

1.1 Why choose Malaysia?

So, why Malaysia? Depends who's asking, and what illusions they're still clinging to. If you're after a Southeast Asian postcard with just enough chaos to feel adventurous, but enough infrastructure to not lose your mind, Malaysia hits a strange, functional middle. It's not as polished as Singapore, not as raw as Indonesia, and not as overplayed as Thailand. But it moves. Quietly. Strategically. And if you understand the tempo, you can ride the current instead of getting dragged under.

The economy is a curious animal, not booming, but breathing steadily. The government keeps pushing growth in a few sharp directions: electronics, oil & gas, Islamic finance, palm oil (yes, still), medical tourism, and anything digital they can slap a "smart" label on. The narrative is "open for business," and for once, there's some substance behind the slogan. Free trade zones like Iskandar and Penang are luring capital with tax breaks and infrastructure, and foreign direct investment is welcome, as long as you don't touch the wrong sectors or forget your paperwork.

What's striking here isn't the hype, it's the pragmatism. This is a country that knows its place on the chessboard: a mid-size player with decent cards and no illusions of grandeur. Inflation stays within 2–3% most years, though spikes hit hard when fuel subsidies wobble or the ringgit tanks. You'll feel it at the pump, in your grocery basket, and in import-heavy services, but it's manageable if you earn in foreign currency or know how to spend like a local.

The job market isn't a buffet. It's segmented, selective, and tilted in favour of two profiles: locals with degrees, and foreigners with rare skills. If you're in tech, engineering, or education, the door is ajar. If you're in finance or media, good luck, you'll be up against well-trained, English-speaking Malaysians who cost half as much and know how to navigate the local hierarchy. That said, digital nomads and remote professionals have more breathing room now, especially with the DE Rantau Pass (which isn't perfect, but it's something).

Survival Hack: If you're working remotely, keep your income offshore and bring it in gradually. You avoid tax complications and buffer against currency swings. Wise or Revolut beat traditional banks on both speed and spread.

Salaries for locals average around RM 3,500/month. Expats in skilled roles can expect RM 8,000 to RM 15,000, which feels comfortable, until you start adding rent, schooling, insurance, and the cost of staying legally employed. KL is the benchmark: expect RM 6,000–8,000 minimum for a single person living decently (no maids, no penthouse, no imported whisky habit). Penang and Johor Bahru offer a 15–25% discount on that lifestyle, with slower rhythms and fewer temptations. Rural Malaysia? Cheaper, yes. But your Amazon cart will cry, and so will you the first time your broadband dies mid-Zoom.

Avoid This: Don't assume "cheap country" equals "cheap life." The visible costs are low. The invisible ones, visas, legal fees, translations, and healthcare, add up fast if you're not watching.

Work culture isn't brutal, but don't mistake the smiles for slack. Officially, the workweek caps at 48 hours. In practice, 44–45 is standard, and unpaid overtime isn't uncommon, especially in sectors where status matters more than productivity. But compared to Singapore's intensity, Malaysia's corporate rhythm is tolerable. You'll find time to breathe, if you learn to manage expectations.

Unspoken Rule: Don't challenge authority in meetings. Hierarchies are real, even in "modern" companies. Criticism is fine, as long as it's phrased as a question and delivered with a smile.

You'll get a solid dose of public holidays, 11 federal days plus whatever your state adds on. Long weekends are part of the culture. People disappear en masse, traffic chokes up, and everything slows down. Plan around it. And if you can, escape during haze season, August to October, when forest fires from Indonesia paint the sky with a toxic smog.

Malaysia ranks mid-high for safety in the region. Violent crime is rare, petty theft is manageable, and there's enough CCTV in urban areas to make any pickpocket think twice. But cyber scams are rampant, and corruption, though subtle, still greases certain wheels.

Insider Tip: You'll hear the phrase "boleh runding" in bureaucratic settings. It means "we can negotiate." It's polite code for "incentives welcome." Whether you play that game is up to you, but pretending it doesn't exist is naïve.

Healthcare is a double system: public and slow, or private and fast. If you've got insurance, private hospitals deliver efficient, English-speaking care. Public hospitals are cheaper, even for foreigners, but you'll wait longer, and comfort levels drop fast. If you're staying long-term, get a local health plan within your first month. Some visa categories demand it anyway.

