Going Places

MARCH 2025

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Discover Sunway City Kuala Lumpur where extraordinary experiences are indeed only moments away.



Contents

42 he slow road

to Banda Aceh

Steeped in legend, Sumatra's northernmost province is the ideal place for slowing down

36 For art's sake

Landmark exhibitions, bluechip art fairs and grand reopenings make Paris a great

time to visit this year

1

CONTENTS

8 12 reasons to love Malaysia

Best new eats, fashion for Eid, homegrown brands and things to do in March

28 A perfect weekend in Kolkata

Wander the city's bustling streets and discover intriguing echoes of its cultural heritage at every turn

51 This is Malaysian Hospitality

Complimentary Wi-Fi on MH flights, seamless airport transfers and exclusive hotel deals

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About the cover The contrasting architectural styles of IM Pei's Louvre Pyramid and the main building Photo: Shutterstock

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Elevate

Savour the unique flavours of Surabaya's Arab Qua<u>rter</u>

enjoy Chennai's striking beaches and explore

Phnom Penh's thrivi central business dist

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Ink Publishing Pte Ltd 48 Craig Road, Singapore 089686 Tel: +65 3165 4100, +60 3 2728 1334 www.ink-global.com

MCI (P) 028/05/2024

Printed by: United Mission Press Sdn. Bhd. Business Registration Number: 755329x

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Dear guests,

As we enter the holy month of Ramadan, a time of reflection, compassion and unity, we are reminded of the importance of meaningful connections and the journeys that bring us closer together.

Just as Ramadan emphasises bonds of togetherness, Malaysia Aviation Group remains committed to connecting you with your loved ones and destinations worldwide. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your continued trust in Malaysia Aviation Group's airlines. Your support has been vital to our journey, and we hope to make every travel experience with us a memorable one.

This March, we're thrilled to recommence flights to Paris after nearly a decade, offering travellers the opportunity to experience the city's timeless romance, rich history and vibrant culture. As Malaysia's flag carrier, we want to make your travels a seamless, enjoyable experience by connecting you to both new and familiar destinations. This aligns with our "Time For" campaign, which reminds travellers that there's no better place or time to explore the world than now.

In addition, our sister airline Firefly will also be expanding its Subang jet operations with new flights to Kuching and Singapore at the end of this month, providing more travel options, be it for work or leisure. With exclusive fares across our wide network and curated offerings, these initiatives reflect our commitment to inspiring travel and fostering meaningful connections worldwide.

As part of our continuous efforts to enhance your onboard experience, we are delighted to extend our complimentary Wi-Fi offering to all passengers travelling on board our Boeing 737-8 aircraft.

This service has been deployed gradually since December 2024, and with the recent addition of three aircraft in January and another three in February – bringing the total to 11 out of 25 – we look forward to expanding the free Wi-Fi offering as we progressively receive the complete fleet of 25 Boeing 737-8.

This follows the complimentary Wi-Fi available on selected widebody aircraft which we introduced in November 2023; allowing all passengers, regardless of cabin class or loyalty tier, to stay connected to loved ones or catch up on work.

On board, we continue to introduce new in-flight dining offerings, taking you on a culinary journey with local and destinationinspired dishes.

Following the introduction of our Best of Asia menu in 2024, passengers across Business Class and Economy Class can indulge in the rich flavours of Thailand and South Korea in Q1 2025, with a menu featuring Korean fried rice and green curry chicken.

In addition to making your onboard experience both comfortable and convenient, we want to ensure the on-ground experience is just as premium.

Some of you may have experienced our recently introduced fleet of luxury sedans from Mercedes-Benz Malaysia – which includes the S 580e Plug-in Hybrid and allelectric EQS 500 4MATIC – when travelling between the Main Terminal and Satellite Building at KLIA Terminal 1.

This Private Terminal Transfer Service is made exclusive for Business Suite and Business Class passengers, as well as Enrich Platinum members, to travel in premium comfort. This collaboration combines luxury travel, lifestyle and sustainability, while also offering our loyal Enrich members with exclusive privileges.

Thank you for choosing to fly with us; it is our privilege to serve you. We look forward to welcoming you on board and making your journeys truly memorable.

On behalf of everyone at Malaysia Aviation Group, we wish you safe travels and enriching journeys throughout Ramadan, filled with warmth, compassion and the true essence of Malaysian Hospitality. Ramadan Mubarak to all.

Izham Ismail

Group Managing Director Malaysia Aviation Group



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Martin and Martin

ome places never stand still. Whether through cultural reinvention, artistic revolution or a renewed appreciation for history, the spirit of renewal is palpable in some of the world's most exciting destinations, inviting us to explore them with fresh eyes.

Take Paris (p34). It's always a good idea, but this year, it feels especially compelling. The City of Lights is buzzing with grand reopenings, landmark exhibitions and blue-chip art fairs. At the same time, art institutions are unveiling exciting updates and small international galleries are flourishing, setting the stage for Art Basel that is taking place in the Grand Palais this October. Add to that a dynamic food scene, and Paris is once again at the centre of it all.

From the beating heart of Europe, we take a slower, more introspective journey to Sumatra, Indonesia. Writer Marco Ferrarese starts in Medan, weaving through vast forests and mountain villages before reaching Banda Aceh (p42), the charming provincial capital of Aceh. It's a reminder that the best journeys aren't just about the destination, but everything in between.

Meanwhile, Phnom Penh's Daun Penh district is quietly emerging as one of Southeast Asia's vibrant hotspots, offering everything from heritage landmarks to luxury shopping and a thriving arts scene (p24). Over in Kolkata, tradition meets transformation – historic tea rooms sit alongside contemporary art galleries, stylish coffee roasteries and sleek riverside developments, making it an intriguing weekend escape.

Other exciting places worth exploring include the stunning beaches of Chennai (p18), the grand bazaars of Delhi's Chandni Chowk (p19) and Surabaya's fascinating Arab Quarter (p22). You can also marvel at China's tallest structure, Canton Tower, a breathtaking landmark in Guangzhou (p17). If this is your first visit to Malaysia, you'll find plenty of reasons to fall in love with the country (p9).

Wherever your travels take you, may they bring a renewed sense of wonder and discovery.

This issue's contributors



Lindsey Tramuta Writer, "For art's sake", p34

Lindsey is a Paris-based culture and travel journalist, bestselling author and podcaster. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times, Condé Nast Traveler, Fortune Magazine, Afar, Travel & Leisure* and *Vogue,* among many others.



Muhammad Fadli *Photographer, "The slow* road to Banda Aceh", *p42*

Muhammad is a

documentary and portrait photographer based in Jakarta. His personal projects focus mostly on history, environment and social issues.



Marco Ferrarese Writer, "The slow road to Banda Aceh", p42

Marco is a Penang-based guidebook author and travel journalist inspired by the offbeat and the unusual. His work has been published in *Lonely Planet, Nikkei Asia* and the *BBC*, among others.

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REASONS



The female graze

Penang

In a leafy suburban neighbourhood in George Town, the delightful **Third Culture Dining** – helmed by chef Sue Ching Khor (pictured) and an all-women front staff – offers one of the best finedining experiences in all of Penang.

The setting: An elegant mid-century modern bungalow that was once an architect's private residence.

The menu: An intriguing and creative showcase of locally sourced seasonal ingredients.

The technique: Expect flavours that shaped Sue Ching's childhood in Malaysia, paired with French culinary techniques (she spent a decade training with French mentors, starting at the acclaimed Institut Paul Bocuse in Lyon).

The must-eats: A starter of mushroom soup flavoured with *kulim*, or jungle garlic, a local nut with a truffle-like aroma. Khor's take on the traditional lam mee features extra-large prawns in a bouillabaisse sauce and angel hair pasta.

The pièce de résistance: Pulling it all together is the warm and attentive service that makes the whole meal feel like a visit with someone stylish and fabulously well-travelled. The space is intimate, so best to book in advance. **thirdculturedining.com**



TO LOVE MALAYSIA

Bold flavours, inspiring people and unforgettable places



2 ^{Kuala Lumpur} A feast for the senses

Chinatown's flavours get a bold, modern twist at Upper House KL, on the rooftop of **B** Hotel on Petaling Street. Enjoy inventive bites such as wagyu ox tongue on roti benggali, octopus with laksam sauce (a fish-based coconut milk gravy) and ulam raja (King's salad). The mains include succulent wagyu beef, and smoked duck with orange, Sichuan peppers and lotus leaf buns. The view is just as spectacular: the Merdeka II8 – the second tallest structure in the world - in all its towering glory. instagram.com/upperhouse.kl









Perak Escape to paradise

Weekend escape idea: the TUI BLUE The Haven Ipoh stands out for its breathtaking limestone scenery. Its centrepiece is a seahorse-shaped pool opening out into a lake that surrounds Rockhaven, a 200-million-yearold limestone monolith often veiled in mystical morning mist. Located at the

base of a mountain, part of a range that forms the spine of Peninsular Malaysia, the hotel's 150 deluxe rooms offer private balconies with panoramic views of the dramatic cliff faces.

Whether it's a morning hike, a lakeside yoga session or simply unwinding by the pool, we can't think of a more serene setting for a rejuvenating escape. *instagram. com/tui_blue_the_ haven_ipoh*



4

Kuala Lumpur

Tea down the rabbit hole The menu at **Surreal**, the newly opened café in Kuchai Lama, lists inventive sips such as fermented apple, cinnamon and brown sugar tepache, alongside The Cousins, a shaken Earl Grey infused with apricot and plum.

The food is just as playful: hotate pai tee (scallop in a pastry shell), coconut green soup and grilled misomarinated tentacles with pumpkin purée.

