

Geography and People • Political Structure • Indian Diaspora • General Information

GEOGRAPHY

The Federation of Malaysia comprises of Peninsular Malaysia and the states of Sabah and Sarawak on the Borneo Island. Strategically situated at the head of the Straits of Malacca, Malaysia is the third largest economy in the ten-member ASEAN grouping and its second largest trading economy. Geographically, it has the distinction of being bounded by the Andaman Sea on the west and the South China Sea on the east.

PEOPLE

This geostrategic location is reflected in Malaysia's multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual population. Its 27 million people include just over 50% Malays, 24% ethnic Chinese, 11% indigenous tribes, and 8% ethnic Indians. Close to four-fifths of the population resides in Peninsular Malaysia. Eastern Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak are home to about 5 million people.

While Islam is the official religion and more than half of the population is Muslim, the religions of Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism are also widely practised.



Bahasa Malaysia and English are the official languages of Malaysia. English is widely spoken and ethnic languages such as Tamil, Mandarin and Chinese dialects are prevalent.

CLIMATE AND TERRAIN

Malaysia enjoys a tropical climate with daily temperatures ranging from 21C to 32C throughout the year and rainfall practically every day. Humidity is high and thunderstorms are frequent. The monsoon season covers the west coast from September to December and

the east coast from October until February.

The terrain is generally low with rising hilly areas, covered with rainforests, plantations and paddy fields. Sabah is home to Mount Kinabalu, the highest peak in South East Asia.

HISTORY

Malaysia was invaded by successive European powers from the early 16th century, beginning with the Portuguese and followed by the Dutch. The British established protectorates from the 19th century and ruled until the country gained independence in 1957. It was also occupied by Japanese forces from 1942 to 1945. The British established the semi-autonomous Federation of Malaysia in 1948, but rising nationalism led them to withdraw in 1957. Independent Malaysia came about in 1963 composed of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. Singapore left the federation in 1965.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The Federation of Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy headed by a King from one of nine Malay Sultanates in rotation for a term of five years. The King, or Yang di-Pertuan Agong, has a largely ceremonial role and is head of the Islamic faith. The present head of state of the federation is Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin, Sultan of Terengganu state.

The government is led by the Prime Minister through a democratic parliamentary system. The country has 13 states and federally administered territories that include the capital of Kuala Lumpur. Elections are held every five years for the federal parliament and the state assemblies.

States enjoy substantial political authority. State assemblies are elected through elections held simultaneously with general elections, except in Sarawak. The governments are headed by Menteri Besar or Chief Executive in states with sultans, or chief ministers in states headed by governors.

The ruling Barisan Nasional, or National Front, is a coalition of the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), among several other regional and national parties. It has been in government at the federal level since independence in 1957.

As a former British colony, Malaysia is a member of the Commonwealth and enjoys many institutions in common with India such as parliamentary democracy, judicial and legal systems, English language, education, administration, etc.

Malaysia is a founding member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

KEY MEMBERS OF CABINET

Y.A.B. Dato' Sri Mohd. Najib Bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak
Prime Minister & Minister of Finance

Y.A.B. Tan Sri Dato' Haji Muhyiddin Bin Mohd. Yassin
Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Education

Y.B. Dato' Seri Ong Tee Keat
Minister of Transport

Y.B. Senator Tan Sri Dr. Koh Tsu Koon
Minister in Prime Minister's Department

Y.B. Datuk Mustapa Bin Mohamed
Minister of International Trade and Industry

Y.B. Datuk Anifah Aman
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Y.B. Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Bin Tun Hussein
Minister of Home Affairs

Y.B. Dato' Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim
Minister of Information, Communication And Culture

Y.B. Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Bin Yakcop
Minister In the Prime Minister's Department,
Economic Planning Unit

Y.B. Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui
Minister of Energy, Green Technology and Water

Y.B. Dato' Seri Mohd Shafie Bin Haji Apdal
Minister of Rural and Regional Development

Y.B. Dato' Seri Mohamed Khaled Bin Nordin
Minister of Higher Education

Y.B. Datuk Dr. Maximus Johnity Ongkili
Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation

Y.B. Datuk Dr. S. Subramaniam
Minister of Human Resources

Y.B. Tan Sri Bernard Giluk Dompok
Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities

Y.B. Dato' Sri Dr Ng Yen Yen
Minister of Tourism

Y.B. Dato' Seri Dr. Ahmad Zahid Bin Hamidi
Minister of Defence

Y.B. Dato' Shaziman Bin Abu Mansor
Minister of Works

Y.B. Dato' Sri Liow Tiong Lai
Minister of Health

INDIAN DIASPORA

Malaysia is home to the second largest population of Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) in the world. PIOs in Malaysia number about 1.9 million, comprising about 8% of the total population. The majority originate from Tamil Nadu, and there is a strong community of Indians whose roots trace back to Punjab, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal and other parts of India.

