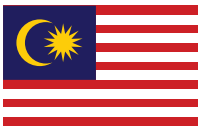
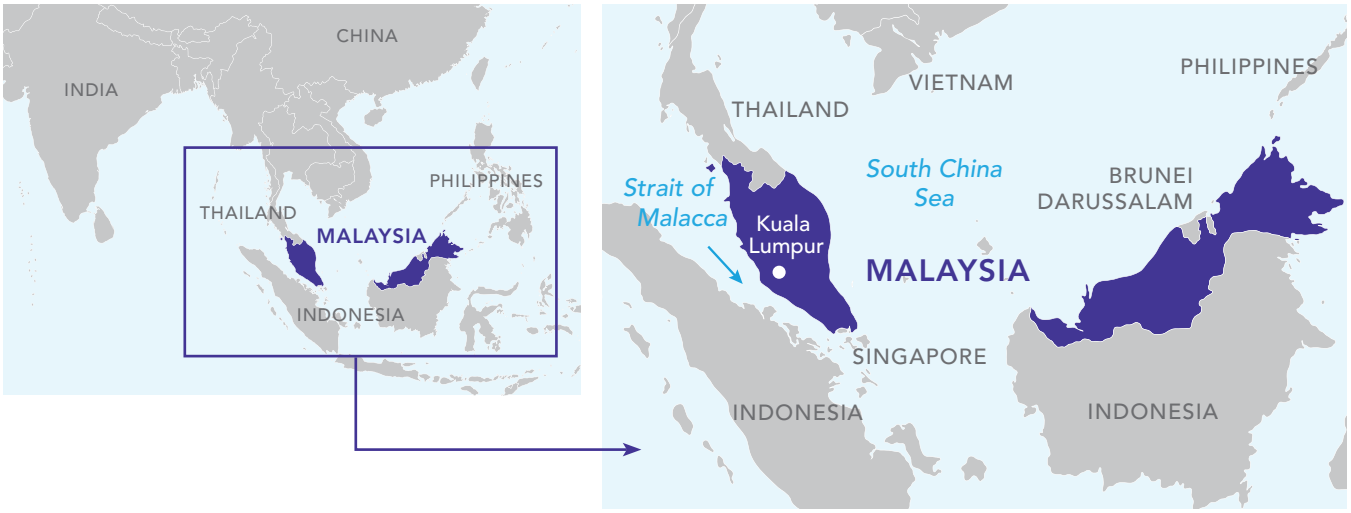


MALAYSIA



PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

Malaysia is divided into Peninsula Malaysia in the west, and Eastern Malaysia (including the states of Sabah and Sarawak) on the northern edge of the island of Borneo. Its climate is tropical, with coastal plains, hills, mountains, and rain forests.

The Strait of Malacca, off the southwest coast of Peninsular Malaysia, is one of the world's busiest and most vital shipping lanes, especially for other Asian countries like China, India, Japan, and Korea. It is estimated that 25% of the world's traded goods are shipped through this Strait.

BASIC FACTS

POPULATION: 30,513,848 (percentage under 25 years: 45%)

LIFE EXPECTANCY: 75 years

LITERACY RATE (AGE 15 AND OVER CAN READ & WRITE): 95%

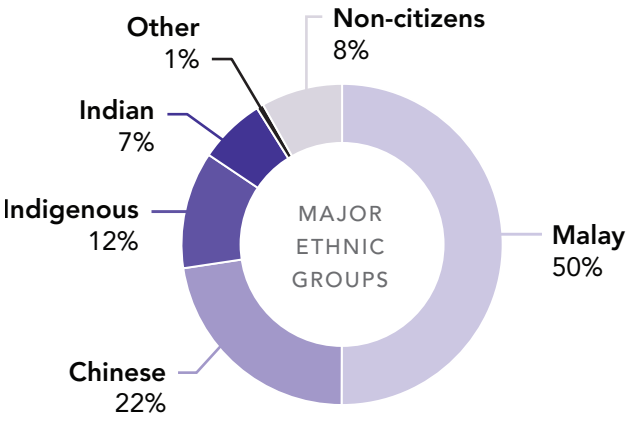
OFFICIAL AND MAJOR LANGUAGE(S): Bahasa Malaysia (official), English, Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, Foochow), Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Panjabi, Thai