The dreamlike aesthetic extends beyond the plate – whimsical fonts and Edward Hopper's *Soir Bleu* add to the ambience, creating a dreamlike atmosphere that feels like you've stepped into a painting. *instagram.com/surreal_kl*

5

Sabah

Kopitiam classics meet modern café vibes

Craving a touch of kopitiam nostalgia in Kota Kinabalu? **Atukuupi** in Central Plaza – a portmanteau of *atuk* (grandfather) and *kopi* (coffee) – brings a modern café twist to beloved kopitiam staples. Signature drinks include salted Atukuupi Masin coffee, Atuk Cham (a rich coffee and tea blend) and the Traditional 3 Layer Atuk Teh, infused with gula melaka and evaporated milk. The food menu stays true to its local roots with staples like nasi lemak, *nasi kuning* (yellow rice) and the indulgent Atuk *Roti Banjir* Curry – a comforting dish of toast drenched in fragrant curry. *instagram.com/atukuupi* ^{Kuala Lumpur} Through the portal

6

Fusion food takes centre stage at The Portal Café in Johor Bahru, with dishes like tender Bulgogi Beef Hash with pulled brisket. It's not just the food that draws you in. Since opening early last year, the café has been living up to its name with a captivating atmosphere. Its carved-out entrance leads to a sci-fi-inspired walkway before you're greeted by a print of René Magritte's The Son of Man and the two main attractions an inverted tree that grows downward and a surreal terrarium that spans the length of the café, instagram.com/theportalcafe



Look here

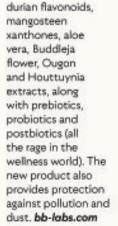
Just in time for Eid, **Dia Guild** and **Tangsi Tujuh** team up to impress with the limited-edition LIUK collection, which features elegantly crafted pieces that play on whites, pastels and translucence.

The collection includes the standout Keluk, a voile poncho-style top with a Mandarin collar and delicate blue embroidery; the Desir long tunic, adorned with delicate clematis flower motifs; and the bold kebaya lapel Gelora top, featuring intricate cutout lace and pink embroidery. *diaguild. com; tangsitujuh.com*



Here comes the sun protection

Headed for the beach? The ingredients in the new Tribiotics 360° Suncare (SPF50) by homegrown skincare brand **B&B Labs** reads like a delicious concoction of the region's best. It contains botanicals such as

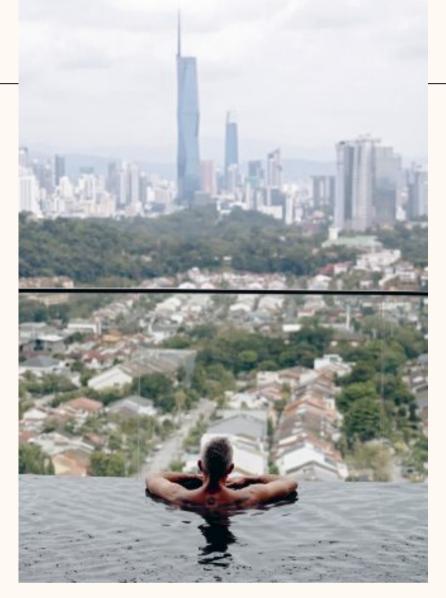


Negeri Sembilan

Raptor watch

Heads up, birders – the annual Raptor Watch in Tanjung Tuan, Port Dickson coincides with the spring migration of raptors across the Straits of Malacca. Thousands of birds of prey – including eacles, hawks and falcons – utilise Tanjung Tuan, with its iconse Cape Rachado Lighthouse, as a crucial stopover point during the long journey south, providing a spectacular aerial display for observers.

Organised annually by the Malaysian Nature Society, part cipabls can join guided birdwatching tours, attend informative taks and learn about raptor conservation. So, set your date for 8 and 9 March 2023 and make your way to Tanjung Tuan to witness this thrilling celebration of nature and wildlife: mns.my





10

Kuala Lumpur

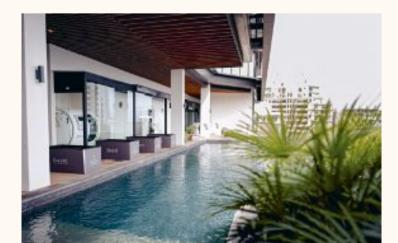
Say hello to a new, improved you

After experiencing the wonders of biohacking – a proactive, science-driven approach to making small, intentional changes to your body, diet and lifestyle – Yap Yann Fang set up **ĀMANÏ Biohacking Club**, Asia's first and largest biohacking club, in the suburb of Bangsar. It is now a sanctuary for individuals with a holistic approach to wellness, offering a range of spaces that includes a salt pool and a meditation cave. It also conducts workshops that teach people who cook for you at home how to whip up nourishing meals.

Cutting-edge technologies

worth checking out include Waveguard, a machine that protects against harmful EMF radiation, and the BioCharger Lounge, where electromagnetic frequencies and light therapy work to revitalise cellular energy.

Ready for your superfit era? **amani.com.my**





Sarawak Call of the wild

The 3rd of March is World Wildlife Day, making this month a fitting time to visit the Semenggoh Wildlife Centre in Sarawak, a short drive from Kuching. The centre, located within the Semenggoh Wildlife Nature Reserve, focuses on rehabilitating the animals for release back into the wild. while conducting research and breeding programmes. The centre has become synonymous with orangutan rehabilitation and is a natural haven for these critically endangered primates. Semenggoh offers visitors a rare chance to see Borneo's great apes up close in their natural habitat - and even feed them along the trail. sarawakforestry.com



Watch out!

12

Did you know that Malaysia is home to one of the most acclaimed young watch brands on the global market? **MING**, an independent watch brand founded by designer and photographer Ming Thein, is out to reignite excitement in watch collecting.

Collectors and watch nerds will be thrilled to know about Thein's latest creation: the recently unveiled 37.09 Uni, inspired by the sea urchin.

The new, limitededition model is a black DLC-coated dive watch with vibrant orange accents, reflecting the sea urchin's tough exterior and prized interior.

It can operate in depths of up to 600m and is pretty fancy too, featuring a sapphire caseback and a rotating sapphire timing dial.

Powered by an automatic Sellita SW300. M1 movement, the 37.09 Uni introduces a newly designed hour index.

Notably, it is the first MING watch to feature orangeemission Super-LumiNova, echoing its namesake's vivid hues.

For those into rare finds, only 150 pieces are available. *ming.watch*



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Planning a visit to the Petronas Twin Towers? Eager to uncover the street art of Pasar Seni or shop in Bukit Bintang? Simply hop on the nearest train and arrive at your destination stress-free. With



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MARCH 2025 MALAYSIAAIRLINES.COM 17



Marina Beach



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Beauty and the breeze

Where to enjoy sun, sand and striking views in **Chennai** BY KHURSHEED DINSHAW

India's southernmost state of Tamil Nadu is

home to a quarter of the country's total coastline, so it's no surprise that it's also where you'll find an assortment of stunning beaches. Spoiler alert: the strong undercurrents at these beaches make them unsafe for swimming. Still, in the state capital of Chennai, beachside hangouts – think seaside dining while enjoying the Bay of Bengal's incoming breeze – are among the most rewarding ways to spend the day. Here's where to go. Located about 4km from Chennal Central station, Marina Beach is the jewel among Chennal's most popular beaches. Nearly 12km long, this is the country's longest beach. Start the day with a walk against a postcard-perfect surrise and end with an equally gorgeous sunset, barefoot on powdery golden sand, lapping waves in the distance.

In the evening, the beach transforms into a pulsating hub of activity with stalls selling food and souvenirs. Shop or embark on a mini tour of the impressive statues - from Mahatma Gandhi to Avvalvar - that line the beach promenade. Spend time at the lighthouse, at the Victory War Memorial and at Perarignar Anna Memorial, dedicated to CN Annadurai, Tamil Nadu's first chief minister. The University of Madras, one of India's oldest and most well-known universities, is located across the Kamaraiar Promenade, making the beach a popular hangout spot for students. Be prepared for the crowds.

centre is the Besant Nagar Beach or Bessle, also known as Edward Elliot's Beach, People flock to this clean and less crowded beach for its serene vibe and proximity to delicious food. The Kai Schmidt Memorial, a tribute to a Danish man who had drowned while attempting to save a woman's life, is one of the beach's most recognisable markers. From Bessie, you can visit the multi-tiered Shri Ashtalakshmi Temple dedicated to Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, the neo-Gothic Santhome Cathedral Basilica housing the tomb of St Thomas the Apostle, the Arupadal Veedu

Thiruvanmiyur Beach

Vailankanni Shrine.

Murugan Temple and the Annai

Smart bikes - equipped with LED lights and a built-in GPS - are available for rent at this beach, 16km from Chennai Central, Not up for cycling? You can also spend the afternoon on a slow, leisurely walk, playing beach volleyball or visiting the Marundeeswarar Temple and the Thiruvanmiyur market. If you're lucky, you might even witness a seasonal bioluminescence show - in October last year, the coast was lit up in neon blue, created by chemical reactions from diverse organisms in the water.



