

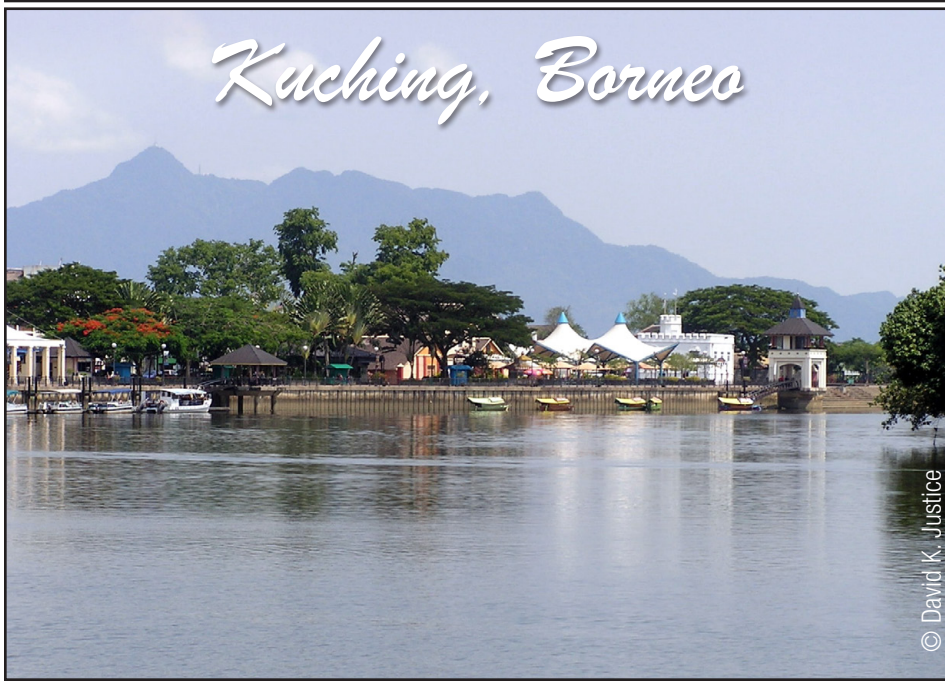


OVERSEAS

Haven Report



Kuching, Malaysia:
The City Of Cats...



Kuching: The City of Cats

By Wendy and David Justice

Kuching offers its residents a generous helping of laid-back charm along with a high standard of living.

Kuching, the capital of the Malaysian state of Sarawak, is located just inland of the northwest coast of the island of Borneo, along the banks of the Sarawak River estuary. Its surroundings offer unlimited opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts.

This is the land of endangered proboscis monkeys, orangutans, the world's biggest flower, and the elusive hornbill. Some of the world's largest remaining virgin rainforests can be explored in the many national parks just a short distance from the city.

It's not just a jungle out there though; Kuching is a pleasant and modern city. On those less adventurous days you can relax on pristine beaches, be pampered in a spa, play a round of golf, watch the latest Hollywood films, or enjoy a day shopping at one of the many malls and specialty shops in the city. Kuching is host to the famous Rainforest World Music Festival, which attracts musicians and attendees from all over the world.

The name Kuching is derived from the Malay word for "cat," and feline lovers will find themselves in good company here. The city is proud of its cat statues and cat museum and seems to have a certain lazy and content feline quality about it, as well.

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Kuching is a city that indulges the gourmet, with a vibrant street food scene and scores of restaurants serving everything from international cuisines to fresh and affordable seafood unloaded straight from the dock. Local herbs, vegetables, and tropical fruits add exciting new flavors to the dining experience.



Pretty, delicious, tropical treats are in store

Kuching may be the perfect off-the-beaten-track retirement destination. Incentives for permanent residency are even more generous here than they are in the rest of Malaysia and the cost of living is very low; less than US\$600 a month for a home-owning couple. Kuching is a cosmopolitan city that offers the comforts of living in the developed world. There is good medical care available, well-maintained roads, and modern infrastructure. Its proximity to the South China Sea and incredibly diverse rainforest ecosystems provide plenty of activities to keep residents busy year-round.

The Land Of The Hornbills

Kuching is the capital and largest city of the state of Sarawak. It is situated very near the equator in the northwestern part of Malaysian Borneo, the third largest island in the world. Sarawak is bordered on the south by the Indonesian state of West Kalimantan and on the east by the tiny oil-rich country of Brunei. Just east of Brunei and sharing a partial border with Sarawak is the Malaysian state of Sabah. The South China Sea lies directly to the north of Kuching. Sarawak, with a total population of about 2 million, is the largest in area of the 13 Malaysian states. It has 420 miles of coastline and an extremely rugged interior, much of which is still covered in primary rainforest.

Kuching is built along the banks of the Sarawak River, a significant waterway that serves as an important means of

transportation and a primary fresh water source for many of the inhabitants of southwestern Sarawak.



The island of Borneo shared by Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia

Kuching spreads over a large area that consists of a central urban core surrounded by extensive suburbs. The city of Kuching has a population of just over 300,000, with a metropolitan area home to about 600,000 inhabitants. Chinese-Malaysians make up the largest ethnic group, totaling 36.6% of the population. They are closely followed by the Malays, who comprise 35.7% of Kuching's residents, followed by the indigenous Bidayuh, who make up 12.4% of the population, and the Iban at 10.9%. The remaining 4.6% includes Indians, non-citizens, and members of the other 25 indigenous tribal groups that inhabit Sarawak.

Although the city itself is quite flat, there are impressive mountains easily visible from the city. The tallest one, Mount Santubong, rises up from the coast to an elevation of 810 meters (2,658 feet).



The Mt. Santubong provides an impressive backdrop

Sarawak is known as “[The Land of the Hornbills](#).” The hornbill is an iconic symbol of modern and traditional Sarawakian culture. It is the largest bird in the jungle, known for its huge and colorful beak and impressive tail feathers that can be as

much as a meter long. Several species of these spectacular tropical birds make this land their home.

White Rajas And Black Gold

The city of Kuching was founded in 1820 by Chinese gold and mercury miners who migrated from Indonesia. In its early days, it was a part of the Sultanate of Brunei and was known as “Gold Town.” Soon after its beginning as a settlement, Sarawak rebelled against Brunei’s Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin – an insurrection that lasted nearly two decades.

In 1839, James Brooke, an intrepid adventurer from Great Britain, sailed up the Sarawak River to Kuching. Brooke managed to bring about a peaceful settlement between the Bidayuh ethnic group and the Sultan of Brunei. The Sultan granted Brooke the state of Sarawak as his reward, starting what was to become a multigenerational period of Brooke rule. In 1841, he was officially appointed by the Sultanate as the White Rajah and sole ruler of Sarawak.



The James Brooke Bistro & Café

Although technically under the administration of the British Empire, Brooke was not beholden to Brunei or England. He governed Sarawak as his personal kingdom, with Kuching as its administrative capital. Brooke introduced a code of laws, and outlawed piracy and the practice of headhunting. He built his residence on the northern bank of the Sarawak River, next to the present-day palace, or *astana*, that now serves as the official residence of the Governor of Sarawak.

In 1868, James Brooke’s nephew, Charles Brooke, became the second White Rajah of Sarawak. Recognizing the need to improve the infrastructure in Kuching, he initiated several civic projects, including improving the city’s drainage and supervising the construction of new streets and buildings.

Following a massive fire in 1884, most of Kuching was rebuilt. The town was transformed from a ramshackle shantytown into a city with Victorian-style government buildings, telecommunication services, sports and entertainment facilities, a race course, and even a country club. A rail line constructed in 1914 served as a major mode of transportation around Kuching until it was decommissioned in 1961.

British businessman Marcus Samuel came to the area in the 1880s, importing kerosene and exporting rice, spices, copra, antiques, and polished seashells. Samuel found the shells to be particularly enticing, and when he discovered oil in Sarawak in 1910, he named his fledgling company Shell Oil.

