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VISIT Malaysia 2026 has officially started, and we're excited to join in the campaign and see it run smoothly and successfully throughout the year.

Running parallel to VM2026 are three state-wide campaigns: Visit Negeri Sembilan 2026, Visit Johor 2026, and Visit Melaka 2026, an extension of its original, Visit Melaka 2024-25.

Tourists – local and foreign – can expect lots of special events and programmes happening all across the nation, every month.

If you're looking for some ideas on where to go beyond what's already heavily promoted, or for things to do over a long weekend, here are a few suggestions.

The train rides

Rail tourism in Peninsular Malaysia is gaining momentum, thanks to the increase – as well as improvements – in services by Keretapi Tanah Melayu Berhad (KTMB) and Prasarana Malaysia Berhad.

There are multiple rail routes to check out within the peninsula, with some services crossing the country's borders and going into Thailand in the north, and Singapore in the south.

We suggest taking the Electric Train Service (ETS) from KL Sentral in Kuala Lumpur, all the way north to Alor Setar, Kedah. The ride is just under five hours and you get three ticket options: Express, Platinum and Gold.

You can find out the differences between ticket classes on the KTMB website (www.ktmb.com.my). Basically, it has to do with price, travel time and the number of stops each train makes.

In Alor Setar, you can choose to do a cultural tour or a historical one, though most times the two are intertwined. Visit the Al-Bukhary Mosque, Kedah Royal Museum, Alor Setar Tower and Kedah Museum, before hitting the Pekan Rabu Complex for some shopping and food.

About an hour away from the city is the Sungai Batu Archaeological Site, a historically important place that is said to be one of the oldest known civilisations in South-East Asia.

You can also take the ETS from KL Sentral to Butterworth in Penang (travel time: between three hours and 35 minutes, and four hours and 20 minutes, depending on ticket class). George Town may be the state's prized gem, but Butterworth on the mainland has many charms too.

Check out the Penang Bird Park, Tow Boo Kong Temple (also known as the Nine Emperor Gods Temple), Butterworth Art Walk and Pantai Bersih, which is a great place to look for a variety of food.

For more food options, head to the Chai Leng Park Hawker Centre.

If you only have a day or two to spare, then take the train to Perak, specifically to Batu Gajah in the Kinta district. From KL, this ride will take you about two hours and 20 minutes, or just under two hours if you choose the Express ticket.

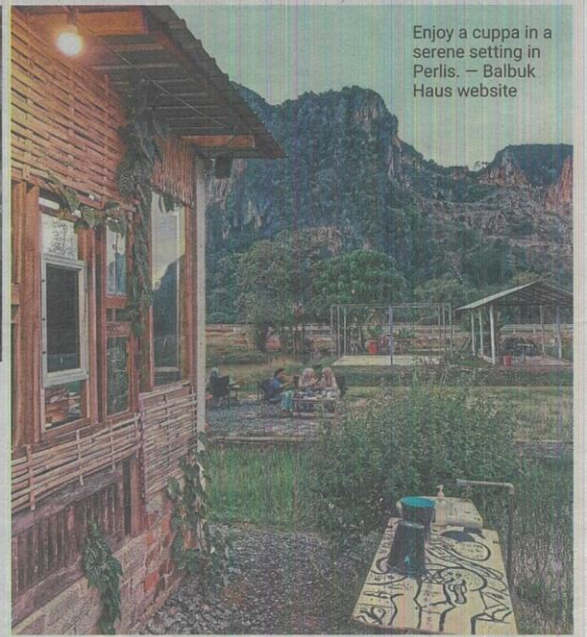
Batu Gajah has many famous attractions, including Kellie's Castle, an unfinished mansion



Redang Island makes for a perfect wellness retreat. — MUKHERJEEAIKAT/Wikimedia Commons



Sip coffee inside a million-year-old cave in Perlis. — KUPI KAHFI/Facebook



Enjoy a cuppa in a serene setting in Perlis. — Balbuk Haus website

with an intriguing background story. There's also the Tanjung Tualang Tin Dredge No. 5, also known as TT5, a living museum that showcases not just Perak's tin mining past, but how the tin industry helped shape the nation.

