

Local's Guide  
**Kuala Lumpur**

Architect Eleena Jamil leads us on a tour of Malaysia's capital, taking in the art, food and sights that make her home city such a vibrant destination.

**KUALA LUMPUR, OR** KL to the locals, was a sleepy tin-mining town before it was turned into a city by the British in the late 19th century.

Since then, it has grown at a frenetic pace. The past three decades in particular have been its most ambitious, with a rigorous drive to build the shiniest and tallest skyscrapers to rival those of other world cities. Yet, despite this generic growth, you can still find places within KL that feel special and unique.

For an architect like myself, Kuala Lumpur is packed with all kinds of inspiration. Within a relatively compact area, you find old Chinese shophouses, colonial, Mughal-style domed buildings, modernist structures and lush gardens, all sitting between soaring skyscrapers.

KL's population is largely made up of Malay, Chinese and Indian people, along with expatriates from all over the world, resulting in a city packed with idiosyncrasies. Each of these cultures have their own customs yet they come together as a homogenised society. This strong sense of identity is evident in the wide variety of food, styles and pursuits.

But first of all, where to stay? I would recommend the modern and centrally located **Traders Hotel** — book a room



## MEET YOUR GUIDE

**Eleena Jamil** is an award-winning architect who was based in the UK for nearly 12 years prior to setting up her own practice in Kuala Lumpur. Jamil is fascinated by the idea of architecture that speaks of a place and helped the Kuala Lumpur City Hall to realise one of the country's first formal bamboo structures at the Perdana Botanical Garden.

facing the gleaming Petronas Twin Towers. You can go on a morning jog around the verdant KLCC Park and, if you're travelling with children, they will love the public wading pool and playgrounds. Come evening, head to the hotel's rooftop for drinks at the SkyBar and enjoy stunning views of the city.

If a hotel with minimalist aesthetics is not for you, then stay at the colonial-style **Anggun Boutique Hotel**. When the sun sets, nearby Jalan Alor turns into a food stall souk with tables and chairs spilling onto the road, offering a huge variety of hawker fare. For somewhere more tranquil, head towards the Ampang district and stay at **Villa Samadhi** in Taman U Thant. Ask the hotel to direct you to its off-site restaurant **Tamarind Springs**, located about a 25-minute drive away in the forest-like suburb of Taman TAR — it's a hidden gem, serving traditional Indochinese food in a tropical setting. Be sure to try my all-time favourites — papaya salad and steamed sea bass.

Take a stroll around Kampung Baru, a Malay village enclave surrounded by tall buildings in the heart of the city. It was settled by the British in 1900 to entice rural folk into KL. Today, it retains some of its original character with traditional timber houses on stilts dotted along the narrow streets, but plans to develop the area may mean these buildings disappear soon.

Start your walk early in the morning to avoid the heat and try my favourite breakfast dish, *nasi lemak*, at a popular stall called **Nasi Lemak Antarabangsa**. It's a classic Malaysian dish of coconut steamed rice and spicy *sambal* sauce, combined with anchovies, boiled egg, peanuts and cucumber. Also order *teh tarik* (pulled tea) — a sweet milk tea that's made frothy with a process called 'pulling', which involves pouring the tea ➤



1. **SkyBar** Head to Traders Hotel for a cocktail.
2. **KLCC Park** The view of the Petronas Twin Towers from the public wading pool.
3. **Perdana Botanical Garden** Seek shade under the petal-shaped shelter.
4. **Nasi Lemak with Rendang** Sample traditional Malaysian cuisine.
5. **Islamic Arts Museum** Ceramic bowls on display.
6. **Suria KLCC** Stroll through one of KL's biggest shopping malls.
7. **Jalan Alor** One of the many bustling outdoor street food spots in Kuala Lumpur.





## DRINK

**SkyBar Traders**  
Hotel, Kuala Lumpur  
City Centre; [www.shangri-la.com/kualalumpur/traders/dining/bars-lounges/sky-bar](http://www.shangri-la.com/kualalumpur/traders/dining/bars-lounges/sky-bar).

## STAY

**Anggun Boutique Hotel**  
7&9, Tengkat  
Tong Shin, Bukit  
Bintang; [www.anggunkl.com](http://www.anggunkl.com).

**Tanah Aina Farrah Soraya Eco Resort**  
8 Jalan Tras, Raub,  
Pahang; [www.tanahaina.com/farrah-soraya](http://www.tanahaina.com/farrah-soraya).

**Traders Hotel**  
Kuala Lumpur  
City Centre; [www.shangri-la.com/kualalumpur/traders](http://www.shangri-la.com/kualalumpur/traders). **Villa Samadhi**  
8  
Persiaran Madge,  
Taman U Thant;  
[www.villasamadhi.com.my](http://www.villasamadhi.com.my).

