

Terengganu



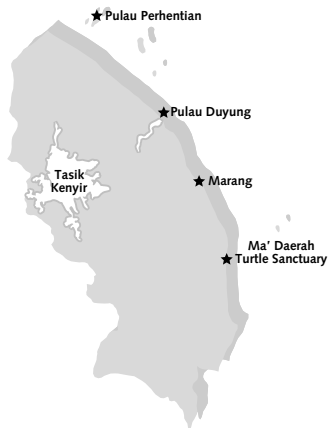
Some places evoke a colour. In this case Terengganu is, far and away, blue. The rich robin's-egg blue of big skies bending under clear, bright sunlight. The deep, royal blue of the ocean running behind ferries to tropical paradise. The turtle-dotted teal of shallow lagoons and horseshoe bays lapping the sugar sands in Pulau Perhentian (the Perhentian Islands). And the organic, vegetative green-blue of Lake Kenyir, vine-shrouded in its jungle womb.

Blue is a cooling colour, and the general laid-back vibe of Terengganu makes for a cooling escape – something about the slow pace of life makes relaxed sighs some of the most common means of communication here. Most travellers come to the state for an island experience, and they're in the right spot: some of the best beaches in the country can be found on Pulau Perhentian, Pulau Redang and Pulau Kapas. Divers in particular are well cared for here, but if you're up for doing nothing at all, Terengganu will indulge your indolence.

But don't completely dismiss mainland Terengganu from your exploration. This is one of the most ethnically Malay states in the country, and you have the opportunity here to engage the Malay people at, simultaneously, their most traditional, their most evolving – note the waves of modernity replacing the traditional stilt houses of Kuala Terengganu, the capital, with air-con condos – and their most Islamic. They're also, we'd note, at their most friendly when dealing with travellers who've wandered off the beach. So enjoy the sun and sand and their considerable charms, and don't forget to engage the real Malaysia hidden behind the palms.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Waking up, swimming and laying on the beach – tropical zen in **Pulau Perhentian** (p319)
- Watching life slip by in river time while snacking on *keropok* (fish paste) in **Marang** (p314)
- Taking a boat up the tributaries of the rivers that feed at **Tasik Kenyir** (p312)
- Helping turtle conservation at **Ma' Daerah Turtle Sanctuary** (p316)
- Living *la vida kampung* on **Pulau Duyung** (p309)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 09

■ POPULATION: 1.08 MILLION

■ AREA: 12,995 SQ KM

History

An Islamic state, possibly the oldest in Malaysia, is known to have existed in Terengganu from at least the early 14th century, although by the following century it had become a vassal of the expansionist Melaka sultanate. However, Terengganu managed to retain a large degree of independence during the emergence of Riau (in Indonesia) and Johor as partners in the region, and was trading with Siam and China.

Terengganu was formally established as a state in 1724. The first sultan was Tun Zainal Abidin, a younger brother of one of the former sultans of Johor. The close association with Johor was to continue for some years; in the mid-18th century, Sultan Mansur spent 15 years in the state. Later, Mansur turned his attention to Kelantan and, after some fighting and shrewd manoeuvring, had his son installed as ruler of the then-kingdom. The main legacy of Mansur's reign was Terengganu becoming a vassal of the Siamese for the duration of the 19th century. Eventually, Terengganu sultan Baginda Omar managed to keep the Siamese at arm's length and the state flourished under his rule.

In 1909 an Anglo-Siamese treaty saw power pass to the British. It was an unpopular move locally, and in 1928 a peasant uprising erupted. It was quickly put down and the British went about consolidating their power in the state until the Japanese invaded in WWII.

During the Japanese occupation, control of the state was passed back to Thailand, but this was short-lived and Terengganu became a member of the Federation of Malaya in 1948. It remained an undeveloped backwater until oil and gas revenue started to flow into the state in the 1980s. Kuala Terengganu was transformed into a bustling city, and tourist development continues to grow apace. In 2004 the state voted in the Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS), but since then the ruling government coalition of Barisan Nasional has reclaimed a three-quarter majority of the state's parliamentary seats. Currently, the sultan of Terengganu serves his country as the King of Malaysia.

Climate

Terengganu has a tropical climate, with daily temperatures ranging between 21°C and 32°C. There is intermittent rain all year, with heavier and more prolonged rainfall during the east-coast monsoon (November to February). Humidity levels hover around 90%.

National Parks

Taman Negara (p294), most of which is within Pahang, includes a small section of western Terengganu, stretching from the Pahang border up towards Tasik Kenyir (p312). Tasik Kenyir, the largest man-made lake in Southeast Asia, is surrounded by virgin rainforest. Protected marine parks include Pulau Perhentian, Pulau Redang and Pulau Lang Tengah.

Getting There & Away

Kuala Terengganu is the state's main transport hub, with bus links to most of Malaysia and Singapore. The East Coast Hwy runs the length of Terengganu, heading north towards Kelantan and the Thai border and south towards Johor Bahru. Kuala Terengganu has an airport, with regular flights to/from KL, while Pulau Redang has air links to KL and Singapore.

Getting Around

Regular buses link the coastal towns, but service is reduced on Fridays. Travelling into the interior is more difficult without your own wheels. Ferries leave from Kuala Besut for Pulau Perhentian, from Merang for Pulau Redang and Pulau Lang Tengah, and from Marang (and sometimes Kuala Terengganu) for Pulau Kapas.

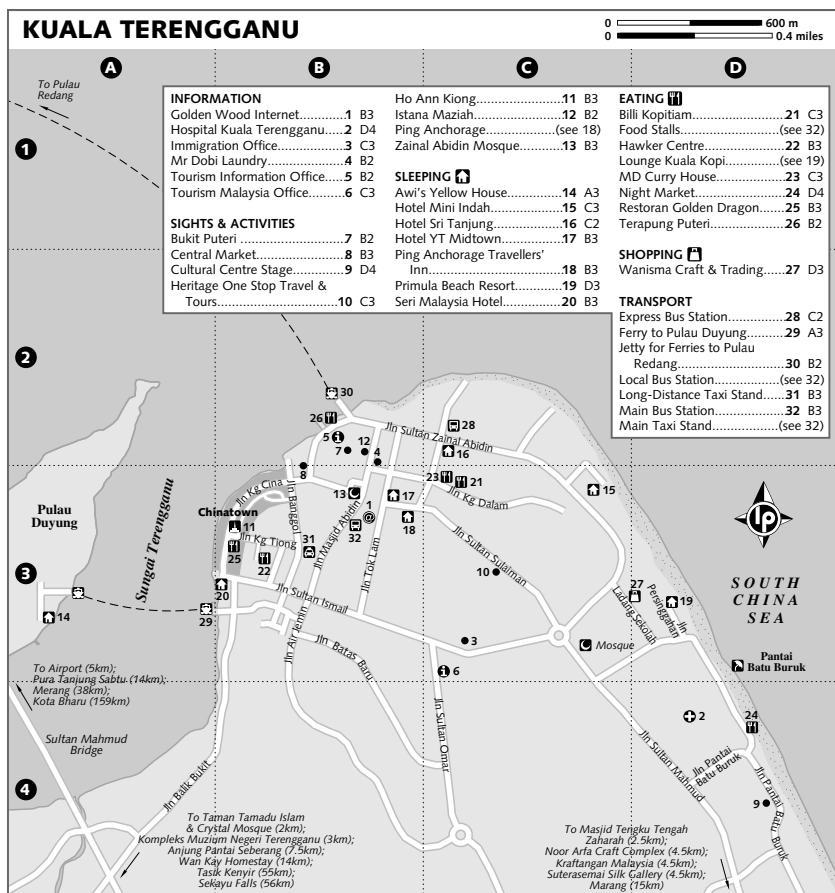
KUALA TERENGGANU

☎ 09 / pop 359,700

Terengganu's capital microcosms the Malaysian economic explosion. It's a Southeast Asian success story: fishing village finds oil, money flows in, modernity ensues. The strict version of Islam practiced here rubs up against the naturally relaxed approach to life most Terengganians seem to possess, making KT's pros and cons manifest in interesting ways. On the plus side, Islamic hospitality and Malay friendliness make this a very welcoming city. The drawback: severe Islam and Malay conservatism means this town can sometimes feel sedate. This isn't helped by new, often sterile-looking buildings created with oil-generated cash. But you can still find an old *kampung* (village) house seemingly hiding among the high-rises, and these glimpses, plus a seafood-heavy local cuisine and good transport links, make Kuala Terengganu worth a few days of exploration.

Information

Jln Sultan Ismail is the commercial hub and home to most banks, which are open 9.30am to 3.30pm, except Friday.



Golden Wood Internet (☎ 631 0128; 59 Jln Tok Lam; per hr RM5)

Hospital Kuala Terengganu (☎ 623 3333; Jln Sultan Mahmud)

Immigration office (☎ 622 1424; Wisma Persekutuan, Jln Sultan Ismail)

Mr Dobi Laundry (☎ 622 1671; Jln Masjid Abidin)

Tourism Malaysia Office (☎ 630 9087; No 11 Menara Yayasan Islam Terengganu (Yayasan Islam Terengganu Tower), Jln Sultan Omar; 🕒 9am-5pm Sat-Thu)

Tourist Information Office (☎ 617 1553; Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin; 🕒 9am-5pm Sat-Thu) Brochures on Terengganu.

www.tourism.terengganu.gov.my Useful portal.