About 8km from Batu Gajah is the small town of Papan that used to thrive in the glory days of tin mining. Today, Papan is almost deserted, with very few people still living in the century-old buildings.

When you're done exploring the north, head down south to Melaka (Pulau Sebang/Tampin stop) or all the way to Segamat, Johor (travel time: between two hours and 35 minutes, and two hours and 45 minutes). This is where you will find the historical Jambatan Putus Buloh Kasap, or Broken Bridge, which was built in 1926 but destroyed during World War II and never fully repaired.

Another 1920s landmark you can find here is the beautiful Church of St Philip (1924), which is still in use today.

Go on an adventure at the Sungai Bantang Recreational Forest and Takah Merluh Waterfall, or, if you're up for it, climb Gunung Ledang (also known as Mount Ophir). This is said to be a challenging climb, though, so maybe do this only if you are physically prepared.

Don't forget that rides on the

commuter trains, the MRT, LRT and monorail are also part of railway tourism, though perhaps some rides may not be as scenic as what you can get on the longer rides.

Rapid Rail services cover KL, Selangor and Putrajaya, while KTMB's Komuter service covers most of the Klang Valley right up to the exterior regions of Selangor, with some routes going into Perak, Penang and even Perlis.

Road trips in Sarawak

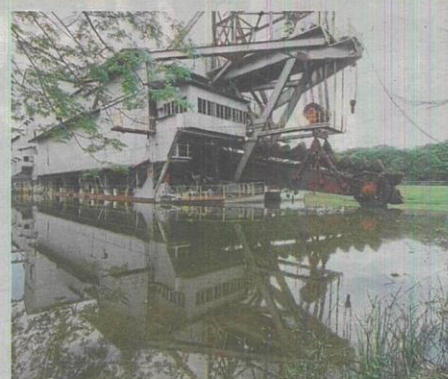
With the Pan Borneo Highway almost complete in Sarawak, 2026 is the best time to go on a road trip in the state.

Spanning 1,077km, the highway starts from the southwestern part of Sarawak – Telok Melano – to the east in Miri, which is close to the border of Brunei.

Long-haul driving enthusiasts online have already started mapping the drive, suggesting interesting places to check out, good rest stops, petrol stations, where to eat and more.

Many also suggest crossing over to Brunei, Labuan and Sabah, if you're doing the trip west to east, that is.

We recommend going from Miri to Telok Melano instead, so you can check out the Tanjung Datu National Park at the end of your trip. Less than two hours



Tanjung Tualang Tin Dredge No. 5 is in Batu Gajah. — SAIFUL BAHRI/The Star

away is Kuching, where there are also lots of attractions to check out; this is also where the main airport is.

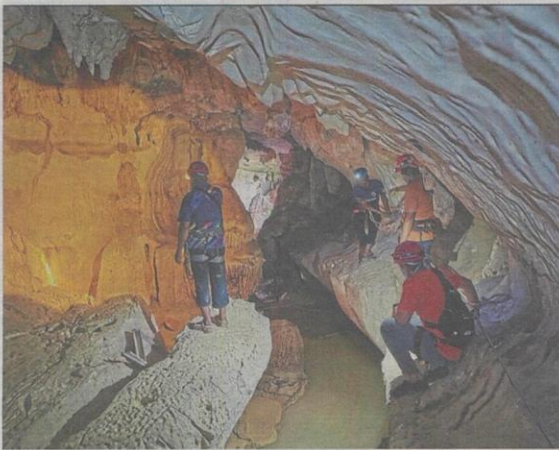
Cafe hop in Perlis

For coffee lovers, the true "hidden gems" in Perlis are its cool cafes. The little state is big on cof-

fee – or cafes, in particular – and it's resulted in quaint coffee shops, and each brings something different to the table.

For example, if you've never experienced drinking coffee while lounging in a cave, you can give this a shot at KUPI KAHFI.

