

Night time in Kuala Lumpur:
The Petronas Towers, once
the world's tallest buildings,
as seen from the revolving
restaurant in the KL Tower

The Malaysian feelgood factor

After sampling the high life in the capital Kuala Lumpur,
Clive Nicholls investigates the boom in medical tourism in Malaysia

PHOTOGRAPHY: CLIVE NICHOLLS



Shop until you drop - the prices are good in the high-end Pavilion Mall



Malaysian culture is colourful and exciting



The KL Tower is almost lost in cloud - in the foreground one of the Petronas twin towers

WHEN THE Post Office Tower opened in London in the mid-Sixties, the papers were full of pictures of the jet set wining and dining in the revolving restaurant. How glamorous and space age it all seemed.

When the restaurant shut in 1980 (it was run by Butlin's incidentally), I realised I was never going to reach the dizzy heights of dining in the BT Tower -

or for that matter joining the jet set... No matter, tonight I'm going one better: the tower is twice as high, the views are more spectacular and, although I never tasted Billy Butlin's revolving food, I would bet that what I'm eating is more than a match.

I'm in the revolving restaurant of the Kuala Lumpur Tower looking eyeball to eyeball with the top levels of the Petronas Twin Towers (once the world's tallest building) about a quarter of a mile away. The wilting sun has dropped through the

mist on the horizon, and across the city lights are coming on.

To the left of the towers, a leading Malaysian bank is throwing enough light into the sky that you suspect it's trying to break the country's National Grid, the towers are sparkling in the night sky and, as the restaurant slowly revolves, the picture constantly changes. I might have missed the Post Office Tower, but this makes up for it.

It's late evening but with jetlag working in my favour, I check into the hotel, still full of

beans. My ears 'pop' in the lift up to my room - always a good sign. Rooms on the higher floors seem to have a better view and in this high-rise city it's even more important. Not sleepy, I make a plan for tomorrow.

Kuala Lumpur is a big shopping destination and having spotted a massive high-end mall just across the road I figure that if I pop over first thing in the morning I'll have the place to myself.

I'm not a big shopping enthusiast but this looks too good to pass by, particularly as it's

just yards away. In the time I have in Malaysia I want to sample big-city life, explore the beautiful and enchanting countryside and enjoy the hospitality - my early taste of the cuisine on offer was promising indeed - but I also want to check out what is a growing and thriving business: medical tourism. I'll set the alarm; jetlag may not be so kind to me in the morning.

Breakfast was shrimps, noodles and freshly squeezed juices - different but spectacular. A Malaysian woman spotted me making a

muck-up of cooking my noodles and gave me a one-to-one lesson - it's easy when you know how. The hotel staff are probably still trying to clean up after my first solo attempt, but after my lesson I was thinking of applying for MasterChef.

As expected, the shopping mall was almost deserted at opening time. All the big brands were there - a bit wasted on me, but I did convert some of the prices and there were significant savings on UK price-tags. If you are planning on shopping overseas, do your



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Clockwise: Eat on the street or in the restaurants – the food is good and the culture warm and welcoming

research before you leave the UK; check online prices to get a true comparison. Watch out for any electrical products that wouldn't be compatible in the UK. Make sure you have space in your suitcase and don't get carried away – clothes that you may never wear suddenly become expensive. Check with the HMRC website on allowances: (www.hmrc.gov.uk). The last time I checked I think the limit was goods up to £390 and, remember, if you buy a watch for £500 you pay duty on the full amount, not the difference. Don't be put off, though – it's great to have something to