Kuching’s prosperity continued under Charles Vyner Brooke, who became the third White Rajah of Sarawak in 1917 following the death of his father. Sarawak experienced an economic boom during this period. The rubber and oil industries flourished, replacing the gold and mercury mining of the olden days. Vyner was instrumental in modernizing the country’s institutions while protecting indigenous traditions, making his administration quite popular among the Bidayuh and other local tribes. He ruled Sarawak until the Japanese Occupation in 1941, when he fled to Australia with his family.

For the next four years, Sarawak was occupied by the Japanese. Vyner returned to Kuching after their surrender and resumed control in 1946. A few months later, he was pressured to cede Sarawak to the British government, finally ending three generations of White Rajah rule.

Independence At Last

In 1963, the British Crown Colony of Sarawak joined Malaya, Sabah, and Singapore to form the modern autonomous country of Malaysia (Singapore subsequently left the federation in 1965). Following the formation of the Malaysian state, Sarawak underwent a period of political and social unrest. It became a hotbed of secessionist, anti-colonial, and communist activity, which lasted until 1973.

Kuching continued to progress, however, and officially became an incorporated city in 1988, maintaining its position as the State Capital. Due to Sarawak’s massive oil and natural gas reserves, the petroleum industry continued to be a driving economic force in this region, creating prosperity in Kuching and the state of Sarawak.

Kuching is known as the Cat City and cat statues are scattered throughout the metropolis, while a cat museum pays them homage. Kuching means “cat” in the Malaysian language, though Kuching wasn’t actually named after a cat. The name originated from the town’s location by a stream that originated on Cat’s Eye Hill, where there was an abundance of a local fruit called the green longan, which was vernacularly known as Cat’s Eye. The stream has since been filled and Kuching’s “cat” has taken on a new meaning.



Kuching cats welcome you

A Cultural Cornucopia

Kuching is a pretty city that presents a comfortable blend of neo-classical British colonial forts, museums, and government buildings, Chinese-style churches, shop-houses and temples, and unique Borneo-style arts and crafts. It’s an eclectic mix.



The British Colonial Kuching Courthouse

Some of the finest museums in all of Malaysia are found in Kuching and offer free entertainment for locals and visitors alike. All museums here have exhibits in English – no interpreters are required.

The spacious [Sarawak Museum](#), built in 1891, is the oldest natural history museum in Borneo. There are extensive collections, with specimens of native Sarawak reptiles, mammals, and birds mounted for display. A large part of the museum is devoted to the many diverse cultures of Sarawak’s tribal population and includes displays of indigenous musical instruments, animal traps, handicrafts, and even a model longhouse that you can explore. There is also a large section of the museum devoted to the petroleum industry – the primary reason why Sarawak is as prosperous as it is today.



Sarawak Museum of Natural History

Directly across the main road from the Sarawak Museum is the [Dewan Tun Abdul Razak Museum](#). Built in a traditional Malaysian architectural style, it serves as an adjunct to the Sarawak Museum. The ground floor houses temporary exhibitions, while the top floor has large collections of prehistoric jars, brass, a longhouse gallery, some exquisite Chinese porcelain, and antique inlaid mother-of-pearl furniture. There is also an Islamic Museum in this immediate vicinity.

The Chinese History Museum is located right on the waterfront in a historic building that was erected in 1912 and used as a civil court and Chamber of Commerce by the Chinese community from 1912 to 1921. It seeks to promote an appreciation of the struggles that the early Chinese immigrants encountered when they first settled in this region.

The [Sarawak Textile Museum](#) is located very near the post office. Built in 1907, its architecture is a mixture of English Colonial and English Renaissance architecture. It’s an interesting museum with extensive displays of local textiles and the costumes of many of Sarawak’s indigenous people.

The Kuching [Cat Museum](#), also known as the Museum of Meows, is devoted to felines. It's definitely a bit kitschy, but cat lovers can explore a huge collection of more than 2,000 artifacts and memorabilia. It is located a few miles north of the river – you'll need a car, bus, or taxi to get there.

There are a few other museums in Kuching – the Sarawak Timber Museum, another petroleum museum, and Malaysia's first planetarium, the Sultan Iskandar Planetarium.

Just across from the waterfront in the downtown area lies the *astana*, the official residence of the Governor of Sarawak. The stately building is quite photogenic, and visitors can explore the gardens, but the palace is not open to visitors.



The governor's residence

Right next to the *astana* is a fort that has the appearance of an English castle. This is Fort Margherita, which was built in 1879 by Charles Brooke, the second White Rajah of Sarawak, to protect Kuching from pirates.



Teng Tua Pek Kong Temple

The oldest Chinese temple in Kuching is located right on the waterfront. The [Siew San Teng Tua Pek Kong Temple](#) is very ornate and is an active place of worship for the Chinese Buddhist community.

One of the most enjoyable ways to while away an afternoon in Kuching is to take a stroll along the waterfront. This attractive one-kilometer-long promenade stretches from the Grand Margherita Hotel west into old downtown Kuching. It is kept very clean and has plenty of park benches where you can sit in the shade and watch the river go by. There are a number of food stalls along the esplanade, as well as a few upscale restaurants. Near the end of the waterfront there is an observation tower and an open-air theater.



The Waterfront Esplanade

National Parks, Beaches, And Resorts

Outdoor enthusiasts will discover a wide assortment of recreational activities nearby. Kuching is close to six extraordinary national parks, as well as some very fine beach resorts.

[Kubah National Park](#) is Kuching's most accessible park, located just 21 kilometers (13 miles) from the city. This is a great place to go if you're a palm tree aficionado, as there are over 100 different species growing here, the richest palm habitat of its size anywhere in the world. Three rugged limestone mountains grace this park, as well as pristine primary rainforest, several waterfalls, and shady, secluded swimming holes. You'll see an amazing diversity of plant life, including many species of orchids, massive trees, and prehistoric-looking ferns. Most of the Hollywood film *Farewell to the King*, starring Nick Nolte, was filmed here.

The elusive proboscis monkey, an endangered species distinguished by its long comical nose, lives in the wilds of [Bako National Park](#), located just 37 kilometers (23 miles) from Kuching. If you are patient and just a little bit lucky, you may also catch a glimpse of wild hornbills, many varieties of monkeys, exotic armored pangolins, or an adorable slow loris. There are seven distinct ecosystems and four different varieties of carnivorous plants in this park. Bako is an excellent introduction to the natural diversity of Sarawak.



Bako's elusive proboscis monkey

Bako is located at the tip of the Muara Tebas Peninsula and accessible only by boat – it's part of the Bako adventure. There are some very remote and beautiful beaches tucked in along the rugged coastline. A well-developed trail system makes the main sites easily accessible. Basic accommodation and camping is available at the park headquarters where inquisitive monkeys will do their best to make your stay a memorable one.

You can visit the [Semenggoh Wildlife Centre](#), which operates a successful orangutan orphanage and wildlife rehabilitation center in the Semenggoh Nature Reserve, approximately 24 kilometers (15 miles) from Kuching.

Kuching is about 40 minutes south of Damai Beach and Mt. Santubong, on the shores of the South China Sea. [Damai Golf and Country Club](#), an 18-hole course designed by Arnold Palmer, is located here. The course features challenging links with spectacular views of the mountain and the South China Sea.

Nearby is the acclaimed [Sarawak Cultural Village](#). The Cultural Village is a living museum where you can explore the crafts, cultures, and traditionally built houses of the main ethnic groups of Sarawak: the Iban, Bidayuh, Orang Ulu, Melanau, Chinese, and Malays. Exhibits are staffed by members of each represented ethnic group – it is a very authentic experience and an excellent place to learn about the lifestyle and heritage of the indigenous people and early settlers of Sarawak. The Cultural Village is also the site of the annual [Rainforest World Music Festival](#), an event that attracts crowds from all over the world.