Located within Bukit Tau Adventure Park, the cafe is set in



Explore Malaysia's first via ferrata with an underground section in Kelantan. — Muse Ecopark/Facebook

Daging salai masak lemak is among the popular dishes you can try in Negri Sembilan. — Masters of Malaysian Cuisine



a limestone cave that is purported to be 280 million years old. Minimal changes to the interior ensure its natural state remains largely intact. If you're claustrophobic, there's also the option of enjoying your cuppa in open-sided domed tents instead.

About 10 minutes by car from the park is another interesting cafe called Ruang by Balbuk Haus. A humble establishment conceptualised in a rustic style, it can be described as an art cafe that doubles as a mini library.

Here, you can feel time slow down as you sip your coffee and read a book or simply take in the serene view of padi fields and Chuping Hill. Come after 6pm, just in time to enjoy dinner under the golden glow of the setting sun.

Also a great place for sunset viewing is Rhuang, a cafe located at Pantai Pulau Ketam. Coffee, beach, sunset – perfect way to end your day in Perlis.

Achieve wellness in Sabah

Cool highlands, verdant trees and cerulean seas make Sabah a great place to visit for some time away in nature. Its natural wonders are also what make the state great for wellness retreats, with locations ranging from breezy beaches to remote rivers.

You can opt for retreats at island resorts near Kota Kinabalu, such as the ones on Pulau Tiga and Gaya Island. Let the rolling waves lull you to complete relaxation.

Go somewhere deep in the forest like Danum Valley, accessible via Lahad Datu, for you to disconnect from the urban hustle and simply bask in the lush rainforest's serenity.

Enjoy the jungle view or river view from your lodge as you spend your holiday in tranquillity.

Another great place to reconnect with nature as well as yourself is at the foot of Mount Kinabalu, in the Ranau district. Try off-grid living in Lemburan, located not far from the Poring Hot Springs (where you can go for a relaxing soak). Or have a relaxing stay in a tea plantation –

Sabah Tea Resort's accommodation choices include a bungalow, a longhouse and cottages.

Just last year, from June to July, Sabah held the Sustainable Wholistic Wellness Tourism event that included a conference, expo and retreat. This showcases the state's commitment to wellness tourism, making it a perfect destination for holistic holidays.

Climb high in Kelantan

If you like adventure, you'll love what Kelantan has in store for adventurous souls. The state is especially exciting for fans of *via ferrata*. It's a rock-climbing activity that involves a series of iron steps and a fixed steel rope, which climbers can safely attach themselves to.

The longest and highest *via ferrata* in Peninsular Malaysia can be found at Gua Ikan in Dabong. (The highest in Malaysia and the world overall is at Mount Kinabalu, Sabah). The upgrade works done in 2020 elevated the track at Gua Ikan from 70m above sea level to 210m.

Over in Gua Musang, at the relatively new Muse Ecopark – opened in 2024 – you can enjoy the combined thrill of *via ferrata* and flying fox. After climbing the limestone cave wall, you can then "fly" down from the 40m-high flying fox platform.

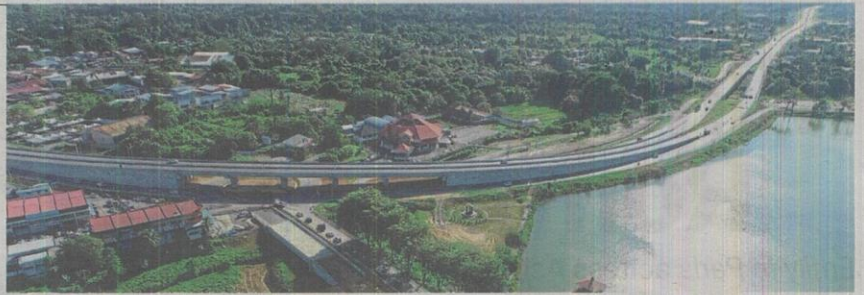
Most recently, the park introduced Malaysia's first *via ferrata* that includes an underground section. So, aside from climbing the cave wall, you'll be venturing into the cave too as part of the route.

