is housed in a 1926 villa built for a wealthy Chinese tin miner. The less than inspiring displays recount the history of tin mining (downstairs) and forestry (upstairs) in Perak. The occasional temporary exhibitions are more interesting. There are two concrete air-raid shelters in the garden, erected in 1941.

Sleeping

Most of Ipoh's hotels are to be found in New Town on the eastern side of Sungai Kinta, with a few of the better budget options in the southeast of the city around Jln Che Tak and Jln Ali Pitchay. There are several modern and reliable midrange hotels catering to business travellers, but the city has more than its share of old and downright seedy establishments, dingy little 'hotels' that are actually brothels.

All the options listed here have private bathrooms.

BUDGET

Embassy (☎ 254 9496; 19 Jln Cm Yusuf; r from RM25; ☎) This is as cheap and cheerful as Ipoh gets (it does get cheaper, but definitely not more cheery). There's not a lot of character, but rooms are clean and the air-con is cold.

New Caspian Hotel (☎ 243 9254; 20-26 Jln Ali Pitchay; r RM35-60; ☎) Welcoming little budget hotel with adequate rooms, which all have TVs and refrigerators. Not to be confused with the less appealing hotel of the same name on Jln Jubilee.

Sun Golden Inn (☎ 243 6255; 17 Jln Che Tak; r RM40-80; ☎) One of Ipoh's better budget choices, the Sun Golden Inn is a clean and friendly Chinese hotel, with good management who are used to dealing with Westerners.

MIDRANGE

Majestic Station Hotel (☎ 255 4242; www.majesticstationhotel.com; Jln Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab; s & d from RM88, f from RM130; ☎) The venerable colonial Majestic Station Hotel in Ipoh's magnificently faded, Moorish-style train station has plenty of character. Rooms are furnished in contemporary style, and while they're nice, they don't quite meet the luxurious promise implied by the premises. Do be a dear and take high tea on the long, tiled verandah.

Seri Malaysia (☎ 241 2936; luckyhot@tm.net.my; Lot 10406 Jln Sturrock; s/d RM120/140; ☎) This branch of the reliable Seri Malaysia chain offers good businessman comfort and crisp, attentive service. Sometimes, you need a bed and some cable TV, and in this regard, Seri more than adequately provides.

Ritz Garden Hotel (☎ 242 7777; www.ritzgardenhotel.com; 86 Jln Yang Kalsom; r/ste from RM160/400; ☎) The Ritz is one of Ipoh's better midrange choices, with a business centre, a restaurant, and free broadband access in every room. Only the priciest suites (starting at RM2300) have access to the tiny pool and sauna, though. Book online for serious discounts.

TOP END

Hotel Excelsior (☎ 253 6666; www.hotelexcelsior.com.my; 43 Jln Sultan Abdul Jalil; s/d/ste RM200/210/260; ☎) This towering city-centre monolith offers the usual comforts aimed at business travellers, including the regulation conservatively styled rooms, restaurants and gym. There's also a nightclub.

Syuen Hotel (☎ 253 8889; www.syuenhotel.com.my; 88 Jln Sultan Abdul Jalil; r/ste from RM300/600; ☎)

The colossal four-star, 290-room Syuen Hotel is the city's top hotel, with all the requisite facilities, including a business centre, cocktail bar, restaurants and a rooftop tennis court and gym. She looks like a grand old dame, but cheaper rooms look out onto internal air shafts and are consequently rather dark. Sizeable discounts on the published rates are available.

Eating

Ipoh is famous for its street food. There's something in the water: folks believe deposits from the rich karst formations around town seep into the groundwater and make Ipoh food unique. Malaysians will tell you Ipoh does the best *kway teow* (a rice noodle dish) in the country. Other tasty local specialities include pomelos – a football-sized citrus fruit – local bean sprouts and Ipoh white coffee, made with palm-oil margarine and served with condensed milk. It's very sweet stuff.

Medan Selera Dato Tawhil Azar (Jln Raja Musa Aziz) Better-known as the Children's Playground, this large food centre has stalls arranged around a small square filled with slides and swings. It's a popular place for Malay food in the evening, it's open late and, of course, kids love it.

MBI Terrace (off Jln Sultan Abdul Jalil; ☎ 7pm-midnight) Essentially attached to the city's municipal sports complex, in the evening MBI serves the best *kway teow* in town, according to many Ipoh residents.

Kafe Abarnaashre (29 Jln Tun Sambathan; mains from RM2; ☎ lunch & dinner) This simple halal Indian cafe facing the *padang* offers superb value. The menu, which includes lots of vegetarian dishes, is displayed on the wall, with roti and *dosa* starting from as little as RM1.

Funny Mountain Soya Bean (☎ 255 6861; 49 Jln Theatre; under RM3; ☎ lunch & dinner) Besides having one of the best business names in Malaysia, Funny Mountain is immensely popular for its one dish: soya bean and bean curd pudding. This is a millennia-old Chinese recipe brought to Ipoh direct from the Middle Kingdom; the curd is both delicious and a piece of Asian history.

Restoran Onn Kee (☎ 253 1652; 51 Jln You Tet Shin; mains from RM3; ☎ 1:30pm-3am) Onn Kee is widely recognised as serving the best *ayam taukeh* (bean-sprout chicken) in Perak, if not Malaysia. The chicken comes boiled, soft and fragrant, the sprouts are particularly fat and

crunchy, and the combined texture and flavour is surpassingly joyous.

Old Town White Coffee (2 Jln Tun Sambathan; mains from RM3; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon, breakfast, lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This upmarket coffee house facing the *padang* seems to be forever crowded. Simple chicken rice dishes prevail, and unsurprisingly, the coffee is pretty good.

Kedai Kopi Kong Meng (65 Jln Bandar Timah; mains from RM4; ☎ breakfast & lunch, closed Sun) Ipoh eaters swear by the Hakka (southeastern Chinese) cuisine in Kong Meng, which has been in business for almost 70 years. Your best bet in this scruffy, friendly little cafe is the beef noodle soup with some of the special homemade chilli sauce.

Xin Quan Fang (174 Jln Sultan Iskandar Shah; mains from RM4; ☎ breakfast & lunch) You better come early (seriously, like 7:15am) for the curry noodles and the pork and bean sprouts. Those two dishes, by the way, are pretty much all Xin Quan Fang churns out, but ohmygod are they good, as testified to by the lines that stretch around the block for this family-run favourite.

Full Sun Fish Head Noodle (off Jln Ng Weng Hup; mains from RM4; ☎ breakfast) Fish head noodle soup for breakfast? Hey, break free from those eggs and do as the locals do. The rich, fishy goodness in the cheek meat says 'Good morning!'; that glassy fish eye staring back at you from the soup says, 'Good choice, foodie'.

Drinking

Chinese coffee shops and food centres all across town serve beer and stout.

FMS Bar (2 Jln Sultan Idris Shah) This Ipoh institution was closed for renovation during our visit. Hopefully open by the time you read this, the Federated Malay States bar has been going since 1906, and was the favoured haunt of colonial planters and miners. It still attracts a gaggle of colourful local characters and expats.

Miners' Arms (☎ 243 4531; 8 Jln Dato' Maharajah Lela) A popular British-style pub, which also serves fish and chips, and steak dinners. There's live music on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Station Bar (Jln Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab; ☎ noon-midnight) On the ground floor of the Majestic Station Hotel, this quiet bar is a rather murky, gloomy place, but it has a kind of rough-edged charm, if you like that kind of thing.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Firefly (☎ 37-845 4543; www.fireflyz.com.my) As of research, the only flights to Ipoh were four times a week from Singapore (not KL) for RM177.

BUS

Ipoh is on the main KL–Butterworth road; 205km north of the capital and 164km south of Butterworth. The long-distance bus station is at **Medan Gopeng** (☎ 312 2844; Jln Raja Dr Nazrin Shah), 5km south of the city centre and linked by frequent shuttle buses to the city bus station (RM1.30). Numerous bus companies operate from the long-distance bus station.

Destinations and standard fares include Alor Setar (RM17), Butterworth (RM14.70), Hat Yai in Thailand (RM65), Johor Bahru (RM37), Kota Bharu (RM25.40), KL (RM13.40), Lumut (RM6) and Melaka (RM22.70).

The city bus station is off a roundabout south of the train station. Buses depart from here for destinations in Perak, such as Batu Gajah (RM1.80), Gopeng (RM1.50; for Kellie's Castle), Kuala Kangsar (RM6), Taiping (RM8) and Teluk Intan (RM5.80), as well as Tanah Rata in the Cameron Highlands (RM10.30). Note that buses to Tapah (RM4.70), operated by Regal Transport, depart from a stop across the road from the bus station.

Perak Roadways has a separate terminus on Jln Tun Abdul Razak, with regular buses to Lumut (RM5.70, 1¼ hours).

The private **Sri Maju bus company** (☎ 253 8898) has its own bus station on Jln Bendahara, from where it runs 'luxury' buses to KL (RM16, every 45 minutes), Butterworth (RM13.50, nine daily) and Singapore (RM55, six to eight daily).