Press freedom? Limited. Don't assume you can comment on politics like you might back home. There are red lines around race, religion, and royalty, and they're not always clear. The Sedition Act is vague on purpose. So keep your opinions offline unless you enjoy meetings with immigration.

Climate is not a side note, it's a daily reality. Equatorial heat means 30–34°C, high humidity, and sudden, biblical rainstorms. The monsoon isn't just "a bit of drizzle." Streets flood, trains stop, and shoes rot. You adapt, or you suffer.

Survival Hack: Get a cheap umbrella and better shoes. Don't wear suede. Ever. And keep your important docs scanned and backed up in the cloud, water damage is real. Connectivity isn't perfect, but it works. Airports are efficient, domestic travel is affordable, and KL's public transport is finally catching up to its ambitions. Outside the cities, though, you'll need wheels, or patience. Ride-hailing apps like Grab are lifesavers. Taxis without meters? Walk away.

Immigration policy is a minefield of categories, quotas, and timelines. Skilled sectors get fast-tracked, on paper. In practice, it depends on timing, paperwork, and the mood of the officer reviewing your file. The MM2H visa was once the golden ticket for retirees and passive income folks. It's still around, but it's stricter, slower, and more selective. Digital nomads get the DE Rantau Pass, better than nothing, but still tethered to proving offshore income.

Visa friendliness here is conditional. You're welcome, as long as you behave, bring money, and leave quietly if things go sideways. That may sound harsh, but it's not unique to Malaysia. It's just...less sugar-coated.

So why choose Malaysia? Because if you play it right, it offers a rare balance, between comfort and cost, structure and spontaneity, safety and edge. It's not a blank slate, and it won't bend to your rhythm. But if you listen closely, and move with its syncopated pulse, it becomes one of the few places left where you can build something real, without burning out or going broke.

1.2 What to expect in practice

You've read the brochures, watched the YouTube vlogs, and maybe even sat through one of those insufferably upbeat relocation webinars. But now comes the part nobody ever explains properly: the daily friction, the small delays that stack up, the cultural rhythm that never quite matches yours. This isn't about the dream. It's about the operating system. Malaysia works, but it works differently. And unless you adjust your internal clock (and your expectations), the country will grind you down before it ever lets you in.

Let's start with time. In Malaysia, time is not linear. It's fluid. MM2H visa approvals, for example, are officially around 90 days. But that's 90 working days, excluding public holidays, sudden system changes, or a misplaced stamp on page 4 of your financial documents. Employment Passes are faster, 30 to 60 days, in theory. But don't bet your arrival date on it. Everything takes a bit longer than it should, and nobody will seem alarmed by this. It's not sabotage, it's just how things move.

The housing search is the first real test. If you're in KL or Penang, and you're not too picky, you can find something in 1–2 weeks. Add another two if you're trying to match a long wish list (good Wi-Fi, near a train, no cockroach history, pet-friendly, short lease, etc.). Be ready to see apartments that look nothing like the photos. Agents here aren't always liars, but they are, let's say, creatively optimistic.

Insider Tip: Don't pay a deposit until you've walked the unit, checked the water pressure, and read the fine print. Some landlords will promise to "fix it after you move in." They won't.

Opening a bank account feels deceptively simple. You need your passport, a valid visa, and proof of address, which you can only get once you've signed a lease, which you can only sign once you have a visa... See the loop? If your documents are clean, some banks will open your account the same day. Others will take a week or more to do "compliance checks," which in practice means someone forgot to click a button.

Health coverage activation depends on whether you go local or international. Private insurance kicks in the same day, if you've prepaid and submitted your medical report. Local schemes like MySalam or the employer-linked EPF coverage take 1–2 weeks, and may require three forms, two stamps, and an agent who knows how to navigate the digital portal that rarely works on the first try.

Tax ID is the rare exception: walk into the LHDN (Inland Revenue Board), hand over your visa, and walk out with a number. No ceremony, no waiting list, no drama. It's the one bureaucratic bright spot you'll come to appreciate, until you hit the residence permit stage, where biometrics, in-person appointments, and mysterious system downtimes return with a vengeance.