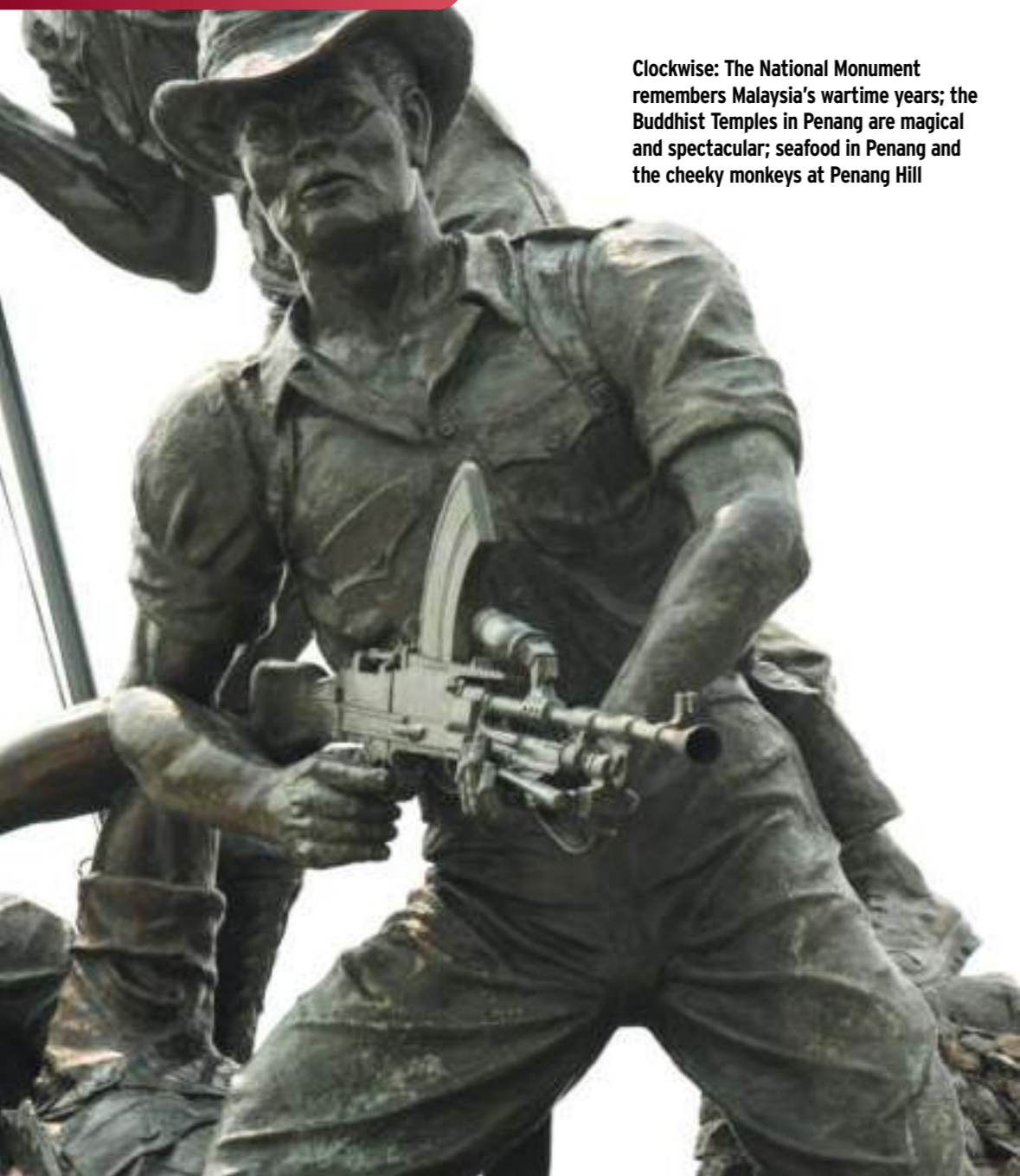
remember your holiday by and get a bargain at the same time. Medical tourism is big business here. The government supports the industry and even has a reception office at the airport to make sure visitors get well looked after. On my trip I'll visit a number of hospitals, clinics and surgeries but first, let's look at why you might want to come to Malaysia for treatment. Price is a big factor, depending on what you're looking for (cosmetic surgery, joint replacement, dentistry, eye surgery and much more); the prices can be around half the price of UK treatments. You obviously

have to fund your flight and accommodation so that has to be factored in, but if Malaysia is a place where you would like to take a holiday and have a makeover at the same time, it could work out for you. The facilities are good, surgeons are well qualified, so what do you need to check out? First, I would book direct with the hospital. Going through an agent could add 20 per cent to the medical bill and eat into the reason for coming in the first place – the price. If you ask an agent to quote first, it's difficult for a hospital to give you a price afterwards. If you can have several