Negri Sembilan flavours

Known for its bold and spicy flavours, Negri Sembilan is a great destination for food lovers who enjoy rich, comforting dishes.

Influenced by Minangkabau culture, the state's cuisine is known for its generous use of coconut milk and bird's eye chilli, so expect most dishes to be spicy, creamy and delicious.

Some popular local dishes include daging salai masak lemak cili api, which features



Part of the Pan Borneo Highway in Sarawak. — Filepic



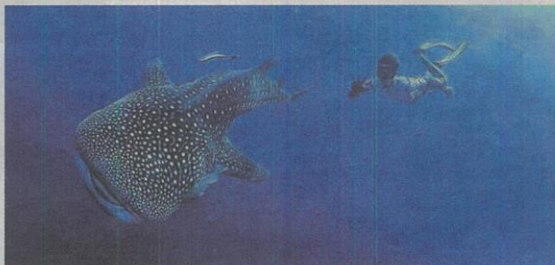
Cameron Highlands' Mossy Forest is tucked in the heart of Gunung Brinchang. — NAZRI SULAIMAN/Wikimedia Commons



Make 2026 the year you go on railway holidays in Malaysia. — FLOREY D. MIKIL/The Star



Stay at a longhouse in a tea plantation in Sabah. — Sabah Tea website



Go on a diving trip on Redang Island to explore its rich marine life. — Redang Bay Resort/Padi website

smoked beef cooked in a spicy coconut gravy; daging jangek, a traditional dish featuring cow skin; and rendang pucuk ubi, which is rendang prepared using tapioca shoots.

These dishes highlight Negri Sembilan's slow-cooked practice.

Start your food journey in Seremban, the state's capital, where eateries such as Restoran Selera Negeri and Rumah Putih Makan Berjambur serve a wide variety of traditional dishes.

Try to go for restaurants that feature kampung-style dining, with a good view to boot.

To end your trip, take a drive to Port Dickson. Here, you can enjoy lots of fresh seafood cooked in many ways, while taking in the peaceful coastal views.

Recharge in Terengganu

The Terengganu coast has endless stretches of white sandy beaches that are perfect for an escape from the city rush.

Every year, visitors from near and far flock to its islands to

unwind, and it's easy to see why – it's a place you'll want to come back to again and again.

Islands like Pulau Perhentian and Pulau Redang, just a short boat ride away from Kuala Terengganu, are the most popular spots. You can go kayaking, diving, snorkelling or simply relax on the beach.

You can also pamper yourself with spa treatments and yoga sessions at resorts on Pulau Perhentian Kecil and Teluk Siang on Redang Island.

These islands are home to a variety of marine and feathered life, too. If you've ever thought about birding, head to Perhentian or Redang, where kingfishers, sunbirds and many other birds can be spotted.

Whether you're seeking adventure or relaxation, Terengganu is a rejuvenating retreat.

Adventure in Pahang

There's no better place than Pahang to satisfy your craving for adventure, especially if hiking

is at the top of your list. The state's diverse terrain offers some of the most rewarding trails in Malaysia, suitable for both beginner and seasoned hikers looking to reconnect with nature.

Buckle up your shoes and venture into Gunung Tahan, located within Taman Negara, Malaysia's oldest national park.

Gunung Tahan, standing at 2,187m, is the tallest mountain in Peninsular Malaysia. The climb is an exhilarating multi-day trek, typically taking five to seven days to complete.

Hikers would need to cross rivers, navigate dense rainforest and tackle steep ascents.

If camping in the jungle isn't your cup of tea, Taman Negara also has more accessible hiking options. Trails such as Bukit Teresek provide a shorter and less demanding climb, yet still reward hikers with stunning views of the mountain.

For a different hiking experience, head to Cameron Highlands, where cooler temperatures make trekking especially pleasant. The area is known for its forest trails, ranging from leisurely walks to more challenging routes.

Among the most popular hikes are Gunung Brinchang and Gunung Irau, both of which take hikers through mossy forests.

Another destination with similar cool-weather is Fraser's Hill. Hikers can explore independently or opt to go with a local guide for a deeper understanding of the area's ecology and history.