TAXI

Long-distance taxis depart from in front of the long-distance bus station, and there is another stand at the city bus station. They're rip offs. Whole-taxi fares include Butterworth (RM200), Cameron Highlands (RM180) and Ipoh airport (RM18).

TRAIN

Ipoh's **train station** (☎ 254 0481; Jln Panglima Bukit Gantang Wahab) is on the main Singapore–Butterworth line. There are daily trains (including very frequent intercity service to the former) to both KL (RM12, 4½ hours) and

Butterworth (RM17, five hours), the latter continuing to Hat Yai in Thailand (RM30, 10 hours).

AROUND IPOH

Lost World of Tambun

At the base of forested limestone cliffs 8km northeast of Ipoh, the **Lost World of Tambun** (☎ 542 8888; www.sunway.com.my/lostworldoftambun; 1 Psn Lagun Sunway 1; adult/child RM25/19; ☎ 11am–6pm Mon & Wed–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun) is a huge waterpark, especially popular with local families at weekends. There are various pools, waterslides, wave generators and the like, as well as natural hot springs, artificial 'ruins' to explore and a tiger enclosure.

Regular buses from Ipoh's city bus station to Tanjung Rambutan (RM1.50) pass the Lost World.

Kellie's Castle

Also known as Kellie's Folly, **Kellie's Castle** (☎ 605 3668; adult/child RM5/2; ☎ 8.30am–6pm) is one of those leftovers of British eccentricity you occasionally find scattered in some random corner of the old empire. Here's the story: wealthy Scottish rubber-plantation owner and lover-of-all-things-India William Kellie Smith commissioned the building to be the home of his son. Not only bricks, but artisans and labourers were sourced from India to build what would have been, if finished, one of the most magnificent residences in Malaysia. Poor Smith died in 1926 and the house was abandoned; today, the remaining six-storey structure is a well-tended tourist site. The best-preserved rooms are the guest bedrooms, adorned with fine figurative plasterwork, and there are splendid views of the surrounding countryside from the roof terrace. Tales of secret passageways and ghosts have added to the air of mystery that surrounds this place.

About 500m from the castle is a **Hindu temple**, built for the artisans by Smith when a mysterious illness decimated the workforce and the remaining workers believed the gods needed to be appeased. To show their gratitude to Smith, the workers placed a figure of him, dressed in a white suit and pith helmet, among the Hindu deities on the temple roof. The temple is now semi-derelict but still in use, and the resident priest will point out the statue of Smith.

Kellie's Castle is inconvenient to reach without your own transport. From Ipoh's city

RAFFLESIA & BUTTERFLY SPOTTING

About 30km from Ipoh and 12km from Gopeng, a wonderful ecotourism opportunity exists in the Ulu Geroh community of Semai Orang Asli people. As part of the Malaysian Nature Society's **Rafflesia Conservation Project** (www.mns.my/artabout.php?aid=25) some of the locals have formed SEMAI (standing for Sahabat Ekopelancungan Memuliharaan Alam Indah, or Friends of Ecotourism and Conservation and Beautiful Tourism), a programme to guide day-trip visitors through the forests looking for the Rafflesia, the world's largest flower, and beautiful butterflies, including the Rajah Brooke Birdwing. For details check the web link above or call ☎ 012-645 6254 or 012-470 1251

bus station you can take either the frequent bus 66 to Gopeng (RM1.50) or buses 36 and 37 to Batu Gajah, which leave every 20 minutes (RM1.80). Bus 67 runs approximately every hour in either direction between Batu Gajah and Gopeng, passing in front of Kellie's Castle. You can also charter a taxi from Ipoh (RM50 to RM60 return); a taxi from Batu Gajah costs RM8.

CAMERON HIGHLANDS

☎ 05

OK traveller, you've been sweating through the jungles, beaches and lowlands of Malaysia for weeks now. Another sticky day will make your clothes unwearable. Another sweaty night and you'll lose the ability to sleep. We grant you a reprieve. Come to the Cameron Highlands.

This is Malaysia's most extensive hill station, an alpine landscape of blue peaks, green humps, fuzzy tea plantations, small towns and white waterfalls cutting throughout. With an altitude of 1300m to 1829m, the temperature rarely drops below 10°C or climbs above 21°C. The Highlands are inside the state borders of Pahang, but easiest access is via Tapah in Perak. The road winds through Ringlet, then the main towns of Tanah Rata, Brinchang and beyond.

Trekking, tea tasting and visiting local agro-tourism sites is the done thing here; you can also meet other travellers, especially backpackers, as this is one of the major nodes on the Banana Pancake Trail.

Unfortunately development, erosion and poorly planned agriculture have taken their environmental toll on the highlands. Landslips and floods have been the tragic by-product of the above. On the plus side, Ringlet Lake, which had essentially become a mud pie as of 2005, has been restored to, if not its old clear beauty, then something approaching a life-sustaining body of water. And Malaysians in general seem to be more aware of green issues. On the downside, increased ease of access to the highlands from Ipoh is only going to spur more development. Tourists are the backbone of the economy here, and their purchasing power will have a huge impact on what the Cameron Highlands eventually become: blighted blockhouses scarring the hills, or the cultivated, beautiful heart of the upland Malaysian peninsula.

Orientation

Though the Cameron Highlands lie just over the Perak state border in Pahang, it is accessed from Perak. From the turn-off at Tapah it's 47km up to Ringlet, the first village of the Highlands. It's an ugly, modern place, offering no real inducement to stop. On the way you'll pass the eye-catching waterfall **Lata Iskandar** at the Km 20 marker (20km from Tapah).

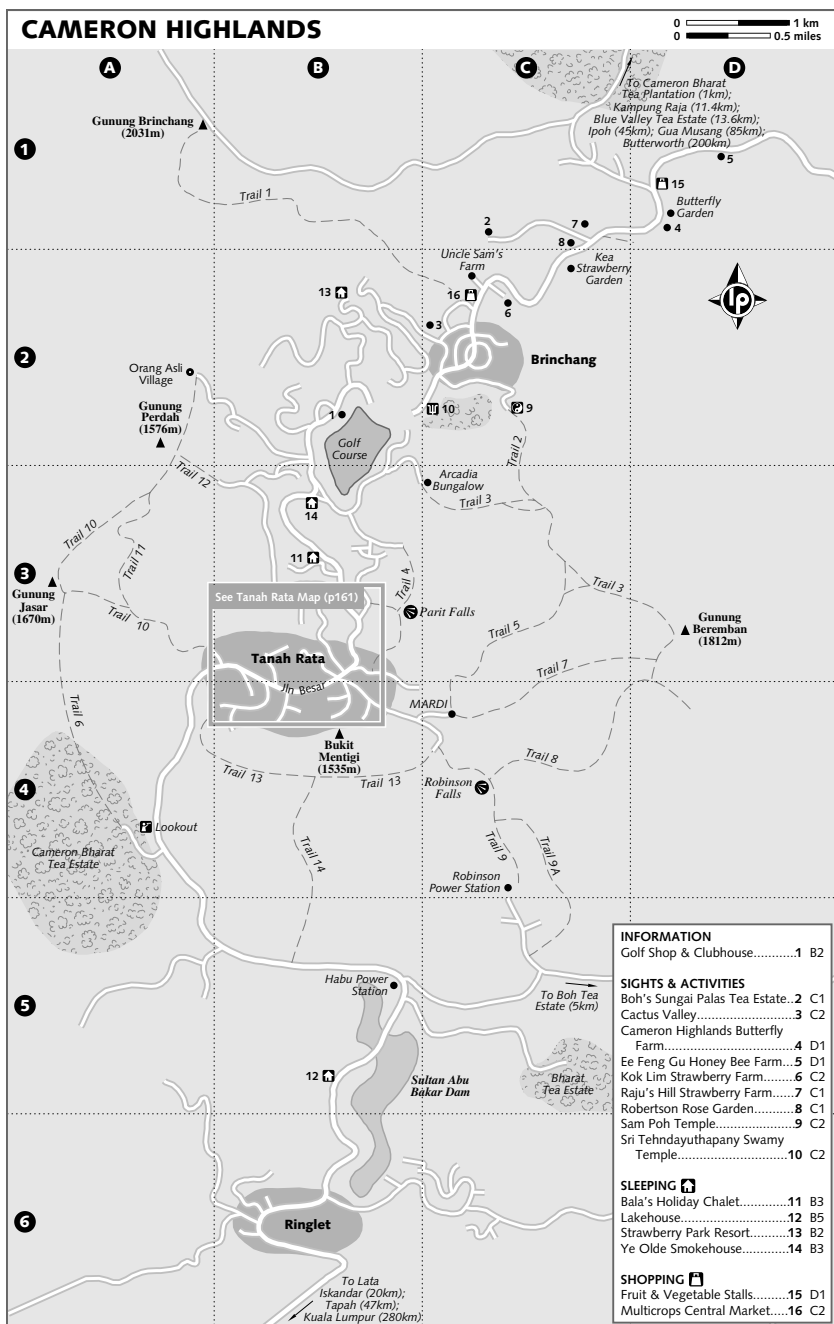
Soon after Ringlet you skirt the reservoir created by Sultan Abu Bakar. Tanah Rata, about 13km past Ringlet, is the main town of the Highlands, where restaurants and shops line busy Jln Besar (Main Rd). Most visitors stay here for its lively atmosphere and transport links.