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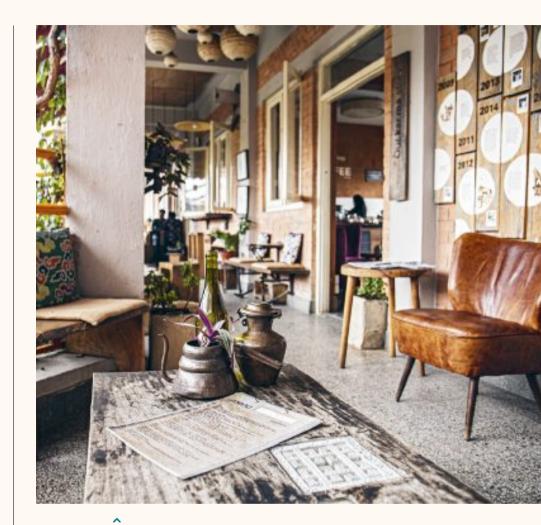


Hot sips in the Himalayas

A third-wave coffee culture is brewing in **Kathmandu** BY ZINARA RATHNAYAKE

Legend says that Nepal's

coffee history is tied to a hermit in the mid 20th century, who first planted seeds brought from Myanmar. Although commercial plantations only began in the 1980s, third-wave roasters and barista schools are now cropping up in the Himalayan country's vibrant capital Kathmandu. Here, three shops in the city are proudly embracing locally produced coffee from Arabica plants grown across Nepal's high-altitude regions and lush valleys, pairing them with soul food and Kathmandu's timeless, laidback vibe.



kar.ma Coffee Gyanmandala, Lalitpur

What began as a pour-over stand on a staircase by Austrian Birgit Lienhart-Gyawali has now grown into one of Kathmandu's planet-forward coffee franchises with two outlets across the city. Their venue in Lalitpur – a historic neighbourhood lined with Unescolisted medieval, red-brick palaces and temples - is particularly charming with bright, earthy interiors blanketed in greenery. But what makes kar.ma stand out is, of course, their coffee; the café serves single origin Arabica produced by independent farmer families from

several villages, like the small hamlet Kalika near Nepal's second largest city Pokhara.

Recently, kar.ma has grown in popularity for their moka pot double espressos with a drizzle of homemade spices, speciality coffee-tasting sessions and artisanal products like coffeeinfused wild honey, handcrafted chocolates and herbal tea blends. They are always looking at ways to minimise coffee waste too, with methods like turning pulp into eco napkins or notebooks. *karmacoffee.com.np*





Ananda Tree House **Opposite Manaaldvip** Boarding School, Phulbari-Ramhiti, Boudha Road 6



Mira's Coffee

Tucked away in a small alley just a few steps away from the city's main tourist hub Thamel, this unassuming coffee shop offers some of Kathmandu's best coffee. It's homely, and barista-owner Raju Shrestha serves a range of cold brews, V60 and fuller-bodied French press brews, and has managed to capture the attention of both tourists and locals with his perfected latte art.

Kaldhara-16

66

[Coffee shops in Kathmandu] are proudly embracing locally produced coffee from Arabica plants grown across the country's highaltitude regions and lush valleys"



"I was always very interested in coffee, so when I started the café, all I wanted to do was to serve the best coffee I could. It makes me really happy when my coffee makes people happy," says Shrestha as he pours frothed milk to foam an easter bunny latte art.

With a cosy book corner, home-baked cinnamon rolls, cookie jars and a small but impressive list of non-coffee drinks - like the café's masala tea and mint lemonades - Mira's is just a really good spot to enjoy a slice of Kathmandu's everyday life. instagram.com/ mirascoffeenp

Everything at Ananda – meaning "bliss" in Sanskrit – holds true to its name. Located near the iconic Boudhanath Stupa with terracotta-tiled floors and sun-dappled houseplants that merge seamlessly with fluttering Tibetan Buddhist prayer flags, this organic café is a nod to Kathmandu's spiritual heart. Artist Pasang Dhondup and his staff from Dolpo, a remote, high-altitude Himalayan region of northwestern Nepal, serves gluten-free buckwheat pancakes, Tibetan-style handpulled noodles and matcha cakes to pair with excellent organic drip coffee. Guests can also choose from a list of herbal teas picked from the high mountain regions, such as their hand-picked wildflower tea from Dolpo and organic blends from across the world. It's the perfect retreat for everyone; there are reading nooks, food cooked with love and a small corner boutique stocked with handmade soaps, notebooks and ceramics. instagram.com/ anandatreehouse





የሞ Heritage on a plate

ELEVATE

Savour the unique flavours of Surabaya in the city's Arab Ouarter BY EVE TEDIA

Fondly known to locals as Ampel,

the Arab Quarter in Surabava -Indonesia's second-largest city after Jakarta - is a fascinating area for immersing yourself in the city's Arab community, history and heritage. Located to the north of Chinatown, this vibrant quarter is renowned as both a religious and culinary destination. At its centre stands the ancient mosque and tomb of Sunan Ampel, one of the revered saints credited with spreading Islam in Java. Shops and streets with Arabic names lend a particular charm to

the area, as though you've been transported elsewhere, and the blend of architectural styles make it a delight to explore. Ready to discover the colourful stories and flavours of the Arab Quarter? Here's where to start.

lasi Tongkol Bu Karmini

Gule Roti Maryam H Safili

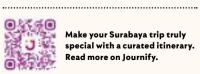
This iconic eatery stays true to the original recipes of a Yemeni immigrant who started selling mung bean stew with flatbreads over 70 years ago. Run by the late Haji Safili's family since the 1980s, it opens from 4pm to 7am, serving up hearty meals to hungry pilgrims and locals alike. Dipping the flatbread, known here as roti maryam, into the golden, thick and creamy mung bean stew is a simple pleasure. But if you're looking to elevate supper, add an order of mutton ribs or satay. Jalan KH Mas Mansyur No 10-14

Nasi Tongkol Bu Karmini

Open from 5am until it sells out around lunchtime, this stall behij Al-Irsyad Hospital is hard to mis - just look for the usual long queu of eager customers. Established inwho serves up her signature fiery mackerel stew with rice and crispy peyek or rice flour crackers. Spice things up with other seafood delights to top your plate, from spicy crab to squid cooked in its ink – a perfect nod to Surabaya's heritage as a bustling harbour. Jalan Petukangan, Nyamplungan

Yaman Kuliner

Tucked away on the ground floor of the almost century-old Hotel Kemajuan, this cosy restaurant has been serving hearty meals since 2002. Run by Muhammad Semid's family, which proudly carries its Arabic heritage, the restaurant offers both individual portions and a large platter set menu that's perfect for groups up to 14. Their aromatic nasi kebuli (pilaf rice) is a standout, and you can pair it with mutton, beef or chicken for a truly satisfying meal. Another must-try is the tender roasted honev mutton, served sizzling on a hot plate. Curious about the differences between kebuli, birvani, mandhi, bukhari and kabsa rice? Just ask the friendly owner for a quick, fascinating lesson in Arabicinfluenced cuisine. Jalan KH Mas Mansyur No 92



Make your Surabaya trip truly special with a curated itinerary. Read more on Journify.

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_⊙____ HOTELS

City sanctuary

A beloved hotel offers busy travellers a calming haven in the heart of **Jakarta BY MAYA CALICA COLLINS**

Every iconic city hosts a vibrant

centre that connects people through culture, commerce and creativity. If London has Canary Wharf and Kuala Lumpur has Bukit Bintang, Jakarta has the Golden Triangle.

Recognised as the diplomatic and business hub of the Indonesian capital, the Golden Triangle stretches from Central to South Jakarta and is home to the city's tallest skyscrapers. Here you'll find the World Trade Centre Jakarta, global banks, embassies, major company headquarters for brands like Google and Nike, and streets adorned with high-end shopping malls and opulent five-star hotel chains. In the heart of the central business district (CBD), the 334room **Gran Meliá Hotel** stands out as a calming presence on Kuningan Street.

Managed by Sol Melia, the acclaimed Spanish hotel and resort chain, this property seamlessly blends Indonesian and Spanish influences to create an atmosphere of tranquillity and modern sophistication. This is evident the moment you walk through the impressive, spacious foyer. If you're looking to decompress in style, you've come to the right place - the Lobby Lounge features a lofty atrium with a lush, landscaped indoor garden surrounded by restaurants, rooms and lounges. The batik patterns on fabrics and sculptures inspired by traditional Balinese and Javanese artists are

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Located in the heart of Jakarta's CBD, Gran Meliá Hotel stands out as a calming presence on Kuningan Street"

complemented by terracotta tiles and warm palettes that remind you of a Spanish home.

For a truly indulgent experience, opt for their RedLevel premium service. True to the Spanish tradition of hospitalidad, a dedicated team curates a stay that offers you exclusive perks. Enjoy a personalised check-in plus a complimentary drink before you're whisked into your elegant RedLevel Suite (with stunning views of Jakarta's skyline). As a RedLevel guest, you'll have access to the hotel's exclusive spaces for people 17 years and up, including the private RedLevel Lounge on the 15th floor. Begin your day slowly, with a leisurely buffet breakfast (available from 6am to 10am), and enjoy afternoon tea from 2pm to 5pm, followed by cocktails in an intimate setting from 6pm.

