
I. THE COUNTRY

Malaysia is a federation of 13 states with an area of 333,660 square kilometres (128,308 square miles) encompassing Peninsular Malaysia at the southern tip of the Asian mainland and the States of Sabah and Sarawak on the northern rim of the Island of Borneo. Peninsular Malaysia has common borders with Thailand on the north and Singapore on the south. Sabah and Sarawak are separated from Peninsular Malaysia by more than 600 km (373 miles) of the South China Sea. These two states share a common border with Indonesia to the south and have as a close neighbour the Sultanate of Brunei.

The capital and largest city of Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur which is situated some 48 km (30 miles) from Port Kelang, the major regional port. The other principal towns in Peninsular Malaysia include Penang, the second largest port; Ipoh, the centre of the tin mining industry; Malacca, a centre of the plantation industry; and Johore Baru, the northern link of the causeway to Singapore. The state capital of Sabah is Kota Kinabalu and the state capital of Sarawak is Kuching.

History and Government

Ever since it was established in the 14th century AD, the Sultanate of Malacca has flourished, becoming a major port and trading centre and serving as a halfway house for traders engaged in the lucrative spice and silk trade of the East. European involvement with Malaysia began with the occupation of Malacca by the Portuguese in the 16th century. Malacca was conquered by the Dutch in 1641, and the British first established a trading settlement in Penang in 1786, and later in Malacca and Singapore. The original Federation of Malaya, which achieved independence in 1957, included nine states and the two British settlements of Penang and Malacca. In 1963 the Federation of Malaysia was formed comprising the 11 Malay states and the former British territories of Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore. Singapore left the Federation in 1965.

Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy under a Supreme Head of State called the Yang di-Pertuan Agong who is