



Heritage Guide to

Kuala Lumpur

 **airbnb** and **thinkCITY**



This is a guide for curious travellers. For those who like to wander, take their time, listen, and connect. It's not just about seeing the city, but experiencing it.

Most guides help you find your way in a city. This one helps you feel it.

Through stories, we will show you the hidden corners, untold histories, and everyday moments that give this city its soul. You won't just see the postcard version

of KL, but one that lives in quiet temples and smoky kopitiams, in second-hand bookstores and back-alley jazz bars, in the smiles of shopkeepers and the shadows of shophouses - places where the city's real spirit lives.

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Find out more about this Classic Heritage Loft House on page 25

Airbnb Foreword

Kuala Lumpur has long been a special destination for Airbnb - a city where history, creativity, and community come together to create unforgettable stays. Over the years, our vibrant community of hosts has welcomed travellers from around the world, offering authentic experiences that reflect the warmth and diversity of Malaysia's capital.

In collaboration with Think City, Airbnb is proud to celebrate Kuala Lumpur's cultural and architectural heritage through this guide - a shared effort to promote sustainable, community-led tourism that both supports local economies and preserves the city's unique cultural identity.

From its iconic landmarks to its lively kopitiams, artisans, and neighbourhoods, Kuala Lumpur's spirit is alive in the everyday. This guide invites travellers to explore the city through a more mindful lens - one that values empathy, curiosity, and respect for the people and places that make it extraordinary.

We are especially proud to spotlight Airbnb hosts who welcome travelers into their lives, sharing their culture and community, and creating a true sense of belonging wherever they go.



Amanpreet Singh Bajaj,
Airbnb's Country Head for India
and Southeast Asia

As Malaysia prepares to welcome the world for Visit Malaysia 2026, this collaboration shines a light on the nation's living heritage - showing how tradition and modernity can coexist to make travel more meaningful and regenerative.

Through this guide, we hope to inspire travellers to discover Kuala Lumpur beyond its skyline - to experience its cultural heartbeat, connect with its communities, and celebrate the stories that keep it alive. Because when we travel this way, we don't just visit a destination - we help sustain it.



- SEE
- VISIT
- EAT
- SHOP
- EXPERIENCE

THE CIVIC PRECINCT

THE HERITAGE & TRADE QUADRANT

MERDEKA 118 PRECINCT

LRT SRI PETALING LINE

LRT AMPANG LINE

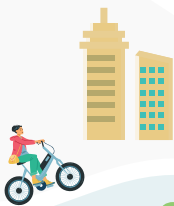
LRT KELANA JAYA LINE

KUALA LUMPUR MONORAIL LINE

MRT LINE



Jalan Raja Chulan



BUKIT BINTANG STATION ●

Jalan Pudu



GMBB

LIMAPULO
TERRACE



● PLAZA RAKYAT STATION

Jalan Bukit Bintang



Jalan Imbi



● MERDEKA STATION

Jalan Hang Jebat



Jalan Hang Tuah



● IMBI STATION



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Warisan KL, the quiet force reshaping Downtown Kuala Lumpur

Warisan KL is a culture-led initiative breathing new life to Downtown Kuala Lumpur by restoring what matters: heritage, community and a sense of belonging.

The past is reimagined not as something frozen in time, but as a foundation to build upon. Shophouses become creative spaces and traditions are used as inspiration for new ideas.

A joint effort by DBKL, Think City and a network of partners, Warisan KL reminds us that cities don't just grow, they become stronger when we value what came before.





From the Old Court House to the Old Kuala Lumpur Railway Station, The Civic Precinct isn't just a cluster of colonial buildings, it's where KL first found its voice. These buildings have witnessed change, ceremony, and history. Often passed by, yet full of quiet stories. This guide invites you to take a closer look.



Dataran Merdeka

Stand here long enough and you'll feel the weight of history shift beneath your feet. Dataran Merdeka is where nations turned, flags changed, and time seemed to hold its breath.

It was here on 31 August 1957, that the British Union Jack was lowered and the Malayan flag unfurled into independence.

Today, Dataran Merdeka still draws crowds: Merdeka parades, weekend strollers, street buskers. In its quieter moments, it feels like a reminder of freedom and hope.





St Mary's Cathedral

Just beside Dataran Merdeka, stands KL's oldest church, built in 1894. A rare expression of early English Gothic, softened by sun and time. Step inside and the air shifts.