Carving musical instruments at the cultural village

About 90 minutes southeast of Kuching is pretty [Lundu Beach](#), the gateway to [Gunung Gading National Park](#). This park is one of the better spots to visit if you want to see the largest flower in the world, the endangered and odiferous Rafflesia. It may be the world's largest flower, but it certainly isn't the prettiest, and when it's blooming, it emits a smell similar to that of rotting meat.

The small fishing village of Sematan and beautiful Sematan Beach are located at the far western tip of Sarawak just past Lundu Beach. The [Sematan Palm Beach Resort](#) offers passes to their resort for those who wish to tarry here for the day and comfortable accommodation for those who choose to stay overnight. You can access numerous waterfalls and visit communal longhouses where members of the indigenous Bidayuh Selakau community live a very traditional lifestyle.

Making Music in the Jungle

For the last three years Sarawak's annual [Rainforest World Music Festival](#) has been recognized by *Songlines* magazine as one of the 25 best international music festivals in the world and in 2006, it was the winner of the Pacific Asia Travel Association's prestigious Heritage & Culture Gold Award. When the music festival was founded in 1997, it initially attracted a crowd of only 400 music lovers. The word quickly spread, though, that this was a premier music event. An estimated 22,000 visitors attended the sold-out three-day celebration in 2012.

Nowadays, people from all over the world travel to the Sarawak Cultural Village just north of Kuching to attend this gathering. On average, 18 to 20 musical groups perform during the festival. [Musicians](#) come from as far away as Brazil, France, the U.S., Congo, Mongolia, and Reunion Island to perform and share their musical traditions.

The Rainforest World Music Festival is held during the second week in July. Fans can mingle with the performers, and are actually encouraged to chat with them during workshops and impromptu concerts held during the day. In the evening the music moves to the dramatic tropical setting of the main stage. If you're a music lover and plan to come to Kuching for the festival, be sure to get your tickets early and book your flight and lodgings well in advance.



Rafflesia: not the prettiest flower in the forest

The [Borneo Highlands Resort](#) is just 56 kilometers (35 miles) southwest of Kuching, right on the Malaysian-Indonesian border. At an elevation of 3,300 feet, it's a tranquil place to cool down and enjoy the outdoors. The resort offers golf, a fitness center and spa, bicycling, and plenty of opportunities for simply relaxing. The 18-hole golf course, designed by Neil Crafter, exploits the natural features and contours of its highland location. You can view the resort's membership information [here](#).



Lake Batang Ai in the highlands south of Kuching

Shopping Fun

Malaysians love to shop, and the residents of Kuching are no exception. There are six malls in and around the city, and more that are under construction. [The Spring](#) is the largest lifestyle shopping mall in Sarawak. It includes a wide variety of stores, a supermarket, restaurants, and a food court.



Head to Old Downtown for antiques or handicrafts

The Main Bazaar, located right along the waterfront, is the oldest street in Kuching, featuring a row of 19th century Chinese shophouses overlooking the river. This is the best part of town to go to if you're shopping for antiques or handicrafts.

Stroll east past the Grand Margherita Hotel and you'll end up on Padungan Road, which is the hub of Kuching's Chinatown. Tiny, bustling stores conduct a thriving business selling Chinese herbs, teas, household goods, and groceries. This is a good part of town to explore the many family restaurants serving authentic Chinese and Hong Kong cuisines.



Padungan Road – the hub of Chinatown

The Sunday Market

Few cities in Asia have markets as fascinating as those in Kuching. Whether you're browsing for Bornean art and handicrafts or stocking your kitchen shelves, you'll find your senses stimulated at Kuching's Sunday Market. The market actually begins on Saturday and encompasses a large area a few miles from downtown.

The outer ring of the Sunday Market consists of vendors selling street food and stalls with goods appealing primarily to tourists – beautiful hand-crafted beaded purses, Sarawak artwork, t-shirts with designs of proboscis monkeys, and other handicrafts. Bargaining is expected in this part of the market and if you are a skilled haggler, you can often negotiate a good price.

In the central part of the market, narrow paths reveal a large "dry" market, with vendors selling everything from rice and noodles to canned goods and fresh exotic spices. You'll find a wide selection of fresh produce in this area, too – fruits such as bananas, dragon fruit, rambutan, longan, and the smelly



Spoiled for choice at the Sunday Market

but extremely popular durian fruit compete for space with fresh, locally grown produce including delicious ferns, fresh greens, tomatoes, onions, bamboo shoots, and countless other vegetables both familiar and strange.



Durian – the (stinky) King of Fruits



A pretty good price for prawns

Although the Sunday market is Kuching's largest and most interesting market, there are other markets in the city that are fine for everyday shopping. Along the west end of the waterfront promenade, you'll find small and crowded shops selling all sorts of groceries, as well as the misnamed "Open Air Market," which is located in an enclosed building near the bus station. Just beyond the eastern edge of the waterfront is the start of Chinatown, where you can browse many small family shops and restaurants.

If you prefer shopping in air-conditioned comfort, you'll find several western-style supermarkets. There are several [Everrise Departmental Stores](#) right in Kuching and two [Giant Hypermarkets](#) that offer a full selection of groceries. There is also the Ting & Ting market, near the Borneo Hotel, that has a large selection of imported foods.

Here's a sample from a shopping basket of goods purchased at Everrise Supermarkets and local markets. A complete Kuching shopping basket can be viewed [here](#).

Apples, green	Basket of 5	3.50 RM
Bananas	1 kg.	2.50 RM
Broccoli	1 kg.	8.90 RM
Cabbage	1 kg.	3.20 RM
Carrots	1 kg.	2.80 RM
Bananas	1 kg.	2.50 RM
Broccoli	1 kg.	8.90 RM
Potatoes	1 kg.	2.50 RM
Tomatoes	1 kg.	6.00 RM
Beef, ground	400 grams	7.20 RM
Chicken, leg quarters	1 kg.	11.50 RM
Butter, imported French	250 grams	4.70 RM
Cheese, slices	250 grams	10.50 RM
Eggs	10 medium	3.70 RM
Milk	1 liter	5.30 RM
Beer, Anchor Strong, local brand	1 can, 330 ml.	7.30 RM
Coffee, whole bean	1 kg.	14 to 22 RM
Orange juice	1 liter	5.90 RM
Drinking water, local brand	1.5 liters	0.50 RM
Wine, Calvet Cabernet 2007	750 ml.	69.00 RM
Bread, sliced white sandwich-style	1 loaf	2.70 RM
Cooking oil	1 liter	3.65 RM
Flour	1 kg.	2.90 RM
Potato chips, local brand	160 grams	4.90 RM
Spaghetti noodles, San Remo	500 grams	4.90 RM
Spaghetti sauce, San Remo	500 grams	9.90 RM
Sugar	1 kg.	2.40 RM
Hand soap, Lux	2 bars	2.80 RM
Razor, Gillette Mach 3	1 razor	12.90 RM
Shampoo, Pantene	700 ml.	27.70 RM

Eating Out And Entertainment

[Star Cineplex](#) and [MBO Cinema](#) are large cinema complexes in Kuching. Going to the movies is an affordable pastime here - tickets are never more than 9 RM, even during peak times.



Happy Diners at the Top Spot

There are many fine restaurants in this city - everything from chic, modern eateries to unassuming proletarian cafés. Seafood lovers should head directly to the Top Spot Center. Here, you'll find about a dozen vendors selling everything from shellfish, crab, and lobster to fresh, locally caught fish and fine fresh vegetables. A decadent meal for two will normally cost less than 60 RM (less than US\$20 at time of publication). The busiest stalls generally have the best food – try the giant prawns and stir-fried ferns at [number 25](#), which has been voted as one of the top ten restaurants in Sarawak.