A few kilometres past Tanah Rata many of the Highlands' more luxurious hotels cluster around a gold course (natch). Past here, at Km 65, is Brinchang, dominated by Chinese Malays and resorts catering for domestic tourists. Although closer to many attractions, it has less character than Tanah Rata and is not so well served by public transport.

The road continues to Kampung Raja, a tea-estate village, and the Blue Valley Tea Estate at Km 90. Flower gardens, strawberry stalls and butterfly farms are on this stretch of road, as is the turn-off to Sungai Palas Tea Estate and Gunung Brinchang (Mt Brinchang; 2031m).

Information

The post office, hospital, police and bus and taxi stations are all on Jln Besar in Tanah Rata. Most guesthouses offer internet access for around RM5 per hour.



CS Travel & Tours (Map p161; ☎ 491 1200; www.cs.travel.com.my; 47 Jln Besar) Organises coach tours of the Highlands and books bus and air tickets.

Dobi Highlands Laundry (Map p161; 62A Persiaran Camellia 3; per 4kg RM6; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 1-8pm Sun)

HSBC Bank (Map p161; Jln Besar)

Maybank (Map p161; Persiaran Camellia 4)

Pusat Computer CL (Map p161; ☎ 491 2907; 1st fl, 55C Persiaran Camellia 3; per hr RM2.80; ☎ 10am-10pm) The cheapest internet access in Tanah Rata.

Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands (☎ 491 4950, 012-589 8684; www.reach.org.my) Local environmental group. Volunteers are welcome to join its reforestation and recycling programmes, and the website has up-to-date information on local eco issues.

Tourist information centre (Map p161; ☎ 491 4560; mctic@tm.net.my; Public Library Complex; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) This small tourist office near the park has a few brochures.

www.cameronhighlands.com An overview of the Highlands, plus information on accommodation and attractions.

www.ewarns.com.my Current information on landslip hazards in the Highlands.

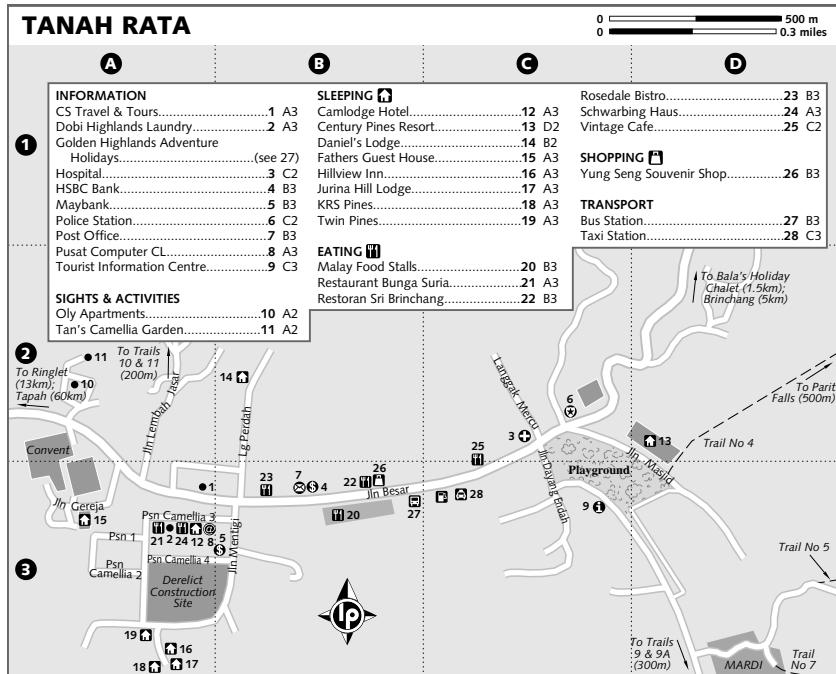
Sights

TEA PLANTATIONS

The first tea was planted here in 1929 by JA Russell, who founded the Boh Tea Estate. When the first tea tour was held we cannot say, but they're certainly the most popular thing to do around here now.

The **Boh Sungai Palas Tea Estate** (Map p160; admission free; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) is up in the hills north of Brinchang, off the road to Gunung Brinchang. The approach road leads past worker housing and a Hindu temple (tea pickers are predominantly Indian) to the modern visitor centre, where you can watch a video on the history of the estate. There's also a gift shop selling every version of Boh tea you can imagine and a pleasant cafe where you can sip tea while looking out over the lush plantations below. Free 15-minute tours showing the tea-making process are conducted during opening hours. Wait for a staff member to collect you from the visitor centre.

Public buses running between Tanah Rata and Kampung Raja pass the turn-off to Gunung Brinchang. From there it's 4km along the winding road past **Robertson Rose**



Garden (worth a detour for its hilltop views) to the plantation entrance, after which it's another 15 minutes' walk downhill to the visitors centre.

You can also visit other tea estates, but guided tours are usually given only for organised groups. One exception is **Boh Tea Estate** (off Map p160; www.boh.com.my), southeast of Tanah Rata and 8km off the main road up to the Highlands. From the end of jungle trail 9A (see opposite), it's only a 45-minute walk to the plantation, and tours are given approximately hourly from 10am to 3.30pm.

The **Cameron Bharat Tea Plantation** (off Map p160; ☎ 491 1133; www.bharattea.com.my) has a teahouse, attractively set overlooking the estate, around 3km north of Brinchang.

OTHER SIGHTS

As unexpected sites in the hills go, a temple to a Chinese eunuch and naval officer just about tops the list. The **Sam Poh Temple** (Map p160), just below Brinchang about 1km off the main road, is a brilliant pastiche of imperial Chinese regalia, statuary dedicated to medieval admiral and eunuch Zheng Ho and, allegedly, the fourth-largest Buddha in Malaysia. The Sam Poh temple is signposted as the 'Tokong Temple' from the intersection at the main road in front of the Iris House Hotel. Nearby **Sri Tehndayuthapany Swamy Temple** (Map p160) is an equally colourful Hindu place of worship – the Tamil Nadu-style sculptures were created by Indian artists, and the temple primarily serves the local tea-picking population.

A series of farms and similar agro-tourism sites are often included in bus and package tours. **Ee Feng Gu Honey Bee Farm** (Map p160; ☎ 496 1951; www.eefenggu.com; admission free; ☎ 8am-7pm) is a working apiary, with pleasant, flower-filled gardens to walk around, and honey to buy. The **Cameron Highlands Butterfly Farm** (Map p160; ☎ 496 1364; Kea Farm; adult/child RM8/5; ☎ 8am-6pm) is home to a fluttering collection of tropical butterflies, including the majestic Raja Brooke. **Raju's Hill Strawberry Farm** (Map p160; ☎ 491 4649; Kea Farm, Brinchang; admission free) may hold the attention of anyone with a keen interest in hydroponic strawberry cultivation, but the main reason for visiting is for the slightly overpriced strawberry jam and ice cream. At **Kok Lim Strawberry Farm** (Map p160; ☎ 491 4481, Brinchang) RM20 gets you the chance to be a labourer for the day and go home with 0.5kg of hand-picked strawberries. Honey, butterflies,

JIM THOMPSON

The Cameron Highlands' most famous jungle trekker was a man who never came back from his walk. American Jim Thompson is credited with having founded the Thai silk industry after WWII. He subsequently made a fortune, and his beautiful, antique-packed house beside a canal in Bangkok is a major tourist attraction today. On 26 March 1967, while holidaying in the Highlands, Jim Thompson left his villa for a predinner stroll – never to be seen again. Despite extensive searches, the mystery of his disappearance has never been explained. Kidnapped? Murdered? Or simply a planned disappearance or suicide? Nobody knows for sure. Today, you can follow his trail on a guided walking tour (p164).

strawberries...how about some cacti? Oh, sweet: here's **Cactus Valley** (Map p160; ☎ 491 5640; Pekan Lama, Brinchang; adult/child RM4/2; ☎ 8am-6pm), where you can wander along tiered terraces filled with various local flowers, fruits and vegetables, as well as cacti. There are potted plants for sale too.

Activities

HIKING

Besides getting in touch with your inner Englishman via tea and strawberries, the main thing to do around here is hike. Trailheads are marked with large yellow-and-black signboards that are sometimes obscured. Guesthouses in Tanah Rata can arrange reliable guides, who will possess an official license bearing their photograph.

The trails generally pass through relatively unspoiled jungle, and the cool weather makes hiking a pleasure. Always carry water, some food, and rain gear to guard against the unpredictable weather. Trails 4 and 9A (as far as Robinson Falls) take an hour or less, while a combination of trails 10, 11 and 12 is a more challenging hike. The rest may be tough going, depending on your level of fitness.