Light slants through stained glass, and if you're lucky, you might hear the low, stirring notes of its historic pipe organ, crafted in 1895 by Henry Willis, the master behind the organs of St Paul's Cathedral and the original Royal Albert Hall.

While the city has grown up and out around it, St. Mary's has remained steady, a place of pause and presence... quietly listening, as KL writes its story.

The River of Life

The Klang River has always been more than water winding through a city—it was Kuala Lumpur's first lifeline, carrying people, goods and hope. In its prime, it powered the ambitions of a growing frontier town. But as the city raced ahead, the river was left behind, narrowed, polluted and forgotten.

With the River of Life project, this once-overlooked waterway has been gently restored not only in form, but in feeling.

Today, it moves with quiet grace. Morning mist drifts over water and stone. At night, lights shimmer on its surface as the city slows its pace. Once a channel of commerce, now a calm thread in a city rediscovering its roots.

Medan Pasar

This square was once KL's main market and a gathering spot under the watch of Kapitan Yap Ah Loy (the third Kapitan China). It bustled with trade by day and secrets by night. The market is gone, but its charm remains.

Shopfronts still carry the patina of age, dressed in locally-made brick from Yap Ah Loy's own kiln. And at its heart, a clock tower rises—built in 1937 to mark the coronation of King George VI—its quiet ticking a reminder that this square has always kept KL's time in one way or another.



VISIT

Masjid Jamek

For over a century, Masjid Jamek, officially known as Sultan Abdul Samad Jamek Mosque, has watched over the confluence of the Klang and Gombak rivers.

Designed by British architect A.B. Hubback, its exotic domes and minarets have been softened by time.

But even before the first marble stone was laid on a quiet morning in March 1908, this land held meaning—it was once the city's first Muslim cemetery.

Trains and skyscrapers now rush past, but inside, Masjid Jamek is still a sanctuary. Steady, sacred and enduring.





Museum of Science, Arts and Innovation for Children (MoSAIC)

Before caution dulls curiosity, there’s a golden moment in childhood when wonder leads the way. MoSAIC was built to keep that moment alive. The first museum of its kind in Malaysia, it rises quietly in KL’s creative heart, inviting young minds to explore, ask and imagine.

In one corner, a robot takes shape; in another, a toy finds a second life. Upstairs, small voices find the courage to be heard, while drawings bloom into proud gallery walls.

It’s a museum made for children, by those who remember what it’s like to be one.



“Each spot I take
my guests to has
a story.”

Tey Chin Lea, Airbnb Host and
Licensed Tourist Guide

The Storyteller of Kuala Lumpur



Wander through Kuala Lumpur on your own and you'll see a city. Walk it with Tey Chin Lea, and you'll begin to understand it.

A former finance man turned licensed tourist guide, Chin Lea doesn't just point out landmarks, he reveals what lies beneath them. Each building, lane, and bridge becomes a chapter in a living story: from the muddy meeting point of the Gombak and Klang rivers where the city was born, to the colonial facades of Merdeka Square and the bustling veins of Chinatown and Little India.

But it all begins, as many things do in Malaysia, over breakfast. At a local kopitiam or mamak stall, he sits with his guests over frothy glasses of teh tarik, listening. Where are they from? What do they love? History,

food, architecture? Then, with a quiet smile, he shapes the day's route like a tailor threading a personal map.

Chin Lea has been walking KL since 1972—long before he ever wore a lanyard or carried a licence. What he offers isn't a packaged itinerary, but a sense of place: how KL grew from jungle outpost to capital city, shaped by trade, tin, floods, migrations, and dreams.

“Where is Kuala Lumpur?” he asks, mid-tour. Confused, his guests gesture around them. He walks them to the confluence of the Klang and Gombak rivers, and lets the water answer.

Every city has stories. Chin Lea just knows where to find them.



Around the Heritage & Trade Quadrant

Step into a part of the city where history and commerce once lived side by side. Temples, markets and narrow alleyways tell stories of the city's early days.

Today, old-world textures meet new creative energies—proof that KL's past isn't frozen in time but is always finding new ways to speak.





"If I wanted to give the alley its identity back, I had to be faithful to its story as well. How we depict history should not be edited. It should be raw."

Zeen Chong, Co-founder and Managing Partner of Kwai Chai Hong

Kwai Chai Hong

In the heart of Chinatown, tucked between the hum of traffic and the pull of modernity, lies Kwai Chai Hong or "Little Ghost Lane" in Cantonese.