Deliciously fresh at The Top Spot

Many restaurants sell local favorites such as Hokkien-style chicken rice or roasted pork rice for around 4 RM, and a dim sum meal for two at a good Chinese restaurant should be easy to find for well under 50 RM. For some of the best Hong Kong and Macau food found outside of China, visit the inexpensive and popular [Kim Bay Restaurant](#).

Leave The Cold Behind

Kuching is located just a little more than one degree of latitude north of the equator and is warm and humid year-round.

Daytime temperatures average 88F (31°C) during the day and drop into the mid 70s (mid 20s centigrade) at night. There is little seasonal variation in temperature – it rarely exceeds the mid-90s (mid-30s centigrade) or dips below the mid 60s (18-20°C).

Kuching has a tropical rainforest climate and receives about 165 inches of rain annually, making this one of the wettest urban areas in Malaysia. Rainfall may occur at any time, and at least some rain falls on an average of 247 days per year. Sudden thunderstorms that clear within an hour or two are the norm, though from November through March, it's the monsoon season and the rain can last all day.



River transport is as common as a taxi ride

Monthly precipitation during the monsoon averages close to 20 inches, but even during the driest months, monthly rainfall still averages more than seven inches. Long-time locals have learned to have an umbrella handy whenever they go outside, regardless of the time of year.

High humidity is a constant companion in the tropics. Expect the average humidity to remain above – often well above – 80% throughout the year.

Although flooding is not an annual occurrence in Kuching, it does happen occasionally. Due to Kuching's location below the prevailing trade winds, typhoons are extremely rare, as are strong windstorms. However, there are often refreshing breezes in the evening, resulting in weather that often feels a bit cooler than Malaysian cities on the mainland.

Foreigners from temperate climates often find that the warm climate agrees with them and consider the weather ideal. All shopping malls and many public buildings and businesses are air-conditioned.

Kuching Climate Chart Monthly Averages

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Max. Temp.	87	84	87	90	91	89	88	89	90	89	89	87
°F / °C	30.6	28.9	30.6	32.2	32.8	31.7	31.1	31.7	32.2	31.7	31.7	30.6
Min. Temp.	73	74	73	74	74	73	74	73	74	74	74	74
°F / °C	22.8	23.3	22.8	23.3	23.3	22.8	23.3	22.8	23.3	23.3	23.3	23.3
Humidity	87%	87%	87%	85%	82%	84%	83%	82%	84%	85%	86%	89%
Rainfall	18	18	18	9.9	14	12	7.2	13	8.2	12	19	20
Inches / mm	457	457	457	251	356	305	183	330	208	305	483	508

Farmers in neighboring Kalimantan, Indonesia still burn their fields during the dry season and large parts of the countryside in Sarawak - indeed in all of Borneo - are being cleared and burned to make way for new palm oil plantations. This can cause uncomfortable levels of haze and smoke in Kuching during the burning season, which lasts from July to early November.



Beautiful empty beach at Bako Park

Retirees Are Welcome Here

Unlike many countries in Southeast Asia, the Malaysian government actively encourages foreign residents to relocate to their country. Retirees will find that Malaysia is an easy country to live in with or without a retirement visa. The Immigration Department has complete information presented in English on their [website](#) that will be of interest to people who want to stay here on a long-term basis.

Visitors from most Western and European countries receive a free 90-day Social Visit Pass from the Customs and Immigration counter at the airport or border crossing when they enter the country. This is different than a visa, as there is no charge and advance application is not required.

It is theoretically possible to renew a Social Visit Pass while remaining in Malaysia, but it is much easier to make a quick “visa run” to a neighboring country once every three months. A trip to either Brunei or Indonesia from Kuching is easy to accomplish in a day or two. Alternately, you can take an inexpensive flight to Singapore or elsewhere in Asia through one of the budget airlines serving Kuching. When you return to Malaysia, you will receive a new pass good for another 90 days. This process can be continued for an extended period of time – in some cases, for years.



There are open, green spaces in the city to sit and relax

There are excellent incentives available to those who qualify for the *Malaysia My Second Home Programme*, or the MM2H visa, as it is commonly called. For those who meet the financial requirements and wish to make a longer-term commitment to living in Malaysia, the MM2H visa may be a better option than quarterly visa runs. This program is especially enticing for younger retirees, as there is no minimum qualifying age for the MM2H visa.

The MM2H visa permits stays of up to ten years with no restrictions on entering and leaving the country, and it's renewable. Under certain conditions, the MM2H visa also

allows participants over the age of 50 to hold part-time employment. See "[Living Long Term in Malaysia – The Social Visit Pass and Malaysia My Second Home Programme](#)" for a thorough explanation of Malaysia's retirement incentives.

For Those with Disabilities

One of the many things that make Malaysia a special place to live is the people's attitudes toward those with disabilities. People will frequently go out of their way to assist a disabled person. Anyone with a recognizable disability will be impressed with the helpfulness and consideration shown to them by others.

Most sidewalks in any urban area are constructed with special tiles to accommodate people with vision-impairments. Malaysian Sign Language (Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia, or BIM), which is related to American Sign Language, is used among the deaf community.

Larger parking garages and lots will generally have a few spots reserved for handicapped access. Kuching has developed somewhat slower than Peninsular Malaysia, however, making life a bit more challenging here for disabled people – especially those with mobility impairments. Sidewalks are often built on hills and rather than having inclines, they have steps, which makes it difficult or impossible to navigate for those in wheelchairs. Frequent rains can make surfaces slippery. Handicapped access to buildings is inconsistent, as well, though it is improving. But there are people living in Kuching who have mobility impairments and are able to get around quite well. You would want to have your own vehicle, however, as public transportation is not equipped for wheelchairs.

LGBT Life in Malaysia

Although there is growing tolerance of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals, homosexuality and all forms of sodomy (including heterosexual oral sex) continue to be illegal throughout Malaysia and are potentially punishable by fines, prison, and even whipping or caning. Legally, you can't even watch a film depicting homosexuals unless the characters either "repent" or die. Although there certainly are homosexuals living in Malaysia, they do so quietly and discretely. Any open displays would be frowned upon and could result in unpleasant consequences.

This can be confusing because there is also much more same-sex touching – especially hand-holding – in Malaysia than there is in Western cultures, particularly among women. There are a number of NGOs that are working to raise awareness and acceptance, though their progress is slow. Those looking for an active gay scene would find Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries to be more attractive choices than Malaysia.

Bringing Your Pet to Malaysia

There is no limit to the number of pets that you can bring to Malaysia, but certain conditions need to be satisfied. Generally speaking, you'll notice very few dogs in Malaysia. Considered to be "ritually unclean" animals by Muslims, they must be kept outside of the living areas of a home. In practice, the few canine pets that you see in Malaysia belong to Chinese-Malaysians, Indian-Malaysians and foreigners. You'll also see few, if any, large dogs anywhere in the country. There are no religious rules concerning cats, however, other than to treat them with kindness and to feed them well. See "[Moving To Malaysia With Your Pet](#)" for details of restrictions and how to prepare your pet for travel to Kuching.



Treat us kindly and feed us well

Housing Is Good Value Here

When you first arrive in Kuching, you'll probably want to find a place to rent before making the commitment to purchase a home. Fortunately, rents are very reasonable and construction standards here are quite good. Most homes are of concrete construction, which makes them resistant to fire, and bugs, as well as keeping them cool in the warm weather. Although prices vary enormously depending on whether you want to live like a local or indulge in luxurious top-end housing, you'll find a wide selection of homes that will meet your budget.

It is quite possible to find comfortable homes that rent for around 1,000 RM per month (less than US\$350).

There are a few condominiums and apartments in the city, but most dwellings are either terrace homes, which consist of a row of connected residences, or free-standing single-family homes. Single-story houses and terrace homes typically have three bedrooms, and two-story homes usually have three bedrooms upstairs and one bedroom on the ground level.