Trail 13 starts from behind the Cameronian Inn, but it stops at the concrete construction pylons.

Although hikes around the Highlands are all relatively short, there is obviously the potential for longer hikes. A glance at the Perak map (p145) will indicate what a short, steep

distance it is from the Highlands down to Ipoh or the main road. For any hike outside the immediate area, however, the local authorities have to be notified and a guide is necessary; contact the tourist office for details. Trail 6 was closed during our research.

Trail 1

This trail officially starts at white stone marker 1/5 on the summit of Gunung Brinchang (2031m), but this is a steep, muddy, overgrown trail (often closed for repairs) and it is not advisable to make this descent. Instead, start your walk at the end point of the trail, at white stone marker 1/48 just north of Cactus Valley and ascend to the top of Gunung Brinchang. This walk should take around 3½ hours to complete. From the summit take the 7km sealed road back to Brinchang through the tea plantations – a pleasant and relatively easy walk of about two hours.

Trail 2

Starting just before Sam Poh Temple outside Brinchang, this steep, strenuous hike follows a thin, slippery track for 1½ hours before joining Trail 3.

Trail 3

Begins at Arcadia Bungalow southeast of the golf course and climbs towards Gunung Beremban (1812m), getting steeper near the summit. It's a strenuous three-hour hike all the way to the mountain. An easier alternative is to go as far as Trail 5 and take that back to the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi); this too, though, is a steep path. Trail 3 continues onward to meet Trails 7 and 8.

Trail 4

One of the more popular trails starts next to the river just past Century Pines Resort in Tanah Rata. It leads to Parit Falls, but garbage from the nearby village finds its way here, and it's not the most bucolic spot. The falls can also be reached from the road around the southern end of the golf course. Both hikes are about half a kilometre.

Trail 5

Starting at Mardi, take the road inside the complex and follow the sign around to the left. It's a steep 1½-hour hike to the junction with Trail 3 through open country

and forest. It's easier if done downhill from Trail 3.

Trail 6

Trail 6 is prone to neglect, and the path is unclear in places. It goes from the end of the road at the Cameron Bharat Tea Estate and merges with Trail 10 at the summit of Gunung Jasar (1670m). It's a difficult 2½-hour uphill hike – take a guide.

Trail 7

This very difficult trail ascends Gunung Beremban. It starts inside Mardi. You should allow all day – it's at a steady three-hour uphill hike, with a very steep final climb to the summit.

Trail 8

This trail tails off Trail 9 just before Robinson Falls and is another steep three-hour approach to Gunung Beremban. Although slightly easier than Trail 7, it's still strenuous, especially if done in reverse from the mountain.

Trails 9 & 9A

Trail 9 starts 1.5km from the main road in Tanah Rata. Take the road past Mardi and follow it to the right where it ends at a footbridge. From here the trail leads downhill past Robinson Falls to a metal gate, about 15 minutes away. Trail 9, which is not recommended, goes through the gate and follows the water pipeline down a steep, slippery incline through the jungle to the power station. We recommend Trail 9A, which branches to the left before the metal gate and in about an hour arrives at Boh Rd. Follow this to the main road, where you can either head east to Boh Tea Estate or west to Habu Power Station for buses back to Tanah Rata.

Trails 10, 11 & 12

Gunung Jasar is a fairly strenuous hike via Trail 10, starting behind the Oly Apartments in Tanah Rata. Go through Tan's Camellia Garden and uphill to the left. After reaching the summit, you can continue on towards Gunung Perdah (1576m), but to continue on this trail you must bypass the mountain and return by Trail 11, which joins up with Trail 10 halfway back to Tanah Rata. Both these paths are unclear; take a guide. Trail

12 continues from Gunung Perdah towards the weather station, but it is not well marked or maintained.

Trails 13 & 14

Trail 13 starts behind Cameronian Holiday Inn. It's a 1.5 hour walk with a stream that merges with Trail 14, a difficult four-hour jaunt up Gunung Mentigi (1535m) that exits onto Tanah Rata road. You'll want a guide.

Tours

CS Travel & Tours (Map p161; ☎ 491 1200; www.cstravel.com.my; 47 Jln Besar, Tanah Rata) sells tickets for popular half-day 'countryside tours' of the Highlands, leaving around 8.45am and 1.45pm (RM30/25 adult/child). This is a good way of ticking off the bingo checklist of Highlands attractions, which are spread out and difficult to reach by public transport. Longer tours such as the full-day 'discovery tour' (RM90/70 adult/child) take in Gunung Brinchang and an Orang Asli village. The village may only be visited in the company of an official guide, who will have made a prior appointment. You can meet the tribesmen and participate in traditional activities such as archery, but this is a living community, not a staged tourist attraction, so remember you are a guest – ask before taking photographs and listen to the advice of your guide. Guides for the hiking trails can also be arranged.

Fathers Guest House (Map p161; ☎ 491 2888; 25 Jln Gereja) has a resident licensed guide who leads informative nature tours of the Highlands, including a visit to an Orang Asli village (RM60); available to nonguests.

Golden Highlands Adventure Holidays (Map p161; ☎ 490 1880; www.gohighadventure.com; bus station, Tanah Ratah) offers guided walking tours (RM68/45 adult/child) of the trail followed by famous disappeared trekker Jim Thompson (see the boxed text, p162).

Titivangsa Tours (☎ 491 1452; www.titivangsatours.com; 36 Jln Besar, Brinchang) runs a few coach trips including the half-day Agro Delight tour (adult/child RM65/55), touring the local flower nurseries, organic farms and orchards. Entrance fees and dinner are included.

Sleeping

The Highlands are at their busiest during the school holidays in April, August and December. During these times you should

book accommodation in advance. Tanah Rata is a favourite stopover for backpackers, and most accommodation here is of the budget variety.

Hostel touts will usually meet new arrivals at the bus station, which is actually pretty useful if you don't know where to stay. If you don't see the tout for the guesthouse you're headed to, ring them and most will pick you up free of charge. Don't believe touts who say their hostel has the last couple of rooms available – this is extremely unlikely. If you choose to walk, it's no more than 20 minutes to any place in town.

Midrange options consist of somewhat impersonal business-style high rises, while luxury resorts are mostly located outside town. Many hotels raise their prices on weekends.

Brinchang also has some hotels, but prices are higher, there's little atmosphere and it's an awkward place to stay if you're dependent on public transport.

The following places have shared bathrooms unless otherwise stated.

TANAH RATA

Budget

Daniel's Lodge (Map p161; ☎ 491 5823; danielslodge@hotmail.com; 9 Lg Perdah; dm/r from RM8/20; ☑) Despite the fact that the common-area whiteboard proudly states 'Fuck the Lonely Planet', we had quite a fun stay in this clean lodge, also known as Kang's. The backpacker force is strong here: French guys roll cigarettes, British gap-yearers get drunk in the back garden and German hikers compare boots...you know what to expect. Management is helpful and good for booking onward travel and tours.

Fathers Guest House (Map p161; ☎ 491 2484; <http://fathers.cameronhighlands.com>; 25 Jln Gereja; dm/s/d/tr from RM10/25/30/50; ☑) This very sociable place is situated on a hill at the western edge of town. The old bunker-style British army Nissen huts are clean and cosy, with between eight and 12 closely packed single beds. There are also rooms with private showers in the nearby house (from RM80), a big garden and a TV lounge. Access is via a long, steep flight of steps.

Twin Pines (Map p161; ☎ 491 2169; <http://twinpines.cameronhighlands.com>; 2 Jln Mentigi; s/d from RM12/20; ☑) Twin Pines is a good option for trekkers wanting backpacker rates with a less backpackery (read: party) atmosphere. The attic rooms are small, but are a steal; other

facilities are well-kept, and management is spot on when it comes to organising tours of the Highlands.

Camlodge Hotel (Map p161; ☎ 491 4549; 3rd fl, 55C Persiaran Camellia 3; s/d/tr RM35/45/55) Above Pusat Computer, in the modern shopping complex at the western end of town. The Camlodge is a small guesthouse with neat, clean rooms but not much atmosphere. All rooms have attached bathrooms.

Midrange

KRS Pines (Map p161; ☎ 491 2777; <http://twinpines.cameronhighlands.com>; 7 Jln Mentigi; s/d from RM60/90; 🚗) Owned by the folks at Twin Pines, KRS offers slightly more upscale digs in a squatish tower block. Smaller rooms go for as low as RM35; all accommodation is spic and span, making this a good borderline budget/midrange option.

Jurina Hill Lodge (Map p161; ☎ 491 5522; <http://jurina.cameronhighlands.com>; Jln Mentigi; r from RM75) Popular with Malaysian families and tour groups, this is a cosy, modern guesthouse in a quiet area directly behind the Hillview Inn. It offers spacious hillside bungalows and apartments with between three and eight rooms, including kitchens.