Once a hideout for gamblers and drifters, it now stands reborn. Through careful

restoration and artful storytelling, the alley's forgotten soul has been reimagined as an open-air gallery where murals flicker with scenes of 1960s Kuala Lumpur.

Wander through, and you might catch a fleeting glimpse of the city as it once was: spirited, untamed, and full of life.



Sin Sze Si Sze Ya Temple & Pioneers of KL Museum

Hidden within a quiet corner of old Chinatown, Sin Sze Si Sze Ya Temple has watched the city rise around it. Built in 1864 by Kapitan Yap Ah Loy, for early settlers, it was a place of hope and guidance. Even now, incense coils above its tiled roof,

carrying the hopes of today into the echoes of yesterday.

Within the temple grounds, the Pioneers of KL Museum tells a quieter story. Here, in faded photographs and forgotten names, live the city's early architects—men and women who laid the foundations of modern Kuala Lumpur.

This space doesn't just preserve history; it honours the spirit of those who built something out of nothing.



"Our museum aims to re-connect Sin Sze Si Sze Ya Temple with Kuala Lumpur, to preserve and promote the temple's precious cultural heritage, celebrate the contributions of the early pioneers of Kuala Lumpur, and educate younger generations about the city's rich history."

Ken Lim, Pioneers of KL Museum Curator



參·甲必丹葉亞來
和早期吉隆坡

3

Kapitan Yap Ah Loy
and Early Years
of Kuala Lumpur

Sri Mahamariamman Temple

Set against the fast pace of Chinatown is a sight both vibrant and serene: the Sri Mahamariamman Temple, Kuala Lumpur's oldest Hindu temple. Built in 1873, its 23-metre "Gopuram" rises in vivid colour, carved with stories of gods, heroes and myths by artisans from Southern India.

What began as a quiet refuge for early Indian settlers has become a masterpiece of devotion and craftsmanship. A place where time seems to pause in every statue, every chime of bell, and every flicker of oil lamp.


[VISIT](#)

+N by UR-MU at Tun HS Lee

A small yet striking gallery within an old Chinatown shophouse, +N by UR-MU is where heritage and contemporary art meet in dialogue.

On the rooftop, a pond reflects the quiet spirit of the place.

Jao Tim

When the city slips into twilight, Jao Tim awakens. Housed in a restored shophouse, this intimate upstairs space flickers with warm light and the rhythm of live music.

At Jao Tim, every night feels like a secret shared where jazz, blues and Cantopop melodies wrap around you like old friends, and the city outside feels a little softer.

REXKL

Once a cherished cinema that filled KL nights with stories on the silver screen, REXKL now hums with a new kind of life. Within its raw brick walls are bookshops, design collectives, art spaces and coffee corners—all tied together by a shared belief in culture, creativity and community.

This is a space to linger. To wander. To stumble upon ideas, music, or conversations you didn't expect, but are glad to have found.



Central Market

Long before luxury malls and megaprojects, Central Market was the heartbeat of KL. Built in 1888 as a wet market on the city's edge, it pulsed with stalls and stories. Today, beneath its pastel Art Deco architecture, that heartbeat lingers.

Its corridors now lined with modern makers; shaping new stories from old roots, weaving tradition into something distinctly of today. Central Market isn't just a place to shop – its culture on display.

Earth Heir at Sustained KL (Kasturi Walk)

On the edge of Kasturi Walk, a small doorway opens into something quietly powerful. Earth Heir is a boutique with a mission. Founded by Malaysian women and fuelled by purpose, its mission is woven into every thread: to uplift indigenous, refugee and heritage artisans through fair and dignified work.

As Malaysia's first B Corp-certified social enterprise, it does more than honour craft—it dignifies lives. Here, souvenirs are not objects, but stories you carry home.

Riwayat Bookstore

In a weathered pre-war building on Jalan Tun HS Lee, Riwayat Bookstore is a quiet sanctuary where history comes alive on every page. “Riwayat,” meaning ‘fable’ in Malay, is a fitting tribute to the many stories that span the expanse of Malaysian and Southeast Asian literature.

The chalkboard outside reads: “Welcome, book lovers. You are among friends.” And somehow, it feels true.