Net income vs cost of living is the math that breaks more than a few egos. You arrive with RM 10,000/month as a remote worker in KL, thinking you're rich. But after rent, bills, insurance, and a couple of overpriced brunches, you're sitting at RM 5,000–6,000. Retirees in Penang with RM 8,000 do slightly better, if they live modestly and don't chase imported luxuries. What matters is how you spend. Living like a local doesn't just mean eating nasi lemak. It means knowing where not to bleed cash unnecessarily. Avoid This: Don't assume the low price of a Grab ride means everything else is cheap. Groceries, electronics, legal services, and international school fees will eat you alive if you don't recalibrate fast.

Now let's talk paperwork. Malaysia is not a member of the Hague Apostille Convention. Translation: every document from your home country, birth certificates, marriage certificates, degrees, must be legalised twice: once by your home government, once by the Malaysian embassy. No shortcuts, no exceptions, and absolutely no digital-only process. Physical stamps rule the day. Bring originals. Bring photocopies. Bring backups on a USB. And don't expect any of it to be fast.

Many services still demand in-person visits. Want to register with the tax office, set up utilities, or extend your visa? You're queuing somewhere, sweating in government buildings, waiting for a counter to open. Online portals exist, but they crash often, don't work on foreign IPs, or simply say "Error 404" when you need them most. Unspoken Rule: Never go to a Malaysian government office on a Monday morning or Friday afternoon. You'll be queuing with half the country. Mid-week, mid-morning is your best shot.

Cultural friction hits differently here. Malaysians are warm, polite, and welcoming, but they communicate in diagonals. Direct confrontation is rare. Disagreement is veiled in smiles or radio silence. If someone says, "Can, can," they might mean "No, absolutely not." And "soon" could mean anything from later today to sometime before your visa expires.

This flexibility extends to time itself. Meetings don't start on time. Deliveries show up an hour late. Appointments drift. It's not personal. It's not lazy. It's just Malaysian time. Fighting it will exhaust you. Adapting to it will save your sanity.

Hidden costs are where many new arrivals get blindsided. A rental deposit in KL is typically 2.5–3.5 months upfront. Some landlords will ask for a “utility deposit” too. Importing a car? Expect up to 105% in duties, unless you qualify for special exemptions under the MM2H program, and even then it's a bureaucratic jungle. Need a document translated or certified? RM 100–500 per page, depending on the language and urgency.

Survival Hack: Budget an emergency RM 10,000 for your first month, not for real emergencies, but for bureaucratic curveballs. That money will get eaten fast by things you didn't know you had to pay for.

Integration moves faster in KL and Penang. There are established expat bubbles, social groups, language cafés, and coworking spaces where you can plug in quickly. People are used to foreigners, the good ones and the clueless ones, so patience is built into the system. But outside the cities? You're on your own. Language barriers rise fast, and English fluency drops. Locals will still be kind, but you'll need Malay (or a lot of miming) to get anything done.

And here's the kicker: this entire adjustment phase takes longer than most people think. It's not a matter of weeks. It's months of reprogramming how you interpret bureaucracy, how you handle time, and how you read social cues that are almost never explicit. Integration isn't about making friends at brunch. It's about learning to function without frustration in a system that doesn't bend to your logic.

So what should you expect in practice? Expect delay. Expect friction. Expect small wins after big waits. Expect to miss the certainty of home. And then, if you're paying attention, expect to get good at navigating it. Quietly. Competently. Like a local, but with better shoes.

1.3 Quick cultural overview

If you're thinking of living in Malaysia, forget the surface-level "multicultural harmony" slogans for a moment. Yes, the country is diverse, stunningly so, but it's also complex, layered, and full of unspoken rules that don't announce themselves until you've already broken one. This isn't a melting pot. It's more like a bento box: neat compartments coexisting side by side, rarely blending, always watching. To live here without constantly tripping over invisible lines, you need to read the room, not just literally, but socially, historically, and emotionally.

Respect for hierarchy isn't optional here, it's stitched into the fabric of how people interact. Age matters. Status matters. Job titles matter more than competence. And if you think you're here to "flatten the structure" or bring in some startup-style disruption, prepare to get quietly sidelined. Elders get the final say, even if they're clearly wrong. Bosses don't expect to be questioned in meetings, and if they are, it had better be sugar-coated and wrapped in four layers of courtesy.

Unspoken Rule: Always address someone by their title, even in emails. "Dato'," "Encik," "Puan," "Dr.," whatever they've got, use it. It's not brown-nosing here. It's baseline respect.