Hillview Inn (Map p161; ☎ 491 2915; hillview_inn@hotmail.com; 17 Jln Mentigi; r RM55-140; 🚗) This three-storey villa has large, lovely rooms all with balconies overlooking a derelict construction site (not as bad as it sounds). You'll pay more for a private bathroom, though the communal showers are superior.

Bala's Holiday Chalet (Map p160; ☎ 491 1660; www.balashalet.com; r/ste from RM120/220; 🚗) Charming mock-Tudor style guesthouse, originally built as a boarding school in 1934. It is set in pretty English-style gardens about 1.5km out of Tanah Rata on the road to Brinchang. The colonial ambience has been preserved, making this one of the more pleasant chalets in the hills.

Top End

Century Pines Resort (Map p161; ☎ 491 5115; www.thongsin.com; 42 Jln Masjid; r/ste from RM249/433) Set in landscaped gardens at the eastern edge of town, this stylish hotel has some beautifully furnished rooms with a light, contemporary touch. It boasts a gym, a pub and a restaurant, and a pleasant outdoor seating area.

Ye Olde Smokehouse (Map p160; ☎ 491 1215; www.thesmokehouse.com.my; r from RM460) This charac-

terful old house near the golf course on the outskirts of town looks as if it's been lifted straight from deepest Surrey, complete with a red British phone box outside. Indoors, the exposed beams, open fireplaces and chintzy decor complete the picture. The restaurant serves up traditional English food too. Prices at the Smokehouse rise by a third on weekends.

Lakehouse (Map p160; ☎ 495 6152; www.lakehouse-cameron.com; r/ste from RM528/616) Overlooking the lake 2km north of Ringlet, this English country house-style hotel has just 18 rooms, all with four-poster beds and antique furnishings. The restaurant serves traditional British cuisine, and there's also a cosy pub and reading rooms. It's a little isolated, and you'll need your own transport to stay here.

BRINCHANG

Budget

Hotel Chua Gin (☎ 491 1801; www.chuagin.com; 11 Jln Besar; r from RM35) This simple hotel offers good value for the price, and is about the only real budget option here. A good bet if you're counting the pennies.

Midrange

Hill Garden Lodge (☎ 491 2988; 15-16 Jln Besar; r from RM72) Neat enough little hotel in the town centre, with small, cosy rooms. It gets busy on Saturday and Sunday, but discounts are often available at other times.

Iris House Hotel (☎ 491 1818; 56 Jln Kuari; r from RM110) Big, modern hotel on the edge of town. The rooms are unremarkable, but this is probably among the better mid-range options. It's at the turn-off to Sam Poh Temple.

Top End

Strawberry Park Resort (Map p160; ☎ 491 1166; www.strawberryparkresorts.com; r/ste from RM450/650; 🚗) A sprawling 'neo-Tudor' resort in the hills west of town, popular with package-tour groups and anyone needing a bit of pampering up in the hills. You'll find a Thai restaurant and a British grill on site.

Eating

TANAH RATA

The cheapest food in Tanah Rata is found in the mainly Malay food stalls (Map p161) stretching down Jln Besar towards the bus and taxi stations.

Restoran Sri Brinchang (Map p161; ☎ 491 5982; 25 Jln Besar; mains from RM3; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This bright place serves a range of simple Indian fare, including tandoori chicken set meals, fish-head curry and vegetarian dishes.

Vintage Café (Map p161; ☎ 012-329 3431; 13 Jln Besar; mains from RM4; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) There's not a lot that's terribly 'vintage' about this place per se, but it does serve a decent line-up of Western and Malay staples.

ourpick Restaurant Bunga Suria (Map p161; ☎ 491 4666; 66A Persiaran Camellia 3; set meals RM5-9; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) The best value in town is to be had at this truly excellent South Indian joint. Meat, veg, dosa, curry, whatever: it's all good, spicy and served in large portions on a banana leaf.

Rosedale Bistro (Map p161; ☎ 491 1419; 42-A Jln Besar; mains RM5-18; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Very popular with travellers, foreign and domestic, the Rosedale's menu spans several cuisines (Chinese, Malay, European, Indian) and is complemented by good coffee and free wi-fi.

Schwarbwing Haus (Map p161; ☎ 491 5667; 59B Persiaran Camellia 3; mains RM18-30; ☺ lunch & dinner) Das is pork knuckles? In *Malaysia!* Jah! Satisfy your yearning for Swiss-German food at this upstairs restaurant. On offer is a meaty menu of bratwurst, schnitzel, pork knuckles and sauerkraut, all imported directly from Europe (hence the relatively high prices).

BRINCHANG

Brinchang has a good night market, which sets up in the central square on late Saturday afternoon. A permanent foodstall centre livens up the southern end of the square. Otherwise, there's a load of Chinese restaurants along the main strip that could mix up all their signs tomorrow without you really being able to tell the difference.

Shopping

The best place to pick up local produce is the **Multicrops Central Market** (Map p160; ☎ 491 5188; 1 Arkid Peladang Sungai Burung, Brinchang; ☺ 9am-6pm), which sells teas, fruits, strawberry jam, honey, potted plants and numerous other things.

Fresh locally grown vegetables and fruit – including Cameronian apples, oranges and passionfruit – can also be purchased from the market stalls beside the Butterfly Garden in Brinchang.

Back in Tanah Rata, **Yung Seng Souvenir Shop** (Map p161; ☎ 491 2223; 29-30 Jln Besar) has a good,

if rather expensive, selection of Orang Asli woodcarvings, as well as cheaper artwork from across Asia.

Getting There & Away BUS

The road between Ipoh and Tanah Rata via Simpang Pulai is the most direct route here, although landslides continue to be a problem; check the current status before you travel. The 'old road', as it's now known, is a long and winding climb from Tapah; hundreds of bends can make it an uncomfortable journey. The road passes a number of Orang Asli villages and roadside shacks, where their produce is sold.

There are four daily buses from Ipoh to Tanah Rata between 8am and 6pm (RM10.90, three to 3½ hours) operated by Kinta Omnibus. From Tanah Rata, the first and last buses to Ipoh leave at 8am and 6pm.

From Tapah, there are eight daily buses to Tanah Rata also operating between 8am and 6pm (RM5.20, two hours). From Tanah Rata, the first and last buses down to Tapah leave at 8am and 6pm.

CS Travel & Tours (p164) runs minibuses to Kuala Tahan (Taman Negara), via Gua Musang (RM85, eight to nine hours, 10am).

Several direct long-distance services originate from the Tanah Rata bus station for KL (RM23 to RM30, five hours, six daily), Penang (RM23 to RM28, six hours, five daily) and Singapore (RM90, 10 hours, one daily).

TAXI

The taxi station in Tanah Rata (Map p161) is just east of the bus station on Jln Besar. Full-taxi fares are RM80 to Tapah, RM250 to Ipoh, RM300 to Penang and RM650 to RM800 to KL, but are open to negotiation.

Getting Around

While we never recommend hitch-hiking, many travellers do so to get between Tanah Rata and Brinchang and the tea plantations beyond.

BUS

Getting between Tanah Rata and Brinchang is not a problem between 6.30am and 6.30pm, as buses run every hour or so. There are scheduled buses every hour from Tanah

Rata to Kampung Raja, 23km away across the Highlands, but it's more like two or three hours until the next one happens by. It's quite a scenic trip, and you can hop off at various fruit and vegetable farms along the way. These buses also pass the turn-off to Gunung Brinchang and the Sungai Palas Tea Estate.

TAXI

Taxi services from Tanah Rata include Ringlet (per car RM18), Brinchang (RM11), Sungai Palas Estate (RM25) and Boh Tea Estate (RM30). For touring around, a taxi costs about RM40 per hour, or you can go up to Gunung Brinchang and back for RM100.

NORTHERN PERAK

KUALA KANGSAR

☎ 05 / pop 39,000

An easy-going town with a deep-seated sense of Malay ethnic identity, Kuala Kangsar, seat of the sultan of Perak, is one of the most pleasant royal capitals in Malaysia. It has

also sat at the centre of many of the events of the past two centuries that defined modern Malaysia: first foothold of the British, who moved to control the peninsula by installing Residents at the royal courts here in the 1870s; birthplace of Malaysia's rubber industry (p168); and site of the first Durbar, or conference of Malay sultans in 1897. Yet by the 1890s, the rapid growth of Ipoh and Taiping had left Kuala Kangsar a quiet backwater steeped in Malay tradition.