After a rejuvenating visit to the spa, emerge from a blissful bubble for dinner at the hotel's acclaimed restaurants. The award-winning Yoshi Izakaya, helmed by chef Hiroyuki Tanaka, serves exquisite Japanese fine dining in a stylish and serene setting. Craving international flavours? At Café Gran Via, take your pick of Indian, Chinese, Mongolian, Japanese and French fare prepared fresh right before your eyes. *melia.com*



NEIGHBOURHOOD GUIDE

Daun Penh

The old and the new thrive in this lively **Phnom Penh** district

Locals and regular visitors to the city will tell you that barely a decade ago skyscrapers were practically non-existent in the Cambodian capital. Scooters and taktuks were the main modes of transportation Fast forward to 2025, and the city thrives at a frenetic pace a plethora of cars – including luxury sports cars and EVs - are part of the bustling traffic, while dozens of buildings over 200m tall dot the skyline. Coupled with immaculately landscaped gardens, historical and cultural sites, having shopping centres and well-preserved heritage buildings, Khan Daun Penh, the city's central business district, has evolved into a traveller's hotspot. It offers a vibrant mix of things to do around the city: affordable upscale dining along Sisewath Riverside, artisan and fair-trade shops dong Street 240, and beautiful hotels at various price points. Dawn Penh's eclectic sights and sounds, combined with the warmth of its friendly locals, are sure to charm any visitor. Meanwhile, the area around Vattanar Capital Tower – one of Cambodia's most iconic modern skyscrapers adds a contemporary flair that harmonic well with the city's rich heritage.



1 Wat Phnom

Wat Phnom, Phnom Penh's tallest religious structure, sits atop a 27m-high man-made hill and dates back to 1372. Legend tells of Daun Penh, a widow who discovered Buddha statues inside a floating tree and built a shrine that later became the temple, inspiring the city's name. Restored over the centuries, the temple features intricate carvings, vibrant murals and a stupa housing King Ponhea Yat's remains. **tourismcambodia.org**

2 SOSORO Museum

A lot of work went into the Cambodia Museum of Economy and Money, also known as SOSORO. Located in a restored heritage building, the museum traces 2,000 years of Cambodia's history - from the Funan era, the Angkorian age, all the way to modern times - through the lens of money and economics. It's a riveting story told in a rigorous curation of interactive displays, rare artefacts and multimedia. 16 Preah Moha Ksatreivani Kossamak Avenue: sosoro.nbc. org.kh

3 Vattanac Capital Tower

Although no longer Cambodia's tallest, Vattanac Capital Tower's iconic design – resembling a dragon's back – remains a symbol of Phnom Penh's rapid development. It houses upscale designer retail brands and swish spots such as TWG, Arabica and Vattanac Brewery. **66 Prech Monivong Boulevard;** vattanaccapital.com

A Rosewood Hotel

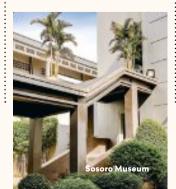
Occupying the top 14 floors of the Vattanac Capital Tower, an imposing 188m structure, the Rosewood's premier suites and rooms offer panoramic views of a booming city and of the legendary Mekong River. The hotel has four dining outlets including Brasserie Louis, where the buffet breakfast is served - a 24-hour fitness centre, a spa and an indoor lap pool on level 33. Right in the heart of the central business district, it's close to historic landmarks, including the Royal Palace, National Museum and Central Market. Vattanac Capital Tower; rosewoodhotels. com

9 Phnom Penh Railway Station

Built in 1932, when Cambodia was a French protectorate, the station's main hall features distinct Art Deco architecture style, reflecting the aesthetic sensibilities of the period. Its grand façade, central clock tower and several stationary historic train carriages have become enduring symbols of the city's rich heritage. **Street 93;** cambodiatrains.info

🙆 Central Market

Also known as Phsar Thmei, this photogenic market was built in 1937. Designed by Jean Desbois,



it features a striking Art Deco central dome and radiating halls. Once among Asia's largest markets, it remains a bustling hub offering a dizzying array of jewellery, electronics, clothing, fresh produce and freshly cooked traditional Khmer food, enjoyed at communal style seating. *Kamet Street*

🕖 Sora Skybar

On the cantilevered terrace of Rosewood's 37th floor, Sora serves exceptional drinks and fabulous city views (spot the X-shaped Phsar Thmei). Whisky lovers can enjoy a year-long collaboration with Nikka Whisky at the Whisky Library, launched last September. The bar also welcomes global mixologists every month as part of its collaboration with the World's 50 Best Bars. Vattanac Capital Tower; rosewoodhotels.com

🖲 La Baab

Located above De La Gare Pharmacy, a hop-skip from Vattanac Capital, this restaurant specialises in Lower Mekong cuisine. Its mid-1800s Battambang-inspired wooden interior creates a warm and inviting atmosphere. Signature Sora Skybar

ELEVATE

dishes include wing beans and lotus root, fish amok with noni leaves and the La Baab Burger. facebook.com/LabaabResto

🤨 Pteah Chas

Founded by social entrepreneur Hem Chansopheak, the community of small creative businesses breathes new life into a restored 1950s colonial shophouse. Pteah Chas (the Khmer word for "old home") includes plant store Jungle à Domicile, local handmade clothing brand Domlei and Co & Bloom Café. facebook.com/ pteahchascommunity

Malaysia Airlines flies between Kuala Lumpur and Phnom Penh 14x weekly.

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Travel for a healthier you

Use your Maybank Cards from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia and Brunei for up to 15% off on health screenings at over 10 top medical centres in Malaysia

Taking care of your health is simple – and with Maybank, it's also more affordable. With up to 15% off health screening packages at the country's top medical centres, Maybank's credit cards make it easier to invest in your health while you're on holiday – without the financial stress.

Whether you're in Malaysia attending a family reunion, celebrating a milestone with friends or setting off on a romantic getaway, it's also the ideal time to take charge of your well-being.

Host a wellness-focused family reunion

Reuniting with loved ones isn't just about reminiscing – it's also about ensuring everyone stays in good health. Many top hospitals in Malaysia offer comprehensive screening packages designed for all ages, from grandparents to grandchildren. **Tip:** Use your Maybank Card for exclusive discounts on health screenings, making your family gathering worry-free and healthfocused while saving on essential medical services.

Celebrate your birthday with self-care

Each birthday is a reminder to take charge of your well-being. For women in their 40s and beyond, regular screenings for heart disease, breast cancer and reproductive health concerns are essential. **Tip:** Book a specialised female health screening package that covers all the essentials for a proactive approach to wellness – and enjoy savings with your Maybank Card.

Go on a golf healing journey

Planning a golf getaway? Before stepping onto the course, consider a fitness and endurance assessment to make sure you're in peak condition. **Tip:** Opt for a personalised health screening to build strength and stamina for your next adventure – all while enjoying exclusive discounts with Maybank.

Better health, better life with Maybank Cards

For your health screening, head to Cengild GI Medical Centre, CVSKL, Gleneagles Hospitals, Island Hospital. **KPJ** Hospitals, LifeCare Medical Centre, Pantai Hospitals, Prince Court Medical Centre, Regency Specialist Hospital and Sunway Medical Centres. **Tip:** Use your Maybank Card and get up to 15% off. Visit maybank.my/medical for more information. Your Mavbank Card can also get you up to 30% discount on hospital stays at CVSKL, **KPJ** Hospitals, Prince Court Medical Centre and Regency Specialist Hospital.

- A PERFECT WEEKEND IN-Kokata Words Pupita Malbotra

This spring, enjoy an urban adventure loaded with history art and food in India's City of Joy

1.90





By turns grand and gritty, languid and lively, Kolkata is one of the most intriguing metropolises in India.

In the capital of India's West Bengal state, you can cruise along chaotic streets in a vintage yellow cab and trace the city's colonial past in the weathered facades of old mansions. Echoes of Kolkata's cultural heritage the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, the cinematic art of Satyajit Ray - pervade its historic tea rooms. At the same time, a contemporary pulse thrives in its newage art galleries, trendy coffee roasteries and sleek riverside developments. From the tantalising aroma of its street food to the slow seduction of its flowing river, stories and surprises unfold at every turn. March and April, pleasantly warm and uncrowded, are ideal months for experiencing the city's timeless charm. Got three days? Here's how to spend them in Kolkata.

Day 1 Travel back in time

Morning. Start the day in Dalhousie Square, now called Benoy Badal Dinesh Bagh or BBD Bagh, where a striking mix of Neo-Classical, Victorian Gothic and Neo-Gothic architecture immediately immerses vou in Kolkata's history as the capital of British India for over 130 years. This area speaks volumes of Kolkata's past, founded by the British East India Company on the banks of the Hooghly River. Landmarks like the Writers' Building, General Post Office and Kolkata Town Hall evoke the colonial powers that once dominated here. You'll also find memorials to freedom fighters who fought to rid India of British rule. No visit is complete without stopping by KC Das, the sweet shop that popularised the iconic rosogolla (a spongy, syrup-soaked treat). The origins of this beloved Bengali dessert are often traced to Portuguese influences on Bengal's rich culinary history.

Afternoon. Enjoy an indulgent lunch at Oh! Calcutta, where traditional Bengali cuisine is served with contemporary flair. After the meal, take in the grandeur of the Victoria Memorial, an awe-inspiring white marble structure set amidst lush gardens. Here you can explore the remnants of Kolkata's colonial past, and learn about its history under British rule through fascinating exhibitions.

From left: Dalhousie Square; live music at Trincas; savoury street food called puchkas

Clockwise from right:

Belur Math; stalls at College Street; a workshop at Kumartuli; Indian Coffee House **Evening.** The energy of Park Street awaits at this iconic boulevard, lined with stately Victorian mansions, vibrant eateries and buzzing pubs. Once the city's jazz hotspot, Park Street still pulses with life, drawing locals and tourists. Start your evening with classic English tea and pastries at **Flurys**, the famous Art Deco tearoom that's been serving pastries and other baked goods since 1927. Then bite into Kolkata's renowned street food scene with crispy *puchkas* (tangy tamarind water-filled puffs) and steaming mutton rolls at **Kusum Rolls**.