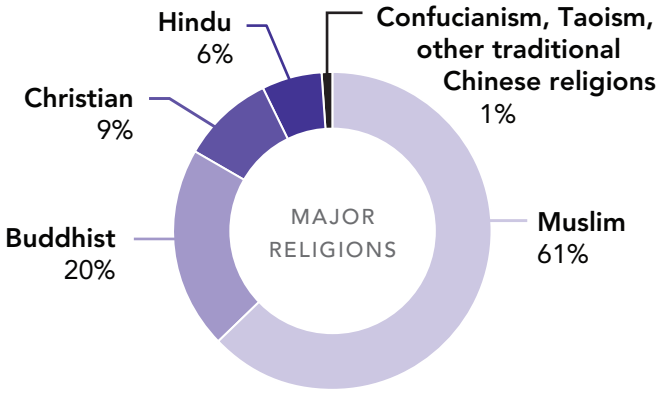
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT: Constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy

CURRENT LEADER: Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak

Source: CIA The World Fact Book

PEOPLE & CULTURE





Source: CIA The World Fact Book

POPULATION PYRAMID

Source: CIA World Fact Book

INTERNET & SOCIAL MEDIA

ACTIVE INTERNET USERS: 66% of population

AVERAGE DAILY INTERNET USE: 5 hours

ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USERS: 56% of population

AVERAGE DAILY SOCIAL MEDIA USE: 3.5 hours

Source: We Are Social

ECONOMY

GDP: C$378.78 billion

GDP PER-CAPITA: C$12,220

CURRENCY: Ringgit

MAJOR EXPORTS & IMPORTS:

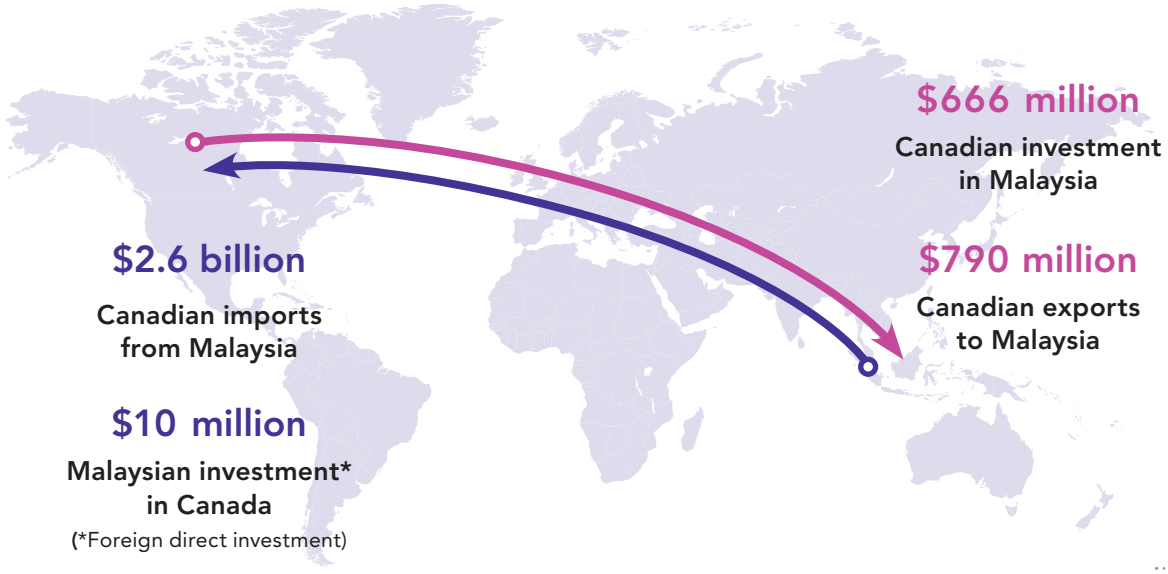
Exports: semiconductors and electronic equipment, palm oil, petroleum and liquefied natural gas, wood and wood products, palm oil, rubber, textiles, chemicals, solar panels

Imports: electronics, machinery, petroleum products, plastics, vehicles, iron and steel products, chemicals

Source: High Commission of Canada in Malaysia & CIA The World Fact Book

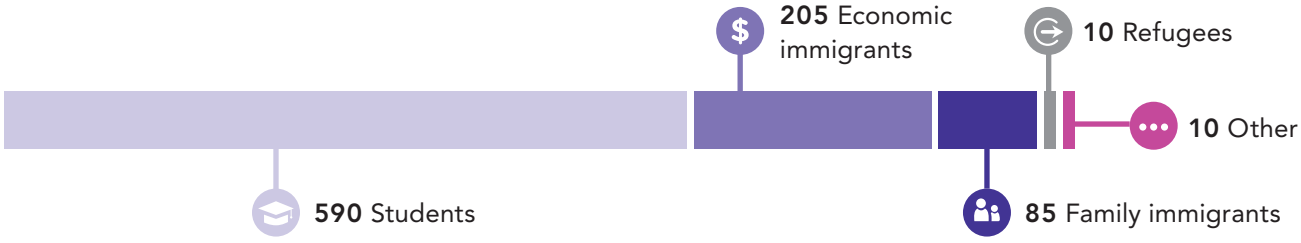
LINKS TO CANADA

TRADE, INVESTMENT IN 2015:



