

Malaysia Then and Now: Penang vs Langkawi

By Hawa Patel

A Journey Revisited

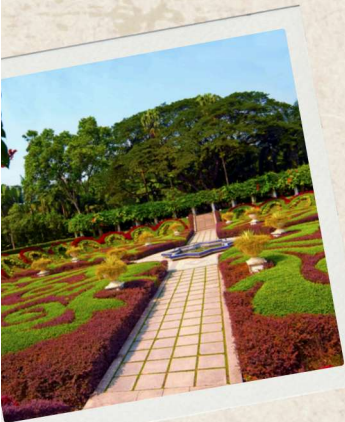
Twenty years ago, our first trip to Malaysia was filled with anticipation and discovery. I was expecting, and the journey felt long yet rewarding. Kuala Lumpur dazzled us with its skyline, and Penang offered a cultural retreat after our stopover in Singapore. A memorable highlight was a pregnant lady being upgraded to business class on the flight back to Kuala Lumpur from Penang, a gesture of kindness then and that made the trip unforgettable.

Fast forward two decades, Sameera had grown into a beautiful young lady, and Riyaz and myself traveling with her and her sibling brought a new dimension to our Malaysian adventure. This time, we added a stopover in Hong Kong before returning to Malaysia, eager to experience the country anew.



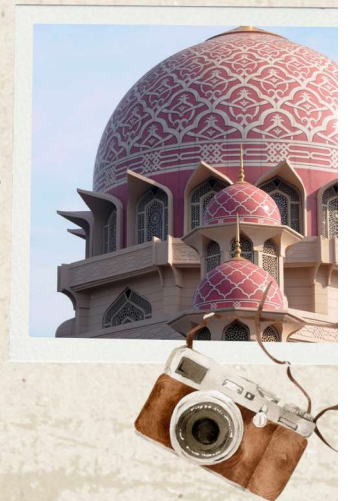
Kuala Lumpur: The Heartbeat of Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur remains a vibrant metropolis, its skyline dominated by the iconic Petronas Twin Towers. The city has grown into a hub of malls, branded stores, and entertainment, making shopping with teenagers an exciting experience. Bukit Bintang, the main shopping and entertainment district, offered delicious street food at Jalan Alor, while TAPAK Urban Street Dining near the Twin Towers provided a lively atmosphere with food trucks and local vibes.



Cultural highlights included revisiting Masjid Negara and the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, both located in the serene Perdana Botanical Garden area. These sites, rich in Islamic heritage, felt just as inspiring the second time around. Malaysia has the most beautiful mosques which include the largest mosque in Malaysia the Blue Mosque, the Crystal Mosque and Pink Mosque both found in Putrajaya. The Pink Mosque is at the edge of the lake and has a stunning view

Sunway Lagoon in Malaysia is renowned for its extensive man-made water features, most notably the Surf Beach, which is considered one of the world's largest man-made surf beaches which has a setting similar to Sun City Valley of the Waves. A day worth setting aside with seven different adventures to experience including Water Park, Amusement Park, Wildlife Park, XPark, Sunway Lost Lagoon, Scream Park, and Captain Quack Land.



Penang: Heritage and Culinary Delights

Penang, especially George Town, is a treasure trove of culture, history, and culinary wonders. Known worldwide for its street food, Penang offers walkable streets, bustling markets, temples, and diverse cultural experiences. However, during our visit, the beaches were less inviting due to huge jellyfish, making swimming difficult. For those who prefer heritage, street life, and food over beach activities, Penang is the ideal destination.

Langkawi, by contrast, is a paradise for water lovers. With pristine beaches, clear waters, and lush nature, it offers relaxation, adventure and exploring the undersea world. Our family enjoyed jet skiing, swimming, and exploring the scenic landscapes. Highlights included the Skybridge cable car, mangrove tours, and island hopping, all of which showcased Langkawi's natural beauty.

Langkawi's laid-back vibe, cleaner waters, and whiter sands provided a soothing escape from the busyness of everyday life. It is an island of romance, relaxation, and water sports, perfect for families seeking tranquillity and adventure. Masjid Hanaan is picturesque along the drive to the cableway. The Langkawi Cable Car, also known as Langkawi sky cab is a spectacular attraction to Langkawi Island. The combo express card includes:

- o the glass floor sky cab express cable car,
- o Skydome,
- o Syrex and
- o 3D Art Museum

We had booked for the island hopping in Langkawi so did not see the need to do the mangrove. I was glad that hubby decided to experience the Kilil Karst Geoforest – Mangrove Forest tour that offers numerous activities for you to choose from, including kayaking around the forest!



The tour will lead you through a complete journey, from discovering the magical forest in its splendour and its hidden wildlife, to eagle watching, and lovely seafood at the fish farm. It was a spectacular experience eagle watching the white bellied sea eagle's feast. We stopped at the Floating Fish farm to view feeding of big groupers, seabass, mantis, prawns, horseshoe crabs and stingrays. Imagine visiting the Bat Cave (Gua Kelawar) ; where we saw spectacular stalagmites and stalactites.

A must-do experience is the sea tour where you can sail out from the river to the open seas of the Andaman Sea. Our most thrilling experience from all our destinations was taking a group quad biking tour into the unknown. In Langkawi we did a twist of an adventurous experience by jet skiing into the sea. A twist to the adrenalin rush.



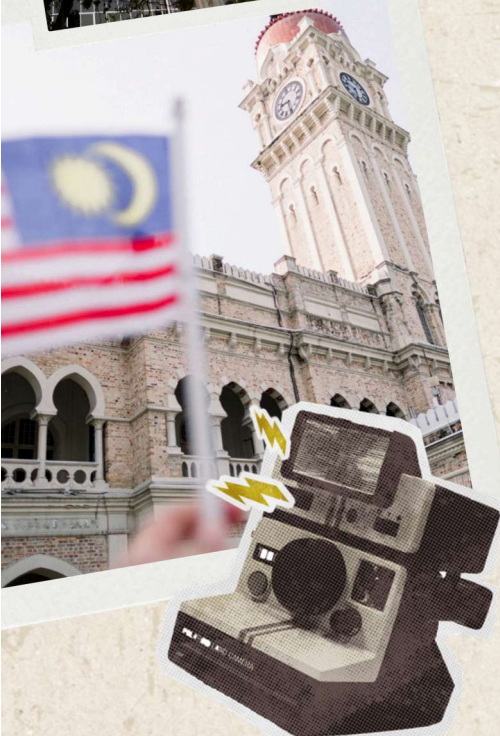
Island hopping is very different from experiencing the Mangrove that takes you out to the different islands that include:

- o Pulau Dayang Bunting (Pregnant Maiden Island)
- o Pulau Singa Besar (Big Lion Island – eagle feeding)
- o Pulau beras Basah (Wet Rice Island)



Penang vs Langkawi: Choosing Your Escape

- **Penang:** Best for heritage, culture, and street food enthusiasts. Ideal for those who enjoy walkable areas, temples, and bustling markets.
- **Langkawi:** Perfect for nature lovers, beachgoers, and water sports enthusiasts. Offers scenic viewpoints, island hopping, and a relaxed atmosphere.



Malaysia, whether through the cultural richness of Penang or the natural beauty of Langkawi, offers diverse experiences for travellers. Revisiting the country after twenty years allowed us to see how both the destinations and our family had grown. Penang and Langkawi each hold their charm, but for our water-loving family, Langkawi was the clear favourite. Malaysia remains a destination that blends heritage, modernity, and natural splendour—making every visit a story worth telling.

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