Sights

The most interesting area to explore is the tiny (but more picturesque for its small size)

Chinatown. There are atmospheric watermarked buildings and faded alleyways clotting this small neighbourhood, which is centred on Jln Kampung Cina (also known as Jln Bandar). The oldest Chinese temple in the state, **Ho Ann Kiong**, is a compact explosion of vibrant red and gold dating from the early 1800s.

For fish so fresh it's still in its death flop, look for the boats docking at the **central market** (Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin). Besides indulging your piscatorial fix, there's a good collection of batik and *kain songket* (cloth brocaded with gold and silver).

Across the road from the market, look for a steep flight of steps leading up to **Bukit Puteri** (Princess Hill; admission RM1; 🕒 9am-5pm Sat-Thu), a 200m-high hill with good views of the city.

On top are the scant remains of a mid-19th-century fort (the legacy of intersultanate warfare), some cannons and a bell.

East of the hill is **Istana Maziah** (Jln Masjid Abidin), the sultan's palace. It's built in semi-tweedy colonial style, but renovations have given the structure a blocky, over-modernist feel. The palace is closed to the public, except for some ceremonial occasions. Nearby, the gleaming **Zainal Abidin Mosque** (Jln Masjid Abidin) dominates the city centre.

Pantai Batu Buruk is the city beach, popular with families and, unfortunately, litter bugs. It's not the best beach in Malaysia given the strong winds and rips, but it's pretty nonetheless. Across the road is the **Cultural Centre stage**; check with the tourist office to see if any shows are lined up.

From the jetty near Seri Malaysia Hotel you can take a 60-sen ferry ride to **Pulau Duyung**, the largest island in the estuary. Fishing boats are built here for both local and international clients, using old-school techniques and tools, and visitors are welcome to look around.

Tours

Popular tours include day trips to Tasik Kenyir (from RM189), river cruises and packages to Pulau Redang. Going in groups reduces individual rates.

Heritage One Stop Travel & Tours (☎ 631 6468; www.heritageonestop.com.my; Blok Teratai, Jln Sultan Sulaiman)

Ping Anchorage (☎ 626 2020; www.pinganchorage.com.my; 77A Jln Sultan Sulaiman)

Sleeping

Homestays are an increasingly popular accommodation option, especially near the beach.

BUDGET

Ping Anchorage Travellers' Inn (☎ 626 2020; www.pinganchorage.com.my; 77A Jln Sultan Sulaiman; dm/r from RM10/26; 🚽) Spread over two floors above the travel agency of the same name, Ping's is a budget standby. Rooms are reasonably clean, but it doesn't have much going for it besides a vaguely social vibe on the rooftop cafe and a central location.

Awai's Yellow House (☎ 624 7363, 622 2080; r RM18-25) Awai's is (or sells itself as) what Terengganu was: a wooden stilt house, the smell of fish paste, salt and chilli, no air-con and nights that stick to you like a wet kiss. Built over the Sungai Terengganu on Pulau Duyung, don't come here

if you don't like roughing it a little, but do if you want a taste of *kampung* life.

Hotel Sri Tanjung (☎ 626 2636; Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin; r from RM60; 🚽) This little option is decked out in over-the-top girly shades of pink and white, but it is a well-kept place that's quite comfy and just within the budget bracket.

Hotel Mini Indah (☎ 622 9053; 60 Sultan Zainal Abidin; s/d RM50/65; 🚽) The Mini Indah doesn't exactly drip with character, but it serves a very clean and functional purpose: getting you a pretty room within stumbling distance of the city beach.

MIDRANGE

Hotel YT Midtown (☎ 623 5288; ythotel@streamyx.my; 30 Jln Tok Lam; r/ste from RM90/225; 🚽 📺) The YT is a big, modern hotel in the centre of town with neat, good-value rooms that come with the regular mod cons such as TVs, minifridges and kettles. There's a decent restaurant downstairs.

Wan Kay Homestay (☎ 019-983 4360; http://wkhomestay.blogspot.com; 1 Taman Abadi, Jln Gong Badak; r/ste from RM100; 🚽 📺) Wan Kay gives you the opportunity to stay with a friendly Malaysian family in their modest but spacious suburban home. The hosts, Beib and Wan, are happy to integrate you into their extended (and extensive) family, and get rave reviews for their hospitality from travellers.

Seri Malaysia Hotel (☎ 623 6454; www.seri-malaysia.com.my; 1640 Jln Balik Bukit; r RM120; 🚽) A popular chain with branches all over Peninsular Malaysia, this is a reliable, squeaky-clean place offering the standard, comfortable, could-be-anywhere set-up. It boasts an attractive riverside terrace restaurant, too.

TOP END

Anjung Pantai Seberang (☎ 013-910 3900, 013-928 2022; www.anjungpantai.co.nr; Pantai Kampung Baru; r 150-480; 🚽) This homestay option consists of several guesthouses ranging from low-slung, somewhat boring bungalows to attractive wooden stilt-style houses. It's a creative alternative that's a little more interesting than the blander corporate high-rise choices in town. About 12 minutes' drive from the city.

Primula Beach Resort (☎ 622 2100; www.primula-hotels.com; Jln Persinggahan; s/d/ste from RM250/330/760; 🚽 📺 🍷) Kuala Terengganu's biggest option is this seafront hotel with spacious, attractively furnished rooms, including some outstanding suites with four-poster beds and multiple

balconies. It's perched on a wide stretch of white sand, and is particularly popular with young families. It has a few very good restaurants and the best coffee bar in town.

Our pick Pura Tanjung Sabtu (☎ 615 3655, 019-983 3365; www.puratanjungSabtu.com; Kampung Tanjung Sabtu; house from RM800; ♿ ♻️ 🚰) It's good, as they say, to be king, yet so rarely can we be. Unless you jaunt near the airport to Pura Tanjung Sabtu, the countryside retreat of a former sultan of Terengganu and, today, the best accommodation option around. Besides being run by the current sultan as a window onto rural Malay life, Pura Tanjung Sabtu is headily romantic. Your sleeping choice is one of three traditional Malay houses adorned in silks, crafts and luxury leaking from the sweet-smelling walls. There's a two-person, two-night minimum in each house; your day is plotted out for you though, as guests get meals cooked for them and are treated to an intense tour itinerary.

Eating & Drinking

Naturally enough, fish plays a big role in local cuisine, but the real local specialty is *kerepok*: a grey concoction of deep-fried fish paste and sago, usually moulded into sausages (*lekor*) or crackers (*keping*). Good with hot sauce.

RESTAURANTS

Billi Kopitiam (No 5, Jln Kampung Dalam; mains from RM4; ☎ lunch & dinner) Billi's isn't your average *kopitiam* (coffee house). This smooth little spot, decked out in Chinese vintage movie posters, brews a mean cup of joe (the iced version is divine), but the chef also whips out some interesting variations on standards like *nasi lemak* and anything *goreng* (fried).

MD Curry House (☎ 013-902 6331; Jln Kampung Dalam; mains from RM4; ☎ lunch & dinner) Sometimes, you need a curry and you need it served on a banana leaf by friendly locals. The MD pretty much has you covered in all regards if you fit the above description.

Restoran Golden Dragon (☎ 622 3034; 198 Jln Kampung Cina; mains from RM5; ☎ lunch & dinner) The Golden Dragon seems constantly packed, usually with loud (often drunk) Chinese customers. There's beer aplenty and one of the finest Chinese seafood menus in town – anything steamed and off the fish list should serve you right.

Terapung Puteri (☎ 631 8946; Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin; mains from RM5; ☎ lunch & dinner) This busy Malay restaurant is perched on stilts, *kampung*-style, on the seafront next to the jetty. There's a

huge menu, with fish, prawns and crab featuring heavily, as well as local items such as *kerepok* and a few Western dishes.

QUICK EATS

There are cheap **food stalls** inside the main bus station and a beachfront **night market** nearby every Friday evening; the latter is a great place to sample *kerepok*, satay and sweets. Chinatown's outdoor **hawker centre** (off Jln Kampung Cina), is divided into Chinese and Malay sections and sizzles with cooking and socialising at night.

If you need a bean fix, **Lounge Kuala Kopi** (Jln Persinggahan; ☎ 3pm-late) inside the Primula Beach Resort, has an excellent range of coffees, including its unique house blend, *kopi de ganu*.

Shopping

Batik and *kain songket* are particularly good buys in Kuala Terengganu. The following three can be found on the Chendering industrial estate (about 4.5km south of town, not far from the 'Floating Mosque', opposite). Minibus 13 from Kuala Terengganu will drop you outside (90 sen).

Noor Arfa Craft Complex (☎ 617 5700; www.noor-arfa.com; ☎ 9am-7pm Sat-Thu) This is a handicraft centre selling a large stock of batik shirts and dresses, *kain songket*, basketware and glass. Printed cotton batik pieces start at RM15 for 2 sq m.

Kraftangan Malaysia (☎ 622 6458; ☎ 9am-5pm Sun-Thu) This outlet sells high-quality *kain songket* costing as much as RM12,000 for 2.5 sq m. There's also a tiny 'Songket Heritage Exhibition' showing varying designs.

Suterasemai Silk Gallery (☎ 617 1355; http://suterasemai.blogspot.com; ☎ 8am-6pm Sun-Thu, 9am-4pm Sat) Offers a collection of handwoven silk, with both hand-drawn and printed designs. Hand-painted silk shirts go for around RM250.

Wanisma Craft & Trading (☎ 622 3311; 32 Ladang Sekolah; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm) Closer to town, this is a batik-dyeing and brass workshop (the largest brass workshop in the country, supposedly) where you can watch the skilled craftsmen at work. The shop here sells their products.