“Riwayat is about thoughtful reading and meaningful connection—with ideas and with the community around us.” **Engku Roestam Alias, Co-founder of Riwayat Bookstore**



Warong Old China

Housed within a gracefully ageing pre-war building along the storied stretch of Jalan Tun H.S. Lee, Warong Old China is an intimate eatery humming with quiet nostalgia. Inside, time slows as the scent of Peranakan spices lingers in the air.

There's a familiar comfort in its faded walls and mismatched crockery, as if the space itself remembers the many meals and moments it has witnessed.

At Warong Old China, heritage is not simply displayed, it's served at the table, one lovingly prepared plate at a time.

Kafei Dian

Housed in a restored 1911 post office, Kafei Dian is a letter from another time, written in soft light and the scent of kaya toast. Its timber beams and checkered tiles remember a KL when coffee came with condensed milk and news was shared, not scrolled. The Hainanese flavours of chicken chop and smoky hor fun rich with wok fragrance are stories retold, not reinvented.



Pucks Coffee

Pucks Coffee is the kind of place you stumble upon... and remember. Hidden just enough to feel like a secret, this little café invites you in with the comforting aroma of freshly brewed coffee and a quiet moment to slow down.

Pastries glisten under soft light and the hum of the city fades to a whisper the moment you step inside. Whether you're alone with a book or watching the world go by, Pucks offers a pocket of calm where time doesn't chase you.



Betel Leaf Chettinad Restaurant

Up a quiet stairway above the swirl of Indian shops and eateries lies a slice of South India, steeped in spice and tradition. At Betel Leaf, the flavours of Chettinad come alive: bold, aromatic, and unapologetically rich.

This is more than a meal; it's a legacy passed down through generations of the Nattukottai Chettiars, famed for their hospitality and masterful use of spices. Ingredients are hand-grown or carefully sourced, and the chefs from Tamil Nadu bring with them a taste of home.

With the soft hum of conversation and the warm clink of steel platters, Betel Leaf offers a dining experience that stirs both appetite and memory.

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a plaid shirt and jeans, stands in front of a colorful mural. The mural features a large butterfly with yellow and orange wings, green leaves, and a blue door with a white starburst design. The man is holding a camera and looking towards the viewer.

“I don’t just show people where to stand. I show them how to see.”

Ted, Airbnb Host and Photography Guide

The Lensman of Kuala Lumpur

Anyone can take a photo of Kuala Lumpur. But walk the city with Ted, and you’ll learn how to frame it.

A seasoned photographer who stumbled into hosting by accident—and stayed for the stories—Ted offers more than a tour. He becomes a personal lens on the city, showing you how to pose, how to see, and how to capture a side of KL most people overlook.

One moment he’s adjusting your angle against a backdrop of gleaming skyscrapers. The next, he’s guiding you through crumbling flats where laundry flutters from open

windows and white-haired residents sit on plastic stools, living testaments to a KL powered by quiet resilience.

As he lines up a shot, he shares a detail—a slice of history, a story of migration, a memory of the city’s early days. It’s an unexpected way to learn a place: not from a textbook, but from a photographer’s eye and a storyteller’s heart.

For Ted, photography isn’t just about what you see. It’s about what you remember—long after the shutter clicks.



Merdeka 118 Precinct

Stadium Merdeka

Long before the towering Merdeka 118 rose above the skyline, another landmark on this hilltop left its mark on the heart of the nation. Stadium Merdeka – built in 1957 – was where independence was declared, a place where the words “Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!” would forever shape Malaysia’s destiny. Worn but dignified, the stadium today stands not just as a sporting arena but as a living monument to a moment when hope became a country, and the future was still unwritten.

The Zhongshan Building

Tucked away in Kampung Attap, the Zhongshan Building feels like a hidden gem, buzzing with creativity. Once a row of utilitarian 1950s shophouses, now a haven for the independent and the in-between.

Restored and reborn, the Zhongshan Building has become a maze of indie bookstores, print studios, and offbeat galleries. Nothing here is mainstream, and that’s the point. Here, KL’s creative side shows up just as it is—honest, messy, and unmistakably alive.



EXPERIENCE

“The idea of creating an arts hub and gallery space came after many conversations with artists and the creative community. Through these discussions we realised that if we all worked together, we could do more things together. So, I wanted to create a space where artists could exchange ideas and collaborate with others.”