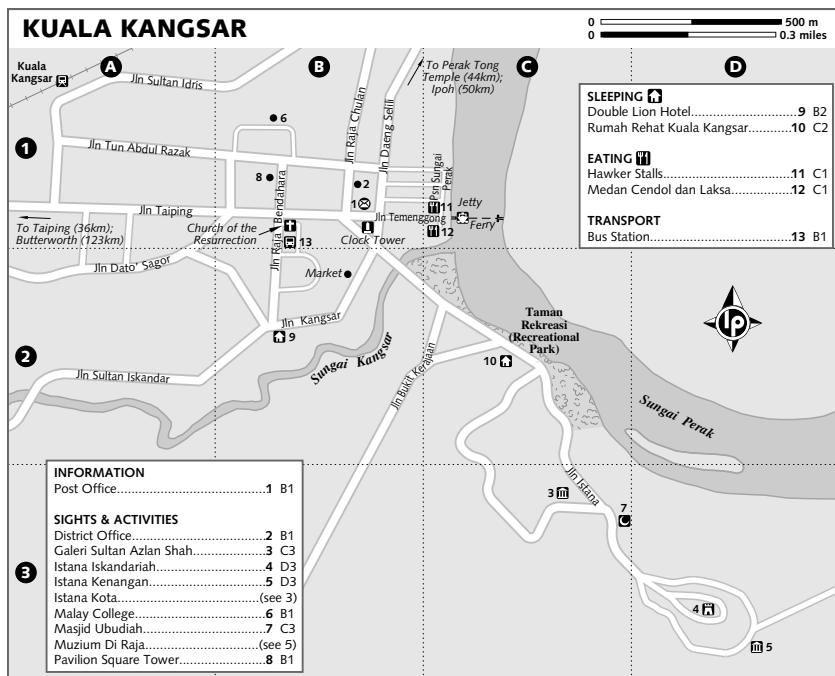
The small town centre is the usual scruffy jumble, but to the southeast the royal district is spacious and quiet. Main sights are few, but they're quite impressive and can easily be explored on a day trip from Taiping or Ipoh.

Information

The town's bank, bus station and post office are northwest of the royal district, off the road towards Taiping and Butterworth.

Sights

Heading out on Jln Istana beside the wide Sungai Perak, the first striking example of the



RUBBERY FACTS

In the late 1870s, a number of rubber trees were planted by British Resident Sir Hugh Low in his gardens in Kuala Kangsar from seed stock allegedly smuggled out of Brazil or taken from London's Kew Gardens. However, it was not until the invention of the pneumatic tyre in 1888, and then the popularity of the motorcar at the start of the 20th century, that rubber suddenly came into demand and rubber plantations sprang up across the country. Almost all of the trees in the new plantations were descended from Low's original rubber trees or from the Singapore Botanic Gardens. You can still see one of those first trees in Kuala Kangsar's **District Office** (Jln Raja Chulan) compound.

wealth of the sultanate is the small but magnificent **Masjid Ubudiah** (Ubudiah Mosque), designed by AB Hubbock, the architect of many of Ipoh's colonial edifices. The mosque, with its huge golden onion-dome, was begun in 1913 but, due to wartime delays and the smashing of imported Italian marble by rampaging elephants, wasn't completed until 1917. The caretaker will show you around the outside of the building for a small donation, but non-Muslims are not allowed inside.

Overlooking the river, **Istana Iskandariah**, the official residence of the sultan of Perak, is arguably the most attractive royal palace in Malaysia. Built in 1933, the building is an intriguing mix of Arab and art deco architectural styles; if you could combine the hotels in Miami's South Beach with a mosque, it might end up looking something like this. The palace is not open to visitors.

Further east is a slightly earlier palace, the wonderfully named **Istana Kenangan** (Palace of Memories), made entirely of wood and woven bamboo, without the use of a single nail. It was built in 1931 and served as the temporary royal quarters until the Istana Iskandariah was completed. It now houses the **Muzium Di Raja** (Royal Museum; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm, closed 12.15-2.45pm Fri), with displays on the state's history and the Perak royal family. Admission is by small donation.

Closer to town on Jln Istana near the Masjid Ubudiah, **Istana Kota**, also known as Istana Hula, is a beautifully restored former royal

palace, incorporating Renaissance and neo-classical elements; it could put you in mind of a Mexican villa on a sunny day. Built in 1903, it now hosts the **Galeri Sultan Azlan Shah** (☎ 777 5362; adult/child RM4/1; ☎ 10am-5pm Sat-Thu, 10am-noon & 2.45-5pm Fri). The Galeri features an exhibition honouring the life of the current sultan of Perak, Sultan Azlan Shah: see his sunglasses, passport, shoes and a separate building that holds his four Rolls Royces, Louis Vuitton luggage and official state gifts. It's a tough life, clearly.

The **Malay College** to the north of town is the most impressive colonial building in Kuala Kangsar. Established in 1905, it was the first Malay school to provide English education for the Malay elite destined for the civil service. It not only provided clerical workers for the British administration but also the nationalist leaders of the conservative 'Malaya for Malays' faction. In the 1950s Anthony Burgess wrote his first book while teaching here.

Opposite the Malay College, **Pavilion Square Tower** is a delightful folly overlooking the surrounding parkland and playing fields. Built in 1930, this small three-storey sports pavilion of Malay and colonial design allowed royalty and VIPs to view polo matches in comfort.

Sleeping & Eating

Kuala Kangsar is an easy day trip from either Ipoh or Taiping, but there are a few cheap hotels if you decide to stay. Rooms have private bathrooms unless otherwise stated.

Double Lion Hotel (☎ 776 1010; 74 Jln Kangsar; s/d from RM25/30; ☎) Conveniently close to the bus station. In addition to the rooms with fans, there are more comfortable air-con rooms available for RM70. You'll find a busy bar and bakery downstairs.

Rumah Rehat Kuala Kangsar (☎ 776 3872; Jln Bukit Kerajaan; r/ste from RM60/150; ☎) The best place in town is this modernised resthouse situated in a quiet parkland area southeast of the centre. Many of the simple yet spacious rooms overlook the river, and it's worth paying the little bit extra for a room with a balcony. There's also a Malay restaurant with a river terrace.

On the riverbank near the jetty, there's a string of hawker stalls selling a variety of traditional Malay snack food, as well as a modern food court, Medan Cendol dan Laksa, which, as the name suggests, is entirely devoted to various laksa dishes (around

RM2), *cendol* (shaved ice, coconut milk and palm-sugar syrup) and soft drinks. There are numerous coffee shops and fast-food outlets around the town centre.

Getting There & Away

Kuala Kangsar is located 50km northwest of Ipoh, just off the main KL–Butterworth road. It is 123km south of Butterworth and 255km north of KL.

Bus connections include Butterworth (RM10.40, two hours, two daily), Ipoh (RM5.50, one hour, roughly hourly), Kota Bharu (RM22.40, six hours, two daily), KL (RM18.70, 3½ to four hours, eight daily), Lumut (RM9.30, 3½ hours, three daily) and Taiping (RM3, 40 minutes, every 20 to 40 minutes).

Taxis leave from next to the bus station for Butterworth (RM90), Ipoh (RM60), KL (RM220) and Taiping (RM45).

The **train station** (☎ 776 1094) is located less conveniently to the northwest of town. All KL–Butterworth trains stop here. There is one daily train to KL (RM12, 5½ hours) and one to Butterworth (RM8, four hours).

ROYAL BELUM STATE PARK

☎ 05

In the northernmost corner of Perak is one of peninsular Malaysia's largest stretches of virgin jungle, **Royal Belum State Park**, also known as **Belum Forest Reserve**. This green dream of a wilderness, which constitutes the Belum–Temenggong Forest, fairly seethes with some of the nation's most dramatic megafauna: tapirs, tigers, sun bears, panthers and the endangered Sumatran Rhino, whose preservation was one of the motivating factors behind gazetting the park.

Exploring the park, which is about 100km north of Kuala Kangsar near the town of Gerik, is currently done by staying at the exclusive **Belum Rainforest Resort** (☎ 791 6800; www.belumresort.com; r from RM350; ☒ ☑). The management of the resort will set you up with guides who will take you on treks into the jungle, but these services don't come cheap: a two-day, one-night excursion package runs a whopping RM800. You can also go on relaxation/fishing trips to manmade **Pulau Banding**, which floats in Temenggong Lake.

The actual resort itself is lovely, all dark wooden floors and crisp white accents with large windows and natural light playing

together to give the impression that the resort is a thin shell between you and the outside forest.

Getting here is easiest with your own wheels; Gerik sits on Hwy 76, which continues onward to the Thai border. Buses to Gerik run at least once a day from Kuala Kangsar (RM8.60) and Kota Bharu (in Kelantan; RM 16).

TAIPING

☎ 05 / pop 200,300

'...the Chinese still need to be kept in check, for they are not allowed to go out at night without passes and lanterns.'

Isabella Bird, The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither, 1883

How the times have changed. Once a sort of Chinese version of the bloodiest scenes from *The Godfather*, old Larut (from Isabella's times) is known today as Taiping, the 'Town of Everlasting Peace'...and pensioners – there are a lot of retirees pottering about this fair city. That's a far cry from when Taiping was secret-society central, and Chinese underground groups fought each other for control of the lucrative tin industry, which eventually shifted to Ipoh. Taiping became a quiet town, somewhat analogous to Kuala Kangsar; if that town is Perak's seat of Malaysian royalty and identity, Taiping once seemed to embody Chinese entrepreneurial energy. Though the city has lost its former status, tourist brochures still boast of its '31 Firsts' for Malaysia, including the first museum; first railway; first newspapers in English, Malay and Tamil; and the country's first zoo. Today Taiping is a pleasing, quiet little place with a nice colonial district and great street food.