## SEE

**Bank Negara Malaysia Museum and Art Gallery**  
2 Jalan Dato' Onn;  
[www.museumbnm.gov.my](http://www.museumbnm.gov.my). **Harith Iskander**  
[www.harithiskander.com](http://www.harithiskander.com). **Islamic Arts Museum**  
Jalan  
Lembah Perdana;  
[www.iamm.org.my](http://www.iamm.org.my). **Perdana Botanical Garden**  
Jalan Kebun  
Bunga; [www.klbotanicalgarden.gov.my](http://www.klbotanicalgarden.gov.my). **The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre**  
Sentul Park, Jalan Strachan;  
[www.klpac.org](http://www.klpac.org).

## SHOP

**Central Market**  
Jalan Hang Kasturi;  
[www.centralmarket.com.my](http://www.centralmarket.com.my). **Pavilion Kuala Lumpur**  
168  
Jalan Bukit Bintang;  
[www.pavilion-kl.com](http://www.pavilion-kl.com). **Suria KLCC**  
Kuala Lumpur  
City Centre; +60  
3 2382 2828.





8

from a height repeatedly (and with much flair) between two large metallic mugs. This effectively cools the milky tea and enhances its unique flavour.

Although also in the city, **Perdana Botanical Garden** feels light years away from the hustle and bustle. Established in the 1880s, this charming 100-hectare park has a beautiful collection of plants and trees. For lunch, stroll to **Restoran Rebung**, where chef Ismail Ahmad offers delicious local Malay fare.

The **Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia** is in the vicinity and, although it's not very large, it is well curated and informative. For families, you can visit the excellent **Bank Negara Malaysia Museum and Art Gallery's** hands-on Children's Gallery.

We Malaysians love trawling malls of a weekend because it's a great way to escape the heat and humidity of the city. **Suria KLCC**, at the foot of the Petronas Twin Towers, is one of the best. From here, walk for about 10 minutes through the air-conditioned elevated walkway to the **Pavilion**, where you can also catch a movie. Exit the mall and walk along the vibrant Jalan Bukit Bintang, which is akin to a high street and lined with shops and restaurants. For local souvenirs and crafts take a train to **Central Market** to scour for interesting wares, such as *batik* (dyed fabric) and great local artworks, among the ubiquitous touristy trinkets. The market is housed in an architectural gem — a lovely 1930s Art Deco building surrounded by colonial shophouses — so it's worth a visit for that alone.

Kuala Lumpur also has a vibrant performing arts scene and there is no better place to enjoy the local talent than

**8. Central Market**  
 Hunt for Malaysian arts and crafts in this Art Deco gem.

**9. Villa Samadhi**  
 Relax poolside from the comfort of a day bed.

**10. Jalan Bukit Bantang**  
 One of Kuala Lumpur's main high street shopping strips.



9

## EAT

### Nasi Lemak Antarabangsa

4 Jalan Raja Muda Musa, Kampung Baru; +60 1 9881 8080. **Restoran Rebung** 5-2, Aras 5, Parkir Bertingkat Bukit Aman, 1 Jalan Tanglin, Taman Botani Perdana; www.restoranrebungdatochefismail.com.

### Tamarind Springs

Jalan 1, Taman Tun Abdul Razak; www.tamarindrestaurants.com/tamarind-springs.html.



10

by catching a play, dance performance, or live music at the **The Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre** in the tranquil Sentul Park.

At a glance Malaysians seem like a serious lot, but in reality most of us have a self-deprecating sense of

humour. To see a glimpse of this, catch a show with Malaysian stand-up comedian **Harith Iskander**, who was dubbed 2016's 'Funniest Person in the World' by the Laugh Factory chain.

For something completely different, visit the surrounding areas of the region. If you have time, drive an hour north-west to Kuala Selangor. At night you can hire a boat and guide to take you along Selangor River to see the glowing fireflies.

Alternatively, take a 90-minute drive north of KL and immerse yourself in the wonders of the Malaysian rainforest by spending a few nights at **Tanah Aina Farrah Soraya Eco Resort** near Raub. It's only accessible via off-road 4WD, as it's in the jungles of Pahang, but it's an ideal spot for adventure-seekers. 🌿

**GETTING THERE** VIRGIN AUSTRALIA OFFERS FLIGHTS TO KUALA LUMPUR WITH ITS CODESHARE PARTNERS SINGAPORE AIRLINES AND SILK AIR. TO BOOK, VISIT [WWW.VIRGINAUSTRALIA.COM](http://WWW.VIRGINAUSTRALIA.COM) OR CALL 13 67 89 (IN AUSTRALIA).