Source: High Commission of Canada in Malaysia

MALAYSIANS COMING TO CANADA IN 2014*:
(*does not include tourists)



Source: Citizenship & Immigration Canada

NOTABLE DATES

HISTORICAL

Hari Merdeka (Independence Day)

August 31 is a public holiday marking the day the Federation of Malaya gained its independence from Britain in 1957. On that day, thousands of Malaysians shouted "Merdeka!" ("Freedom!") seven times as the British flag was lowered and the new flag of independence was raised. Today, Malaysians still welcome the day with seven shouts of "Merdeka!" (This holiday should not be confused with Malaysia Day, which commemorates the formation of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963.)

More on Malaysia's independence:
1957: Malaya celebrates independence, *BBC*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/august/31/newsid_3534000/3534340.stm

CURRENT EVENT

Disappearance of Malaysia Air 370

On March 8, 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight 370 disappeared while traveling from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. There were 239 people on board. An extensive international search for the plane initially failed to yield clues until debris from the aircraft (or at least suspected to have come from the aircraft) was found on the coast of southeastern Africa and the Indian Ocean islands of Reunion and Mauritius. The cause of the flight's disappearance is unknown.

More on the Disappearance of MH370:
Missing Malaysia plane MH370: What we know, *BBC*, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26503141

CULTURAL HOLIDAY

Hari Raya Aidilfitri (also known as Hari Raya Puasa)

Hari Raya Aidilfitri, the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast, is a religious holiday celebrated by Malaysia's Muslims. *Hari Raya* means 'celebration day,' and Hari Raya Aidilfitri marks the end of Ramadan, the holy month when Muslims fast from dawn until sunset. Hari Raya Aidilfitri is considered one of the two most important celebrations for Muslims. The other is Hari Raya Haji, which is the festival of Abraham's sacrifice.

More on Hari Raya Aidilfitri:
Hari Raya Puasa (Hari Raya Aidilfitri), Wonderful Malaysia, http://www.wonderfulmalaysia.com/faq/hari-raya-puasa-hari-raya-aidilfitri.htm

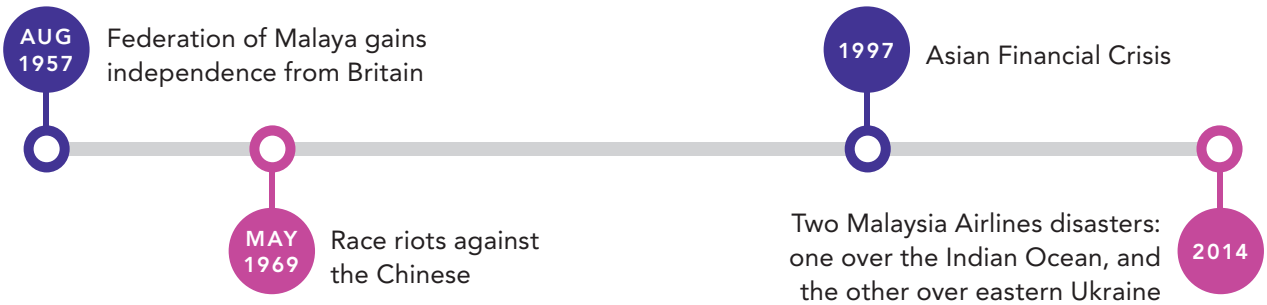
HONOURABLE MENTION

Agong's (King's) Birthday

Every year on the first Saturday of June, Malaysians celebrate the birthday of the Malaysian king, who is referred to as Yang di-Pertuan Agong. The largest and most popular celebration occurs in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur at Istana Negara, which was the king's former residence. During the celebration at Istana Negara, a ceremony is held to honour the king and other honourable Malaysians. This celebration is often seen as the year's grandest event for Malaysians. The king is elected for a five-year term, and the holiday is a ceremonial date, meaning it is not the king's actual birthday.

