

Bharu you can go via Jerteh (RM3.50) or via Pasir Puteh (RM2.50). From Jerteh to Kuala Besut it costs RM1 by bus and RM8 by taxi. From Pasir Puteh it's RM1 by bus and RM10 by taxi. However, since a taxi to/from Kota Bharu costs only RM28 per car, most people opt to go the whole way by taxi. From the south, you can go to/from Kuala Terengganu by bus (RM5.70) or taxi (RM50 per car).

PULAU PERHENTIAN

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A short boat trip from Kuala Besut will take you to the beautiful islands of Pulau Perhentian Besar and Pulau Perhentian Kecil, just 20km off the coast. These are arguably the most beautiful islands in Malaysia, with crystal-clear aquamarine water and white-sand beaches.

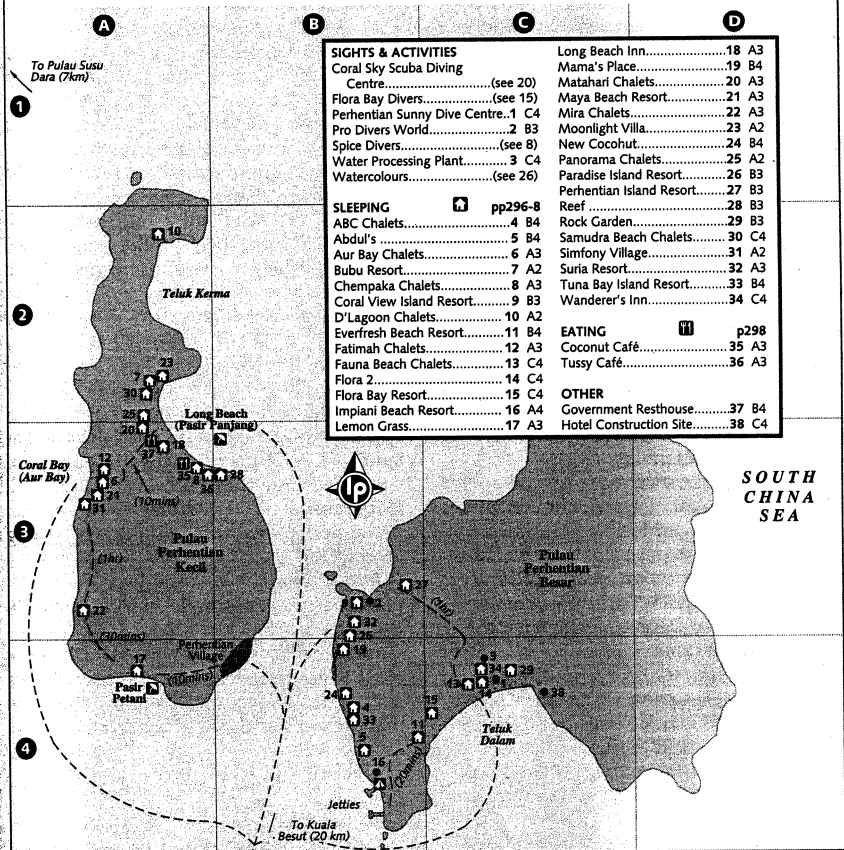
While both islands have their strong points, Kecil, with its abundance of cheap chalets and lively bars and restaurants, tends to attract the younger backpacker crowd, while Besar offers higher standards of accommodation and a quieter, more relaxed ambience. The undecided can cross the strait from island to island for around RM10 (about 10 minutes).

The more expensive resorts on Besar have excellent restaurants, with seafood and barbeques being particularly good; all are open to non-guests. Over on Kecil, there are a few decent cafés serving up noodle and rice dishes, as well as various Western meals. Almost all chalet operations have their own restaurant. Alcohol is available in a few bars and hotel restaurants on both islands, though it's not openly displayed and you will have to ask for it. Prices are, naturally, higher than on the mainland

Activities on the islands include snorkelling and diving, jungle walks and just hanging around on the beach waiting for the coconuts to drop.

Note that many places, on both islands, charge 'high-season' prices, usually from late May to September, and sometimes on weekends year-round. Prices quoted here are high season. These islands basically shut down during the monsoon (usually from mid-November to early March) although some hotels remain open for hardier tourists.

PULAU PERHENTIAN



Orientation

A narrow strait separates Perhentian Besar, the big island, from Perhentian Kecil, the small island.