Malaysia is deeply collectivist. Family comes first, always. That means you'll meet 35-year-olds still living with their parents, not out of necessity, but out of duty. It also means decisions aren't always personal; they're communal. People will say "I'll check with my family" before accepting a job, a lease, or even a dinner invitation. That's not indecisiveness. It's alignment.

Religious and cultural diversity is real, and beautiful, but don't mistake visibility for freedom. The country officially embraces Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and more. Mosques sit next to temples and churches. But politically, this diversity is a fragile balance, and you're not here to poke it. Criticising any religion publicly (even your own) is a fast track to legal trouble. So keep your secular takes to private dinners with trusted friends.

Communication is indirect by design. You'll rarely hear "no" said plainly. Instead, it's "Maybe can..." or "We'll see..." or just a long silence. Disagreement is buffered by smiles. Sarcasm is subtle. Jokes are localised. If you press too hard, too fast, people won't argue, they'll just disappear from your inbox.

Avoid This: Don't interpret "yes" as commitment. In many cases, it just means "I don't want to say no right now." You'll learn to spot the difference, eventually.

Non-verbal cues carry weight. A smile may mean warmth, or it may mean "please stop talking." Crossing your arms in a conversation can be read as hostile. Standing too close may be invasive. Pointing with your index finger? Rude. Use your thumb or your whole hand, especially with elders. And never, never, touch someone's head, even a child's. It's considered sacred in many communities.

Family and gender norms vary across the spectrum, but there's a general tilt toward patriarchy, especially in Malay households. Men are expected to lead, women to accommodate, though urban Malaysia is seeing more fluidity, especially among younger generations. Still, if you're a woman with strong opinions or leadership ambitions, be ready for subtle resistance in traditional circles. Not overt, but enough to slow you down if you don't assert your space deliberately.

LGBTQ+ life exists here, but in the shadows. Same-sex relationships aren't legally recognised, and public displays of queer identity can invite anything from social disapproval to actual harassment. That said, KL and Penang have discreet scenes, bars, art spaces, even queer-friendly therapists. You just have to know where to look. Visibility is a calculated risk. For many, the price of safety is silence.

Insider Tip: Queer expats often live openly within trusted expat or arts circles, but they keep a low profile in professional or bureaucratic settings. If you're part of the community, find your tribe early, but stay smart about where and how you're seen.

The urban-rural divide is sharper than most newcomers expect. Cities like KL, George Town, and Johor Bahru are fast, multicultural, and relatively liberal. English is widely spoken. Cafés stay open late. People are used to difference. Step outside that bubble, say, into Kelantan, Terengganu, or parts of rural Pahang, and the tone shifts dramatically. Headscarves become the norm. English thins out. Social codes tighten. And your foreignness becomes much more noticeable.

Survival Hack: Learn a few basic phrases in Malay, even in the city. "Terima kasih" (thank you), "maaf" (sorry), and "boleh?" (can?) go further than you think, especially outside expat zones.

Malaysia's festive calendar is a cultural education in itself. You'll celebrate Hari Raya with your Muslim friends, eat mandarin oranges at Chinese New Year, light oil lamps for Deepavali, and maybe get flour thrown at you during Thaipusam if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time. These aren't token events. They're sacred, communal, and often overwhelming, in the best way. But they also come with expectations. Don't show up to a Hari Raya open house in shorts. Don't bring beef to a Deepavali gathering. When in doubt, ask, people will appreciate it.

And then there's sport. Badminton is a national obsession. Football comes close. During big matches, traffic clears, stalls close, and grown men scream at televisions with religious fervour. Join in, but don't mock the local team, especially if they're losing. It's not funny. It's personal.

Living in Malaysia means learning to decode nuance, respect difference, and hold multiple truths at once. You'll have to unlearn the idea that directness is clarity, or that liberal values are universal. You're not here to correct anything. You're here to understand it, or at least navigate it without arrogance.

So don't just "adapt." Listen. Observe. Ask. Malaysia will never lay it all out for you, but if you show you're paying attention, it'll start letting you in. Quietly. Gradually. One signal at a time.

1.4 Political environment & freedoms

Before you fall in love with Malaysia's calm façades and friendly small talk, you should understand one thing: this is a politically complex country with very clear boundaries, and very vague consequences if you cross them. Most expats live here for years without brushing up against these limits. But ignorance isn't immunity. The rules aren't always enforced, until they are. And by then, it's too late to act surprised.