Historically, Indians were brought to Malaysia as indentured labour by British colonialists to work on rubber estates and later shifted to oil-palm plantations. After Malaysia gained independence in 1957, Indian professionals came to work as doctors, professors, engineers,

lawyers and civil servants. While a majority of the PIO population in Malaysia is low-income, Indians are significantly represented in many professional and business sectors such as medical, legal and academic sectors as well as civil services.

Malaysia is also home to a significant group of Indian expatriates working in Malaysian, Indian and multinational companies at senior management positions. In addition, there are about 140,000 skilled and semi-skilled workers from India involved in restaurants, personal services, manufacturing sector, manual labour and other fields.

PIOs in Malaysia largely adhere to traditional Indian culture and language. The festival of Deepawali is a national holiday and Thaipusam has been declared a holiday in several states. Thousands of Hindu temples are found all over the country. Tamil language schools are part of the education system. South Indian food is well represented in restaurants, street food and food courts. Indian dance and music is widely accepted as part of Malaysian culture.

A number of political, cultural and business associations representing Indian-Malaysian interests are active all over the country.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Air Links

Malaysia is well-connected by air with international airports in several cities. Its main airport at Kuala Lumpur is 75 km from the city, about 45 minutes on the excellent highway, and is accessible by road, bus, or the airport express train.

Malaysian Airlines operates direct flights connecting Kuala Lumpur to Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai and New Delhi. The low-cost airlines, Air Asia, operates daily flights to Tiruchirapalli. Indian Airlines conducts daily direct flights between Chennai and Kuala Lumpur. Jet Airways also operates daily direct flights on Kuala Lumpur-Chennai sector.

www.indianairlines.in/index.aspx

www.malaysiaairlines.com/my/en/home.aspx

www.airasia.com/site/my/en/home.jsp

www.jetairways.com

Tourism

Most tour operators offer packages for tourism in Malaysia and the country is a highly popular destination for Indians, with over 550,000 Indian visitors arriving in Malaysia in 2008.

The main cities of tourist attraction are Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Langkawi. Kuala Lumpur, the capital, is home to the iconic Petronas Twin Towers, old Batu Cave Temple of Lord Murugan, and other tourist sites. Penang offers stately colonial architecture, beach activities and unique street food. Langkawi Island is known for its mangrove forests and duty-free shopping. Other major tourist destinations are Melaka, the confluence of many cultures, and Genting Highlands, which has casinos and theme parks.

Malaysia boasts of excellent beaches and golf courses, with high-quality resorts and spas at relatively affordable rates. Deep sea diving and snorkelling are major attractions, and the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak offer nature tourism to rainforest habitats.

www.tourism.gov.my/en/about/default.asp

Currency

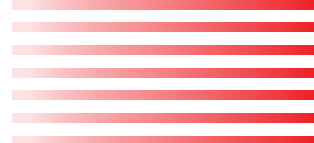
The monetary unit of the country is Ringgit Malaysia and is written as RM. The exchange rate is valued at USD 1 = RM3.50 or approximately Rs 13.5 per ringgit. Foreign currencies, including Indian rupees, can be exchanged at banks and money changers, available at most malls and tourist areas.

Banking Hours

Most states: Monday- Friday: 9.30 am to 4.30 pm. Saturday & Sunday: Closed .

Kelantan & Terengganu: Sunday - Wednesday : 9.30 am to 4.30 pm.
Thursday :9.30 am to 4.00 pm. Friday/Saturday*/Public holiday: Closed.





Indian Banks in Malaysia

Bank of Baroda, UCO Bank, Indian Overseas Bank & ICICI Bank Limited have representative Offices in Malaysia. A recent joint venture agreement has been signed between Bank of Baroda, Indian Overseas Bank and Andhra Bank for opening a branch in Malaysia. It is expected to be operational in early 2010.

Post Office

Opening hours from 8.30 am to 6.00 pm daily, except for the first Saturdays of the month, Sundays and public holidays. In Kelantan and Terengganu, the post office operates on the same days, but is closed on Fridays and public holidays.

Time

Two-and-a-half hours ahead of IST; Eight hours ahead of GMT and 16 hours ahead of U.S Standard Time.

Electricity

Voltage is 220 - 240 Volt AC at 50 cycles per second. Standard 3- pin square plugs and socket. For appliances and mobile phone chargers from India, adapter plugs will be required.

Measurement and Weight

Malaysia follows the metric system for weight and measurement as in India.

Telephone

Local calls can be made from public phones using shillings or prepaid cards. International calls can also be made using card phones or at any Telekom office.

It can be expensive to use roaming Indian connections. Indian travellers can purchase local phone cards, widely available.

