Contents

List of Illustrations 4
Acknowledgments 5
Introduction 7

1 From Yesterday to Today
   The where, how, what and why 9
2 Wheels, Water and Wings
   Transport systems 45
3 Starting Point, Kuala Lumpur 65
4 South to the Causeway
   Malacca and Johore 98
5 Looking East
   The East Coast 115
6 Pearls in the North
   Penang and its vicinity 142
7 Enchanted Interlude
   Sarawak and Sabah 156
8 Island City
   Singapore 179
   Recipes from Malaysia and Singapore 217
Index 220
Illustrations

Plates

1. East Coast market scene
2. Batik painting
3. Satok Bridge, Sarawak
4. Batu Caves
5. Kuala Lumpur's municipal buildings
6. Stadthuys, Malacca
7. Coconut baboon
8. Pagoda, Penang
9. Snake temple, Penang
10. Penang Hill Railway
11. Main streets, Penang
12. Longhouse interior, Ensebang
13. Outside a longhouse
14. Headman dancing, Sarawak
15. Ensebang longhouse dancers
16. Market place, Sabah
17. Boats at Kuching, Sarawak
18. Mount Kinabalu
19. Street in Singapore
20. Market stall, Singapore
21. View from Singapore River
22. Tiger Balm Gardens
23. Medium in Singapore temple
24. Rubber tapper at work

Maps

1. Peninsula Malaysia 6
2. Sabah and Sarawak 158
3. Singapore City 181
Introduction

I was on deck before dawn on the morning that I saw Malaysia for the first time. The sea slapped idly at the Canton as she moved landwards, and my nostrils, accustomed for three long weeks to the salty tang of the open sea, were assaulted by rich earth odours drifting in the humid air, while the unfamiliar contours of Penang Island loomed like grey spectres in the lightening sky. Then, red-faced and angry at being disturbed, the sun arrived, transforming hillsides, forests and buildings with his reflected choler, while the sky turned slowly into morning azure. The quayside clattered into noisy activity, and, as the breeze died in the shelter of the harbour, a band of sweat formed at my waist, a sensation which was to become part and parcel of existence in the years that followed. Small knots of people were waiting on the dock, and, looming above one Chinese group, consisting of a man, woman and three small children, I saw the familiar bulk of my husband. The Chinese family were friends of his from Singapore who were visiting relations in Penang and had come in force to welcome me, and, since that first introduction, 20 years ago, I have never quite been able to divide Malaysia and Singapore neatly into separate entities as the politicians seem to do. So many of the people that I came to know during my sojourns in South-East Asia have relatives sprinkled liberally through the region, and come and go happily between them. In addition, the very proximity of the two nations and their ways of life, add to their similarities, while the intermingling of their history makes it necessary, when speaking or writing of one or the other, to refer back to past occurrences of mutual interest.
Nevertheless, there are very considerable contrasts, caused not only by the national traits of the predominant races in each place, and their longstanding rivalries, but also by the difference in size between the two, and the developments within them, which stretch even into present-day tourism. Such developments and rivalries are among the many fascinating aspects of any comment one makes on Malaysia and Singapore, for, although they argue furiously on occasion, neither can really afford to lose the other, and it is this almost 'Tom and Jerry' relationship which inevitably has effects far beyond their own confines and contains much of their inner strength. Loving them both, each for their own especial qualities, I can only wish them peace and prosperity in which to develop in harmonious disharmony along their separate, but inevitably united, paths.

Malaysia and Singapore embrace such a large area, not only physically but also historically, that it is not possible to cover everything in a book of this size; so I have concentrated mostly on areas and happenings that a tourist, or a business visitor with a few hours to spare, could discover for himself. I am deeply conscious that this will inevitably lead to some gaps in coverage, and I ask pardon of those lovely places and people that I have of necessity had to leave out. But the consolation must surely lie in the knowledge that there must always be something left for next time, which perhaps could also be considered to be one of the secrets of success in today's tourism scene.