Malaysia is a federal constitutional monarchy, a rare breed. Thirteen states, each with its own quirks, stacked beneath a rotating King (the Yang di-Pertuan Agong), who's more symbolic than sovereign. Every five years, the crown shifts among the hereditary rulers of nine Malay states like a gentleman's relay. It's ceremonial, yes, but don't underestimate the symbolic power of the monarchy here. Criticism of the King isn't just taboo. It's illegal. Full stop.

Beneath the royal choreography, Malaysia runs a parliamentary democracy, on paper. In reality, the political scene is fluid to the point of chaos. Coalitions form and implode like unstable molecules. Governments fall without elections. Party alliances shift in the dead of night. Voters often wake up to find the opposition has become the government, or vice versa, with no warning and no real explanation.

Unspoken Rule: Don't bring up politics at local dinner tables. If they do, listen more than you speak. Everyone has opinions, but not everyone has the same legal room to express them.

The judiciary? In theory, independent. In practice, selectively so. Lower courts operate with a degree of normalcy, but high-profile or politically sensitive cases tend to follow more...narrative logic. Judges are appointed, not elected, and while the legal infrastructure is solid, delays are endemic. Cases can drag on for years. If you ever need to sue someone, bring snacks.

Civil liberties are technically enshrined but practically conditional. Freedom of speech exists, until you criticize religion, race relations, or the monarchy. The Sedition Act is deliberately broad. The Communications and Multimedia Act gives the state reach into your tweets and WhatsApps. And "spreading false information" is a flexible charge that can be deployed against anyone who hits a nerve.

Avoid This: Don't assume what you post on social media is "just between friends." The line between public and private is thin here, especially if your views touch race, religion, or national identity.

Freedom of assembly? Only with police approval. Protests happen, but they're choreographed. Permits are rarely granted for anything controversial, and if you're a foreigner at a rally, even just filming it, you're risking arrest or deportation. The law doesn't distinguish between activism and presence. If you're there, you're part of it.

Digital privacy is another illusion. Surveillance exists, and not just in theory. VPNs are legal and common, especially among expats who value online discretion, but don't rely on them for full invisibility. Malaysia may not be China, but it's not Estonia either. If the state wants to see your digital footprint, it can.

The media landscape is a chessboard of allegiances. The big TV stations and newspapers are owned by political or business interests, often both. They toe the party line, especially around elections or social unrest. Independent voices exist online, Malaysiakini, Free Malaysia Today, The Vibes, but they operate under constant legal pressure. News portals have been sued, blocked, or "investigated" for coverage that challenges the official story.

Insider Tip: If you want real news, follow multiple sources, local, regional, expat-run, and international. Compare headlines. Read between the lines. And always check the date, recycled outrage circulates here like seasonal fruit.

Corruption? It's not systemic, it's structural. The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) does pursue high-profile cases, but enforcement is uneven. One year, a minister is jailed. The next year, they're back in a new post. Whistleblower protections exist, but the process is opaque, the risks are high, and the support systems fragile.

The truth is, corruption isn't a scandal here, it's an accepted friction. It shows up in customs, in licensing, in "expedited" processing fees that are never officially requested but silently expected. Some expats play along. Others refuse. Both strategies work, until they don't.

Survival Hack: Always ask for a receipt, even for minor administrative payments. It signals you're playing by the book, and often shuts down any backroom suggestions.

Living in Malaysia means living with limits, many of which aren't clearly marked. You can critique policies, but not principles. You can debate decisions, but not identities. And you can participate, but only within your lane. As an expat, you're expected to observe, not intervene. And honestly? That's fair.

You're a guest here. And like in any household, there are rooms you don't enter, topics you don't raise, and conversations you're not invited to lead. That's not oppression. That's the deal. You're free, as long as you understand where the edges are.

1.5 Social fractures & tensions

For all its glossy tourism slogans and polite smiles, Malaysia is not a frictionless society. Beneath the surface, sometimes just barely beneath, are tensions that shape everything from school admissions to housing prices to who gets the mic in political discourse. If you're going to live here with your eyes open, you need to understand the weight of history, the invisible dividing lines, and the quiet resentments that no one admits publicly but everyone feels.