For lovers of literature, **Oxford Bookstore** is a haven where colonial-era titles sit next to modern bestsellers. Get lost in an eclectic collection of antiques at **Russell Exchange** auction house. Take a detour to the South Park Street Cemetery, an offbeat site where 1,600 tombs in Gothic and Indo-Saracenic styles offer a solemn reflection of the past. End your evening with a hearty retro Chinese or European meal at **Mocambo**, followed by live music and a nightcap at **Trincas Restaurant and Bar**, a true Kolkata institution.



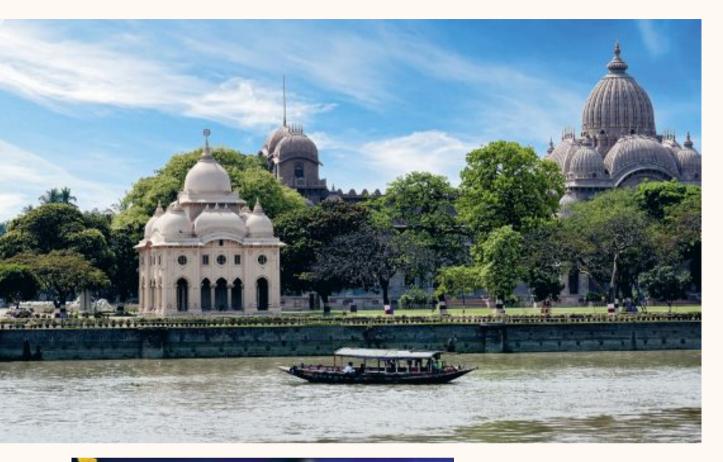
Day 2 Culture-tripping

Morning. Explore the charming neighbourhood of **Sovabazar**, where Kolkata's heritage comes alive. Known for its vibrant Durga Puja celebrations, it's home to the majestic $B\bar{a}ris$, heritage mansions once belonging to a class of aristocratic and influential families known as Zamindar. Sovabazar Rajbari, with its towering Tuscan pillars and sprawling courtyards, is an iconic example of 18th-century opulence.

Afternoon. Get your hands dirty at **Kumartuli**, a labyrinth of narrow alleys and workshops. Craftsmanship and artistry are on full display in the city's artistic soul, where over 500 artisans create intricately designed Durga idols out of clay. Then, head over to the grand Marble Palace and marvel at works by Raja Ravi Varma and Peter Paul Rubens. Take a breather at the **Indian Coffee House**, aka College Street Coffee House, where Kolkata's intelligentsia once gathered, exchanging ideas and philosophies under the gentle hum of old fans.

Evening. As the sun sets, unwind at **Prinsep Ghat**, where a combination of Venetian Gothic and Palladian architecture make an unexpected visual treat. A boat ride along the Hooghly River offers the perfect, serene contrast to the city's bustling pace. Take in the stunning view of **Vidyasagar Setu**, six-lane cable-stayed bridge, as it stretches across the river, and don't miss the iconic **Howrah Bridge**, one of the busiest cantilever bridges in the world.

Next, wander through **Chinatown** in Terreti Bazaar, where ancient temples sit alongside markets bursting with the aromas of spices, tea, noodles and dried mushrooms. For an unforgettable end to your cultural journey, attend a dance or music performance inspired by Tagore's works at **Rabindra Sadan**, a convention centre built in the writer's honor. End the day with seafood *thali* (platter) at **6 Ballygunge Place**; it's the perfect meal to complement an enriching day filled with art, culture and Kolkata's unique spirit.





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Kolkata's intelligentsia once gathered at College Street Coffee House, exchanging ideas and philosophies under the gentle hum of old fans"



Below: Bustling Hogg Market; Dakshineswar Kali Temple

Day 3 A spiritual journey

Morning. Begin at **Belur Math**, the spiritual centre founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897. A mesmerising fusion of Hindu, Christian and Islamic architecture, this place is the ultimate reflection of the mission's philosophy: unity in diversity. The tranquil vibes and a gentle hum of serenity make it the perfect spot to reset your mind.



Next, go to **Dakshineswar Kali Temple**, dedicated to the goddess Kali. Located along the Hooghly River, this sacred space carries mystic energy and offers a sense of calm amidst the city's frenzy.

Afternoon. It's time to switch gears to **College Street**, the world's largest second-hand book market. This literary haven is brimming with rare editions, vintage classics and forgotten treasures, offering the perfect escape into Kolkata's intellectual world. Then make your way to **Bow Barracks**, where the city's Anglo-Indian community brings history to life through vibrant street art and murals. Here, contemporary creativity meets historical storytelling.

Evening. As the sun sets, reach **New Market** (Hogg Market), the bustling heart of Kolkata's shopping scene since 1874. Navigate its maze-like alleys, where you'll find everything from artisanal leather goods to imported cheese. Don't miss **Nahoum and Sons**, one of the oldest Jewish bakeries in India, known for its signature plum cakes, buttery biscuits and melt-inyour-mouth cheesecakes, perfect for the sweet-tooth traveller.

Pick up embroidered craft known as *kantha* for a unique souvenir of the city's artistry. After shopping, catch a Bengali theatre performance or a Rabindra Sangeet recital at **Kala Mandir**. End your Kolkata adventure with an iconic *chelo kebab* dinner at Peter Cat, where smoky, tender meat skewers meet fragrant rice and a perfectly fried egg... pure indulgence. You'll soon find that the flavours, sights and soul of Kolkata will stay with you long after you've left.



Where to stay



Glenburn Penthouse

A hidden boutique gem that offers an effortlessly cool vibe with its chic interiors, personalised service and panoramic views of Kolkata's skyline. Perfect for those who like their luxury with a side of peace and quiet. **7A Russel Street**

Taj Bengal

Located in a swish residential neighbourhood, this luxury spread is all about spacious rooms, great dining (it has six restaurants and a bar) and convenience. It even offers 24-hour on-call medical services. **34-B, Belvedere Rd,** *Alipore*

The Rajbari Bawali

Experience a piece of Kolkata's regal past. This boutique hotel brings oldworld Bengali elegance into the now with spacious rooms, stunning architecture and a seamless blend of traditional style and modern comfort. North Bawali, 24 Parganas (South)



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Get Lost Someplace Interesting in Kota Kinabalu

Step into the heart of Kota Kinabalu

where every day brings a new adventure, from island hopping to city exploring. Unwind in your spacious room, relax on your private balcony, and recharge for what's next.

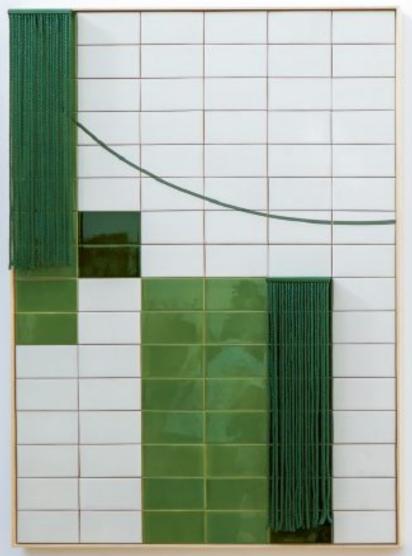


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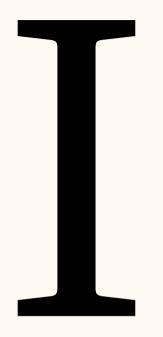


For



art's sake

Paris is always a good idea, and this year's grand reopenings, landmark exhibitions and blue-chip art fairs make a trip to the French capital almost essential. Here, journalist and long-time resident **Lindsey Tramuta**, author of *The New Paris*, inspires us to get packing



Below: The freshly restored Notre-Dame cathedral



N THE 18 YEARS I'VE LIVED IN PARIS, I CAN COUNT

on one hand the number of times I've ambled through the cavernous inner sanctum of Notre-Dame Cathedral before a fire nearly erased it from our beloved skyline in April 2019. The Gothic beacon first emerged in the 12th century as the continent was pulling itself out of the Dark Ages and has borne witness to the hazards and joys of life across centuries. Given that, I assumed, as most Parisians did, it would never falter. I told myself I had plenty of opportunities to climb the 422 steps to the top of its bell towers and take in the views of the Seine River, the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower, the very sights the Gargoyles have fixated on for generations.

Our collective history may have changed that day, but there would be a happy ending five years later. Freed from soot, its artworks painstakingly restored, its pastel-painted chapel columns brightened for the first time in centuries, its roof rebuilt from the wood of 2,000 oak trees, felled by hand, its spire reconstructed exactly as before, and its 14 large bronze Neo-Gothic chandeliers - weighing nearly 300kg each - repaired and reinstalled in the nave of the cathedral, Notre-Dame is back in a big way since December 2024. Naturally, visitors are eager to observe how she shines anew. "Notre-Dame is a meeting place for believers and non-believers, Parisians and foreigners," said archbishop Laurent Ulrich before the reopening, adding that the diocese anticipates 15 million visitors in 2025. "It creates an invisible but very real link between us all."

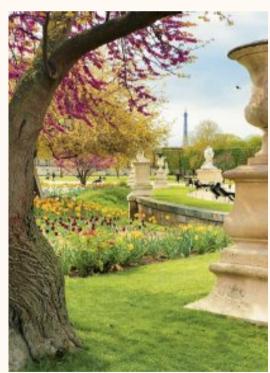
The cathedral's rebirth concluded a momentous year for the French capital. As host of an Olympic and Paralympic Games that will be remembered as one of the most magical, meaningful and sustainable in history, the city drew in millions of travellers to witness firsthand how an ancient city perpetually reinvents itself and has inspired millions more to visit this year. These milestones weren't truly unique, however. They unfolded in lockstep with the capital's broader postpandemic renaissance.