Gladys Nicol
1. From Yesterday to Today

'Turn left at the bottom of Africa, past India and keep straight on. Sooner or later you'll come to the Malay States.' That might have been the directions given to the first explorers from the Northern Hemisphere who went in search of Peninsular Malaysia, the long, expressive, Eastern finger which points downward from Burma and Thailand towards Indonesia and Borneo. Singapore, joined to the Peninsula by the man-made Johore Causeway, is a protective nail on that finger, stopping within 85 miles of the equator. Although modern Malaysia also includes Sabah and Sarawak, two States in the great island of Borneo, this is a relatively recent happening, but it is quite logical if one is to think of Malaysia as a community mainly composed of Malay peoples. Yet it isn't quite as simple as that, for many different races have found their way over the centuries to this curving corner of South-East Asia, and one finds Chinese, Indians, Europeans, Malays and combinations of all of them, living more or less amicably together, each preserving their own ways and their own beliefs in a free and democratic society. We, in Europe, are still inclined to think of Singapore and Malaysia as comparatively 'new' nations, even though they are fully-fledged members of that melting pot of the world's hopes that we call the United Nations. Certainly they are older and wiser than some of the emergent African nations, but very young in comparison to the 'old hands' in the rest of the world. Yet it is likely that there were civilisations in the Malay Peninsula and the islands while we were still daubing paint on our faces, or when Attila ravaged his way across his known world. Granted the civilisations were
different, but that some community life existed is beyond doubt. Some of them continue today in astonishingly pure and untouched forms in primitive tribes within the shadowed heart of Malaysia’s jungles, as far removed from the modern city Malay as they are from the citizens of New York or London.

If we start in time-honoured fashion at the beginning, ‘once upon a time’ would seem to be as good a way as any, for the beginnings of Malaysia are shrouded in the mists of time, just as early sea mists hang like curtains around her rain-forests, among the oldest of their kind in the world. It is estimated that the great jungles remained inviolate for something like a 100 million years, and, while much of the world was gripped in the Ice Age, the myriad creatures which dwelt in the green steaminess of Malaysian forests remained undisturbed and relatively unchanged. As well as primitive man, therefore, many other creatures retained their original forms and can be found nowhere else in the world. In some ways this is not surprising, for – despite the concrete jungles of civilisation which insinuate themselves further into the green ones, tarmacadam roads and asphalt runways which replace old trails, tin mine scars, and rubber, palm oil, and rice plantations – two thirds of all Malaysia is still primeval forest and mangrove swamp, so that wildlife keeps a chance of survival; but, of course, how long this can continue is dependent on modern man and his demands.

Much is due to the hitherto sheer inaccessibility and difficulty of the hinterland terrain. Peninsular Malaysia, the original Malaya, for instance, covers approximately 5,000 square miles and boasts a coastline of over 1,000 miles. The central mountain ranges form a steep skullcap, rising to 7,000 feet at Gunong Tahan. On the western side, descent is steep, so that rivers rush headlong down the slopes in a pattern of waterfalls and fast-flowing streams, before reaching the 50-mile-wide coastal plain which faces Sumatra across the narrow Malaccan strait. On the eastern side of the range, the contours are more gradual, with longer, lazier rivers eventually flowing into the South China Sea across palm-lined beaches
where there is little or no natural harbouring. Likewise, Sabah, covering about 29,388 square miles of the northern cap of Borneo, has mountain ranges which rise majestically all the way to the 13,455 feet of Kinabalu, highest mountain in South-East Asia. Three-quarters of the population live along the swampy coastal strips facing the South China Sea in the west, and the Sulu and Celebes Seas in the east. The dense tropical forests which cover the slopes have therefore been left to the aborigine tribes, and to the orang-utan (‘forest man’ in Malay) who has also dwelt there for thousands of years.

Sarawak, with its romantic White Rajah image, and its fascinating little capital of Kuching, is a composition of mangrove swamp, wide rivers and virtually unexplored jungle, set against a backdrop of high mountains.

Singapore is a different story. Roughly the size of the Isle of Wight, and covering, together with 54 other small islands in the vicinity, a total area of about 225 square miles, its bursting population of two and a half million people, mostly of Chinese stock, has entailed the clearance and reclamation of most of its territory to accommodate them in housing and industrial developments. However, there too, one can find an area of about 12 square miles in the Bukit Panjang district which is marked off as a catchment and nature reserve, and there are traces of the original landscape, though little wildlife remains.

The predominantly unchanging quality of all these places is their climate, for their proximity to the equator ensures an eternal warmth and humidity. There is a considerable rainfall, as well as hot sunshine, throughout the year. In most parts, temperature changes vary only slightly between 75 and 87°F although in the higher areas, such as Cameron Highlands hill station in Peninsular Malaysia, temperatures have been recorded as low as 36°F. Seasons are indicated by a higher incidence of rainfall between October and January with the coming of the north-east Monsoon. This is usually followed by a drier spell between February and July, although, in common with many other places in the world, weather patterns have changed slightly in recent years. These seasonal changes are not immediately apparent to a new-