Start with geography. The country is officially one nation, but in practice, there's a stark East–West divide. The Peninsular side, where KL, Penang, and Johor Bahru sit, gets the lion's share of infrastructure, investment, and attention. Across the South China Sea, Sabah and Sarawak remain less developed. Roads are patchier, hospitals fewer, broadband spottier. In rural interiors, access to education and emergency care is still a logistical battle. Locals from East Malaysia often joke, with bitterness under the grin, that they're treated as “the forgotten states.”

Unspoken Rule: If you're in East Malaysia, don't compare it to KL. Don't say “it's so underdeveloped here.” They know. You'll just sound like another West Malaysian expat with a GPS and no context.

Then there's the elephant in the room: ethnicity. Malaysia's population is roughly 69% Malay and other indigenous groups (collectively called Bumiputera), 23% Chinese, and 7% Indian. On paper, everyone is Malaysian. In practice, the playing field is tilted. The Bumiputera policy framework, meant to uplift the majority Malays after independence, reserves special access to scholarships, civil service jobs, housing discounts, and business quotas. It's affirmative action on a national scale, but it's not framed as temporary.

Ethnic Chinese and Indian Malaysians, many of whom have been here for generations, face real barriers. They often dominate the private sector, business, finance, tech, but are sidelined in public institutions. Many send their kids abroad for university, not by choice, but because local options are rationed. It breeds quiet frustration, especially among middle-class urban families who feel both successful and second-tier.

Avoid This: Don't say “Malaysians are all the same deep down.” It's tone-deaf. The divisions are real, even if they're not always vocalised. People navigate them daily, you don't get to wish them away with a smile.

Urbanisation adds its own layer of tension. KL, slick, vertical, aspirational, is choking on its own momentum. Traffic is permanent. Property prices are decoupled from wages. Air pollution spikes with every dry season. Young Malaysians can't afford to live where they work, and many still rely on family support deep into adulthood. The city projects modernity, but its planning often ignores livability.

Meanwhile, rural areas stagnate or lose their youth to the cities. The gap between urban convenience and rural constraint is widening, not just economically, but culturally. City dwellers develop more progressive attitudes, especially around gender, race, and religion. Rural communities tend to hold the line on tradition. The clash is subtle but constant.

And then there's religion. Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, and its influence goes far beyond Friday prayers. Sharia courts operate in parallel with civil courts, but only for Muslims, and only on personal matters (marriage, inheritance, moral conduct). Non-Muslims are not subject to Sharia, but that doesn't mean they're untouched by its political gravity. Political Islam is increasingly assertive, and secularism, while still embedded in law, is often on the defensive.

Insider Tip: If you're invited to a Malay wedding, follow the dress code and mind your alcohol talk. Religion here is visible, proud, and non-negotiable. You don't have to share the belief, but you do have to respect its space.

This dual-legal system creates friction, sometimes in high-profile court cases, often in small daily bureaucracies. For mixed couples, custody disputes can become jurisdictional nightmares. For Muslim converts, leaving the religion is almost impossible legally. These aren't abstract issues. They shape lives, especially for locals, but also for expats who cross cultural lines in marriage, business, or parenting.

And then there's the memory that never fully fades: May 13, 1969. The racial riots that broke out after a contentious election left hundreds dead and the nation deeply scarred. It's rarely discussed openly, especially by younger Malaysians, but the shadow lingers. It's the reference point for every politician warning against "tensions" or "unrest." It's why certain slogans or speeches trigger a sharp intake of breath in even the most modern boardrooms. Memory here is collective, and guarded.

Survival Hack: If you hear someone mention “sensitive topics” or “don’t talk about May 13,” take the hint. This isn’t a place for casual political hot takes. Earn trust before you ask real questions, and know when to back off.

Living in Malaysia as an expat means you get to float above many of these tensions, at least at first. You’re not expected to take sides. You’re treated as a guest, not a rival. But the longer you stay, the more you’ll feel them, in policy decisions, in school applications, in who gets promoted, and who doesn’t. These are not open wounds. They’re pressure points. And knowing where they are makes all the difference between integration and misstep.

Malaysia works, in part because people agree not to pick at the stitches too often. But that doesn’t mean the stitches aren’t there. As a foreigner, your job isn’t to fix the fracture. Your job is to understand where it lies, and how to move with care.