More on Agong's Birthday:
Agong's Birthday, Public Holidays, http://publicholidays.com.my/agongs-birthday/

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS



Source: Public Holidays & BBC

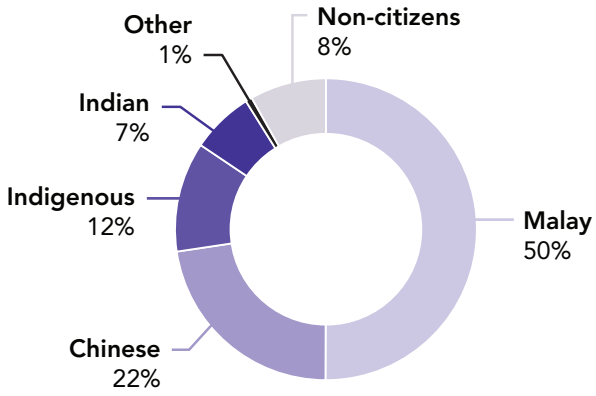
MULTI-ETHNIC MALAYSIA

Malaysia is very ethnically diverse, with people of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous heritage. Malays refer to themselves as "bumiputera," meaning "sons of the soil," because they inhabited the territory before the arrival of the Chinese and Indians during the colonial period. But the Malays are not the only group that is 'indigenous' to Malaysia: a group collectively known as the Orang Asli (a term that means "original" or "first" people in the Malay language) includes approximately 150,000 people from 18 different ethnic groups who many believe pre-date the Malays.

In 1957, decolonization left political power in Malay hands, while the Chinese had more economic power. This tension that came to a boil in 1969, when a four-day race riot left between 100 and 600 people dead, most of them Chinese (estimates vary depending on who you ask).

In 1970, the Malaysian government launched an affirmative action policy called the New Economic Policy (NEP), citing the need to give Malays the chance to 'catch up.' The NEP gave Malays preference in university admissions and government jobs. But after more than 45 years, many non-Malays are frustrated that such preferences still exist. Some in the government agree that it may be time to end the policy, but they worry that doing so will alienate the large Malay population.

Ethnicities in Malaysia



Source: CIA The World Factbook

Want to learn more?

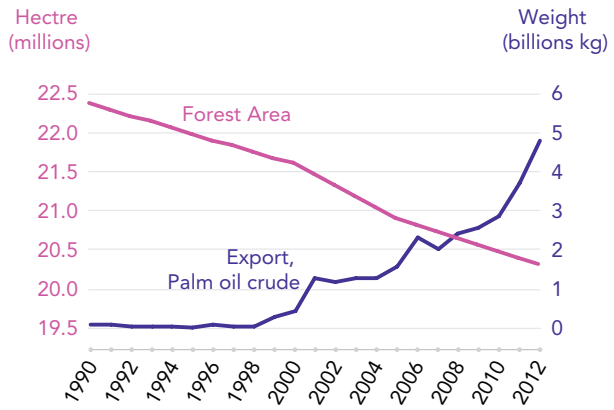
- Malaysia—Orang Asli, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, http://minorityrights.org/minorities/orang-asli/
- Race War in Malaysia, *TIME*, https://web.archive.org/web/20070518061525/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,900859,00.html
- 7 Regular Malaysians Share Their Vivid Memories of May 13, 1969, CILISOS, https://cilisos.my/7-malaysians-share-their-most-vivid-memories-of-may-13-1969/
- Policy Brief 13 Affirmative Action Malaysia, Overseas Development Institute, https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/4078.pdf
- A Never-ending Policy, *Economist*, http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21576654-elections-may-could-mark-turning-point-never-ending-policy

MALAYSIA'S DISAPPEARING FORESTS

Chocolate—along with soap, cereal, cookies, ice cream, cosmetics, dog food, and other daily products—often contains palm oil, Malaysia's second-largest export. The spread of palm oil plantations is at the heart of several related controversies. One is that they are causing serious deforestation and a loss of natural carbon storage. They are also resulting in a loss of habitat for endangered and vulnerable species such as orangutans, Sumatran rhinos, clouded leopards, and pygmy elephants. And not least of all, many of these plantations have displaced Malaysia's indigenous people, known collectively as Orang Asli, cutting the cultural and spiritual connection they have to their ancestral lands.

Many large companies, including Nestle, Hershey, and Krispy Kreme, have pledged to purchase palm oil only from sellers that do not contribute to further deforestation. Fortunately, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is trying to help with this (see links below). But consumers outside of Malaysia must still do their part to make informed choices.

Rate of Deforestation vs Palm Oil Demand



Sources: United Nations Environment Programme & UN Data

Want to learn more?

