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How to have a perfect family holiday in Malaysia

By Clio Wood

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Forget all your fears about [visiting Asia with kids](#) – it's far from traumatic. In fact, when it comes to Malaysia, it's like the country's been designed for families, writes Clio Wood.

Malaysia is smiley, very smiley. Every person we come across has a big grin on their face and a welcome word or two for us. But it's not just because we're lovely people (we are) or that they're a friendly nation (they definitely are) but because we've got two kids in tow.

Yes, rather than making things difficult when we direct ourselves at Southeast Asia with the kids this summer, they're our secret weapon.

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[Malaysia](#) is great for kids. From the automatic kids' menus and amenities at every hotel we go to (no need to ask) and the wide range of Asian and Western cuisine to keep even the fussiest of eaters happy to the brilliant activities and attractions designed to interest all ages, it's a great option for a family adventure.

Added to this is the fact Malaysia is widely English-speaking and easy to navigate, has air-conditioning and a whole array of geographies and features which mean you can have a brilliant journey in one easy-to-manage country; it's more than just your average family holiday.

We start with a city break in Malaysia's largest city and cultural capital, Kuala Lumpur (KL). With a historic heart, frenetic energy, chaotic traffic and modern architecture, it's the perfect showcase for modern Asia and a great introduction to the country.

We stayed in the iconic Majestic Hotel, a beacon of the colonial social scene, the white facade of which still evokes past times, particularly with a smile and a wave from doormen sporting vintage khaki uniforms.

KL is full of such colonial [architecture](#), particularly around Merdeka (Independence) Square, which is home to the Royal Selangor Club – its old cricket pitch at the centre of the square is now a vast, open lawn for the public to enjoy and celebrations to be feted.

The kids were more amused by the world's largest walk-in aviary in the Lake Gardens, a whizz up the Petronas Towers (the world's tallest twin towers), and the [Islamic Art Museum](#), as well as a quick pitstop in the fantastic public library to shelter from a (warm) torrential downpour. There are so many things to do that we'd barely got started by the time we moved on to the Cameron Highlands.

Malaysia has its very own hill stations where colonising government officials would retire when the heat of the lower country grew oppressive. The Cameron Highlands, northeast of KL, are the most well-known, named by a Scot, William Cameron, in 1885. He lost his mind and his health amid his obsession to map the highlands, and as we journey up through the lush jungle hills, it's easy to see why.

We marvel at stunning views, en-route by car from Ipoh, Perak state's capital, to stay at the Cameron Highlands Resort. The vista from the balcony of our suite suggests European hills rather than Malaysian mountains, and the black and white timber-framed buildings all around us agree. We manage to eat our weight in strawberries (it's wall-to-wall farms up here) before leaving the next day.

We're heading for Penang Island, famous for the Unesco world heritage site of Georgetown, which we reach by romantic ferry from the mainland and base ourselves at the Eastern and Oriental Hotel, right on the famous waterfront. The location prompts maximum squeals from the kids when they hit the pools overlooking the harbour (10/10 from our 10-year-old). The E&O is a "grande dame" colonial hotel, founded by the Sarkies Brothers of Raffles Hotel, Singapore fame, and its corridors leave the kids in awe.

We feast on Penang’s famous street food, where there are plenty of non-spicy options for our little ones, and pay a quick visit to Fort Cornwallis, where Francis Light founded the town, and wander through the renowned “shophouse” architecture. Stamford Raffles himself (founder of Singapore) pioneered these five-foot ways, a covered, continuous walkway in front of shops to protect pedestrians from the unrelenting sun and keep them cool. The kids don’t care about the history, but they do love the shade it provides.

We choose to end our trip on the white beaches and in the rainforest canopies of Langkawi Island, with a stronger focus on conservation and the natural world to contrast with our previous stops.

We see monkeys, hornbills, all manner of lizards and stingless bees at The Datai hotel, one of the world’s leading hotels, which also prides itself on its mandate to support the community and leave no mark on nature and its surroundings. Even swimming in the sea a short distance from its beach, you can see no trace of the buildings – a remarkable feat.

We luxuriate in silky sands, pristine pools and at the hands of talented massage therapists, while the kids are treated like royalty and become obsessed with the golf buggies that beetle around the resort’s steep winding lanes. We’re very sad to leave, but with so much more to discover, we’ll definitely be back.

Checklist

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