The two local English-language newspapers, the [Borneo Post](#) and the [New Sarawak Tribune](#), have classified sections that are good resources to refer to when house-hunting. Since so many residents of Kuching speak English, finding a home can often be as easy as simply making a few phone calls and meeting with landlords. Alternately, you can drive around neighborhoods that look appealing, making notes of homes with “To Let” or “For Rent” signs posted by entry gates or in other visible locations. See [“Kuching - Housing For Sale And For Rent”](#)

Another option for finding a home is to use the Internet. The leading Internet portal [iProperty](#) lists properties for sale or rent in Kuching or anywhere in Malaysia, and there are several smaller Internet databases that have listings in the Kuching area, as well.

If you want to avoid the complications of house-hunting on your own, there are several realtors and property management companies doing business in Kuching. Using a realtor or agent can be a very efficient way to see a variety of homes with a minimum amount of hassle.



An Old Downtown street scene

The agent’s skills at negotiating the best deal for you make their services invaluable. A Malaysian agent will have a much better understanding of the culture and the various nuances of the local real estate market than you will.

A good agent who is eager to show you places that meet your criteria can really take the hassle out of renting. Property agents are paid by the property owner when a buyer or renter is secured. It is to their advantage to find you a place that you’ll like. Real estate companies in Kuching include [Kuching Top Property](#), [WTW International](#) and [Hornbill Real Estate](#). Please see the [“Kuching Contact List”](#) for a more complete list of house-hunting resources.

Landlords will usually ask for a lease with a minimum duration of six months and, more often, a duration of one or two years. If you are only willing to commit to a six month stay, you narrow your choices and your rent will likely be higher than it would be if you are willing to make a longer commitment.

Generally, you pay for the first month’s rent plus a deposit equal to two months. All utilities are the responsibility of the tenant, and the landlord may request that you make a utility deposit equal to six months or one year’s worth of gas, electric, and water. Most foreigners choose to keep the utilities in their landlord’s name to avoid having to pay large “foreigner deposits.” The deposit is refunded within 30 days of vacating the property and often much sooner. The tenant customarily pays utility bills as they become due – any post office will accept payments.

Homeowners associations haven’t quite made it to Kuching – unless you are purchasing a condo, it is unlikely that you will be charged any HOA fees.

When you sign the lease, you’ll be responsible for paying a stamp fee to the government, usually between 300 RM to 600 RM. This non-refundable tax is charged to the tenant based on the total price of the lease. The landlord or agent will take the signed lease to an official who registers and notarizes the document. The landlord and tenant both receive notarized copies of the lease, which are written in plain English.

The suburbs north of the river are populated mainly by ethnic Malays. Southeast Kuching is well integrated and most of the foreigners living here choose to live in this part of town. Preferred areas include the suburbs Tabuan Jaya, Kings



Native totem-pole art

Center, Green Heights, Tabuan Desa, Tabuan Heights and Pelita Heights, which are all located relatively near the airport.

Though flooding is not common in Kuching, some parts of the city near the river experience occasional flooding. Unless you are moving to a high-rise condo along the waterfront, you'll want to use caution moving to low-lying riverfront areas.

Buying a Home

Both resident and non-resident foreigners can purchase real estate in Malaysia. Generally, the minimum purchase price of each property must be at least 500,000 RM. More than one residential property may be purchased, and property can be used to produce rental income. Financing is available for up to 60 per cent of the value of the property, and additional loan incentives exist for individuals who are participants in the Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) visa program.

As a foreigner, there are real advantages to buying property in Kuching. There is a lower minimum purchase price for real estate in Kuching than there is anywhere else in Malaysia outside of a few other cities in Sarawak. You can buy a home, including land, for as little as 350,000 RM, whereas the required investment in the rest of Malaysia is 500,000 RM.

You'll find a large selection of attractive houses and condominiums in this category. Homes in this price range will be spacious residences in good urban or suburban neighborhoods, and will usually include gated parking, a small yard and at least three bedrooms. Expect to see air conditioning in several rooms, large kitchens, spacious living areas, big bedrooms, and large, modern bathrooms. See ["Kuching - Housing For Sale And For Rent."](#)

It is legal to purchase a home for less than 350,000 RM if you spend money to remodel, upgrade or improve it. Many homes listed as unfurnished, especially newer homes, are bare shells. For example, the kitchen may not have any cabinets or appliances – it's just an empty room with plumbing and electrical hookups. It's up to the buyer to outfit their home to their tastes. It's also possible to negotiate fittings and fixtures as a condition of sale. Most developers will add these costs onto the base purchase price so that the final price reflects these improvements, thereby bringing the cost of the home up to the minimum amount required for foreigner purchase. Foreigners can secure mortgage financing in Malaysia. The



Look for the little details

required down payment is generally 20% if the buyer has a retirement visa or 40% for non-resident foreigners. Thirty-year mortgage rates are relatively low – about 6.6% at the time of writing. Taxes are paid when the house is purchased and when it is sold – there are no annual property taxes in Malaysia. See ["All About Taxes"](#) for more information.

When looking at properties for sale, you'll notice many places in Kuching are referred to as "leasehold," rather than "freehold." Leasehold means that you are leasing the house and the land, generally with either a 60-year renewable lease or a 99-year lease. In contrast, freehold homes are not leased – you own the title to the property. Freehold homes often retain their value or appreciate in value more than those properties sold as leasehold.

Settling In

Getting settled in your new home is a straightforward process. As a foreigner, you may have to pay an extra deposit or two, but otherwise, things seem to work just about the same in Malaysia as they would anywhere else.

Apartment Rental - monthly cost per couple in Malaysian ringgit (RM)

	1200	Furnished 3-bedroom apartment
Rent (median price – can be higher or lower)		
HOA Fees	0	N/A
Property Taxes	0	N/A
Transportation	105	Bus, occasional taxis
Gas	15	Used for cooking
Electricity, water, trash	225	Using A/C at night and most days
Telephone	12	Digi prepaid cell phone plan – New SIM plus 100 minutes
Internet	68	Unlimited access with Maxis
Cable TV	120	English language channels and movies through Astro
Household Help	0	Allow 450 RM if full-time, live-in maid is required
Groceries	675	
Entertainment	600	Frequent meals out, miscellaneous expenses
TOTAL	3020	US\$972 (at the exchange rate 12/3/12)

House Ownership - monthly cost per couple in Malaysian ringgit (RM)

		Furnished 3-bedroom house
HOA Fees	0	
Property Taxes	15	Quit claim fees
Transportation	105	Bus, occasional taxis
Gas	15	Used for cooking
Electricity, water, trash	225	Using A/C at night and most days
Telephone	12	Digi prepaid cell phone plan – New SIM plus 100 minutes
Internet	68	Unlimited access with Maxis
Cable TV	120	English language channels and movies through Astro
Household Help	0	Allow 450 RM if full-time maid is required
Groceries	675	
Entertainment	600	Frequent meals out, miscellaneous expenses
TOTAL	1,835	US\$590 (at the exchange rate 12/3/12)

Monthly Car Ownership Expenses in Malaysian ringgit (RM)

Registration and license plates	5
Insurance	45
Maintenance	150
Fuel	100
Car Total	300 (US\$97)

Cell phone coverage is excellent, and land-lines are available. Malaysian banks are stable and modern. Cable TV, reliable Internet, and English-language newspapers keep you informed. Power outages are rare and the water that comes out of the tap is considered safe enough to drink.

Getting Online

For foreigners living abroad, the Internet is often a necessity. The Internet in Kuching is widely available, reliable and reasonably priced. Most commonly, access is through 3G and 4G “broadband” systems, where a device similar to a cell phone transponder is plugged into the computer and communicates with transmission towers.

[Maxis](#), [Telekom Malaysia](#) (TM), and [Hotlink](#) are the main Internet providers in Kuching. Locals say that Maxis provides the widest and most reliable coverage in Sarawak. Monthly access charges vary depending on the connection speed desired, whether you want a prepaid or postpaid plan, and any special promotions, but expect to spend between 48 to 88 RM per month for unlimited Internet access.