- Global Forest Change, University of Maryland, http://earthenginepartners.appspot.com/science-2013-global-forest
- "Is Malaysia's Palm Oil Worth the Cost?" BBC News, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33729763
- "3 Global Giants Drop Malaysian Palm Oil Supplier over Deforestation," The Straits Times, http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/3-global-giants-drop-malaysian-palm-oil-supplier-over-deforestation
- Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, http://www.rspo.org/about/how-we-work
- "Displaced Indigenous Malaysians Face Uncertain Future," United Nations University, https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/displaced-indigenous-malaysians-face-uncertain-future
- "The Palm Oil Plantations of Malaysia," Al Jazeera, http://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/asia/2012/06/22121.html

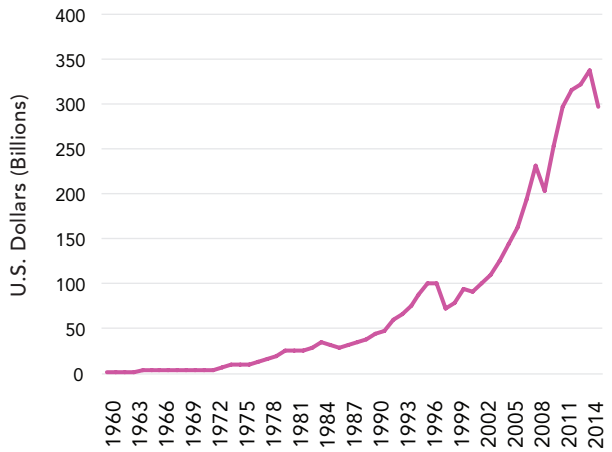
MALAYSIA'S ECONOMY

Malaysia has one of Southeast Asia's strongest economies. In the past, it relied on the export of natural resources such as tin, rubber, and palm oil. While these are still an important part of the country's economy, in the 1980s and 1990s, Malaysia began to shift its focus to manufacturing, electronics, and cars for export. Today, it has a balanced economy and is a leading exporter of electrical appliances, electronic parts and components, natural gas, and palm oil.

In 1997, Malaysia was one of the countries hit by the Asian Financial Crisis. The crisis shrank its economy by 7.4 per cent the following year, but it rebounded relatively quickly. Now, Malaysia's goal is to reach industrialized-country status by 2020. It plans to do this by focusing its economy on advanced materials, biotechnology, energy technologies, automated manufacturing, and internet technologies (IT).

Malaysia has also narrowed its inequality gap. In 1969 (the year of the Race Riots), its Gini-coefficient—the measurement often used to determine the extent of a country's inequality—was 0.531. In 2014, the Gini-coefficient was 0.401. But others point to more troubling signs for Malaysia's economy, namely, the government's refusal to abandon the New Economic Policy supporting affirmative action for Malays. They say that it is encouraging 'brain drain' among the country's Chinese and Indians who leave the country because they feel their talents could be better appreciated and rewarded elsewhere.

GDP Growth from 1960–2014



Source: The World Bank & The Commonwealth

To learn more, check out these links:

- Malaysia Economy, Asian Development Bank, http://www.adb.org/countries/malaysia/economy
- Recovery from the Asian Crisis and the Role of the IMF, International Monetary Fund, https://www.imf.org/external/np/exr/ib/2000/062300.htm#box4
- What is new in Malaysia's New Economic Model?, The World Bank, http://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/what-is-new-in-malaysia-s-new-economic-model

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Pages 1–4

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UN Data, http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/

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We Are Social, http://wearesocial.com/sg/special-reports/digital-social-mobile-in-apac-in-2015

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Multi-Ethnic Malaysia

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A Never Ending Policy, *The Economist*, http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21576654-elections-may-could-mark-turning-point-never-ending-policy

Malaysia's Disappearing Forests

Environmental Data Explorer, United Nations Environmental Programme, http://geodata.grid.unep.ch/results.php

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Is Malaysia's palm oil worth the cost?, *BBC*, http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/3-global-giants-drop-malaysian-palm-oil-supplier-over-deforestation

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GDP (current US$), The World Bank, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=MY

Malaysia: Economy, The Commonwealth, http://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/malaysia/economy

Malaysia Overview, The World Bank, http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/malaysia/overview

ABOUT ASIA PROFILES

Asia Profiles introduces you to some basic facts, background, and points of interest of the countries and territories of the Asia Pacific. It is part of the Asia Pacific Curriculum initiative by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada.

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