Central market (Jln Sultan Zainal Abidin) Handicrafts are also sold upstairs at the central market. Bargaining is possible here – and necessary to get fair prices.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Malaysia Airlines (☎ 662 6600; airport) and **AirAsia** (☎ 32 171 9333; airport) have direct flights to KL,

with fares going for as low as RM50 if you book in advance. **Firefly** (☎ 7845 4543; airport) offers flights to Singapore.

BUS

The main bus station on Jln Masjid Abidin is a terminus for all local buses. Some long-distance buses depart from here as well, but most use the express bus station in the north of town (ask at your lodgings or when buying your ticket if you're unsure of which station to go to).

At the local bus station there are services to/from Marang (RM3), Rantau Abang (RM5), Dungun (RM8) and Merang (RM2).

From the express bus station there are regular services running to and from Kuantan (RM13), Johor Bahru (RM34), Singapore (RM36), Melaka (RM34), KL (RM30), Ipoh (RM43), Kuala Besut (RM10) and Kota Bharu (RM11). There are two daily buses to Penang (RM32).

TAXI

Kuala Terengganu's main taxi stand is near the bus station. Regular taxi destinations include Marang (RM15), Kota Bharu (RM80), Kuala Besut (RM60), Rantau Abang (RM40), Merang (RM35) and Tasik Kenyir (RM120). Some long-distance taxis leave from a stand on Jln Masjid Abidin.

Getting Around

A hop on, hop off town bus goes to all of the major sites in town, the State Museum (right), Floating Mosque (right) and Islamic Park (right); it runs through the main bus station on an ostensibly regular basis, but service was down during our research. It should run for an as yet unspecified price (but not likely more than RM3) by the time you read this.

A taxi to the airport costs around RM28. Local buses leave from the main bus station in the town centre. Taxis around town cost a minimum of RM5, but there aren't many about; try at the long-distance taxi stand.

Once the trishaw (bicycle rickshaw) capital of Malaysia, there are still a very few of these pedal-powered numbers around. Prices are highly negotiable.

AROUND KUALA TERENGGANU

☎ 09

Kuala Terengganu is the natural base for exploring Terengganu state. In the southwest

and southeast, respectively, are the impressive Kompleks Muzium Negeri Terengganu (Terengganu State Museum) and the distinctive Masjid Tengku Tengah Zaharah (Floating Mosque). Sekayu Falls and Tasik Kenyir are far to the southwest.

Kompleks Muzium Negeri Terengganu

The **Kompleks Muzium Negeri Terengganu** (Terengganu State Museum; ☎ 622 1433; <http://museum.terengganu.gov.my>; adult/child RM5/2; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu) is nothing if not memorable, if only for the fact that it consists of some 26 hectares of Terengganu educational goodness. It's the largest museum in Southeast Asia, and thankfully, quantity and quality aren't too disjointed here. The complex of traditional houses that fronts the grounds is practically worth your custom on its own. On the inside are historical artefacts (such as a Jawi – traditional Malay text – inscription that essentially dates the arrival of Islam to the nation) that are fantastic. That said, a few exhibits are duds; the Petroleum Gallery presents a, shall we say, somewhat one-sided depiction of things (ie 'Petrol is great!'). The Istana Tengku Long, a wooden palace that dates from 1888, contains much of the royal regalia of the Terengganu sultanate, and boat-enthusiasts will love the outdoor maritime gallery recreations of water-borne vessels. To get here, take minibus 10 (90 sen), marked 'Muzium/Losong', from the main bus station. A taxi from Kuala Terengganu will cost RM12.

Masjid Tengku Tengah Zaharah

The most famous religious structure in the state is the 'Floating Mosque', located 4.5km southeast of Kuala Terengganu. It's not really floating, just set on a man-made island, but its white, traditional Moorish design is beautifully blinding in the strong daylight, and warmly enchanting as the sun sets. Bus 13 from Kuala Terengganu will drop you outside (90 sen).

Taman Tamadu Islam

Touted as the world's first 'Islamic civilisation park,' **Taman Tamadu Islam** (Window on Islam; ☎ 627 8888; www.tti.com.my; adult/child RM20/10; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Thu, from 9am Fri-Sun), 2.5km west of Kuala Terengganu, is essentially a series of miniature models of famous Islamic landmarks from across the world. The holistic approach to Islam is interesting – where else can you see

the Taj Mahal next to Syria's Aleppo Citadel – but the contextual explanations needed to appreciate the site are a bit lacking. The park also houses the **Crystal Mosque**, opened in 2008. Constructed largely from glass and steel, its one of those buildings that, in an effort to look futuristic, comes off as immediately dated. Still, it is garishly eye-catching at night, when the entire affair is lit from within. Shuttle buses run here from the Kuala Terengganu jetty station for RM2 on a somewhat regular basis; a taxi will cost around RM15.

Sekayu Falls

These waterfalls, 56km southwest of Kuala Terengganu, are part of a large park popular with locals on Friday and public holidays. The falls extend up a mountainside; the main falls are 15 minutes in from the entrance. A further 20 minutes' walk brings you to the more attractive upper falls. There's also an orchard with a huge variety of seasonal tropical fruit.



There are three daily buses from Kuala Terengganu to the park entrance (RM4.40), 2km from the falls. The first leaves at 9am, and the last bus comes back at 3pm. Ping Anchorage (p309) offers day trips taking in the falls and Kenyir Dam from RM99 per person, including lunch.

TASIK KENYIR

 09

The construction of the Kenyir Dam in 1985 flooded some 2600 sq km of jungle, creating Southeast Asia's largest man-made lake, with clumps of wild overgrowth gasping over the water's surface. Today Tasik Kenyir (Lake Kenyir) and its 340 islands constitute Terengganu's most popular inland tourism destination. There are some resorts dotted around the water, all low-key and fairly up-scale in terms of cost and service. If you're looking to spend a relatively luxurious night in the local jungle, which houses some 8000 species of flowers, this is the spot for you.

Information

There is a small **tourist information office** ( 626 7788; www.ketengah.gov.my/kenyir;  9am–5pm) near the jetty in Pengkalan Gawi, the lake's main access point. Also at the jetty you'll find a cafe, a shop, and a few kiosks where you can book boat trips, which start from RM600 for a jaunt to the nearest islands to significantly more for day trips and fishing expeditions across the

lake. There's technically a RM1 entrance fee and a RM5 camera fee upon arrival at the lake, but this wasn't collected during our visit.

Sights

Waterfalls and caves are high on the list of Kenyir's attractions, as well as a number of fish farms. These are reached by boat (as day trips from the lake's main access point, Pengkalan Gawi), or from the resorts themselves. Perhaps more interesting are trips up the rivers that empty into the lake. Among these, a journey up **Sungai Petuang**, at the extreme northern end of the lake, is a highlight of a Kenyir visit. When the water is high, it's possible to travel several kilometres upriver into beautiful virgin jungle.

Fishing is a popular activity and the lake is surprisingly rich in species, including *toman* (snakehead), *buang* (catfish), *kelah* (a kind of carp), *kelisa* (green arowana) and *kalui* (giant gouramy). You will need a permit (RM10) to fish here; this will be arranged for you if you book onto a fishing trip.

The water level varies considerably, peaking at the end of the rainy season in March or April and gradually decreasing until the start of the next rainy season in November. When the water is high the lake takes on an eerie atmosphere, with the tops of drowned trees poking through the surface; when low the lake is reduced to a series of canals through partially denuded jungle hills. Of the two states, high water is undoubtedly more beautiful so come in late spring or early summer.

At the height of the rainy season there is a risk of flooding, and some areas and communities can become inaccessible as poorly maintained roads and bridges are submerged or damaged by rising water.

Sleeping

Most accommodation is in resort chalets or floating longhouse structures built over the lake. There are no budget options. Resorts usually offer meals and boat transport from Pengkalan Gawi.

Kenyir Sanctuary Resort ( 019-824 4360; r from RM85; ) Offers some of the cheapest rooms on the lake. There are 40 rustic wooden chalets, including some pricier air-con rooms.

Musang Kenyir Resort ( 623 1888; r from RM140; ) On the north shore of the lake, Musang consists of several rustic *kampung*-style houses plopped over the waters. Facilities are basic, but the setting is beautiful.

Petang Island Resort (☎ 822 1276; www.pirkenyir.com.my; r RM250; 🍷 🍷) On its own little island in the middle of the lake, this is a quiet retreat with a choice of comfortably furnished single- or double-storey chalets and longhouse rooms. Chalets have kitchens if you want to cook for yourself, but there's a good restaurant here, too.

Kenyir Lakeview Resort (☎ 666 8888; www.lakekenyir.com; r/ste from RM380/620; 🍷 🍷) The most glamorous property on the lake, this peaceful resort has spacious and well-equipped chalets with balconies overlooking the water or the rainforest. There's a restaurant, tennis courts and a gym, and plenty of organised activities.

Another option is to explore Kenyir by houseboat, which allows you to reach remote regions of the lake, but you'll likely need a large group to make a trip economical.

Most visitors come to Kenyir on all-inclusive packages, which can either be arranged directly with the resort or with a travel agency in Kuala Terengganu, which will probably work out cheaper.