DSL Internet, which requires a fixed line telephone, offers faster speeds and costs around 84 RM per month for unlimited access. DSL is only provided by Telekom Malaysia. Foreigners are usually charged a deposit ranging from 100 RM to 500 RM. These deposits are generally waived if you are living here under the Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) program. If you do have to pay the deposit, it will be refunded when service is terminated and the final bill is paid.



© David K. Justice

The Cultural Village dancers

Talking On The Telephone

Getting a fixed telephone line and service can often be difficult and is often unnecessary. The ponderously bureaucratic [Telekom Malaysia](#) holds a monopoly on fixed line communications in Malaysia and is notorious for its customer service. Fixed line plans, which start at 48 RM per month, include free local calls and reasonable long-distance rates. Foreigners are charged a substantial deposit for fixed-line service and the wait to install new service can sometimes be quite lengthy.

It is much easier to use a prepaid or postpaid cellular phone plan. Prepaid plans do not require long-term contracts, and calls are very affordable. [Digi](#) and [Hotlink](#) are two popular providers that offer prepaid and postpaid plans. If you purchase a prepaid plan, adding airtime is simple. Almost any convenience store or shopping center will have a “top up” kiosk. As with Internet, foreigner deposits are assessed if you choose a postpaid plan.

Mobile phones in Malaysia are not locked, so any phone can be used with any provider. Switching from one provider to another is as easy as purchasing an inexpensive new SIM card. None of the mobile providers in Malaysia charge subscribers for incoming calls or incoming text messages. Activation fees are minimal or nonexistent when initiating new service.

Watching Your Favorite Shows

You'll find no shortage of television shows and movies in English. Cable channels offer the same programs available in the West, including BBC, CNN, Bloomberg, ESPN, MTV, and Nickelodeon. Movie channels, such as HBO, Max, and Fox, bring Hollywood to Malaysia. Cable is provided by [Astro](#), which offers a wide range of plans. Monthly rates will vary depending on the package, ranging from 38.95 RM for basic cable to 155 RM for a plan that includes every premium channel. You can view the complete list of packages [here](#).

Hooking Up Utilities

Electricity is dependable and is transmitted at 220 volts. Electrical outlets use three-pronged, UK-style plugs. The utility bill, which includes charges for electric and natural gas, is sent to the residence. It can be paid at any post office or directly to the utility company. If you place the utilities in your own name,

expect to pay a foreigner deposit of around 1,000 RM. This deposit is refundable after service has been in your name for a year or when you discontinue service and pay your final bill. If you are renting, you'll find that most landlords are happy to keep the utilities in their name, so you will not have to pay the foreigner deposit.

Water is billed separately and paid monthly at the post office. Tap water is treated and is considered safe enough to drink without boiling, though most residents do use inexpensive water-boilers or purchase bottled water. Restaurants provide purified water or bottled water for their customers, and ice is sanitary and safe to consume.



A colorful view from the Waterfront

Money Matters

The many banks located in Kuching offer a full range of banking services. Although it can be difficult to open a Malaysian bank account unless you have a long-term visa such as the MM2H or are employed, it may be possible at some banks with a letter of reference from your current bank. Currently, Standard Chartered Bank states that they will allow foreigners with only a Social Visit Pass (a 90-day pass) to have accounts with them

– just bring your passport to the branch where you want to have the account. There is no minimum deposit required.

ATMs can be found throughout the city and in just about every small town throughout Malaysia. Most ATMs participate in the global networks Plus, Cirrus, and Star so it is easy to withdraw cash from an account in your home country. ATM machines accept four-digit PIN codes. Very few banks charge service fees for using their ATMs. Several U.S. and European-based banks including Standard Chartered, Citibank, and HSBC have branches in Kuching.

Health Care – Not Wild or Primitive

Hospitals are well-equipped and modern, and most medical personnel speak fluent English. Health care costs are very low and the quality of care tends to be excellent. Since Malaysia does not have any medical schools, all physicians practicing medicine here have received their education abroad – mainly in the E.U., Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S. Health care is of such a high standard and so reasonably priced that the country's tourism board claims that Malaysia is one of the world's top five medical tourism destinations – visits are growing at a rate of 30% annually.

There are three private medical centers in Kuching that are accustomed to treating foreigners.

[Timberland Medical Centre](#) is an acute-care specialist center that provides a wide range of medical and surgical services. They have specialty clinics providing cardiology, dermatology, eye surgery, gastroenterology, dialysis, advanced diagnostic imaging, and more. A consultation with a physician costs only 15 RM during regular business hours or 30 RM at night. They also offer an assortment of [health packages](#), designed for the prevention and diagnosis of medical conditions. In addition to having a busy outpatient clinic, Timberland also provides inpatient services. A private room costs 140 RM per day.

The internationally accredited [Kuching Specialist Hospital](#), managed by the healthcare conglomerate KPJ, offers a wide range of outpatient and inpatient specialist services, including several operating theaters, an intensive care unit, and a 24-hour emergency room. They also offer a selection of [wellness packages](#). In-patient daily rates for a private room start at 180 RM. It is located about six miles from downtown Kuching.



A great variety of architectural styles

The [Normah Medical Specialist Centre](#) is a private 130-bed acute care hospital and medical specialist hospital located about 3.5 miles from the city center. It has been open since 1988. They offer primary and family medical care and their specialties include pediatrics, cardiology, oncology, and general surgery. They were the first hospital in Borneo to offer open-heart surgery. Normah Medical Specialist Centre is a full-service hospital, with a 24-hour emergency department, laboratory, outpatient, and inpatient services. They are accredited by the Malaysian Society for Quality in Health and working towards receiving a Joint Commission International (JCI) accreditation. An inpatient room costs 180 RM per day.

Kuching's fourth hospital is the Sarawak General Hospital, which is locally referred to as Hospital Bau. This public hospital is mainly used by lower income Malaysians.

If you have an extremely difficult or complex medical concern that for some reason can not be treated in Kuching, you can take a short flight to Singapore, which boasts some of the finest medical care in the world. Costs for health care in Singapore are well below what you can find in the West.

The [Lions Nursing Home](#) offers skilled nursing care, physiotherapy, and rehabilitation services for those requiring long-term care.

Dental care in Kuching is also a bargain. English-speaking dentists are generally foreign-educated. Clinics are clean with modern equipment, and there is no need to fly to Singapore or elsewhere to have dental treatment. Clinics here tend to operate independently, rather than being hospital-affiliated. You can find a list of dental clinics in Kuching at the [701 Directory](#).

In Malaysia, many routine medical tests do not require a doctor's prescription. X-rays, blood tests, mammograms, and many other procedures can be done on a walk-in basis, with physician consultations available but not mandatory. Additionally, many drugs that require a prescription in the U.S. can be obtained over-the-counter in Malaysia, often at a considerable savings on the price of the identical drug sold in the U.S., Canada, or Europe.



Traditional Chinese medicines and herbs

If you take a specific medication, you will want to confirm that you can get the identical medication in Malaysia. Tylenol is sold under the brand name of Panadol. Ibuprofen is available, but generally requires a physician's prescription. Narcotic pain medications are not available anywhere in Malaysia, and strict rules govern the importation of controlled substances of any kind.

English Spoken Here

"Sarawakians have always taken pride in our command of the English language, and we must continue to maintain this mastery for the sake of the future generations...The English language is a language which opens up the global world to us." Baru Bian, Sarawak legislator and native rights lawyer

Kuching is a very diverse city, with sizeable Chinese, Malay, and aboriginal "orang asli" populations. Each ethnic group

has their own language and to complicate things even further, subgroups within each group will often have their own unique language or dialect. Fortunately, most locals are able to speak at least some English. Sarawak, with Kuching as its administrative capital, was a British protectorate and colony until the early 1960s. English is the primary language of instruction for math and science in primary and secondary grades. English is also the de facto language of business and the primary language of many Malaysians. Unlike most of Malaysia, English is designated as an official language of Sarawak.

