

Catch the bus to KL



THE PALACE: The residence of the royal family is an impressive white and gold palace in Middle Eastern meets Malay style.

PHOTO: JOHN BISHOP

John Bishop finds that exploring Kuala Lumpur is best by bus

KUALA Lumpur is well suited for a hop on/hop off bus tour operation and the KL version of this widely used type of tourist service is cheap, efficient and goes to all the right places.

It is difficult for the ordinary traveller to walk from one attraction to another. And the bus and underground train operations aren't as good as Hong Kong, Singapore or European cities.

The distances between attractions are often too great, it is almost always too hot and sometimes the footpaths aren't in the best repair.

So the hop on/hop off bus service is ideal.

The route starts and ends outside the Tourism Malaysia office, which dispenses maps, advice and sells souvenirs and crafts, but travellers can climb aboard anywhere on the route. Maps available on board show the route and the attractions at

each stop.

The tour covers all the major attractions from the KL Tower and Petronas Twin Towers, to the shopping and entertainment area known as the Golden Triangle, which includes Burkit Bintang, a kaleidoscope of mall-based shopping and eating experiences through to

“ The Central Market is pretty much a must see place.

temples, Chinatown, the sports stadium, the Islamic museum and the Malaysian craft village.

The palace of the Malaysian royal family situated a few kilometres out of the city centre is included. No entry is allowed, but there's a five minute photo stop for families to pose with the guards on duty.

The Menara Tower is the second stop on the hop on/hop off bus tour. Go up the tower, which is already on a hill to get the best panoramic view of the

city. Choose carefully which level you wish to go to. Both the viewing floors offer 360 degree walk around, but one is open and the second is closed (but cheaper).

There's also an F1 simulator ride for adrenaline junkies and children.

On the way to the Bintang Walk, the bus will take you past the craft cultural centre where, in a relaxed setting, you can see the potters, silversmiths and weavers at work, and buy their products.

The Bintang walk is the opening to the shopping malls full of high-class shops, international brand labels, restaurants and services. The Pavilion Mall received the Mayor's Best mall in KL award last year.

The Central Market is a must-see place. The locals saved the building, originally the fish market, from destruction and now it houses dozens of small stalls selling Malaysian centred crafts and clothing. This is where you buy batik not brands.

You can also have your feet and legs cleaned by tiny flesh

eating fish which tickle the skin while devouring your loose scales. Fun and harmless and only 10 ringgit (\$2.50) for 15 minutes.

From there it is only a short walk to Little India and the Sri Mahamariamman Temple, a series of Hindu shrines.

On the way back to downtown, the bus stops at the Parliament (open for tours) and the Botanical Garden, and then the bird park, which is also the getting-off point for the butterfly park, the national Planetarium and the Memorial to Ton Abdul Razak, the man who led Malaya to independence and was its first prime minister.

Next is the Islamic Art Museum and National Mosque, both of which encourage visitors.

On from there to the Royal Selangor Club, which is a grand old wooden building from colonial times still well-maintained and full of pictures from that era. Only members can buy drinks.

** John Bishop visited Kuala Lumpur courtesy of Malaysia Airlines and Tourism Malaysia.*



Don't miss the bus

THE buses run every 20 to 30 minutes starting at 8am and finishing at midnight on a defined route of 23 stops.

Tickets cost 45 ringgit (about \$17), last 24 hours, and can be bought on board.

The purple and magenta buses are two storied with half the upper deck open air, and they have their own designated and numbered bus stops – typically on main roads where other buses stop, so they are not hard to find.

The service covers all the major attractions and places of interest, often several at one stop.

A must see is the Petronas Twin Towers (although there are now actually three towers). It is probably the visual symbol most closely associated with Kuala Lumpur. The buildings themselves are a strong architectural statement, with their narrowing spires and cross link, but even more strongly they speak of Malaysia's prosperity built in part on wealth from oil.

This is KL's most prestigious business address. No one can live there.

Petronas, the state-owned energy company, owns and has developed most of the area around the towers and no expense has been spared.

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