Getting There & Away

Tasik Kenyir is 15km west of Kuala Berang and 55km from Kuala Terengganu. The main access point is the jetty at Pengkalan Gawi, on the northern shore of the lake. To get there, take a taxi from Kuala Terengganu (RM120 per car). There are also buses to Kuala Berang from Kuala Terengganu (RM8); from Kuala Berang a taxi is only about RM80. If you book a package in Kuala Terengganu with an agency it should provide minibus transport and offer day trips to the lake.

Getting Around

Travel around the lake is expensive as you will have to charter a whole boat, either from Pengkalan Gawi or from your resort. Boat hire costs around RM150 to RM200 per hour and a half-day fishing trip costs about RM700. The resorts offer various trips around the lake, but prices depend on the number of passengers, so again this can be rather pricey. Cruises are sometimes included in package deals. An organised day trip (p309) from Kuala Terengganu is your best bet if you just want a quick scout around.

SOUTH OF KUALA TERENGGANU

Besides long stretches of beach and ocean, the most distinctive landmark of this stretch of the Malaysian coast are flaming oil refin-

eries. About 25km north of Cherating, **Cukai** and **Kemaman** are the first towns of any size north of Kuantan, and the first towns you reach in Terengganu state when travelling up the coast. The two towns have merged into one long developed strip, with little of interest to hold passing travellers. **Hotel Tiara** (☎ 859 1802; K-353 Jln Kampung Tengah; r RM45-55; 🍷), roughly opposite the bus station (turn at the 'Masjid Jamek' sign), has basic rooms.

Buses from Cherating or Kuantan both cost RM7. Express buses cost RM9 from Marang and RM11 from Kuala Terengganu. Taxis (per car) cost RM30 to Cherating, RM50 to Kuantan, RM60 to Dungun and RM80 to RM100 to Kuala Terengganu.

Kemasik

☎ 09

Kemasik's palm-fringed beach has some of the clearest water on the east coast. The nearest accommodation is at the gargantuan, five-star **Awana Kijal Golf, Beach & Spa Resort** (☎ 864 1188; www.awana.com.my; r/ste from RM280/520; 🍷 🍷 🍷) on the beach around 1km south, towards Kijal, stacked with the usual golf courses, tennis courts, spa etc. Discounts are often available, especially if you book over the internet. Take a local bus running between Kemaman-Cukai and Dungun, or if you're driving, turn off Route 3 (East Coast Highway) at the 'Pantai Kemasik' sign.

Paka

☎ 09

The beach here is almost as good as the one at Kemasik, but the view is somewhat marred by the refinery a few kilometres down the coast. The village is a little run-down but quite picturesque.

The modern **Residence Resort** (☎ 827 3366; www.residenceresortpaka.com; r/ste from RM280/500; 🍷 🍷 🍷) is a luxurious cluster of airy rooms with smooth white sheets and rattan furniture. The best way to visit Paka is to take a local bus running between Kerteh and Dungun. If you're driving, turn off at the 'Pantai Paka' sign.

Dungun

☎ 09

Dungun and the port of Kuala Dungun form the largest town on the coast between Kemaman-Cukai and Kuala Terengganu. You may need to stay here if no buses are running.

There are a few standard hotels; try **Hotel Kasanya** (☎ 848 1704; 225 Jln Tambun; r from RM98; 🚗), a reasonable option, around five minutes' walk from the bus station; cross the sports field and take a left on the main road.

Buses go to Kuala Terengganu (RM8) and Kemaman-Cukai (RM6). Kuala Terengganu-bound buses will drop you at Rantau Abang (RM3); the same bus heading in the opposite direction will stop at Dungan. You can also hop on the bus in Rantau Abang (RM2), from where a taxi shouldn't be more than RM10.

On the coast around 8km east of Dungan is the gorgeous **Tanjong Jara Resort** (☎ 03-2783 3000; www.tanjongjaresort.com; Batu 8 off Jln Dungan; r/stc from RM350/900; 🚗 🚗 🚗). It's a peaceful and secluded place set on a long, sandy stretch of beach, with a choice of spacious and luxurious traditional-style chalets, some with private verandahs and sunken baths set in a futuristic yoga-chic-style studio setting.

Rantau Abang

☎ 09

Rantau Abang once attracted flocks of tourists who came to see giant leatherback turtles come ashore to lay their eggs. Now that the focus of turtle conservation is the Ma' Daerah sanctuary (p316) further south, Rantau Abang has taken on the dusty if pleasant ambience of a quiet seaside town gone slightly to seed. The beach is still golden and the water is still blue, although the latter is also plagued by strong undertows.

You can still pop by the **Turtle Information Centre** (☎ 845 8169; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Sun-Thu, 8am-noon Sat), essentially a small showroom with a few information boards where staff will run a 10-minute film (in English) on request. Otherwise, there's not much to do but nothing, and a good place to do that is **Awang's Beach Resort** (☎ 019-974 9533; r from RM70; 🚗), a cluster of sandy chalets inhabited by some laid-back staff, loud pet birds and general Jack Johnson-ambience.

Dungan-Kuala Terengganu buses run in both directions every hour from 7am to 6pm and there's a bus stop near the Turtle Information Centre. To/from Dungan costs RM2; to Kuala Terengganu costs RM5. A taxi to Kuala Terengganu costs RM40.

Marang

☎ 09

Marang is the jump-off point for ferries to Pulau Kapas (see opposite) and a quiet fish-

ing town. It's a little overbuilt by the highway but still pleasant in a rural way, especially in spots like **Kampung Jenang**, where you can observe the weaving of *atap* (roof thatching) and the making of coconut sugar, as well as the gathering of coconuts by trained monkeys. It's especially attractive in summer, when numerous exotic fruit trees are in season. It's possible to visit the village as an easy day trip from Marang or Kuala Terengganu.

If you are in town on Sunday be sure to check out the excellent **market**, which starts at 3pm near the town's jetties.

SLEEPING & EATING

Kamal Guesthouse (☎ 618 2181; No B 283 Jln Kampung Paya; r RM30-70; 🚗) This sleepy guesthouse on the main road has some reasonable rooms with attached showers and toilets. Only the pricier ones have air-con.

Marang Guesthouse (☎ 618 1976; www.marang guesthouse.com; Jln Kampung Paya Bukit; r from RM40; 🚗) A series of dark, comfy if occasionally musty chalets perch on a hill overlooking the main road down to the jetty. At night, the high-up location and surrounding jungle makes for an agreeably rustic escape.

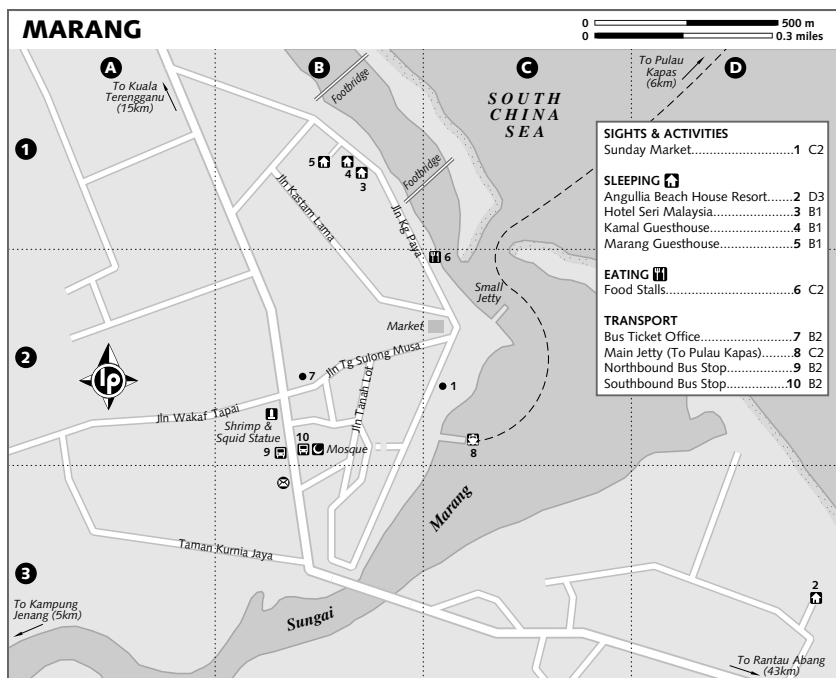
Angullia Beach House Resort (☎ 618 1322; angullia_resort@yahoo.com; r RM75-185; 🚗) Across the bridge to the southeast is this peaceful resort. There's a variety of chalets spread out under the palm trees on a stretch of coarse golden sand, with a good view of Pulau Kapas. There are also larger chalets housing up to four people (RM250) and a garden restaurant. It's popular with school groups.

Hotel Seri Malaysia (☎ 618 2889; www.serimalaysia.com.my; 3964 Jln Kampung Paya; r RM150; 🚗 🚗) The most upscale spot in town is this bright, modern chain hotel on the coast north of the centre, offering rooms any Western traveller in need of mod-cons will be comfortable with.

There are a couple of basic *kedai kopi* (coffee shops) in the town centre, near the bus ticket office, and you can also find some **food stalls** (Jln Kampung Paya) near the jetties.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are regular local buses to Kuala Terengganu (RM3) and Dungan/Rantau Abang (RM6/4). For long-distance buses there's a **ticket office** (☎ 618 2799; Jln Tanjung Sulong Musa) near the town's main intersection. There are two daily buses to KL (RM30.40),



two to Johor Bahru (RM35) and five to Kuantan-Cherating (RM15).

There are four bus stops on the main road. Southbound express buses usually stop in front of the mosque, and northbound services will pick you up just north of the post office. This is not a hard and fast rule, however, and it's best to ask the owner of your guesthouse or someone at the ticket office first.