The official language of Malaysia is Bahasa Malaysia. This language uses the same alphabet as English and is pronounced phonetically. There are many borrowed words of English, Arabic, Chinese, Indian, Dutch, and Portuguese origin. Bahasa Malaysia is considered one of the easier languages for English speakers to learn. The Malay dialect spoken in Sarawak, though similar to Bahasa Malaysia, is different enough to be categorized as its own language, Bahasa Melayu Sarawak. Within Sarawak there are differences in dialect, as well – for example, Bahasa Orang Laut is spoken in some coastal areas of Sarawak.



Colorful Downtown Kuching

Although Hokkien is the native tongue for most Chinese living in Kuching, Mandarin is the standard language of education and is understood by most Chinese-Malaysians living here. The Iban language is spoken by native people of the Iban ethnic group, but almost all of them also understand Bahasa Malaysia and many are conversant in English. Other tribal groups, such as the Bidayuh, Melanau, and Orang Ulu may speak their own native languages. As a result of the ethnic diversity in this part of the world, an impressive number of Malaysians are conversationally fluent in three or four languages. Most residents of Kuching speak at least their native tongue,

the official language Bahasa Malaysia, the local Bahasa Melayu Sarawak, and English.

The lack of a homogeneous language is clearly reflected around the city. Signs for road names are written in Malay and Chinese. Shop names and other private signs are usually written in Malay, English, and/or Chinese. Most road signs alerting drivers to construction zones or hazards are in Malay. Any interactions that you may have with the government or civil servants (at the post office, for example) will likely be with ethnic Malays speaking either Bahasa or English.

Airplanes, Automobiles, and Boats

The only way to get to Kuching from North America or Europe is to fly. The recently renovated Kuching International Airport, located about seven miles from downtown, is served by several major airlines, including [Malaysia Airlines](#), [Silk Air](#), and the budget carriers [Air Asia](#) and [Tiger Airways](#). [MASwings](#) offers flights to several cities in the Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah, as well as destinations in Brunei and Indonesia. There are several flights daily that connect Kuching with Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and various destinations throughout Malaysia.

Travel around Malaysian Borneo can be done by air, road, and boat. The well-maintained Pan Borneo Highway connects Kuching to the rest of northern Sarawak, Brunei, and Sabah. Some areas of the rugged interior, however, are accessible solely by boat or air or can be reached only on primitive four-wheel drive logging tracks or footpaths.

Some useful words and phrases in Bahasa Malaysia:

Good morning: *Selamat pagi*
 Good afternoon: *Selamat tengah hari*
 Good evening: *Selamat malam*
 Goodbye: *Selamat tinggal*
 Yes: *Ya* (*Auk* in Bahasa Melayu Sarawak)
 No: *Tidak* (*Sik* in Bahasa Melayu Sarawak)
 Please: *Tolong*
 Thank you: *Terima kasih*
 Help!: *Tolong!*
 Eat: *Makan*
 Drink: *Minum*
 Sleep: *Tidur*
 To emphasize a point: *lah* (*bah* in Bahasa Melayu Sarawak)



Comfortable air travel to the interior

The first major town to the east of Kuching is Sibul – a place worth visiting in its own right. The quickest and most pleasant way to get to Sibul is by boat. It’s a five-hour trip to Sibul along the coast of the South China Sea and up the immense Rejang River. The Express Bahagia and Express Sejahtera boats make the trip every morning at 8:30 AM. Traveling by car, the journey takes about six hours, or seven hours by public bus. From Sibul, you can take a boat further up the Rejang into the wild interior of Malaysian Borneo.



River transport is big in Borneo

Long-distance buses departing from Kuching’s Penrissen Bus Terminal leave throughout the day to destinations throughout Sarawak. Although rail service was common during British colonial times, there are currently no trains in Sarawak.

Getting Around Kuching

Kuching is quite spread out, covering over 1,800 square kilometers (700 square miles) of low density suburbs. You will probably want to have your own vehicle if you live here. Roads in the city are paved and in generally good repair. There is a refreshing lack of traffic jams during most times

of the day, though major roads can become congested during the weekday rush hour. There are quite a few traffic circles (roundabouts) in the city, and busy intersections have traffic lights.

Driving is on the left – it’s not a difficult adjustment to make if you’re from the U.S. or Canada, but something to keep in mind if you are considering importing your vehicle. International driver’s licenses are recognized in Malaysia, and if you come here under the MM2H program, you can apply for a Malaysian driver’s license. Auto insurance is mandatory, as is the use of seatbelts. Helmets are also mandatory while operating or riding on a motorcycle. It is illegal to talk or text on a hand-held phone while driving in Malaysia.



Kuching Waterfront - where do you want to go?

There are public buses that serve the city. Kuching City Area Transport (CAT) is the primary bus company serving Kuching, though there are other bus services, as well. City buses are very reasonably priced but few are air-conditioned. They depart from a confusing maze of streets a few blocks from the waterfront. The slightly more comfortable minivans that ply various routes in the city leave from this same area. If you don’t know what bus or minivan to take, the tourist information centers can be helpful, or you can ask any bus driver. There are also low-cost shuttle buses provided by the State Ministry of Tourism that transport tourists around the main sites in Kuching, though they aren’t practical transportation if you live here permanently. Kuching doesn’t have a comprehensive public transportation system – routes are limited and buses don’t run at night.

There is no shortage of taxis in Kuching. Taxis have meters installed but drivers will not use them – you’ll need to negotiate the fare before entering the cab to ensure a fair price. It costs around 10 RM to go even a few blocks, with longer trips costing more. If you are relying on public transportation to get around, you’ll discover that there will be many instances when you’ll have to enlist the services of a taxi, which will have a negative impact on your budget.

It’s a Safe City

Crime-wise, very little happens in Kuching. The risk of being a victim of a violent crime is almost nonexistent in Kuching, and acts of terrorism are extremely unlikely. According to the [Global Peace Index](#), Malaysia is the 19th safest country in the world – in comparison, the United States ranks 82nd. There have been some reports of purse snatching, especially near the tourist areas of the waterfront. Motorbikes veer close to the sidewalk as the driver (or passenger) attempts to grab the shoulder-bag of a passing pedestrian. The police, though, have recognized this as a problem, and have erected “pedestrian barriers” that block access from the streets to the sidewalks, thus keeping pedestrians safe.



Only crocodile cannons here

The greatest danger comes from motor vehicle accidents, though even these are relatively rare, as the roads are quite good and traffic laws are enforced.

There is very little risk of acquiring malaria in Kuching or in urban areas near the coast of Sarawak, so no prophylaxis (preventative medication) is generally recommended. However, if your travels take you to remote inland areas, you may want to consider taking anti-malarial medication. Of greater concern is [dengue fever](#), which is a problem throughout the Asian

tropics, especially in urban areas such as Kuching. Dengue, also known as breakbone fever, is transmitted to humans by infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. The greatest risk occurs during daytime hours when these mosquitoes feed. Since there is no vaccine, bite prevention is the key in avoiding this extremely unpleasant but rarely fatal disease. Use a good DEET-based repellent when mosquitoes are present.

Food sanitation in Kuching is good and the risk of acquiring a food related illness is low. Street-food vendors are inspected regularly by the Health Department, but if you have any doubts, just find a busy vendor – you can be assured that their food is fresh and hygienically prepared.

Annoying insects do live in the tropics and you may want to plan a budget that includes an exterminator service.

Most likely, the only safety issue that you’ll have will be getting caught in a rainstorm without an umbrella. No need to fret – after a few times, taking an umbrella whenever you go outside will be as natural as putting on your shoes.