Information

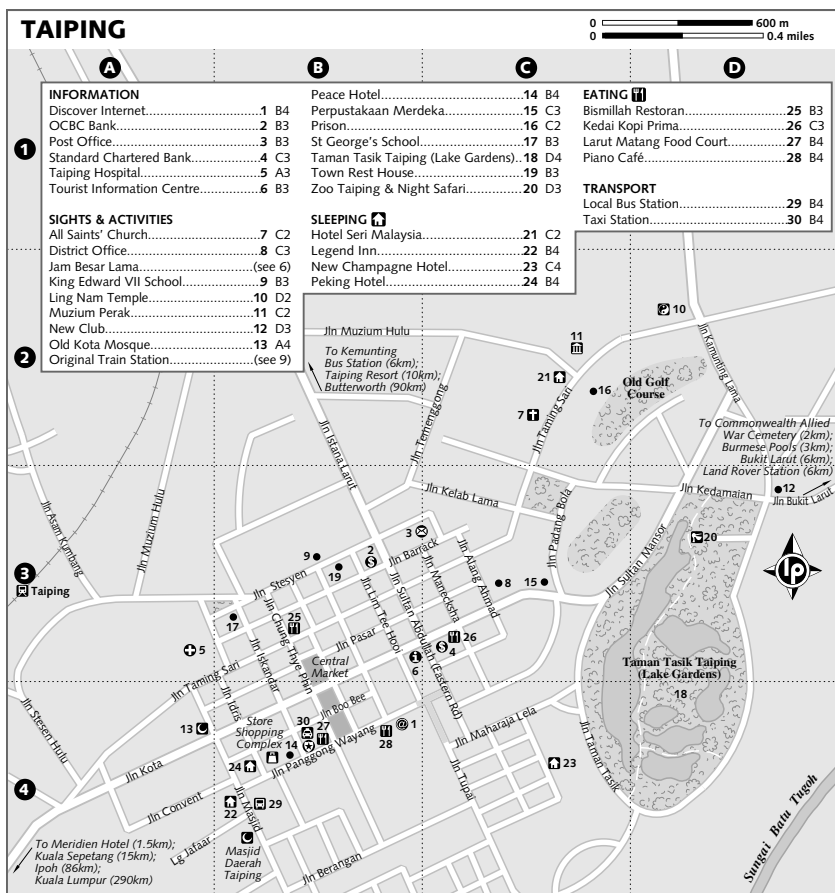
Discover Internet (☎ 806 9487; 3 Jln Panggong Wayang; per hr RM2)

OCBC Bank (Jln Barrack)

Standard Chartered Bank (Jln Kota)

Taiping Hospital (☎ 808 3333; Jln Taming Sari)

Tourist information centre (☎ 805 3245; Menara Jam, 355 Jln Kota; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm Mon–Thu, 8.30am–1pm & 2–5.30pm Fri, 8.30am–3pm Sat) Located in the Jam Besar. The tourist information centre sells the useful



Taiping Pocket Guide (RM3) and *Old Taiping* (RM20), a brief history of the town.

Taiping Peace Initiative The Taiping Peace Initiative promotes peace through workshops and through the annual Taiping Peace Awards. Contact the tourist information centre for volunteering opportunities.

www.vintagemalaya.com/Taiping Provides a comprehensive list of Taiping's many heritage buildings.

Sights

TAMAN TASIK TAIPING

Taiping is renowned for its beautiful 62 hectare **Taman Tasik Taiping** (Lake Gardens), built in 1880 on the site of an abandoned tin mine. The gardens owe their lush greenery to the fact that Taiping's annual rainfall is one of the highest in Peninsular Malaysia. In the hills

that rise above the gardens is Bukit Larut, the oldest hill station in Malaysia.

The Lake Gardens also hosts the **Zoo Taiping & Night Safari** (☎ 808 6577; www.zootaiping.gov.my; adult/child RM12/8; ☎ 8am-11pm, to midnight Sat), one of the best in the country. If they're not snoozing in the midday heat, you can see all manner of creatures, including elephants, tigers, Malayan sun bears and tapirs lolling about. Feeding time is 10am to noon.

The zoo opens again in the evening for what's billed as Malaysia's first **night safari** (adult/child RM16/10; ☎ 8-11pm, to midnight Sat), when you have a better chance of seeing nocturnal animals beginning to stir, such as fishing bats, slow lorises and big cats. It's an eerily atmospheric experience, especially if there are few other visitors.

MUZIUM PERAK

Northwest of the gardens, the **Muzium Perak** (State Museum; ☎ 807 2057; Jln Taming Sari; admission free; 🕒 9am-5pm, closed 12.15-2.45pm Fri) is housed in an impressive colonial building. It's the oldest museum in Malaysia, opening in 1883, and boasts exhibits on subjects as wide-ranging as the Orang Asli and the Outdoors. The cultural collection includes traditional *kris* (daggers), carvings and costumes and is the highlight of the place.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

The neoclassical **District Office** is on Jln Alang Ahmad. Just around the corner is the **Perpustakaan Merdeka** (Independence Library; 1882). Closer to town on Jln Kota, the **Jam Besar Lama** (Old Clock Tower; 1890) once functioned as Taiping's fire station and now houses the tourist information centre.

Taiping was the starting point for Malaysia's first railway line, now defunct. Opened in 1885, it ran 13.5km to Port Weld (Kuala Sepetang). The original **train station** is a few steps west of gracious, colonial **King Edward VII School** (1905), the classrooms of which were used as torture chambers by the Japanese during WWII. Also on Jln Stesyen are **St George's School** (1915) and the **Town Rest House** (1894), formerly the governor's residence and now the Lagenda Hotel. Another colonial-era landmark is the whitewashed **New Club** building on Jln Bukit Larut, also dating from 1894.

At the western end of town, the **Old Kota Mosque** (1897) is the oldest in Taiping, mainly of note for its hexagonal design.

Taiping has a number of fine old shop-houses, such as the **Peace Hotel** on Jln Iskandar. The Peranakan architecture has stucco tiles, stained glass, and beautifully carved bird and flower designs on the upper-wall dividers inside. The coffee shop downstairs is a good spot for a beer, but the scruffy hotel upstairs should be avoided. Opposite the Muzium Perak, the **prison**, built in 1879 to house lawless miners, was used by the Japanese during WWII and later as a rehabilitation centre for captured communists during the Emergency.

Just southwest of the museum and the prison, **All Saints' Church** (1886) is one of the oldest Anglican churches in Malaysia. The cemetery contains the graves of early colonial settlers, most of whom died of tropical diseases or failed to achieve the colonial pension needed to return home to Britain or Australia.

To the north of Muzium Perak, the colourful, gaudy **Ling Nam Temple** is the oldest Chinese temple in Perak. There's sadly not much left apart from a boat figure dedicated to the emperor who built China's first canal.

OTHER SIGHTS

Taiping's **Commonwealth Allied War Cemetery** is just east of the Lake Gardens, with row upon row of headstones for the British, Australian and Indian troops killed during WWII. Further on, down a side road, the **Burmese Pools** are a popular bathing spot by the river.

Sleeping

Taiping has an excellent selection of moderately priced accommodation. Most of the cheap hotels are scattered around the central market, the liveliest (but noisiest) part of town. The better choices are a few streets away. Prices include private bathrooms unless otherwise stated.

Peking Hotel (☎ 807 2975; 2 Jln Idris; r from RM35; 📶) One of Taiping's great strengths as a destination is its attractive old colonial buildings, so why not sleep in one? The Peking fairly drips with faded character, and was used as a military-police station by the Japanese during WWII. These days it offers fairly basic rooms, which are comfortable enough for the price.

Meridien Hotel (☎ 808 1133; 2 Jln Simpang; r RM60; 📶) For a businessman's hotel, this is a good deal: clean, cool rooms, plenty of mod-cons and general convenience, if not a lot of character.

New Champagne Hotel (☎ 806 5060; www.newchampagnehotel.com; 17 Jln Lim Swee Aun; r from RM63; 📶) The excellently titled New Champagne sells itself as 'high class budget', which in this case means 'normal midrange'. Not that there's anything wrong with that – it's spic and span and serves its purpose.

Legend Inn (☎ 806 0000; www.legendinn.com; 2 Jln Lg Jafaar; r/ste RM98/155; 📶) Located across a busy road from the bus station, this modern block has all the requisite midrange amenities, and rooms are large and brightly furnished. It has a good restaurant downstairs too.

Hotel Seri Malaysia (☎ 806 9502; www.serimaysia.com.my; Jln Taming Sari; r RM120; 📶 📶) Spotless chain hotel near the Lake Gardens and, less appealingly, right opposite the prison. It's a grand, and extensive, pink villa complex, offering the usual high standards of comfort and service.

Taiping Resort (www.taipingresort.com; Jln Bukit Jana; from R120; 🚗 🚶) If you'd like to head out of town for some peace, quiet and golf, this little resort tucked into the jungle hills 10km north of the city is quite a steal. Rooms are good in a chain-hotel kind of way, but the pretty location is the main draw. Annoyingly, it only takes online reservations.