Liza Ho, Gallerist & Curator of the Zhongshan Building

GMBB Creative Community Mall

In a nation of malls, GMBB offers something quieter: the raw energy of KL's creative core. Step inside and you'll find centuries-old traditions like wayang kulit reimagined with pop culture flair, murals that move, and installations that invite more than just a glance.

At GMBB, pop-ups, performances and exhibitions come and go, each one offering something new. You don't shop here. You wander. You stumble on the unexpected.



Triptyk

Down a graffiti-laced alley in Kampung Attap, Triptyk unfolds behind a red neon glow—a pre-war shophouse reborn as a sanctuary for the curious foodie.

A tribute to its namesake, a three-panel work of art (triptych), the establishment houses three concepts: 2 kitchens and a bar. Within its weathered walls, Corridor serves Indochine-inspired plates, while upstairs, Bar Triptyk crafts low-proof cocktails infused with miso, oolong, and memory.

Here, old walls hold new ideas, plated and poured with quiet confidence.

Limapulo Terrace

A rust-red shutter opens to the scent of coconut and chilli, and Limapulo Terrace on Tong Shin Road serves up rich Nyonya flavours the way memories remember them—rich, honest, and just a little bit stubborn.

The retro tiles, the enamelware, the creak of floorboards, it all feels like stepping into someone's story. On a terrace where time lingers, so does taste.

“Every dish we try,
carries the story of a
people.”

Manjeet Dillon, Airbnb Host
and Food Culture Guide

The Spice Whisperer of KL

Some hosts feed you. Manjeet Dillon nourishes you with stories, and the soul of a city served on a plate.

A passionate cultural curator and lifelong local, Manjeet has crafted her Culture on a Plate experience like a well-balanced dish—layered, thoughtful, and deeply satisfying. She doesn’t just introduce you to the cuisine of Malaysia. She shows you how it came to be—each dish a chapter, each stop a window into the way Malaysians live, cook, pray, and come together.

At the Sin Sze Ya Temple, Manjeet explains the idea of food as offerings while she points out the pineapples on an altar. Then just outside, she introduces you to Uncle Chai, whose warm, flaky pineapple

tarts are a quiet triumph of local flavour. Moments like these define the walk: not just food, but food as meaning.

And just when you think the feast is over, she serves the star dish—curry laksa. Rich, complex, unforgettable. A testament to the Chinese merchants who came seeking trade, found love instead, and helped create a culture and cuisine that fused traditions in ways both tender and timeless.

When the tour ends, you may leave with a full belly. But more than that, you’ll carry a deeper appreciation for a city where every meal is a mosaic—and every bite, a story.



“The best part, is seeing others appreciate what my parents spent a lifetime preserving.”

Ellina, Airbnb Host, Classic Heritage Loft House, Kuala Lumpur

The Keepers of Time

In a city that is always building up, one family chose to build back.

For Ellina and her parents, heritage isn't just about nostalgia, it's continuity. A quiet act of keeping beauty alive for the next generation.

What began as a humble storage space for their growing collection of antiques has, over time, become something much more: a cluster of lovingly restored, antique wooden homes that carry the grace and craftsmanship of another era into the heart of Kuala Lumpur.

Each home tells a story. Carved windows that once looked out on village gardens now frame the city skyline. Intricate Peranakan details whisper of hands that shaped them decades ago. Every beam, every tile, every

corner, a tribute to the kind of artistry that modern life so easily forgets.

Many guests come expecting a stay, and leave feeling they've touched something timeless. Some spend days without stepping out, content with the sound of water and the company of squirrels in the trees.

For Ellina and her family, these homes are more than stays, they're a love letter to the Malaysia that once was, and to the stories still waiting to be told.

Scan here to check the availability of **Classic Heritage Loft House, Kuala Lumpur**



About Airbnb

Airbnb was born in 2007 when two hosts welcomed three guests to their San Francisco home, and has since grown to over 5 million hosts who have welcomed over 2 billion guest arrivals in almost every country across the globe. Every day, hosts offer unique stays, experiences, and services that make it possible for guests to connect with communities in a more authentic way.



About Think City

Think City is an impact organisation established in 2009 to create more sustainable and equitable places for the benefit of all. Our knowledge, skills and strategies focus on urban solutions, the environment, social communities, and the cultural economy.

Think City is a wholly owned subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Berhad (the sovereign wealth fund of the Government of Malaysia).

For more information,
log on to thinkcity.com.my.