You can feel the energy of renewal everywhere, from the updates of art institutions and the proliferation of small, international galleries to the thriving restaurant scene and the very streets of Paris. Mayor Anne Hidalgo and her team have made good on a yearslong campaign to rid the streets of cars by expanding the city's network of bicycle paths. So far, they've created more than 1,000km of cyclist-friendly routes and have committed to another 160km by 2026.



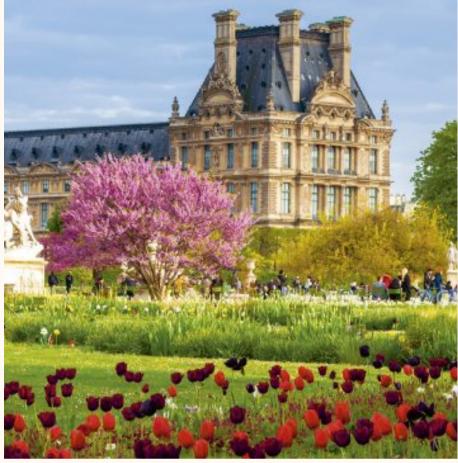






Clockwise from left: Viewing the Eiffel Tower from a river cruise; the Grand Palais; the Tuileries Garden, a green public space between the Louvre and the Place de la Concorde





IN THE ART WORLD, THE SHIFT HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY

noteworthy. Among the most anticipated reopenings is the riverside Grand Palais, the impressive steel-framed and glass structure just off the Champs-Élysées initially constructed to host the 1900 World's Fair. Since then, it has served as the spectacular setting for all manner of events, from fashion shows and photography fairs to countless landmark art exhibitions.

But like all Parisian relics, it badly needed a refresh, having never been top-to-bottom renovated since the former culture minister André Malraux installed art galleries within the space in 1966. Since 2021, it has undergone three years of restoration and restructuring, which removed partitions and opened up interior spaces that had been blocked off for the last 60 years. It partially reopened to host taekwondo and fencing competitions in the 2024 Olympics but will be fully back in business by mid-2025 when the works are complete. Then, guests will be able to pass directly beneath the glass-domed central nave and take in even larger-scale exhibitions.

Exhibition spaces like the Grand Palais and large and small museums have always been the city's calling card. The Louvre, housing some of the world's most iconic works, such as the *Venus de Milo* and the *Mona Lisa*, as well as IM Pei's glass pyramid, is not only the largest museum on earth but arguably the most recognisable of all art institutions. This spring through 21 July, the Louvre will stage a fashion exhibition for the first time in its 232-year history. "Louvre Couture" highlights pieces by Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel, Yohji Yamamoto and Dolce & Gabbana, alongside the museum's historical collections to create a dialogue between fashion and classical art.

BUT WHILE IT HAS BEEN A GRAND MUSEUM CITY AND

the home of avant-garde art movements, it hasn't always been a destination for contemporary art fans. Kamel Mennour, an art dealer with four namesake galleries in Paris, distinctly remembers a defunct landscape when he set up his business in 1999.

"It was an old lady. It was a sleeping lady," he told *Artsy* magazine. It would take the emergence of several privately funded art institutions like the Frank Gehry-designed Fondation Louis Vuitton, the Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection and Lafayette Anticipations; the opening of Parisian outposts from major international galleries; and the shockwave of Brexit to reshape the art market and make Paris appealing to artists, buyers and travellers in a new way.

Today, France is the fourth-largest art market globally and is steadily growing, which partially explains why Art Basel set its sights on Paris and effectively ousted the city's erstwhile flagship fall art fair, FIAC. The potential for Paris to regain the status it had before New York dethroned it as the art capital of the world was enough for the annual art fair to invest in the city. Art Basel-Paris and the spring cultural rendezvous Art Paris (also held in the Grand Palais) are only **Clockwise from left:** Last year's Art Basel at the Grand Palais; springtime outside the Louvre; local institution

Café de Flore on Rue Saint-Germain; the Grand Palais' unique steelwork; the ultimate city ride; appreciating the works at Art Basel



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In Paris you can feel the energy of renewal everywhere, from the updates of art institutions and the proliferation of small, international galleries to the thriving restaurant scene"









Opposite page:

The iconic Louvre Pyramid by the Chinese American architect IM Pei. **This page** from top: Iris van Herpen's *Sculpting the Senses* at Musée des Arts Décoratifs; a sunset cruise along the Seine River

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Malaysia Airlines flies between Kuala Lumpur and Paris 4x weekly starting on 22 March 2025; with daily flights from 29 March 2025 onwards.

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two reasons the momentum continues this year. "It's an exciting year because it marks the 100th anniversary of the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts of 1925," said Dan Thawley, the art director of the two-year-old design fair Matter and Shape, which takes place this month in the heart of the Tuileries Garden. "Art Deco will be a key theme for our exhibitors, and there will also be homages all over the city."

That includes a star-studded ball in July at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs (MAD). The American filmmaker Sofia Coppola was named the artistic director of the museum's inaugural Bal d'Été which will pay tribute to French elegance and art de vivre, while simultaneously kicking off Haute Couture week. As the second oldest museum in Paris, and home to the most extensive decorative arts collections in Europe – with nearly 1.5 million predominantly French design pieces, some dating back as far as the Middle Ages – the MAD is a particularly apt backdrop for what is poised to be a pure celebration of talent across the creative divide.

Anyone considering visiting in the fall will have more than one artistic event to experience. For two weeks in September, the French street artist JR will transform the Pont Neuf, the oldest standing bridge, into a sculptured grotto in homage to the late artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude and their monumental artistic project *Pont Neuf Wrapped* from 1985. And by year's end, the Fondation Cartier, the first of the country's corporate-funded art institutions, will open the doors to its new building across from the Louvre.

All of these developments give regular visitors even more reason to keep returning. "What makes Paris so unique is how effortlessly it combines the old and the new," explained Susan Khalje, a couture specialist who has been bringing travellers to Paris for the last 20 years to meet the artisans who keep fashion and design craftsmanship alive. "To be immersed in that mix, in which both are honoured and given equal weight, is exhilarating, whether you're visiting for the first time or the hundredth time." Might 2025 be the year you see for yourself?





Where to eat



Café des Ministères

An exceptional, classic bistro in a charming neighbourhood best known for housing the National Assembly. Come for generous portions of vol-auvent and chou farci. **83 Rue de l'Université**

Bistrot des Tournelles

Top-quality steak, bottomless fries and Beaujolais wines are the raison d'être of this old-world bistro updated by young talents on the edge of the Marais neighbourhood. **6 Rue des Tournelles**

Le Verre Volé

Intimate bistro meets wine bar, this spot has been a dining standout around the Canal Saint Martin since it first opened in 2000. Expect natural wines and a small menu that rotates regularly. **67 Rue de Lancry**

The

slow

road

Sumatra's northernmost province is raw, delightfully unhurried and endlessly rewarding

Words Marco Ferrarese Photography Muhammad Fadli

Banda Aceh





When I told a friend I wanted to visit Aceh – a conservative province on the northwestern end of Indonesia – he had one question: "Are you going to Pulau Weh?"

Previous spread:

The mountain road along Gayo Highlands; Lake Laut Tawar in Takengon, a town in Central Aceh

Clockwise from top

left: A farmer dries coffee under the sun in Takengon; a Sumatran orangutan; sunrise view at Pantan Terong; Irwansyah, the keeper of Pantan Terong; a small river inside the Leuser Ecosystem in Ise-Ise, Gayo Highlands Pulau Weh, a jigsaw-shaped island just off the provincial capital Banda Aceh, is Indonesia's Kilometre 0, the point from which all distances in the country are traditionally measured. It has long drawn divers and tourists to its waters.

But Aceh is more than its fabled religious conservatism or its renowned dive sites. It's a province of vast forests, rugged mountains and a quieter way of life that invites exploration. It was all the reason I needed to skip the faster coastal highway linking Banda Aceh and Medan and opt for a slower, more immersive journey through Aceh's mountainous interior.

Starting in Medan, North Sumatra's bustling capital, I travelled by *angkot* – a local shared minivan – to Kutacane, a sprawling town and gateway to Aceh's south. I expected a rough ride through battered roads, but my seatmate was quick to reassure me that the roads were smooth. "You'd be surprised how nice the asphalt is." he said. He was right.



From Kutacane, another van took me to Ketambe, a village on the edge of Gunung Leuser National Park, home to one of the world's last orangutan habitats. Here, I joined Salat, a local guide, for a trek through dense forest, hoping to catch a glimpse of these elusive apes. The anticipation was palpable – every rustling branch or whispering breeze set my heart racing. Hours passed uneventfully. Just as I was ready to be disappointed, we spotted a solitary male lunching on leaves. Then we hit the orangutan jackpot– five more of them appeared, cloaked in orange against the green canopy.

From Ketambe, the road westward twisted through verdant hills, leading me eight hours later to Takengon, a highaltitude town nestled by Lake Laut Tawar. Surrounded by the Gayo Highlands, where coffee grows in abundance, Takengon's tranquillity was a balm for city-weary folks like me. With the help of Gayo Travel, a local outfit championing grassroots tourism, I rented a motorbike and explored the area. Pantan Terong, a viewpoint 1,800m above the lake, offered breathtaking vistas of the crystalline waters framed by misty peaks. Top to bottom: The hamlet of Lelabu, at the side of Lake Laut; coffee processing in Takengon; ripe coffee cherries in Bener Meriah. Opposite page: A foggy morning along the mountain road in Gayo Highlands





Aceh is a province of vast forests, rugged mountains and a quieter way of life that invites exploration" **Clockwise from left:** A star-speckled dawn sky in Takengon; the winding road to Pantan Terong; twilight in Aceh



Along the northern shore, I discovered the Putri Pukes Cave – steeped in legend – and stopped at lakeside villages where entrepreneurial locals had set up cosy cafés and campsites. A cup of Gayo coffee by the water completed the experience.