On Perhentian Kecil, the most popular spot is Long Beach (Pasir Panjang), an excellent white sandy beach with a string of economical bungalow operations, cafés and a few (expensive) shops. Perhentian Kecil is also the administrative centre and has a fair-sized village with a few kedai kopi and shops. Across the narrow waist of the island, Coral Bay is another popular spot with a decent stretch of beach and the best sunsets on the islands. The island also has several isolated bays with private beaches for those in search of solitude.

Over on Besar, most of the accommodation is clustered on the western side of the island along a series of beaches divided by rocky headlands. For those looking to get away from it all, a walk through the jungle, or a 10-minute boat ride, leads to the isolated bay of Teluk Dalam, which has a wide, palm-fringed beach. At the time of writing, however, a huge new luxury resort was under construction at the far end of the bay, which, when completed (possibly mid-2004), will no doubt change the character of this currently sedate stretch of sand.

Information

It's difficult to change money on the Perhentians. Perhentian Island Resort, Coral

View Island Resort and Flora Bay Resort – on Besar – and Matahari Chalets – on Kecil – will cash travellers cheques, but at poor rates, so bring plenty of cash over from the mainland.

Most places will allow you to make phone calls from their mobile phones, but you'll pay dearly for the pleasure. Internet access is limited, slow and expensive; expect to pay around RM12 for 30 minutes.

Diving & Snorkelling

There are coral reefs off both islands and around nearby uninhabited islands, Pulau Susu Dara in particular. The best bets for land-based snorkelling are the northern end of Long Beach on Kecil, and the point in front of Coral View Island Resort on Besar. Most chalets organise snorkelling trips for around RM30 per person, and also rent out equipment.

For scuba divers there are several operations on Perhentian Besar, though prices tend to be pretty uniform.

Pro Diver's World (☎ 010-903 0943) Offers two dives for RM140 and PADI open-water courses for RM750.

Watercolours (☎ 019-981 1852; www.watercolours.world.com) Offers two dives for RM140 and PADI open-water courses for RM750.

Flora Bay Divers (☎ 697 7266; www.florabaydivers.com) This outfit on Teluk Dalam is the only five-star PADI outlet on the islands. It offers special courses from RM200 and dive trips to Redang (RM220 for three dives).

Perhentian Sunny Dive Centre (☎ 019-395 1463) Offers two dives for RM140 and PADI open-water courses for RM750.

Coral Sky Scuba Diving Centre (☎ 010-910 1963; www.coralsskydiver.com) On Kecil, two dives cost RM120 and PADI open-water courses go for RM650.

Spice Divers (☎ 019-985 7329; www.spicedivers.com) Offers two dives for RM140.

Sleeping & Eating

PULAU PERHENTIAN BESAR

There are three main beaches on Perhentian Besar: the northern beach on the western side, which is dominated by Perhentian Island Resort; the main beach on the western side of the island; and Teluk Dalam, on the island's southeast coast.

Perhentian Island Resort (☎ 697 4900; www.perhentianresort.com; d RM250-350; ☎ ☎) Perhentian Besar's most luxurious option, this overlooks perhaps the best beach on the islands – a beautiful half-moon bay with good coral

around the points on either side. It's a big resort with a huddle of comfortable bungalows and a first-class restaurant. Keep in mind that you don't have to stay at the resort to enjoy its beach – anyone can walk over from the island's other beaches.

Perhentian Besar's main beach is a quick clamber over a headland from the resort. This beach stretches all the way to the southern tip of the island, interrupted by several rocky headlands – at low tide you can walk around them on the sand, otherwise you'll have to go up and over along wooded trails.

Coral View Island Resort (☎ 010-903 0943; d RM100-210; ☎ ☎) At the northern end of the beach, this top-notch place is in a great location. There's a wide range of chalet accommodation available, from standard fan rooms (RM280) to very smart beachfront suites (RM500) and there's a couple of very good restaurants serving Malay, Thai, Chinese and Western dishes. Fresh seafood is the house speciality, with lunch costing around RM30.

Reef (d RM70) This basic and very laid-back place has eleven simple chalets set back from the beach.

Paradise Island Resort (☎ 019-981 1852; d RM300-60; ☎ ☎) This friendly place has clean chalets and a good restaurant. It's under the same management as the attached Watercolours dive centre (see Diving & Snorkelling, this page), and is about the best value on Besar.

Mama's Place (☎ 010-981 3359; RM60-95) The last place on this section of beach has a choice of reasonably comfortable chalets with or without bathrooms.

On the other side of the headland there's another stretch of beach with some quite varied accommodation.

New Cocohut (☎ 697 7988; d RM30-80; ☎ ☎) This has a good choice of rooms including pleasant beachside chalets and a two-storey longhouse, which has some great views from the upstairs balcony.

