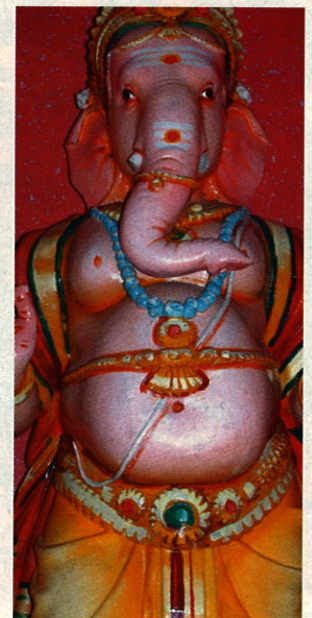


TRAVEL

Malaysian melodies

Singing the praises of
a popular Southeast
Asian destination





For years Czechs have bee-lined to Thailand for its beaches, food and low prices. Now, as folks start thinking about next year's holiday season, Thailand's southern neighbor is batting its lashes at these increasingly attractive travelers.

As part of an extensive promotion campaign, Malaysia is courting the world in celebration of its 50th year of nationhood. Part of this charm offensive is aimed at what tourism officials see as an up-and-coming prospect: the Czech traveler. With four weeks of vacation to burn a year and a thickening wallet, Czechs on holiday are turning the heads of tourism officials in Malaysia. This year alone, Tourism Malaysia is boosting its presence here, saturating television screens with its catchy ads.

Last year, Czech travel to the country increased about 40 percent, to 2,890 people, according to Jahara Baba, an official at Tourism Malaysia. He makes no secret about wanting to see Czechs and other East Europeans bypass Thailand, Singapore and China for Malaysia.

Indeed, says Karin Šeligová of CzechTourism, "Exotic countries are still popular among Czechs."



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Zairi Basri, the head of the chancery at the Malaysian Embassy in Prague, says part of the Malaysian campaign in the Czech Republic is to “encourage people-to-people contacts as this will help promote bilateral relations and also create better understanding between the two countries.”

A Malaysian vacation is within reach of average Praguers. While pound-rich Britons and euro-strong Germans flock to the Czech capital every summer, locals can head to a country where their crowns still go far. Plus, English is widely spoken in Malaysia, a former British colony that is now a nexus of Indian, Chinese and Southeast Asian cultures. To top it off, Malaysia boasts outstanding food, world-class beaches and exceptionally friendly natives.

“Multiculturalism has not only made Malaysia a gastronomical paradise, it has also made Malaysia home to hundreds of colorful festivals,” Basri says. “Malaysia is the best place for a perfect holiday full of surprises, eclectic cultures and natural wonders.” Here’s a small sample of what awaits you.

Kuching A small city on the island of Borneo, Kuching is worth a visit in July, when Malaysia hosts the Rainforest Music Festival. This year, bands from 15 nations, from Zimbabwe to Italy, rocked the thousands of

people gathered at the Sarawak Cultural Village where it was held. Get there early to check out the different examples of houses Borneo’s tribes live in, which are all recreated in the village. And, if you get a chance, sneak away for a quick dip in the South China Sea.

Also in Borneo, don’t miss the Semengoh Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, a rare chance to see wild orangutans swing in from the jungle for daily free food. Feedings are at 9 a.m., and the apes know it, so don’t be late.

To see the best part of Kuching, take a stroll along the city’s newly developed riverwalk, an attractive stretch dotted with river taxis. Parallel to it runs a street lined with markets and souvenir shops.

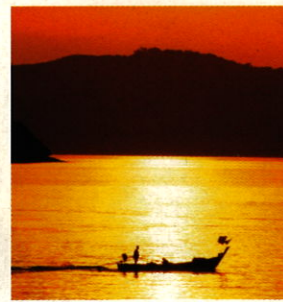
Kuala Lumpur Without a doubt, the postcard image of Kuala Lumpur is the iconic Petronas Towers, twin towers built in 1996. The tallest in the world when built (they were eclipsed by the Taipei 101 building in 2004) the towers’ design takes a nod from Islamic art and houses some of the best shopping in the world.

To get a great view of the city, visit the nearby KL Tower, a 421-meter (1,381-foot) tall spire with a 360-degree indoor observation deck at the top. The KL Tower and Petronas Towers can also be seen from the city’s lovely Orchid and Hibiscus garden, a cultivated

The Ubudiah Mosque is one of many Malaysian treasures. Those who weary of the beach will find a plethora of cultural and historic sites.



Photos courtesy of MALAYSIA TOURISM



park that contains nearly every variety of these flowers.

At night, make a stop in the vibrant Chinatown and see if you can't haggle a deal with the many merchants hawking fake Prada handbags along with traditional Chinese silk dresses.

Just outside of Kuala Lumpur sits the Batu Caves, a must-see. Said to be discovered by an Indian trader in the 1800s, a Hindu temple was built there in 1891, and last year an impressive 43-meter-tall statue of Lord Murugan was erected at the base of the 292 steps that lead visitors into the vast cave. Watch out for the wild monkeys.

Worth noting A true shame would be to visit Malaysia and not spend some time on one of its exquisite beaches. Langkawi Island has spots that are the ideal tropical getaways. The popular island of Penang also has picture-perfect beaches, along with five-star hotels, shopping and some of the best Indian food outside of the Subcontinent.

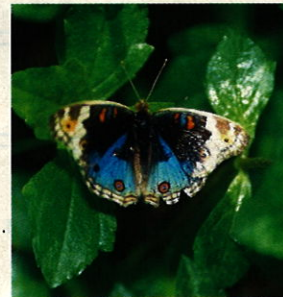
For a true taste of Malaysia, visit a fruit stand and get a taste of the unofficial national fruit, the durian. Be warned, it's known for its awful smell and not everyone can stomach the taste. Also, you will not be allowed to bring durian back to your hotel. | Kimberly Ashton

IN THE KNOW

The best times to visit Malaysia are from February to September, before the monsoon season kicks in. Lying just north of the equator, Malaysia is warm and humid year-round, averaging around 31 degrees Celsius (88 F).

Flights to Malaysia leave from Frankfurt for now, but there is talk of AirAsia X opening a route from Prague in the near future. Czechs do not need visas to travel to Malaysia.

For more information, visit www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my.



Malaysia is a beautiful mix of culture and nature. A long history and good weather add to its holiday appeal.