Retiring to the City of Cats

If living in a modern city in the heart of “wild” Borneo piques your imagination, you’ll find that Kuching will meet or exceed your expectations. Outdoor enthusiasts will be more than happy with the opportunities here – from pristine beaches, virgin jungles, and unparalleled exotic wildlife to golf and hiking in the cool highlands. Those preferring the city life will be heartened by plentiful shopping, museum hopping and abundant culinary delights. Whether you prefer the cosmopolitan life or the great outdoors, you’ll be immersed in the unique culture of this region, interacting with the indigenous community and gaining appreciation for the distinctive arts and traditions of a people found nowhere else in the world.

Kuching has other attributes that make it a nice place to live. It is one of the cleanest cities in Malaysia and has been recognized by the United Nations, the Alliance for Healthy Cities, and the World Health Organization for this achievement. English speakers will have no problems at all communicating in Kuching, as English is an official language of Sarawak.

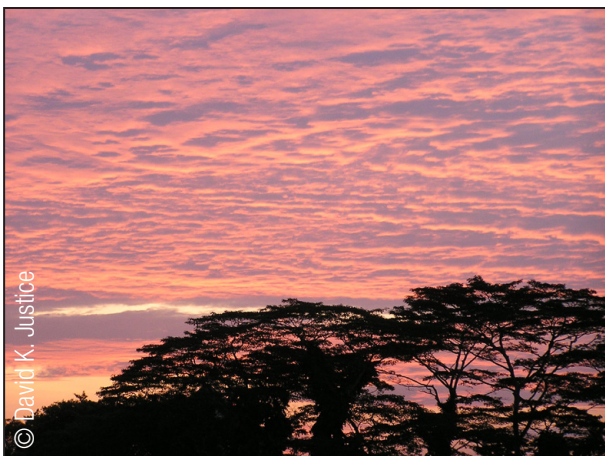
Foreign homebuyers enjoy special incentives with the My Second Home Program in Kuching, and select other cities in the state of Sarawak, and are permitted to purchase



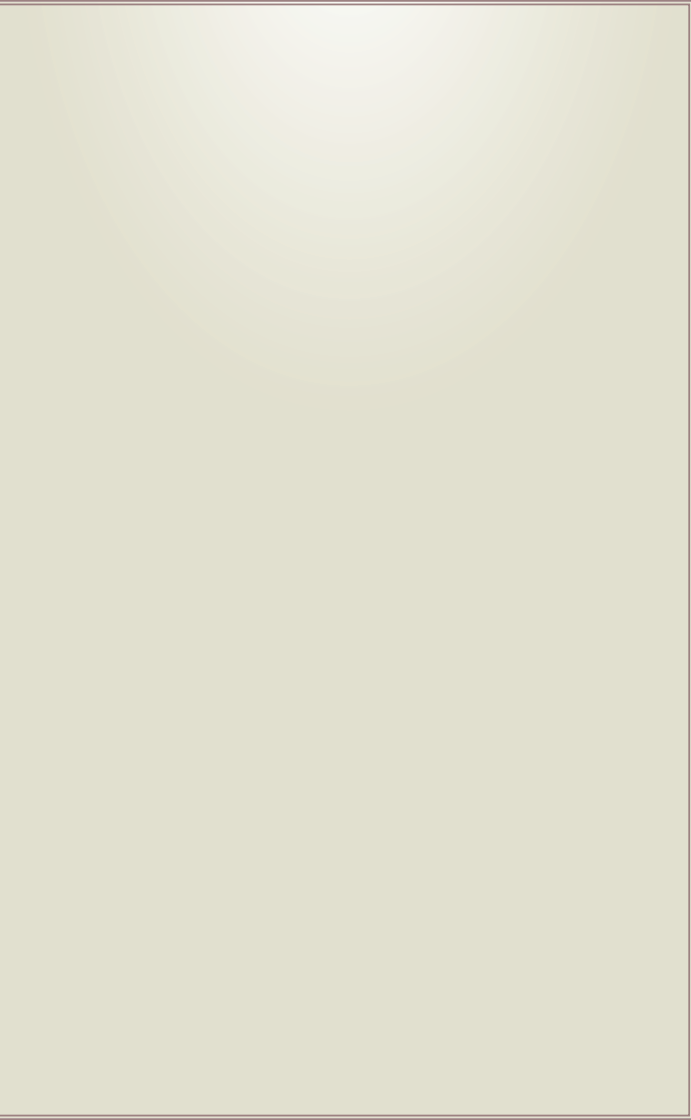
Native art, old and new

property at a lower minimum investment than in any other state in Malaysia.

There are certainly foreigners living here who first came to Kuching as tourists. The city's vibrant cultural scene, exciting outdoor activities, and culinary pleasures encourage visitors to take a relaxing stretch and linger here. Kuching offers retirees plenty of incentives to stay for months or years. 🇲🇾



Linger long in the Land of the Hornbills



Overseas Retirement Letter Online Resources

[Kuching Monthly Budget](#)

[Kuching Shopping Basket](#)

[Kuching Contacts](#)

[Kuching Houses for Sale and Rent](#)

[Malaysia's Visas and Residency Program](#)

[Malaysia's Tax System](#)

[How to Move to Malaysia with a Pet](#)

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- Whether it's better to rent or to buy, given the local market right now...
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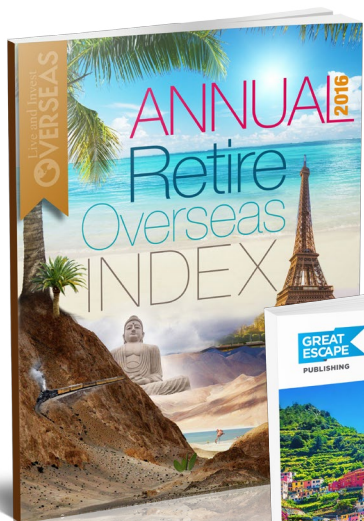
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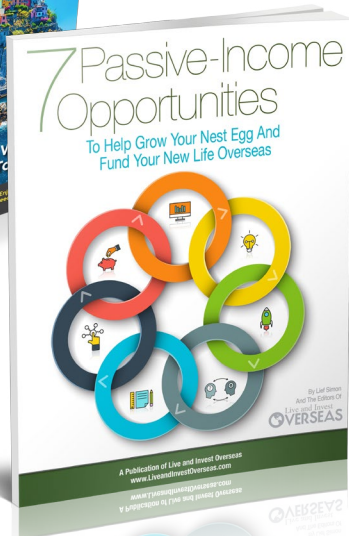
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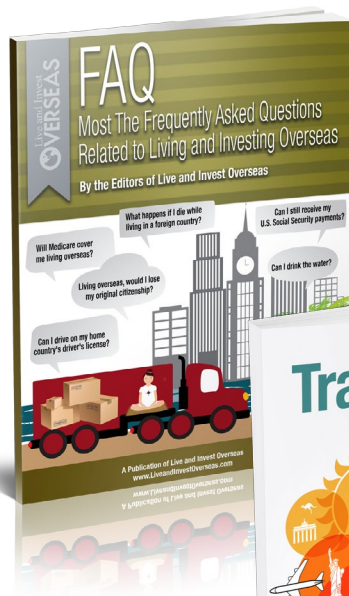


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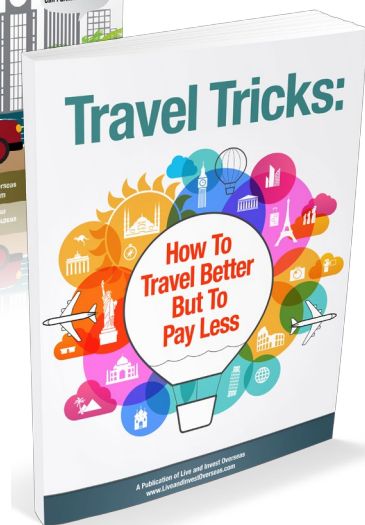


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Kathleen Peddicord
Publisher, Live and Invest Overseas

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