ABC Chalets (☎ 697 7568; d RM20-50) Scruffy rooms are in a tatty and not very enticing longhouse.

Tuna Bay Island Resort (☎ 697 7779; www.tunabay.com.my; d RM128-250; ☎ ☎) Immaculate chalets perch on a lovely stretch of beach, with others facing the jungle behind. Family rooms, sleeping up to four adults, are

PERHENTIAN ACCOMMODATION WARNING

In recent years, the Perhentians have exploded in popularity. In peak season, which is usually from late May to September, it can be difficult to find a place to stay on some of the island's most popular beaches, Long Beach on Kecil in particular.

The peak-season scenario goes something like this: boat after boat pulls up on Long Beach to discharge another group of hopeful travellers. Staggering under heavy packs in the hot sun, the new arrivals make their way desperately up and down the beach in search of a vacant room, only to find that even the most wretched accommodation is full. In frustration, they either camp out on the beach and wait for a room to open up, or make the 10-minute journey across the island to Coral Bay to repeat the process all over again.

The real tragedy here is that, while these folks go through hell to secure some pretty grim rooms, there are usually plenty of openings over on Besar or at some of Kecil's lovely isolated bays. So resist the temptation to join the lemmings!

available from RM258. There's also a very good restaurant, with barbeque dinners costing around RM25.

Clambering over the next headland brings you to a quiet beach where you'll find the popular **Abdul's** (☎ 010-983 7303; d RM50-60). Options include chalets with fan and bathroom and family rooms for RM80. Just beyond is the Government Resthouse, reserved for Malaysian government officials.

It is possible to camp on the beach south of the Government Resthouse, although this area is far from quiet on long weekends.

An easily missed track leads from behind the second jetty over the hill to Teluk Dalam, a secluded bay with a long stretch of shallow beach.

Everfresh Beach Resort (☎ 697 7620; d RM30-80) This shabby collection of ramshackle A-frames and bungalows is serviced by indifferent staff.

Flora Bay Resort (☎ 697 7266; www.florabayresort.com; d RM50-150; ☎ ☎) This big place has a variety of chalet accommodation, set back from the beach. Prices rise by 20% on Saturday and Sunday. **Flora 2**, an extension of Flora Bay is a little further along the beach, with a smaller range of identical chalets.

Fauna Beach Chalets (☎ 697 7607; d RM40-50) This basic place also offers family chalets for RM65.

Wanderer's Inn (☎ 012-290 9300; oyaandena@hotmail.com; d RM20-25) One of the most interesting places on Teluk Dalam, this intimate and very laid-back place is run by the amiable Oya and Ena. There are only six basic huts, with shared bathroom, as well as tent sites for RM10 and a rustic little restaurant under the trees.

Samudra Beach Chalets (☎ 697 7608; d RM35-50) This pleasant, friendly place has simple beachfront bungalows and a decent restaurant. Right next door, however, is the site of a brand new luxury resort, still under construction at the time of writing, but due for completion by summer 2004, so this will no longer be the quiet and isolated place it used to be.

A trail leads from Fauna Beach Chalets around a water-processing plant over the middle of the island to Perhentian Island Resort.

PULAU PERHENTIAN KECIL

Accommodation on Perhentian Kecil tends to be more basic and prices generally lower, starting at around RM30 for a chalet with two beds, a mosquito net and a well or common shower. Recently, though, there have been a number of more upmarket developments, a trend that seems set to continue.

With a great strip of white sand out the front, Long Beach is the most popular place on the island. Unfortunately, it's becoming overdeveloped and can be quite noisy.

Rock Garden (d RM20-30) On the rocks at the southern end of the beach, this has an interesting location and some of the cheapest chalets around, though at this price you don't even get a fan. The best ones are high up on the rocks with a good view of the sea.

Lemon Grass (d RM25) This new place has a range of basic fanless huts. It's a bit scruffy, and some may find scrambling over the rocks and undergrowth awkward.

Chempaka Chalets (☎ 010-985 7329; d RM20-60) Run by the ever-cheerful Musky, there's a

range of good chalets in a pleasant, laid-back setting. The spontaneous parties and beach barbecues make this a lively, sociable place.

Long Beach Inn (☎ 019-981 8999; d RM100-120; ☎) This more upmarket option has comfortable modern chalets with bathrooms.

Matahari Chalets (☎ 019-956 8726; d RM30-75) In the middle of the beach, set back among the trees, this is one of the better choices, with a good range of accommodation, from simple chalets with shared bathroom to spacious bungalows. The restaurant is quite good too.