Pulau Kapas

☎ 09

Pretty Pulau Kapas is an emerald coated in powder-white sand and a general air of take it easy. All accommodation is concentrated on three small beaches on the west coast, but you can walk around the headlands to quieter beaches. Just off the north coast of Kapas is tiny Pulau Gemia; it's not usually possible to visit, unless you're staying at the island's exclusive Gem Wellness Resort (p316).

Pulau Kapas is best avoided during holidays and long weekends, when it is overrun with day-trippers. Outside of these times, the island is likely to be very quiet. It shuts

down during the east-coast monsoon season (November to March).

ACTIVITIES

Kapas is billed as a snorkelling paradise, though coral is scarce on the most accessible beaches facing the coast. Some of the best snorkelling is around the northern end of the island and Pulau Gemia. North of Gemia, a sunken WWII Japanese landing craft, now carpeted in coral, is a popular dive site.

All of the resorts listed here can arrange snorkelling and diving trips.

Aqua-Sport Divers (☎ 019-983 5879; www.divekapas.com), attached to Duta Puri Island Resort, charges RM110/180 for one/two dives, including equipment, and trips out to the Japanese boat (RM150). Snorkelling costs RM30 for a session.

SLEEPING & EATING

Many people staying on Kapas do so through all-inclusive package tours.

Lighthouse (☎ 017-988 9046; dm/r RM20/50) On the southernmost tip of the bay, this is the

ADOPT A TURTLE

Turtles were once a common sight all along Terengganu's coastline, but sadly their numbers have diminished significantly. However, green turtles remain relatively abundant and the **Ma' Daerah Turtle Sanctuary** (<http://madaerah.org>) on the coast between Kerteh and Paka was established by the fisheries department to ensure their survival here. The turtles nest on this protected site between April and September, and although not open to casual tourists, volunteers are very welcome. In the summer months you can spend a weekend helping to monitor turtle landings, collecting eggs for transfer to the hatchery and releasing hatchlings. A minimum donation of RM250 (RM150 for children) is required, and accommodation and meals are provided; book your place two weeks in advance. You could also 'adopt' a nest (RM100) or a turtle (RM150) or help with cleaning up the beach, which usually takes place around April.

Local buses running between Kerteh and Dungan stop nearby, but you will need an advance reservation to visit. Ping Anchorage (p309) in Kuala Terengganu, working through the sanctuary, runs night-time trips here in summer (RM150).

cheapest and most atmospheric budget spot on Kapas, with all rooms in one elevated long-house under the trees. It's rustic, but very sociable, and is popular with diving groups.

Kapas Island Resort (☎ 631 6468; www.kapasidlandresort.com; dm RM20, r RM90-200; 🍷 📺) The best option is this resort just south of the jetty. Set among pretty landscaped gardens, the freestanding timber chalets all have two single beds and a verandah. Cheaper ones, facing the jungle, are more secluded. There's also a longhouse dorm sleeping up to 30, with mattresses on the floor; a bargain if you can get it to yourself.

North of the jetty, a stone walkway leads to another beach with a couple more options.

Kapas Beach Chalet (☎ 019-936 0750; r RM40-70) Also known simply as KBC, there's a choice of rooms here, ranging from very basic 'back-packer' rooms with outside (but private) toilets to more comfortable A-frame huts with TVs. The friendly Dutch owner can arrange fishing trips and barbecues.

Mak Cik Gemuk Beach Resort (☎ 624 5120; r RM40-120; 🍷) This older place has a variety of unmodernised rooms; take a look at a few before deciding. A few are in need of a good scrub, and a few have received a wash down.

Qimi Chalet (☎ 019-951 8159; r RM80-120) A walkway leads to this small, northernmost collection of huts, on its own beach. Basic indeed, and isolated, but it has a certain castaway charm.

Gem Wellness Spa & Island Resort (☎ 625 2505; information@gemisle.com; r from RM260; 🍷) Perched on tiny Pulau Gemia, 800m north of Pulau Kapas, this resort is worth a try for those in search of something more sophisticated. It's a peaceful spot, with airy wooden chalets, a couple of small private beaches and, between May and

October, guests can watch baby green turtles emerging at the resort's own turtle hatchery. The spa offers the usual pampering services, and all-inclusive package deals are available.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Boats to Pulau Kapas leave from Marang's main jetty and tickets can be purchased from any of the agents nearby. Boats leave when four or more people show up, and charge RM25 per person return. Be sure to arrange a pick-up time when you purchase your ticket. You can usually count on morning departures at around 8am and 9am. The same boats will continue to Pulau Gemia if requested.

NORTH OF KUALA TERENGGANU

North of Kuala Terengganu the main road (Route 3) leaves the coast and runs inland to Kota Bharu, 165km north, via Jerteh. The quiet coastal back road from Kuala Terengganu to Kuala Besut runs along a beautiful stretch of coast and is popular with cyclists.

Merang

☎ 09

Gateway to Pulau Redang, the sleepy little fishing village of Merang (not to be confused with Marang) is one of the few remaining villages of its kind where development hasn't gone ahead in leaps and bounds. There's little of interest in the village, but the beach is attractive if you have to spend some time waiting for ferry connections to Redang.

SLEEPING

Kembara Resort (☎ 653 1770; <http://kembararesort.tripod.com>; dm RM10, r RM35-60; 🍷 📺) About 500m

south of the village (follow the signs from the main road), this is a friendly place with a range of plain but homely chalets. There are organised activities and a common kitchen.

Merang Inn Village Resort (☎ 624 3435; r RM40-60; 🏠) In the centre of the village, this place has decent fan and air-con chalets just across the road from the beach, but the rooms are lacking in character.

Sutra Beach Resort (☎ 669 6200; www.sutra-beachresort.com.my; Kampung Rhu Tapai; r/stg from RM185/650; 🏠 🚗) About 6km south of Merang, and 35km north of Kuala Terengganu, this big complex is set on a private beach and offers a choice of accommodation. Most attractive are the beachfront rooms with uninterrupted views of the South China Sea. There are numerous organised tours available, and various packages.

Aryani Resort (☎ 653 2111; www.thearyani.com; Jln Rhu Tapai; r from RM369; 🏠 🚗) One of Malaysia's most exclusive hotels lies on a secluded stretch of coast 4km south of Merang. The detached chalets are a mix of Malay and Javanese design, and are spread out in tranquil, landscaped grounds just off the beach. All have private gardens and sunken outdoor baths. Best of all is the sumptuous Redang Suite (RM1055), a traditionally furnished 150-year-old Malay house on stilts. The restaurants serve Western and Malay cuisine, while the spa offers indulgent body treatments and massages.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are daily buses from the main bus station in Kuala Terengganu to Merang (RM3). Taxis from Kuala Terengganu cost RM35 per car. Coming from the north is more difficult and it is easiest to go south as far as Kuala Terengganu and then backtrack. Otherwise, taxis from Kota Bharu cost RM70.

Pulau Redang

☎ 09
Redang is one of the prettiest east-coast islands and a definite candidate for tropical bliss, but for a few issues. Its position within a marine park lends itself to excellent diving and snorkelling, and you can easily lose yourself in between the golden sunlight, cackling jungle and lapping waves. Unfortunately, it's difficult to visit outside of package tours, which tend to be regimented affairs with arrival lectures, set times for meals, snorkelling and 'leisure'. It's popular with groups of young Malaysians and weekend Singaporeans.

In the past, and to a degree now, debris from construction has led to coral damage and ugly piles of rubble along the beach, but some folks on the island are starting to both wiseen and clean up. There are beautiful bays on the eastern shore, including Teluk Dalam, Teluk Kalong and Pasir Panjang. The huge Berjaya Redang Beach Resort and the airport are on the north shore, while the island's main village is in the interior.

Note that Pulau Redang basically shuts down from 1 November to 1 March; the best time to visit is from mid-March to late September. There is a RM5 conservation fee for entering the marine reserve, usually payable at your resort.

SLEEPING

Accommodation on Pulau Redang is best organised as a package in Kuala Terengganu; tour companies such as Ping Anchorage (p309) sell packages for all the resorts, and several of the resorts have offices in Kuala Terengganu too, in particular along Jln Kampung Cina.

Note that package prices given in this section are for three days and two nights and are per person, based on two sharing, and include boat transfer from Merang, all meals and two snorkelling trips. Single occupancy normally carries a minimum surcharge of RM50 per night. Prices rise on school and public holidays. Promotional packages are frequently offered – check hotel websites before visiting.

Pasir Panjang

Most of the small resorts are built on a beautiful stretch of white-sand beach known as Pasir Panjang, on the east coast of the island.

Redang Pelangi Resort (☎ 624 2158; www.redang-pelangi.com; r from RM259; 🏠) This is a casual, resort-style affair that offers fairly simple two- and four-bed wooden chalets. There's an on-site dive centre, a couple of shops and a beachfront bar. The price here also includes transfer from Kuala Terengganu to the jetty in Merang.

Redang Bay Resort (☎ 620 3200; www.redangbay.com.my; dm/s/d per person from RM310/368/418; 🏠 🚗) At the southern end of the beach, this rather characterless resort has a mix of concrete-block-style accommodation and chalets. Rooms are neat and clean, if a little spartan. The karaoke lounge is open till all hours, and there's a 'beach disco' on weekends, so don't come looking for a quiet island retreat.

