

## KL Shop Over

JUNE 2007

VACATIONS & TRAVEL

There are two kinds of people in this world, those who pack light when they travel, and those who pack an extra bag to make room for their shopping. If you were planning to visit Kuala Lumpur and travelling light you might end up having to buy another suitcase when you get there.

The perfect Asian stopover demands just three things. Good connecting flights to Europe and the rest of Asia, plenty of exciting itineraries for daytime exploring and a multitude of markets and malls to help you finish off the Christmas list.

The shoppers menu in Kuala Lumpur is as much a blend of different national influences as a curry laksa. Choose from Chinese bazaars that come to life at night, streets filled with Indian textiles and magnificent malls showcasing the very best of European designers.

A colourful mix of cultures is what defines the character of Kuala Lumpur, but it is the flare of Malay people that brings it all together for the rest of the world to enjoy.

The Petronas Twin Towers are a proud symbol of the city and a modern Malaysia, boldly putting on display the elegance of Islamic design and the innovation of leading-edge technology. The towers dwarf everything around them, shifting the focus of the city away from the historical trading areas along the Klang River and signposting the future of an increasingly prosperous nation.

Ground level at the Petronas Twin Towers is where you'll find KLCC, the KL City Centre, a massive complex of gardens, aquatic playgrounds and shopping centres. The star attraction on the block is Suria KLCC, miles of retail where food and fashion is flavoured with all things Asian.

It's the unique treasures at Suria KLCC that reveal how different Malaysia is to the rest of Asia, such as the heritage crafts at Pucuk Rebung and the contemporary designs at Tenmoku Pottery. At the same time Malaysia is inclusive of all Asian cultures, as demonstrated by Lotus Arte's seductive collection of jade artefacts and the neighbouring retailers offering replica terracotta warriors and carved Buddha statues.

Shopping can work up an appetite, so it's worth visiting the information desk at Suria KLCC to pick up your free copy of their 64-page good food guide. You would need a whole day to inspect every restaurant in the complex and choose one for lunch, but a few minutes flipping through the book and you'll be ready to make a bee-line for something suitably delicious.

After dark there are two standout options to combine dining and shopping in Kuala Lumpur. You can head down to Chinatown for something cheap and cheerful, or frock-up for the finer things of life at Starhill Gallery.

The Chinese Night Bazaar on Petaling Street comes complete with souvenir stands, two-dollar clothing shops and an endless supply of fake watches. Mingled through this pandemonium are street cafes, snack stalls and hawkers markets. The night air in Chinatown is seared with flames as the curb-side cooks redefine the meaning of fast-food. Eat, shop and run.

Just a few blocks away is Bintang Walk, but it might as well be on another planet. Bukit Bintang Street is a bustling parade of coffee shops, department stores and people. As you step off the pavement and into Starhill Gallery you are entering a world of the sensual and serene.

This is a place where floors have names instead of numbers. The buttons on the elevators say it all – Adorn, Indulge, Pamper and more. Exclusive names from distant lands have made Starhill Gallery their home away from home, such as Boucheron, Lanvin and Glashutte.

On the "Muse" level you'll find a selection of gallery spaces where local and international artists present their contemporary expressions of calligraphy, photography, paintings and sculptures. You'll also find the House of Suzie Wong, an eclectic shop richly decorated in red silk, dark timbers and exotic antiques.

If ever you need a range of Chinese wedding beds to choose from, Suzie is your girl.

As lavish as "Muse" may seem at first, it still comes second to "Feast" in the pursuit of hedonistic pleasure among the many faces of Starhill Gallery. Candles, lanterns and shaded lamps twinkle in a sea of kitchens and bars, guiding the eyes through stone-laid paths of culinary exploration. The entire floor is a collection of exquisite restaurants that span the breadth of Asia.

Distinctive menus belonging to any one kitchen can be enjoyed from tables belonging to any of the others. It's like a hawkers market for fine diners. Your group can be dim-summing at the Luk Yu Tea House while one of your party sizzles with Korean styled Ginseng Chicken. Even the most discerning of taste-buds will find something enticing and memorable.

Exclusive shopping and luxury dining is all very nice, but no expedition of a foreign city is complete without hunting out a bargain that you just couldn't get back home. Kuala Lumpur's bargain potential excels when shopping for textiles and technology.

Little India is awash with t-shirts, saris and sarongs. This rabble of closed-in streets is a short walk from Kuala Lumpur's most beautiful mosque, Masjid Jamek, but you'll still need your Lonely Planet to find it. Once you have entered the maze of material expect to haggle and bargain for everything.

Marked prices are merely a guide to where the bidding starts. Expect to hear plenty of complaining from the store owners about how they can't afford to feed their ailing grandmother unless you offer more money. Don't be fooled by their well rehearsed theatrics, if your price really is too low they can always say, "No thanks."

Your real problem will be the overwhelming selection to choose from, and making sure you don't walk out with more than you really need. Shop keepers in Little India are very good at bending to accommodate a bargain price, so long as you buy in bulk.

If you do find something you really like then make sure you do your deal there and then, instead of planning to return later. Once you walk around the corner and get lost in the next alley you may never find your favourite shop again.

The best bargains on electronic goods can be found at Sungei Wang Plaza, maybe even the best in Asia. Getting there is easy, as the monorail station for Bukit Bintang stops right alongside the back entrance. From the outside Sungei Wang looks unremarkable, and even a little seedy, but from the inside it's like a city within a city – neon lights and shiny windows decorated with iPods, digital cameras and laptop computers.

Bargaining is also the rule here, except for the department stores, and you'll be amazed at how much the price-tag on a digital camera can drop when you make it clear that you're a genuine buyer. It's better to look serious than eager of course. Once a salesman has worked out you won't leave the store without your new MP3 player there's little chance of beating him down on price.

Whether shopping for gadgets or garments, always remember the golden rule of bargaining; If someone accepts your offer then you have to buy it, and if they don't accept your offer then be prepared to walk away.

And try not to smile too much when you realise what a great bargain you're getting, you still have to find room for it in your baggage.