Panorama Chalets (☎ 010-934 0123; d RM30-80; ☎) A range of chalets offering varying levels of comfort, including family chalets for four people (RM100).

Simfony Village (☎ 019-947 9421; d RM15-35) Basic A-frames have shared bathroom and nicer chalets, which aren't bad for the price have a bathroom attached.

Bubu Resort (☎ 697 8888; www.buburesort.com.my; d from RM200; ☎) At the northern end of the beach, this is the newest, and sole upscale option here. This modern three-storey hotel has light, spacious rooms, most with balconies. There's a good restaurant and seafood is barbecued on the beach regularly (RM20-30). Dorm rooms and a dive centre are planned (due to open late 2004).

Moonlight Villa (☎ 019-961 7898; d RM20-50) This popular spot right at the end of the bay is a bit shabby; the cheaper, fanless A-frame huts have certainly seen better days.

A jungle trail over the narrow waist of the island leads from Long Beach to Coral Bay (sometimes known as Aur Bay) on the western side of the island. The beach is quite pleasant and gets good sunsets but, like Long Beach, its popularity has caught up with it and it's a little crowded and noisy.

Suria Resort (☎ 697 7990; www.suriareorts.com; s & d RM120-250; ☎) At the southern edge of the beach, Suria has spotless modern chalets in a great location, though the price is a little high.

Maya Beach Resort (☎ 019-937 9136; s & d RM40-50) With a few of the nicest A-frames on the beach, this place is often booked up.

Aur Bay Chalets (☎ 010-985 8584; d RM40-60) Fairly basic rooms set back from the sea, with a small restaurant attached. Back on the beach, **Fatimah Chalets** (☎ 019-963 0391; dm/d from RM10/30) has a few simple chalets and eight-bed dorms, as well as a nice little café.

There are a number of small bays around the island, each with one set of chalets, and often only accessible by boat. **D' Lagoon Chalets** (☎ 019-985 7089; s & d RM25-50) is on Teluk Kerma, a small bay on the north-eastern side of the island. This is one of the better places on Kecil, with good coral and a tranquil, isolated location. There are long-house rooms and chalets, as well as a more unusual tree-house for all those budding Tarzans and Janes (RM20). Tracks lead to a couple of very remote beaches in the northwestern corner of the island.

On the southwest coast, **Mira Chalets** (☎ 010-964 0582; s & d RM30-50) is an adventurous choice on a small secluded beach, with the jungle right behind. There are just eight rickety chalets set amid banana and coconut trees, in a location Robinson Crusoe would have been proud to call home. The friendly owner cooks up traditional Malay meals in the driftwood-bedecked restaurant. Walking tracks lead through the rainforest to Pasir Petani (30 minutes, about 1.5km) and north to Coral Bay (one hour, about 3km).

On the south coast is the lovely isolated beach of Pasir Petani, where you'll find the upmarket **Impiani Beach Resort** (☎/fax 697 7346; s & d RM140-180). It's a peaceful setting, and the pricier chalets facing the beach have great views out over the open sea.

There are a few basic places to eat spread out along Long Beach, including **Tussy Café** (next to Matahari Chalets), which serves Western-style breakfast (RM5) and Malaysian dishes from around RM9. Further on, **Coconut Café** serves a barbecue set dinner for RM10.

Getting There & Away

Both speedboats (RM60 return, 30 minutes) and slow boats (RM40 return, 1½ hours) run several times a day between Kuala Besut and the Perhentians, from 8.30am to 5.30pm, although you can expect delays or cancellations if the weather is bad, or if there aren't enough passengers. The boats will drop you off at any of the beaches. In the other direction, speedboats depart from the islands daily at around 8am, noon and 4pm; slow boats hourly from 8am to noon. It's a good idea to let the owner of your guesthouse know a day before you leave, so they can arrange a pick-up. Tickets are sold by several travel agents around Kuala

Besut, the best of which is Perhentian Pelangi Travel & Tours (p294).

Note that you can board a speedboat in either direction with a slow-boat ticket if you pay the RM10 fare difference.

Note that the waves on Long Beach can be hazardous – when the waves are high get dropped off or picked up on the other side of the island at Coral Bay. Also, guesthouse operators on Kecil now charge RM2 for ferry pick-ups and drop-offs.

Getting Around

While there are some trails around the island, the easiest way to go from beach to beach or island to island is by boat. Most resort and chalet owners can arrange for a boat and driver. From island to island, the trip costs RM10 per boat, and a jaunt from one beach to another on the same island usually costs about RM8. You can charter a boat for a half-day tour round the islands for RM50.