

A Walk in the Park in Kuala Lumpur *Red Deer Advocate – 2005*



A large sign posted outside the city park in Malaysia's capital of Kuala Lumpur reads: "Please Do Not Feed the Monkeys." Being naïve, the warning sign did not cause me any concern when I decided to go for a leisurely walk through this lovely city park. After all, I had no intention of feeding the monkeys when I wandered in with an ice cream cone in hand.

Moments later, I was running through the park with six monkeys chasing after me. The largest male was baring his yellow teeth and hissing swearwords in monkey language. Although I don't speak the language, I'm pretty sure I heard the "B" word. "Drop the cone or die!" he seemed to say. Terrified, I dropped the cone and ran. This experience was the first indication that Kuala Lumpur is not an ordinary holiday destination.

In fact, Kuala Lumpur is anything but ordinary. The city is exotic, unique, and surprisingly rich in graceful architecture that reflects the ethnic diversity of the metropolis. It is a safe, modern, and aesthetically pleasing city to visit, and aside from the monkeys, the locals are very friendly. To miss Kuala Lumpur is to miss the opportunity to experience modern Malaysia.

After an invigorating jog through the city park, we began our city tour by exploring some of the religious sites in the city. The architecture in Kuala Lumpur is a fascinating mix of many different cultures and eras. We stopped at gleaming Islamic mosques, ancient Chinese Temples, an old Anglican Church and an Indian Temple. It is intriguing to see the way the city's divergent races live together with few outward signs of conflict.

Wandering inside the temples was an experience not soon to be forgotten. After donning traditional Muslim attire, we visited a mosque and were able to observe the religious services. From there we visited a Buddhist temple where we were able to observe a young family teaching their one-year-old daughter how to light incense and pray. The temples were incredible monuments and the religious ceremonies were fascinating.

Our next stop was at one of the city's most famous landmarks, the railway station. Designed in 1911 by British architects, the station conjures up images of Arabian knights with its Moorish combination of domes, spires, turrets, and archways. Inside are a café and hotel as well as a still functioning train shed.

From the train station we moved on to the modern part of the city. Kuala Lumpur has some of Southeast Asia's most impressive skyscrapers. Perhaps the most famous are the Petronas twin towers, which appeared in the movie *Entrapment*. Set in an enormous and artistically designed tropical garden, the towers house a discovery centre, a stunningly beautiful concert hall and an unusual art gallery, all of which are connected to a shopping gallery and food court. They are the tallest buildings in the world at 452 metres high. And as is the tradition with very tall buildings, a rotating restaurant is located at the top that offers an outstanding view of the entire city and a good buffet featuring local cuisine.

Our final stop was the city's famed night market. Located in the original China Town known by locals as Petaling Street, the market opens at 8:00 P.M. most nights. Hundreds of small outdoor booths line the streets offering everything from local food, to fake Rolex watches and Gucci Handbags. Bargaining is a must here and prices are very low. Locals and tourists alike hang out in the market and you can really feel the beat of the city here.

As I relaxed in my hotel room after an action-packed day exploring the sites of Kuala Lumpur, I realized that this is a city that I would never forget. It leaves a mark indelibly on you and you come home a changed person. It's hard to identify what the change is, but I'm sure I will never be able to look at a monkey quite the same way.

If You Go:

- Don't let the food vendors outside the city park tempt you, if you carry food into the park, the monkeys will become aggressive.
- When visiting religious sites always dress modestly and act in a respectful and reverent manner.
- Kuala Lumpur is an easy city to navigate on foot as many of the attractions are within easy walking distance of city centre, but a good map is essential.
- Until 1957, Malaysia was a British State, and English is still widely spoken particularly in the capital city. The official language is Bahasa Malaysia.
- Airfare from Calgary to Kuala Lumpur will cost approximately \$1550 depending on the season of travel.
- Penalties for possession of drugs include lengthy jail stays. The penalty for drug trafficking in Malaysia is death. In airports and train stations always keep a close eye on your bags.

Safety Tips When Travelling Abroad:

- a.) Always check with the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs for the latest travel advisories prior to booking any trip abroad. The website is: <http://www.voyage.gc.ca>.
- b.) Carry a Canadian passport that is valid for at least six months beyond the date of your expected return to Canada.
- c.) Keep a photocopy of your passport's identification page on your person.
- d.) Always carry passports, tickets, and money separately.
- e.) Keep valuables and passports in your hotel safe and carry only enough money for anticipated expenses.
- f.) Leave a copy of your itinerary and proof of citizenship with family and/or friends back

in Canada.

g.) Carry legally certified documentation signed by both parents permitting a child under 18 to travel alone or with an adult (i.e. a relative or teacher), or carry legally certified documentation from the absent parent if only one parent escorts the child, in addition to a copy of any separation or divorce decree or death certificate.

h.) Do not visit unknown or isolated areas without first obtaining information or assistance.

i.) Make sure you have adequate medical insurance in case of emergencies.

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