



Kuantan & Days

Kuala Lumpur Nights

Malaysia has many great locations and Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur are right up with the best of them writes **Mike Smith** who visited both on a recent trip.

PHOTOS MIKE SMITH

Kuantan, the state capital of Pahang, Malaysia has a new lease of life and a bright future thanks to new hotels, mega shopping malls, industrial parks and cutting edge attractions. These complement its well established beaches, nature reserves and spicy cuisine.

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital, is a vibrant modern city of six million. Recently ranked 4th best city in the world for shopping by CNN, it has an active arts scene, iconic twin towers, top class hotels and major sporting events including the Formula 1 Grand Prix.

Mangroves and Fishing Villages
Arriving at Kuantan's Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah

Airport after a comfortable short flight on a Firefly ATR 72-500 turboprop our coach took us straight to the Kuantan River Cruise pier where we boarded a catamaran and headed downstream towards the South China Sea.

Five hundred year old mangrove swamps lined both sides of the river and sea eagles soared above us before swooping for their fish lunch. Egrets and kingfishers were in abundance. The fishing villages had traditional wooden vessels moored nearby, including trawlers and squid boats.

As we passed mosques and a lighthouse we entered the South China Sea with views over the beach at Teluk Cempedak and heavily forested hillsides. The sun beat down and we shifted seats for shade as we returned upstream some 1.5 hours later.



No Beer at the Garden

Our first hotel, MS Garden, was ideally located in the center of town, where I met John an 82 year old Aussie who spends several months a year there and insists it's fantastic. I totally agree, but would have liked a beer!

My room was clean and spacious and the buffet dinner excellent. Being strategically located near the Berjaya Mega Mall and CapitalMalls Asia's East Coast Mall I managed to get some shopping done after dinner.

Cleanest Beach on Earth?

Kuantan is rightly famous for its beaches that attract lots of Europeans. The nearest to MS Garden is Teluk Cempedak. Walking from the car park to the beach I stopped to watch long tailed macaque monkeys, many with babies, splashing in puddles and swinging on trees.

I swear I've never seen a cleaner beach in my life! I walked from one end to the other and only saw one piece of litter. The sand is soft and fine and I almost had the place to myself. Apparently it does get crowded on weekends. Large rocks at either end of the bay, a couple of fine hotels, blue sea and thousands of trees in the background make this an idyllic spot. Even the McDonalds and Starbucks seem to fit in with the simple souvenir shops and food stalls.

Lunch was at Zenith Hotel, a new, classy 5-star establishment with full amenities including a club room, gym, pool, spa and substantial conference facilities. The

buffet was excellent and the desert selection amazing!

Tin Mines and Homestays

Leaving Kuantan we proceeded 45km to Sungai Lembing passing large palm oil plantations en route. Sungai Lembing was once a successful tin mining community of 20,000 people with over 1,400 miners, but suffered when the tin price crashed as demand fell when aluminium became the preferred material for cans etc. Once it was the longest and deepest mine in the world, but had been in decline since the 1970's and closed in 1986. The town is trying to establish itself as a tourist spot. It has a long way to go, but has made substantial progress. There is now a museum and you can tour an old mine to get a glimpse of what a tough life miners had.

We took a very interesting bike ride around the village, crossing the river by a suspension bridge and calling in at several cottage industries making noodles, biscuits, crackers and cakes. We dropped in at a homestay for drinks and heard that they provide the opportunity to live with a local family and experience life in the palm oil plantations, riding horses and learning to cook local food.

Lunch was at Agro Semuji Resort where we feasted on delicious local Pahang food. Had time permitted we could have fished, trekked through forests of pitcher plants, wild orchids and ferns, had team building exercises or sat patiently waiting for durians to fall! (similar to watching paint dry!)



Wet and Wild

A few minutes away our accommodation for the night was at Bukit Gambang Resort City. I am not a big fan of water theme parks but it was very popular and families loved it. However, I will go back when the huge safari park is complete! It promises to be an exciting experience. Dinner on site was special as two white lions are already housed in a glass fronted enclosure at the side of the restaurant and provided a natural spectacle.

On day four we headed for Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, stopping on the way at the Kuala Ganda Elephant Sanctuary that does great work looking after maltreated elephants. The animals are treated with total respect and do not perform fancy tricks or take people on treks, but we did have chance to feed the baby elephants and watch the adults being bathed and play in the river.

KL Towers Above the Rest

Arriving at Kuala Lumpur we proceeded to the newly opened Vivatel, conveniently located adjacent to a shopping mall where I replaced my broken suit case.

One of the highlights of the trip was going up to the 42nd floor bridge that joins the towers of the Petronas Twin Towers, then we ascended to the 88th floor for fantastic views of the city. I also got to chat with some Iranian ladies at the top of the tower (the first I'd ever met who are still living in Iran) and what a bundle of fun they were! Forget stereotypes, they loved to dance and



enjoy life –governments are often the problem, not citizens who just want the best for themselves and their families!

Exploring the park outside the Towers and a couple of mega malls, including the hugely impressive Pavilion Mall with its luxurious bright and open feel and wonderful designer shops I idled away a pleasant couple of hours.

Flying Malaysia's Colours

Finally I boarded the bus for the Colours of 1Malaysia Celebration at Merdeka Square showcasing the colours of Malaysia with blue representing the sea, green the jungle and red, white and blue of the Malaysian flag. About 100,000 spectators attended the event.

I sat on the road at the front, very uncomfortably,

to make sure I got a good view of the 15 segments representing all aspects of Malay life and culture. It reminded me of the Chingay Parade in Singapore. 6,700 participants from all walks of life took part and the rain did not put them off at all!

Traditional dances, music, floats, transport (including 200 Porsches, trishaws, taxis and of course a Formula 1 racing car), fireworks and an incredibly energetic finale wowed the crowd. Tired, wet and aching, but happy I took the last train on the LRT back to the Vivatel Hotel where I grabbed a few hours sleep before heading back to Singapore on Firefly the next morning.

Kuantan and KL both have lots to offer. Malaysia Truly Asia really is a fun, sophisticated, place to holiday with great beaches, green jungles, diverse shopping and arts facilities. [A](#)

Hotels

Kuantan

MS Garden – good location, for business or leisure, 4-star
Sri Manja – out of town, friendly management, families, 3-star

Bukit Gambang

Bukit Gambang City Resort – all round family and business entertainment, MICE facilities.

Kuala Lumpur

Vivatel Hotel – conveniently located on Lrt. Adjacent shopping centre, 4-star

Airline

Firefly Airlines flies from Singapore to Kuantan and to KL.

Tour arranged by Tourism Malaysia Singapore.