As my journey drew to a close, I took a night bus to Banda Aceh, arriving at dawn. The city bears the deep scars of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, which claimed 170,000 lives in Aceh alone. At the Kapal Apung – a 2,600-tonne generator barge flung ashore by the waves – an elderly man pointed to a high-water mark on a nearby wall. "It reminds us how high the water had surged," he said. Nearby, the Aceh Tsunami Museum serves as both a tribute to the past and a warning for the future. Its sombre halls and manicured gardens resonate with resilience.

I could have ended my trip on Pulau Weh's beaches, mingling with other travellers, but some journeys are indeed the destination. So instead, I lingered in Banda Aceh, soaking in its hopeful, forward-looking atmosphere. This slow, unhurried journey through Aceh's heartland had turned my expectations upside down. For anyone seeking a lesstrodden path, Aceh offers an experience that lingers – a province of profound stories, striking landscapes and an enduring spirit. 66

Surrounded by the Gayo Highlands, where coffee grows in abundance, Takengon's tranquillity was a balm for city-weary folks like me.²⁷



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Firefly flies between Penang and Banda Aceh 4x weekly.

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March

BEST SPOTS

2025

The best restaurants to dine in across Malaysia this month



Chargrilled goodness at Firewood in Penang

Tucked inside a restored heritage building in George Town, Firewood is where charcoal-grilled perfection meets modern culinary craft. A 2025 Michelin Selected Restaurant, it specialises in steaks, seafood and seasonal vegetables, all cooked over an open fire for deep, smoky flavours. Helmed by chef Ker Yang Hao, the restaurant offers an intimate setting that's ideal for both casual gatherings and special occasions. **firegroup.my**



Elevated dining at Rock Salt in Kuala Lumpur

At Rock Salt in Sri Hartamas, expect a dining experience unlike any other. Here, dishes are prepared tableside on lava rocks heated to 260°C, enhancing their flavour with a subtle mineral finish. Whether you're indulging in A5 Wagyu beef, Mongolian fried rice or a Caesar salad served on a tortilla, every dish spotlights technique and creativity. A must-visit for those looking for something beyond ordinary dining. *rocksalt.com.my*



Bold, smoky flavours at Fire Pitz in Johor Bahru

At Fire Pitz in Horizon Hills, Johor Bahru, open-fire cooking takes centre stage. This modern grill house is known for its smoky, flame-kissed meats and seafood, paired with bold flavours and a relaxed yet refined atmosphere. Whether it's a casual night out or a special occasion, expect a menu that spotlights premium cuts and fresh seafood, all prepared over a roaring flame by chef Lew Jia Jiun. instagram.com/firepitz_restaurant

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Welcome aboard Malaysia Aviation Group's (MAG) airlines. This month, see what we have on offer to ensure safe, seamless and fuss-free journeys. **52** Inside

our airlines

News and updates from MAG Airlines



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See where MAG Airlines can take you, around Malaysia and around the world



Onboard entertainment

Keep yourself entertained with our latest releases of Hollywood movies, TV shows and music THIS IS MALAYSIAN HOSPITALITY Airline news



Malaysia Airlines and Firefly win big and soar to new heights

Excellence in the skies has its rewards. Malaysia Airlines and Firefly earned top honours at the 2024 Putra Brand Awards, with Malaysia Airlines clinching the coveted Platinum Award in the Transportation, Travel & Tourism category – a leap from last year's Bronze – while Firefly earned a Bronze Award. Malaysia Airlines was also named "Airline of the Year" at the Voyage Awards in China, recognising its industry leadership, innovation and commitment to sustainable aviation. These accolades reaffirm the Group's dedication to elevating every journey.





Malaysia Airlines' complimentary Wi-Fi now available on the Boeing 737-8 aircraft

Malaysia Airlines has elevated in-flight connectivity by extending its complimentary Wi-Fi to selected narrowbody aircraft. As of February, six of its Boeing 737-8 planes have been equipped with this service, following the successful rollout on selected widebody aircraft in November 2023. Available to all passengers – regardless of cabin class or loyalty tier – this service ensures seamless browsing, streaming and staying in touch mid-air. Malaysia Airlines keeps you connected, making every journey seamless and effortless.

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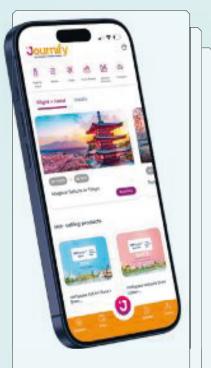
Luxury travel redefined with MAG and Mercedes-Benz collaboration

Malaysia Aviation Group and Mercedes-Benz Malaysia are taking luxury travel to new heights. Enrich Platinum members, Business Suite and Business Class passengers can now experience seamless airport transfers in the luxury carmaker's flagship models, including the S 580e Plug-in Hybrid and all-electric EQS 500 4MATIC. Beyond effortless transfers, this collaboration unlocks a world of exclusive privileges – think curated #MyMercedesRewards on select Mercedes-Benz models, invitations to premium lifestyle events and bespoke luxury travel experiences. Starting 1 March 2025, these indulgent perks will extend to new Mercedes-Benz customers, ensuring unparalleled comfort and style throughout the journey.



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Beyond the cabin: observing Ramadan in the skies

MAG crew members Ismail bin Yusof and Siti Haslinda Abd Rahman reflect on the kindness and compassion they witness among colleagues and passengers throughout this sacred month

Restored faith in humanity by Ismail bin Yusof

I have proudly served as a cabin crew member for over 35 years. Now as an Inflight Supervisor, observing Ramadan while managing inflight duties has deepened my faith and reinforced the values of patience, compassion and service – essential qualities in our line of work.

Under Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), travellers are exempt from fasting when their journey exceed two *Marhalah* (approximately 90km one way). This concession safeguards the wellbeing and operational efficiency of aviation professionals. However, many cabin crew still fast mid-flight, viewing it as a test of spiritual discipline and resilience.

Fasting during long flights and irregular schedules presents unique challenges. Managing an 18-hour fast while navigating time zones requires careful planning. I often adjust my meal prep to ensure I have nutritious options ready for *iftar* (breaking fast). To maintain energy and focus, I prioritise hydration during non-fasting hours and opt for energydense foods to sustain me through long duty periods.

One of my most memorable experiences during Ramadan was on a flight to Auckland. A family of passengers was observing iftar in their seats and graciously invited me to join them. Sharing dates with them created a beautiful moment of connection. Seeing their joy and being part of their breaking fast was heartwarming – a reminder of the communal spirit of Ramadan, even at 35,000 feet.

The camaraderie among my colleagues is a tremendous source of support during Ramadan. We check in on each other and share iftar when possible. This fosters an environment of inclusivity and respect, making the experience even more special.

Travelling during Ramadan exposes me to various cultures and deepens my appreciation for our shared humanity. Each flight offers moments of reflection and kindness. I'm grateful for supportive colleagues and passengers who share their stories with me. To all observing this sacred month, may your journey be filled with peace, patience and fulfilment.



Heartwarming acts of kindness by Siti Haslinda Abd Rahman

I've been a flight attendant for 23 years. Observing Ramadan while working has deepened my faith, allowing me to balance spirituality with my responsibilities onboard. Fasting during long flights and irregular schedules is challenging, but I manage by staying hydrated during non-fasting hours, eating balanced *schur* (pre-dawn) meals and taking short breaks when possible.

One of my most memorable moments happened on the first day of Ramadan. As we prepared to break our fast, a passenger kindly offered me dates and wished me "Selamat berbuka puasa". That small yet meaningful gesture reminded me of Ramadan's universal spirit and the sense of unity that transcends borders. It is a moment I will always cherish.

The support from my colleagues during this month is invaluable. Even those who don't fast always show understanding, ensuring I have time to break my fast and offering words of encouragement when I'm feeling drained. Sometimes, we even break our fast together after flights, making the experience even more meaningful.

Travelling during Ramadan has given me the opportunity to experience this holy month in different parts of the world. Observing how people from different cultures come together in prayer, reflect on their faith and support one another has been truly inspiring. In certain regions, there is a strong emphasis on charity and helping those in need, further inspiring me to embrace the spirit of Ramadan.

As we observe Ramadan, I encourage everyone to find peace and strength in their journey. Whether fasting or supporting others, may this month be a time of spiritual growth and reflection for all. And always remember – small acts of kindness and understanding can make a world of difference. Let us continue to inspire one another to grow in faith and unity.