Redang Holiday Beach Villa (☎ 624 5500; www.redangholiday.com; r from RM329; 🏠) At the northern tip of the beach is this welcoming place, with a series of smart duplex chalets climbing the rocks (chalets S13 and S14 have the best outlooks). Larger chalets sleep up to eight.

Coral Redang Island Resort (☎ 630 7110; www.coralredang.com.my; s/d per person from RM690/485; 🏠) Towards the northern end of the beach, this full-blown resort has slightly overpriced but very pleasant chalets that offer a bit more character than some of the cheaper places. There's a dive centre attached and diving packages start at RM800 per person, which includes four dives.

South of Pasir Panjang

In the bay directly south of Pasir Panjang you will find several more places to stay strung out along an excellent white-sand beach.

Redang Kalong Resort (☎ 03-7960 7163; www.redangkalong.com; r from RM249; 🏠) At the secluded Teluk Kalong is this quiet place, set among the palm trees in a private little bay. Diving packages start at RM589 and include five dives. Turtles often come ashore along here to lay eggs.

Ayu Mayang Resort (☎ 626 2020; www.redangkalong.com; r from RM269; 🏠) In seeming response to the high-rise-type hotels that have taken over much of the seashore, Ayu Mayan consists of wooden chalets, more rustic than regal, that give a good Robinson Crusoe crossed with a *kampung* vibe. Room interiors are a bit plain for the price.

Redang Reef Resort (☎ 622 6181; www.redangreefresort.com.my; r from RM300; 🏠) On the headland, this friendly place is in a great location, though you'll get your feet wet going to and fro at high tide. The two-storey wooden chalets are very basic but popular with student groups. The better chalets on the rocks are more secluded and have fantastic views of the bay. It also has a tiny private beach.

Laguna Redang Island Resort (☎ 630 7888; www.lagunaredang.com.my; r from RM348; 🏠 📺 📶) Redang's biggest resort – a vast, 222-room complex that is still being added to – dominates this beach. It has luxurious sea-view suites with balconies, excellent restaurants, a diving centre and a full program of children's activities. Buildings are in traditional Malay style, designed by the same architect who built the state museum in Kuala Terengganu.

Redang Beach Resort (☎ 623 8188; www.redang.com.my; r from RM369; 🏠 📺) This place has an arrangement of modern double-storey chalets and boasts a five-star PADI diving centre, a

few shops and a regular beach disco, which makes it a bit intense for a quiet escape.

Berjaya Redang Beach Resort (☎ 630 8866; www.berjayaresorts.com.my; r/ste from RM690/1150; 🏠 📺 📶) Redang's most luxurious resort has a wide choice of sumptuous wooden chalets in delightful, landscaped gardens, and an excellent private beach. This is as close to royalty as you'll get at Redang; some of the chalets really do feel like small palaces.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nearly all visitors to Redang purchase packages that include boat transfer to the island. If you go independently, you'll need to hitch a ride on one of the resort boats (adult/child RM100/50), but in the high season (April to September) room-only deals will be scarce. Ferries run from the string of jetties along the river in Merang. Ferries also run from Shahbandar jetty in downtown Kuala Terengganu, but are less frequent and must generally be arranged via your resort. A schedule for all resort ferries can be found at www.redang.org/transport.htm.

Redang's airport is near the Berjaya Redang Beach Resort; **Berjaya Air** (☎ 630 8866; www.berjaya-air.com) has daily flights to KL (Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport; roundtrip RM526) and to Singapore (Seletar Airport; roundtrip RM837).

It's also possible to visit Redang on a dive trip from Pulau Perhentian (see p320).

Pulau Lang Tengah

☎ 09

Tiny, idyllic Lang Tengah lies roughly halfway between Pulau Redang and Pulau Perhentian, and with only three resorts to choose from, it's a much quieter, less-developed place than its better-known neighbours, and there is no resident population. It's a hidden gem, with soft white-sand beaches, clean turquoise waters and some of the best snorkelling in Malaysia just offshore. Like Redang, almost everyone comes on package deals that include ferry transport, snorkelling or diving.

SLEEPING

The island's three resorts are spaced out on the west coast, and offer a bewildering variety of package deals; unless otherwise stated, those listed in this section are for three days and two nights. The prices here are for the high season (June to September).

Islands (☎ 07-235 1216; www.langtengah.com.my), based in Johor Bahru, offers good deals.

D'Coconut Lagoon (☎ 03-4252 6686; www.dcoconutlagoon.com; r from RM225; 🏠) The smallest of the resorts has fairly plain but comfy chalets with fridges, TVs and other mod-cons, set around an attractive pool. These prices are per night, but half- and full-board options are also offered.

Redang Lang Island Resort (☎ 623 9911; www.malaysiaislandresort.com; s/d from RM340/420; 🏠) Offers basic but neat wooden chalets just a few steps from the beach, with a common TV lounge and karaoke bar. Snorkelling and diving packages are available, and prices are slightly higher from Thursday to Sunday.

Lang Sari Resort (☎ 03-2166 1318; <http://langsari.com>; s/d from RM348/478; 🏠 📺) Huge wooden chalets look over strings of lanterns, the beach and guests relaxing in hammocks. You can canoe, go turtle or shark watching, or do what your purpose here is: nap in the shade. Amenities are pretty advanced for the rural setting.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Between April and August, ferries to Lang Tengah leave from the jetty in Merang at 10am and noon, and return from the island at 8.30am and 2pm. From September to March they leave Merang at 12.30pm and depart the island at 2pm. If you're travelling independently, the one-way fare for adults/children is RM80/40.

Kuala Besut

☎ 09

Kuala Besut, on the coast south of Kota Bharu, is a sleepy fishing village that serves as the ferry point to Pulau Perhentian.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Taxis and local buses run to and from the taxi stand in the centre of town, very near the seafront. There are numerous travel agencies around town that can arrange ferries to, and accommodation on, the islands, and all charge identical prices. Several of the resorts have their own agents' offices in town, too. There is a RM5 conservation fee for entering the marine park around the Perhentians; buy your ticket at the jetty before you board.

SLEEPING & EATING

Kuala Besut's few hotels are mostly functional affairs.

Vaudin Guesthouse (☎ 697 4887/611; Jln Pantai; r RM20-40; 🏠) This is the cheapest place in town,

with a few drab rooms over the travel agency of the same name. Only two rooms have air-con, and bathrooms are communal.

Samudera Hotel (☎ 697 9326; www.kekal-samudera.com; Jln Pantai; r from RM65; 🏠) Near the jetty, this renovated place is the best option in town, with large simple rooms and private bathrooms.

There are several *kedai kopi* around town, as well as a few shops where you can buy basic provisions. Around the square formed by the taxi stand are a few small shops and restaurants.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Kuala Besut is best reached from Kota Bharu to the north. There is no direct bus – you will have to travel via Jerneh or Pasir Puteh for an onward connection. The total fare ends up being between RM5 and RM10. However, as a taxi from Kota Bharu costs RM65 per car, most people choose this easier option. From the south, you can come from Kuala Terengganu by bus (RM8) or taxi (RM80 per car). There are also two daily buses from KL (RM33.80, nine hours).

PULAU PERHENTIAN

☎ 09

The Perhentians are tropical paradise. Full stop. The water is simultaneously electric teal and crystal clear; the jungle is thick, fecund and thrilling; the sand, from a distance, looks like snow. At night bonfires and kerosene lamps on the beach and phosphorescence in the water makes pin holes in the velvety black, the stars soar above you and the real world becomes something like a bad dream. Most people come to snorkel, dive or do nothing at all. These goals are all eminently achievable.

Even Eden must be divvied up. There are two main islands: smaller Kecil ('Small'), popular with the younger backpacker crowd, and Besar ('Large'), with higher standards of accommodation and a quieter, more relaxed ambience. The undecided can cross the strait from island to island for around RM20 (about five to 10 minutes).

Not everyone loves the Perhentians, though. These are quiet islands, and if you're looking for a Thai-style party atmosphere, you're very much in the wrong place. Alcohol is available and during the high season (May to September) you can usually find some kind of impromptu beach party at night, but this isn't full-moon territory by any stretch. Prices quoted here are for the high season. The islands basically

shut down during the monsoon (usually from mid-November to mid-February) although some hotels remain open for hardier tourists. That said, some places don't bother opening until April or even later. There are no banks or ATMs on the islands, so bring cash.

Orientation

A narrow strait separates Perhentian Besar from Perhentian Kecil.

On Perhentian Kecil the most popular spot is Long Beach (Pasir Panjang), an excellent white-sand beach with a string of mostly budget chalets, cafes and a few tiny shops. Perhentian Kecil is the administrative centre of the islands and has a fair-sized village with a few *kedai kopi* and shops, as well as a police station and basic clinic, though nothing to entice tourists. Across the narrow waist of the island, Coral Bay (Aur Bay) is a moon-shaped stretch of beach that's arguably prettier than Long Beach, although it's tough to wade here on the shell-strewn seafloor. There are other isolated bays with private beaches for those in search of solitude.

Over on Besar, most of the accommodation is clustered on the western side of the island along a series of beaches divided by rocky headlands. For those looking to get away from it all, a walk through the jungle, or a five-minute boat ride, leads to the isolated Teluk Dalam (Dalam Bay), which has a wide, palm-fringed beach.

Information

Once more, with feeling: *there are no banks or ATMs on the islands*. Some of the bigger resorts will cash travellers cheques, but at poor rates, and usually only for their own guests. Even the pricey diving schools only occasionally accept credit cards. The nearest bank is in Jerteh, on the mainland – no one wants to spend their tropical vacation bussing to a bank branch.