Eating

Larut Matang Food Court (off Jln Panggung Wayang; mains from RM3) Come evening time, this is the best place for hawker food (and perhaps food in general) in the city, serving up awesome mee goreng, curry, laksa and the rest.

Kedai Kopi Prima (cnr Jln Kota & Jln Manecksha; mains from RM3; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This big, busy Chinese coffee shop spills out onto the street in the evenings, which it shares with the near-identical Tang Chen right opposite. Big-screen TVs, music and endless crowds make for a lively atmosphere. Try the *popiah* (delicious thin, wet spring rolls).

Bismillah Restoran (138 Jln Taming Sari; mains from RM3; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of the oldest, and most decrepit-looking, coffee shops, Bismillah is a simple but welcoming place noted for its biryani and roti; the latter is considered the best around.

Piano Café (☎ 807 9007; 7 Jln Panggung Wayang; mains from RM10; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Smart cafe serving Western dishes of the fish-and-chips variety, along with lots of fruit juices but no alcohol. There's occasional live music in the evenings.

Getting There & Away

Taiping is several kilometres off the main KL–Butterworth road. It's 90km south of Butterworth and 291km north of KL. The express-bus station is 7km north of the town centre, at Kemunting. Frequent buses go to Butterworth (RM5.90), Ipoh (RM6.45) and KL (RM19), with less-frequent connections to other destinations like Kota Bharu (RM22.75), Johor Bahru/Singapore (RM52), Kuantan (RM33.35) and Kuala Terengganu (RM45).

There are no hotels nearby, nor any reason to stay in Kemunting – hop on bus 8 (RM1) or take a taxi (RM8) to the town centre. Local buses leave across the street from Masjid Daerah Taiping. From here, buses depart every 15 minutes for Kuala Kangsar (RM3, one hour). There are also buses to Lumut (RM9.90, two hours, three daily).

Taiping's **train station** (☎ 807 5584) is 1km west of the town centre, on the KL–Butterworth line. There is one daily train to KL (RM24, seven hours) and one to Butterworth (RM8, three hours).

Long-distance taxis depart from the centre of town, near the police station.

BUKIT LARUT

☎ 05

Crouched in a wet and cool colonial atmosphere some 1019m above sea level is Bukit Larut (Maxwell Hill), the oldest hill station in Malaysia. It's not nearly as developed as the Cameron Highlands, and while the scenery is a little less dramatic, there's more of a sense of what hill stations were originally about here: elegant bungalows, quiet lanes, sweet-smelling gardens and not much noise but the wind in the leaves. There are no attractions other than the above, which suits some folks just fine.

Few people visit Bukit Larut – in fact, bungalows here only accommodate around 70 visitors. During the school holidays, all are full. Even if you don't stay, Bukit Larut can be an excellent day trip. Getting up to the hill station is half the fun, and once there, you've got fine views over Taiping and the Lake Gardens far below.

Sights & Activities

Most visitors go up and back by Land Rover (RM4.50 return, 7am to 6pm), though the hill is also a favourite with locals who walk up in three to four hours. It's a very scenic path, but don't imagine this is some casual stroll – you need to be fit to complete the walk. You could also choose to take a Land Rover up and walk down.

The first stop is the crumbling **Tea Gardens** checkpoint at the Km 5.5 marker, where a ramshackle guesthouse and a few exotic trees are the only reminder of the former tea estate. Next up, at the Km 9.5 marker, you'll find the Bukit Larut Guesthouse, Bungalow Beringin and a canteen for meals. The Land Rovers stop at the main administration office, where you book for the return journey if you haven't already – very advisable on weekends. There are some tame strolls through the nearby gardens from here.

The Land Rovers usually continue 2km up the hill to Gunung Hijau Rest House. Nearby are the Tempinis and Sri Kanangan bungalows, as well as the **Cendana nursery**, where

tulips are grown. From here it's a 30-minute walk along the road, noted for its profusion of butterflies, to the **Telekom transmitter station** at the top of the hill.

The jungle on the hill is superb, but the only real trail for exploring leads off the main road from between the two transmission towers. (It's best to do all your walking in the morning, as afternoon rains cause dangerous, gigantic sparks – large enough to hit your head – along the transmission lines.) The trail follows a practically abandoned path to **Gunung Hijau** (1448m). You can usually only follow the leech-ridden path for about 15 minutes to an old pumping station (now functioning as a small Shiva shrine), but even on this short walk there's a good chance of seeing monkeys and numerous birds. Beyond the shrine the trail is periodically cleared but quickly becomes overgrown; it's advisable to take a guide with you. If you do make it to the summit, on clear days you can see clear out to the Selat Melaka (Strait of Melaka).

Walking back down the road, it takes half an hour from Gunung Hijau Rest House to the main post at Bukit Larut Guesthouse, another hour to the Tea Gardens checkpoint, then another 1½ hours to get to the Land Rover station at the bottom of the hill, 6km from the Taiping Lake Gardens.

Sleeping & Eating

You can book space in one of the bungalows by ringing ☎ 807 7241, or by writing to the Officer in Charge, Bukit Larut Hill Resort, Taiping. If you haven't booked earlier, ring from the Land Rover station at the bottom of the hill.

Bukit Larut Guesthouse (1036m) and **Gunung Hijau Rest House** (1113m) each has four double rooms costing between RM50 and RM60. The bungalows **Beringin** (RM150) at 1036m and **Tempinis** (RM150) at 1143m are equipped with kitchens, so you need to bring provisions. Beringin can accommodate up to eight people; Tempinis up to 10. You pay for the whole bungalow, regardless of how many people are in your party, so coming by yourself is an expensive proposition. Meals are available from the caretakers at the bungalows, but they need advance notice.

There is a basic **camping ground** (per person RM2) below the main resthouse near the Tempinis bungalow.

Next to the upper Land Rover office, the **Bukit Larut Guesthouse** (mains RM3-6) is usually open for meals and has impressive views. Simple rice and noodle dishes are the main menu items.

Getting There & Away

Prior to WWII, you had the choice of walking, riding a pony or being carried up in a sedan chair, as there was no road to the station. Japanese POWs were put to work building a road at the close of the war, and it was opened in 1948.

Private cars are not allowed on the road – it's only open to government Land Rovers, which run a regular service from the station at the foot of the hill, just above the Taiping Lake Gardens. They operate every hour on the hour from 7am to 6pm (until 4pm in the low season), and the trip takes about 40 minutes.

The winding road negotiates 72 hairpin bends on the steep ascent, and there are superb views through the trees on the way up. The Land Rovers going up and those going down pass each other midway at the Tea Gardens. Fares are paid at the bottom of the hill – it's RM2 to the administration office and RM2.50 to Gunung Hijau Rest House. Alternatively, you can walk to the top in three or four hours.

To book a seat in a Land Rover (which is advisable), ring the **station** (☎ 807 7241) at the bottom of the hill. A taxi from central Taiping to this station, about 6km east of the Lake Gardens, should cost RM8.

KUALA SEPETANG

☎ 05

Around 15km west of Taiping, Kuala Sepetang – still shown on some maps under its old name of Port Weld – is a small, scruffy Chinese town of minimal appeal. The main reason for coming out this way is to visit the **Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve** (☎ 858 1762; admission free; 🕒 8am-7pm). The forest, which stretches from here up the coast of Perak towards Seberang Perai (Penang), represents almost half of all Malaysia's gazetted mangrove cover, and is one of the country's most significant nature reserves.

The entrance to the reserve is about 500m outside the town; ask the driver to let you off when you see the big gateway and sign on your right reading 'Pejabat Hutan Kecil Paya Laut'. Here a raised wooden walkway

winds its way through a small section of the reserve, allowing you to explore this fascinating ecosystem without getting your feet damp. There are several signs along the route explaining, in English, what plants you are looking at and how it all works. Smooth otters, leopard cats and macaques all inhabit this landscape, though you're unlikely to see much more than the odd bird and scamp-ering lizard unless you're here in the early morning or evening.

If you wish to stay, there are some large **A-frame huts** (from RM38; 🏠), perched on stilts at the water's edge, which sleep between four and eight people. Only one has air-con, and there are shared bathroom blocks. There are also shared tents (RM30), and you can pitch your own here too for around RM10, but make enquiries first as space is limited.

You can explore the mangroves further by charter boat, although it can get quite expensive. The reserve office can set you up with a guide, but expect to pay around RM350 to RM500 for the day.

It may be possible to arrange meals, but there are several basic Chinese restaurants just down the road in Kuala Sepetang. There is also a bank and post office on the main road (Trump Rd), as well as fruit and vegetable stalls and a surprising number of snooker halls, but that's about it.

Getting There & Away

Blue Omnibus 77 runs every 40 minutes from 6.05am to 7pm between Taiping's local bus station and Kuala Sepetang (RM1.90, 30 minutes), with a couple of later departures after that.

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