

CITY



BEACH



MALAYSIA

# City Beach

Get the best of both worlds with a twin-centre trip to Malaysia, says Jennifer Morris [➔](#)



“It’s more scared of us than we are of it; it won’t come near us,” said an optimistic travel agent before a cheeky little macaque monkey – complete with suckling baby – readied itself to hop on to our boat as we cruised through the mangroves in the Unesco-registered geopark that is Langkawi.

This was not my only encounter with all creatures great and small during a Malaysia Airlines fam trip to the island and to capital Kuala Lumpur.

A stay in the depths of the lush rainforest would see a timid, dusky leaf monkey regard me from a nearby tree as I unwound outdoors post-spa treatment; frogs shared the bathroom and there were butterflies galore – all within walking distance of a pristine beach.

This sat in stark but delicious contrast to the Malaysian capital, with culinary influences spanning

China and India, busy maze-like markets, and skyscrapers worthy of any cosmopolitan city.

**LANGKAWI**

“It’s very green and tropical,” says Jemma Allerton, personal travel expert at Kuoni in John Lewis, Cardiff, “but the rainforest leads to pristine beach with clear blue water and that’s a special combination”.

We arrived at our island accommodation, the Datai Langkawi, after a seamless transfer at Kuala Lumpur on to a 55-minute flight. I was immediately struck by how the luxury resort complemented its surroundings, with monkeys wandering near the beach, and exceedingly rare flying mammal the colugo spotted up a tree outside reception on our first day.

We were led on a nature walk through the resort and neighbouring forest by renowned



naturalist Irshad Mobarak who pointed out that, despite its diminutive size, the small island has 530 species of butterfly compared to the UK’s 66. Resting on a rock next to a trickling stream with nothing but the sound of cicadas for distraction, I could practically feel my blood pressure falling.

A stay at the Datai includes some complimentary nature walks and beach walks for children, but Mobarak’s company, JungleWalla, can organise rainforest walks with hotel transfers for around £28 per person. Other day tours include a kayaking and swimming adventure and a mangrove cruise,



**FAR LEFT:** The Datai Langkawi

**LEFT:** Street food in Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia’s best. The trendy Pantai Cenang and Pantai Tengah make up the most developed stretch, while the sandy strips of Tanjung Rhu and Datai Bay – which also houses the Andaman resort – are more upscale.

Bobbing around in the water with the mountains in view and a cocktail in hand, I couldn’t think of a better place to unwind.

**KUALA LUMPUR**

Back in the capital and en route to our hotel we stopped for lunch at the Banana Leaf – a restaurant popular with locals – where we chose our favourite Indian dishes from a platter before they were piled high on our leaf ‘plates’.

Indian, Chinese and Malay cuisines are most popular in the capital, and a city tour with Travels with Samadi – which runs guided tours around Kuala Lumpur and beyond – visits Chinatown, Little India and the

with beautiful views over the ocean, which costs around £34.

Outside the resort, the Langkawi SkyBridge and SkyCab – one of the steepest cable cars in the world – deliver stunning panoramic views over the forest and ocean (from about £8.50).

The island’s sweeping white-sand beaches also rank among



**The island’s sweeping white-sand beaches rank among Malaysia’s best**

Petronas Towers, for around £60. Alternatively, a Vespa street-food tour costs around £80.

Sitting on a little stool at a street-side stall, I was struck by the brilliant contrast a city-plus-beach break offers: fine dining on the edge of the rainforest overlooking a glorious bay one night, and mastering the art of eating fine noodles with chopsticks to the sounds of car horns the next.

For yet another side of the city, we arrived at the boutique Villa Samadhi. Its sizable rooms, furnished impeccably

with reclaimed wood and set around a tranquil swimming pool, transported me from the concrete jungle beyond the wall.

This is a good option for clients seeking a base to explore the city, but also a resort to enjoy in itself – and the free cocktail hour each evening will be sure to relax travel-weary guests.

It’s “a little bit of paradise in the middle of the city”, according to Sandbanks Travel owner Liz Mace. She says: “The breakfast and cocktails were exceptional. I would recommend it to older clientele or honeymooners with a bit more money.”

No city stay is complete without viewing the Petronas Towers at night when they are lit up for the whole city to see. We went to rooftop bar Marini’s on 57, which has an unobstructed view of the towers.

Kuala Lumpur is one of those cities that rewards a little bit



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LEFT: Central Market, Kuala Lumpur

of time spent getting to know it. Enjoy diverse dining and drinks by night, then head off the beaten track by day to discover colourful local markets.

**TWIN SPIN**

Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi make an ideal twin-centre, says Travel Counsellor Jeanette Coughlan. "Malaysia's biggest competitor for beach-plus-city breaks is Thailand," she says. "The people in Malaysia are wonderful

and it feels a bit more unique and fresh than Thailand."

With no direct flights from the UK to Langkawi, a stopover in Kuala Lumpur makes sense: Malaysia Airlines operates a twice-daily direct service from London to the Malaysian capital, and up to five flights per day on to Langkawi.

In addition to the twin-centre concept, three-centre options adding in Penang are popular for those looking for a longer stay. **TW**

**Tried & Tested**

**THE DATAI LANGKAWI**

This Leading Hotels of the World property offers luxury and exceptional service in an exciting setting, centred around a picturesque lily pond. Split between rainforest, canopy and beach collections, its 122 rooms, suites and villas have unique charm. The Dining Room and Pavilion restaurants are a more formal affair, while the Beach Club is a laid-back alternative. [thedatai.com](http://thedatai.com)



**VILLA SAMADHI, KUALA LUMPUR**

Villa Samadhi, targeted at couples, comprises 21 generously sized rooms. Breakfast is at Mandi-Mandi, which specialises in Malaysian and international cuisine. The resort's style is

described as 'rustic-luxe', featuring 100% second-hand timber and handmade grass roofs. [villasamadhi.com.my](http://villasamadhi.com.my) **Book it:** Western & Oriental offers three nights at Villa Samadhi and four at the Datai Langkawi from £1,539, both B&B, including Malaysia Airlines flights from Heathrow to Kuala Lumpur and on to Langkawi, and private transfers. [westernoriental.com](http://westernoriental.com)

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