There are no public telephones. Hotels may allow you to make calls from their mobile phones, but it won't be cheap. Mobile phone numbers for resorts given here may change from one season to the next, and some have no phones, but travel agents in Kuala Besut will have the latest contact details. Where land-line numbers have been given, these are for more reliable resort offices in Kuala Besut. Internet access is limited and expensive; expect to pay around RM20 to RM24 per hour. The cheapest is at **Lazy Buoys** (per hr RM16) on Long Beach.

The only medical facility on the islands is the very basic **clinic** (Perhentian Village). Dive operators and some of the bigger resorts can offer first aid if needed.

There is a RM5 conservation fee for everyone entering the marine park around the Perhentians; this fee will likely be tacked onto the price of your ticket at the jetty in Kuala Besut.

If the tides are low, you may have to board a small fishing boat to get between the ferry and your destination island (and vice versa). This service comes with an unexpected RM3 fee.

Local 'beach boys' are generally harmless, but we have read reports of inappropriate propositions made to female travellers who have been invited on private walks, boat trips, etc. Ask yourself: would you follow this man at home? If the answer is 'No,' best not follow him here either.

Finally, we need to stress: you are still in Malaysia, and topless sunbathing is unacceptable. Locals are too polite to tell people to their face, but you are insulting their sense of modesty (and while we're not making excuses for them, certainly encouraging the sleaziness of the aforementioned 'beach boys') by taking off your top.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELLING

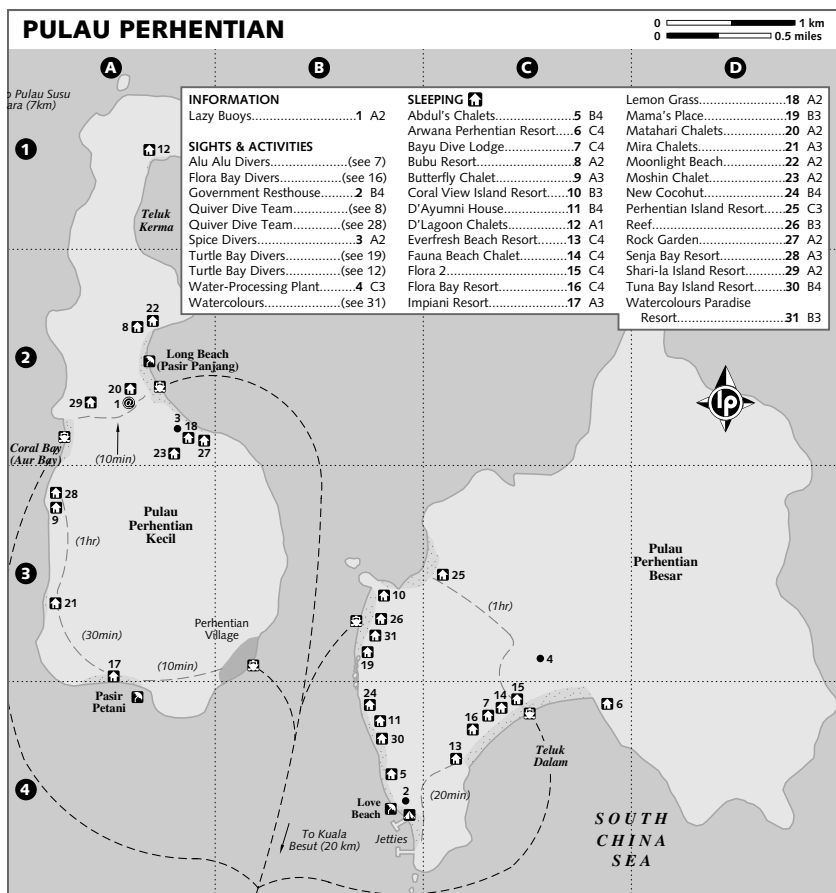
There are coral reefs off both islands and around nearby uninhabited islands, Pulau Susu Dara in particular. The best bets for snorkelling off the coast are the northern end of Long Beach on Kecil, and the point in front of Coral View Island Resort on Besar. You can wade out to a living coral reef right in front of Tuna Bay Island Resort. Most chalets organise snorkelling trips for around RM40 per person (more or less depending on the size of the group) and also rent out equipment.

For scuba divers there are several operations on both islands, though prices are pretty uniform. At the time of research, open-water certification went from RM850 to RM1100, while dives cost around RM80 to RM125, with discounts for multiple dives. Many of the operators below also run dive excursions out to Pulau Redang.

Alu Alu Divers (☎ 691 1650; www.alualudivers.com)

At Bayu Dive Lodge on Besar.

Flora Bay Divers (☎ 691 1661; www.florabaydivers.com) At Teluk Dalam on Besar.



Quiver Dive Team (☎ 012-213 8885; <http://quiver-perhentian.com>) Next to Bubu resort on Kecil; operates as Senja Mantis in Coral Bay.

Spice Divers (☎ 691 1555; <http://spicedivers.net>) On Kecil; offers two dives for RM150.

Turtle Bay Divers (☎ 019-333 6647, 019-910 6647; www.turtlebaydivers.com) Has offices at D'Lagoon (on Kecil) and Mama's (on Besar).

Watercolours (☎ 691 1850; www.watercoloursworld.com) By Paradise Island Resort on Besar. Also has an office on Impiani Resort on Kecil.

HIKING

On Pulau Kecil, the jungle track between Long Beach and Coral Bay is signposted and takes 10 to 15 minutes to walk. It's an easy, if humid, hike; take a torch at night. Longer tracks run

between Coral Bay and Pasir Petani; ask your guesthouse about conditions and keep in mind the trail is only half-decently marked. Don't attempt walking it in anything less than sports sandals. On Pulau Besar, a jungle track cuts across the island (and around a water-processing plant) from near Perhentian Island Resort to Teluk Dalam at Fauna Beach Chalet. Again, check beforehand if it's clear the whole way.

Sleeping & Eating

PULAU PERHENTIAN BESAR

There are three main beaches on Perhentian Besar: the northern beach on the western side, dominated by Perhentian Island Resort; the main beach on the western side of the island; and Teluk Dalam, on the island's southern coast.

PRESERVING THE PERHENTIANS

The Perhentians are, unfortunately, becoming victims of their own success. The presence of algae on exposed reefs during high season may be attributed to overflowing resort septic tanks. Long-time visitors and expats say some species of fish have become less visible over the years. Boat operators certainly have no qualms about flicking cigarette butts in the ocean and otherwise casually littering, and some will grab sea turtles and bring them to the surface, a practice that is extremely stressful to the turtle.

Rubbish from the Perhentians is stored on offshore pontoons and collected by contractors. Unfortunately, bags of trash are occasionally washed off those pontoons and float their way back to the islands, according to Kuala Lumpur conservation group Wild Asia (www.wildasia.org). The same group says an overtaxed sewage system has added nutrients (ie your waste) to the water, resulting in algal blooms on the fragile reef eco-system.

Never litter, and encourage your boat operators not to as well. Never stand on living coral, which can cause irreparable damage (even the force of a strong flipper kick can damage a reef). Observe the sea life around you, but do not touch it. Contact the **Department of Marine Parks** (☎ 308-886 1111; www.dmpm.nre.gov.my) with information on tour operators and resorts that engage in questionable environmental practices.

Main Beach

Perhentian Besar's main beach stretches to the southern tip of the island, interrupted by several rocky headlands – at low tide you can walk around them on the sand, otherwise you'll have to use a water taxi. A smaller beach taken up by Perhentian Island Resort is accessible via a footbridge on the northern end of the beach.

It's possible to **camp** on the beach south of the Government Resthouse ('Love Beach'), although this area is far from quiet on long weekends. You'll need a permit (RM5 per night) available at a little cafe here, if it's open. The beach and bays here are, to put it lightly, spectacular.

D'ayumni House (☎ 691 1680, 019-436 4463; <http://d-ayumnihouse.blogspot.com>; dm RM40, r RM80-200; 🍷 🍷) A pretty wooden house rises over a series of low-slung, teak-chic chalets and bungalows. Popular with divers and those seeking a bit of budget backpacker vibe in Besar.

Mama's Place (☎ 019-985 3359; www.mamaschalet.com; r RM60-100) The most southern place on this section of beach has a choice of reasonably comfortable chalets with or without bathrooms.

Watercolours Paradise Resort (☎ 691 1850; www.watercoloursworld.com; r RM70-130; 🍷) This friendly resort has clean chalets operated under the same management as the attached Watercolours dive centre, and is about the best value on Besar. The 'Impiani' expansion is a little more upscale, but more in terms of price (RM150 to RM240) than actual quality of lodging.

Abdul's Chalets (☎ 019-912 7303; s/d from RM70/150) The wooden beach huts at this popular place

are pretty ordinary, but all have private bathrooms and there's a cafe too. Just beyond is the Government Resthouse, reserved for Malaysian government officials.

Reef (☎ 019-981 6762; r RM100-270) Reef's very basic chalets are set back from the beach amidst a gaggle of lounging, flip-flopped staff. There's an equally basic cafe and a lazy, laid-back atmosphere.

Coral View Island Resort (☎ 019-981 3359; r/s from RM135/295; 🍷 🍷) With a great location at the northern end of the beach, Coral View's accommodation runs from simple fan chalets up to rather smart beachfront suites. There are a couple of good restaurants serving Asian and Western dishes (lunch RM30), and shops.