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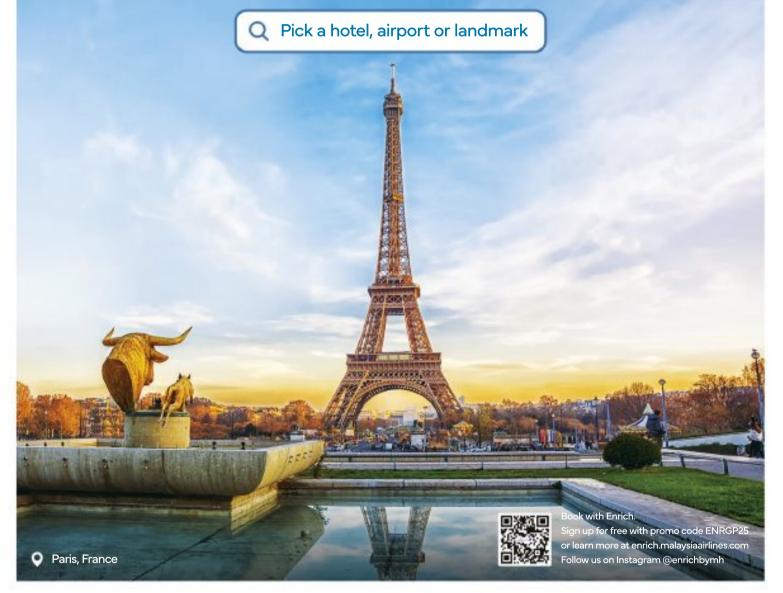




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B737-8

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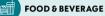
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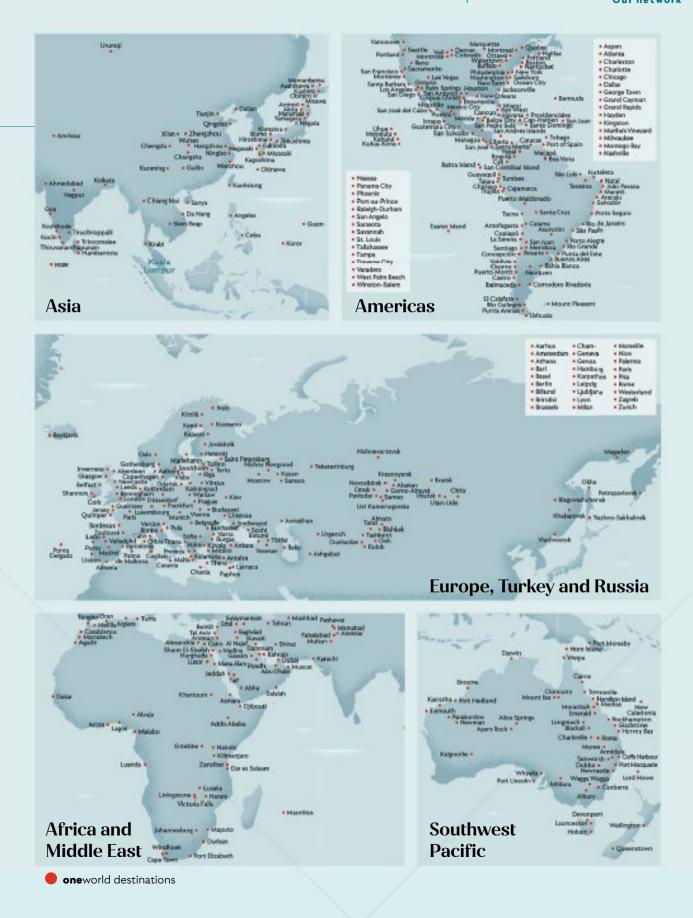
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MOVIES p70 TELEVISION p81 AUDIO p82



Check out our Hollywood Latest on page 71!



Nickel Boys





Maria



Don't Move







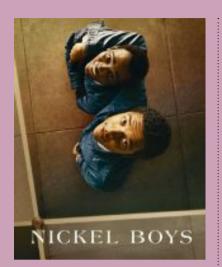
Wolfs

George Clooney and Brad Pitt team up again in this gripping action-comedy

Two rival professional fixers, played by George Clooney and Brad Pitt, are thrust into an unexpected partnership when a young man's accidental death in a hotel room leads to a chaotic cover-up. As they navigate the dangerous world of crime and deceit, their contrasting styles clash, forcing them to work together against time and unforeseen threats to finish the job.







Based on Colson Whitehead's acclaimed novel, **Nickel Boys** follows Elwood Curtis, a Black teen facing systemic racism at a brutal 1960s reform school in Florida.



In a post-apocalyptic world, a wealthy family resides in a salt mine. As their sheltered son grows curious about the outside world, dark secrets unravel in this gripping dystopian drama.



In this adaptation of Stephen King's horror classic, Ben Mears returns to his hometown, teaming up with local children to battle the vampiric forces threatening 'Salem's Lot.



Exhibiting Forgiveness explores the complexities of family dynamics and redemption as Tarrell grapples with his estranged father, a recovering addict seeking reconciliation.



Don't Move is a chilling thriller about Iris, a grieving mother whose search for solace leads to an encounter with a charismatic stranger that spirals into a fight for survival.



Maria, directed by Pablo Larraín and starring Angelina Jolie, explores the final days of opera legend Maria Callas in 1970s Paris, offering a poignant tribute to an iconic musical figure.



Aftermath follows the fallout of a mid-air collision, centring Roman, who loses his wife and daughter, and Jake, the air traffic controller held responsible for the tragedy.



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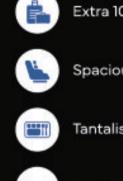
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Malay





Mengejar Lailatul Qadar

Mengejar Lailatul Qadar follows Zaid, who indulges in gambling and neglects his family during Ramadan. As the consequences of his actions catch up with him, he faces a profound wake-up call about his responsibilities and faith.

Kurung Kerawang Untuk Adik

Highlighting themes of family, love and redemption, this heartfelt film tells the story of Shazwi, who, after years of wrongful imprisonment, returns to grant his disabled sister's wish for a beautiful baju kurung kerawang,



Biar Biasa Biasa

In Bigr Bigsg Bigsg, Sofia markets a luxury hijab collection while navigating controversies surrounding her colleague Mael, accused of design theft. The film explores ambition, creativity and the challenges of the fashion industry.

Indonesian



The Architecture of Love

This film centres Raia, a writer grappling with her husband's infidelity. In New York, she meets architect River, and as they connect, their painful pasts challenge their budding romance amid the vibrant cityscape.



Stealing Raden Saleh

A painter named Piko must replicate Raden Saleh's masterpiece to save his imprisoned father. When blackmailed by a former president, he and his friend Ucup embark on a daring art heist.

Chinese



A Sun

After A-ho, a troubled youth, lands in juvenile detention, his father's disdain intensifies, leading to a series of crises that shatter their family dynamics and force them to confront deep-seated issues.

OSCAR SPECIAL

Japanese



Departures

Daigo is a cellist who becomes a mortician after his orchestra disbands. As he navigates this unexpected career path, he discovers the beauty in life while reconnecting with his roots and finding purpose.

Korean



Parasite

In this darkly comedic thriller, the impoverished Kim family infiltrates the wealthy Park household. Their symbiotic relationship unravels as greed and deception lead to shocking consequences for both families.

Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne

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Japanese



Bushido

Former samurai Kakunoshin Yanagida is wrongfully accused and forced into poverty with his daughter, Kinu. Upholding his honour through the game of Go, he ultimately seeks vengeance when the truth of his disgrace is revealed.

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Hindi



12th Fail

IPS officer Manoj Kumar Sharma courageously embarks on a journey to restart his academic life and pursue his dream of passing the UPSC exam. Set against the backdrop of fierce competition, the film highlights resilience and determination in the face of adversity.

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Malayalam



Aavesham

Three teenagers arrive in Bangalore for their engineering degrees and quickly find themselves in conflict with seniors. Seeking revenge, they enlist the help of local gangster Ranga, leading to a series of chaotic confrontations.

Mandarin



Wonderland

Korean



You Will Die in 6 Hours

Tamil



J Baby

Telugu



Premalu

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Night Court

Drama



ER



All Rise

Travel

Young Sheldon



Aerial Asia

Lifetsyle

K i d s



Firehouse Tales

Japanese

Ninja Hattori

(Season 1-6)



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Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs

Korean

Earth Arcade

- Season 1



Calming Meditation

Tamil



Binge Cafe with Anu Hasan



Religious

Explore the profound themes of victory and the fulfillment of divine promises in Surah Al-Fath. Whether through a concise overview or an in-depth analysis, this exploration offers insights that inspire faith and deeper understanding.



Surah Al-Fath – Concise Commentary



Surah Al-Fath – Deeper Look

Malay



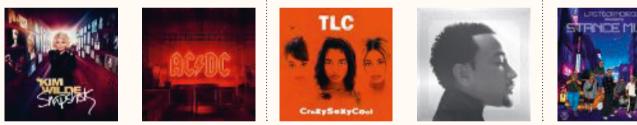




The Hits

Experience the magic of *The Power of Love* with Jennifer Rush's timeless ballads and Christina Aguilera's spectacular **25th** *Anniversary Live – EP.* These releases showcase their powerful vocals and iconic hits, celebrating decades of unforgettable artistry.

Memories



Japanese



Korean



R&B



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Tamil

Club



Hindi









Kids





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Lure of the luge

If you're looking for a rush of adrenaline

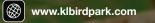
to start your day, the Skyline Luge Kuala Lumpur in Gamuda Gardens, Rawang – less than an hour's drive from KL city centre – is the place to go. Whether you're gliding down on a leisurely ride or zooming through tight corners in a friendly race, there's something for everyone. The multiple-track options cater to all levels of excitement, making it the perfect activity for couples, families or groups of friends.

But the fun doesn't stop when the sun sets. Once night falls, the luge tracks come alive, creating a magical vibe. Cap off the adventure with snacks or drinks at the site's dining spots. The best part? The evening queues are usually shorter, giving you the chance to enjoy as many rides as you like. Plus, the stunning views from above on the Skyline add an extra layer of excitement. Pro tip: as photography and videography is not allowed on the track for safety reasons, appoint someone in your group to capture the fun. This is one after-dark adventure you'll want to keep in the memory bank. kualalumpur. skylineluge.com



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