New Cocohut (☎ 691 1811; www.perhentianislandcocohut.com; r RM140-230; 🍷) Cocohuts has a good choice of rooms including pleasant beachside chalets and a two-storey longhouse, which has some great views from the upstairs balcony. The semi-sea-view rooms' interiors are probably a little nicer than the sea-view rooms.

Tuna Bay Island Resort (☎ 690 2902; www.tunabay.com.my; d/tr/f from RM220/270/370; 🍷 🍷) This gathering of pristine chalets perches on a lovely stretch of white sand, with others set in the pretty gardens or facing the jungle behind. You can wade out to a living coral reef just offshore, and afterwards relax in the islands' best restaurant and only authentic cocktail bar – a great place to unwind with a Long Island iced tea.

Perhentian Island Resort (☎ 691 1111; www.perhentianislandresort.net; s/d/tr from RM398/436/614; 🍷 🍷)

Approached via a rickety wooden walkway from behind Coral View Island Resort, this luxurious option overlooks perhaps the best beach on the islands – a beautiful half-moon bay with good coral around the points on either side. There's a huddle of comfortable bungalows and a first-class restaurant.

Teluk Dalam

An easily missed track leads from behind the second jetty near Love Beach over the hill northeast to Teluk Dalam, a secluded bay with a shallow beach, but it's easier to take a boat.

Everfresh Beach Resort (☎/fax 697 7620; r RM30-80)

At the western end of the bay, this is an ageing array of ramshackle A-frames and bungalows set around a pretty garden. It's quiet and just about OK, but has seen better days.

Arwana Perhentian Resort (☎ 778 0888; www.arwanaperhentian.com.my; dm/d/ste from RM30/120/580;

☎ ☎) This huge upmarket resort occupies the eastern flank of Teluk Dalam, although it has no beach frontage itself. The broad array of rooms includes, surprisingly, two dorm blocks at the very back. The cheaper 'standard' rooms are a bit poky. Facilities include a snooker room, karaoke booths and a dive centre.

Fauna Beach Chalet (☎ 691 7607; r RM50-140; ☎ ☎) Sitting on an attractive stretch of sand, Fauna has a choice of the usual creaky wooden huts and more comfortable sea-view bungalows. Pricier ones have air-con; there's no hot water.

Bayu Dive Lodge (☎ 691 1650; www.alualudivers.com; r RM60-190) A collection of smart deep-brown chalets situated around a sandy central courtyard, this place is only open during the high season, when it also operates a dive centre.

Flora Bay Resort (☎ 691 1666; www.florabayresort.com; r RM130-215; ☎ ☎) This big place has a variety of options at the back of the beach, ranging from garden-view fan huts to 'deluxe' air-con beach chalets. Flora 2, an extension of Flora Bay, is a little further along the beach, with a smaller range of pretty much identical chalets.

PULAU PERHENTIAN KECIL

Accommodation on Perhentian Kecil tends to be simpler and prices generally lower, starting at around RM20 to RM30 for a standard hut with two beds and shared bathroom, or as little as RM10 in the low season. Conditions are often much of a muchness. There are a couple of upscale developments if you crave more comfort.

With a picturesque swathe of white sand, Long Beach is the most popular place on the island. Note that swimming here can be very dangerous, though, especially during the monsoon and for a month or two after, when high waves and powerful riptides pose serious threats; there have been a number of near tragedies here. There are no lifeguards and no markers to tell you which sections of the beach are safe.

A signposted jungle trail over the narrow waist of the island leads from Long Beach to Coral Bay on the western side of the island. The beach is quite pleasant and gets good sunsets but, like Long Beach, it can get a little crowded.

There are a number of small bays around the island, each harbouring isolated chalets. Practically, these are only accessible by boat.

D'Lagoon Chalets (☎ 019-985 7089; dm RM10, r RM25-60) On Teluk Kerma, a small bay on the north-eastern side of the island. This is one of the better places on Kecil, with good coral and a tranquil, isolated location. There are longhouse rooms and chalets, as well as a more unusual treehouse for all those budding Tarzans and Janes. Tracks lead to a couple of very remote beaches in the northwestern corner of the island.

Senja Bay Resort (☎ 691 1799; www.senjabay.com; dm/r/ste from RM20/105/230; ☎ ☎) A slight step up from budget blah, the facilities at this cluster of bungalows and huts are a little more polished and pricey than many of the alternatives. Good for travellers who may want a little quiet.

Matahari Chalets (☎ 019-914 2883; www.matahari.chalet.com; r RM25-120) Set back among the trees with a walkway to the beach, Matahari is one of the better chalet operations. It has a good range of accommodation, from simple huts with shared bathroom to spacious bungalows. There's also a restaurant, shop and moneychanger.

Mira Chalets (r RM30-70) On the southwest coast, Mira is an adventurous choice, set on a small secluded beach with the jungle right behind. There are eight rickety chalets set amid banana and coconut trees, in a location Robinson Crusoe would've been proud to call home. Meals are offered in the driftwood-bedecked restaurant. Walking tracks lead through the rainforest to Pasir Petani (30 minutes, about 1.5km) and north to Coral Bay (one hour, about 3km).

Mohsin Chalet (☎ 961 1580; r from RM30) Mohsin has some great chalets sprawling into the sand and up a hill. The receptionist is surreally friendly, and the ambience is tropically languid.

Moonlight Beach (☎ 019-926 9441; r RM30-150; ☎ ☎) Moonlight's staff are friendly as hell, their

EAT. DRINK. BE PERHENTIAN.

When it comes to food, there are three options. First: cheap cafes with cookie-cutter menus, all serving the same bland-it-for-the-foreigner Malay and decent-because-you're-on-a-beach-so-no-one's-complaining Western food for roughly RM6 to RM15 per main. Next: nightly beachfront barbecues, which are ubiquitous. Usually a very filling, tasty bit of grilled fish and potatoes will cost around RM18. Finally, the more upmarket resorts like Tuna Bay have kitchens cranking out some pretty good steak, pasta and Malay mainstays.

If you need a party at night, look for the bonfires and listen for the techno that sprouts up along the beach most evenings. Buy yourself some overpriced beer and 'monkey juice,' the nickname for a sickeningly sweet brown liquor that will, after a few pulls, have you face down in the sand.

A-frame huts are fairly spruce and their regular rooms, while a bit blocky, are comfortable enough. It's also likely the only spot on the island partly managed by a lady boy.

Lemon Grass (☎ 012-9562393; rRM35) At the southern tip of Long Beach, Lemon Grass has 16 no-frills fan huts with shared bathrooms. There are great views from the verandah at reception and nice secluded spots to sit and gaze out to sea.

Rock Garden (rRM40) Steep steps behind Lemon Grass will get you to this vertiginous place on the rocks, which had just come under new ownership during our research and may no longer be called Rock Garden when you read this. The position of the huts, overlooking the well, long sweep of Long Beach is fabulous.

Butterfly Chalet (r RM45-60) Reached by a steep clamber over the rocks next to Senja Bay, this end-of-the-line place has a series of basic wooden huts perched precariously on the headland. They're all a bit tattered, but the setting, among blooming gardens and with superb views across the bay, is beautiful.

Impiani Resort (☎ 019-981 1852, 013-952 5182; www.impiani.com; r RM150-240; 📶) This resort is on the south coast at isolated Pasir Petani. It's a peaceful, secluded setting, and the pricier chalets facing the beach have great views out over the open sea. There's an on-site restaurant and diving facilities.

Shari-la Island Resort (☎ 691 1500; www.shari-la.com; r/ste from RM230/350; 📶 📺) Situated on the northern end of Coral Bay, and sprawling back into the jungle trail, this is a good, clean and relatively posh option for those needing a little luxury while living the backpacker dream. Has 24-hour electricity.

Bubu Resort (☎ 03 2142 6688; www.buburesort.com.my; r from RM250; 📶) At the northern end of the bay, this is the sole top-end option on Long Beach. It's a somewhat overpriced, modern three-storey hotel that looks out of scale here, but the rooms

catch the sun, and most have balconies. There's a restaurant, bar and dive centre.

Getting There & Away

Speedboats (adult/child RM70/35 return, 30 to 40 minutes) run several times a day between Kuala Besut and the Perhentians from 8.30am to 5.30pm although you can expect delays or cancellations if the weather is bad or if there aren't enough passengers. There used to be cheaper (and safer) slowboats plying this route, but this wasn't the case during our research. The boats will drop you off at any of the beaches.

In the other direction, speedboats depart from the islands daily at about 8am, noon and 4pm. It's a good idea to let the owner of your guesthouse know a day before you leave so they can arrange a pick-up. Tickets are sold by several travel agents around Kuala Besut (p319). If the water is rough (and on Long Beach in general, where the badly built jetty comes out over shallow water) you may be ferried from the beach on a small boat to your mainland-bound craft; you'll have to pay around RM3 for this.

Boats also run to and from the Perhentians from the tiny port of Tok Bali in Kelantan. There is only one operator (Symphony) on this route and prices are the same as from Kuala Besut, though the journey takes slightly longer. Both readers and Malaysian Tourism authorities have complained about the reliability and condition of these boats; we recommend that travellers only use ferries out of Kuala Besut.

Getting Around

While there are some trails around the island, the easiest way to go from beach to beach or island to island is by boat. Chalet owners can arrange a taxi boat. From island to island, the trip costs RM20 per boat, and a jaunt from one beach to another on the same island usually costs about RM10. Prices double at night.