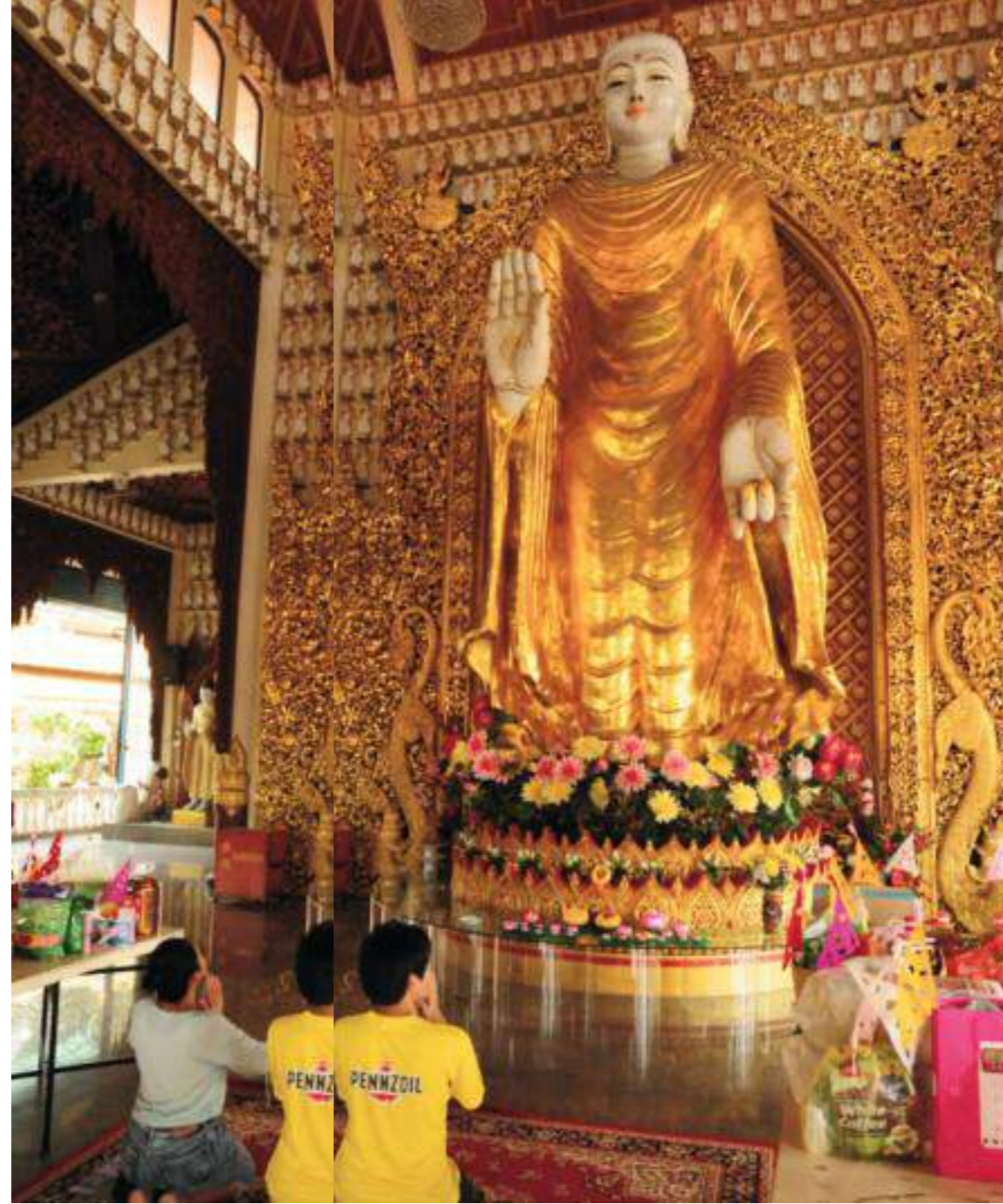
treatments at the same time (such as multiple teeth implants) the case gets even stronger. Check the exchange rate with the Malaysian Ringgit – a stronger pound means a cheaper operation. Make sure you're fit and able to have the operation. One consultant plastic surgeon I spoke to advised not to smoke for two weeks before operations – nicotine has a dramatic negative effect on healing. Blood-thinning drugs would also cause problems. Check that taxes are included in any price quoted – in some areas new taxes come in from April 1. If you are going for a day's health

screening, you should factor in the cost of one day's holiday – that is, the cost of flights and accommodation divided by the number of days you are staying. Check that the hospital will pick you up from the airport, provide aftercare, and get you back for your flight. Allow a bit of extra time on your stay for contingencies and don't book anything you would have to cancel if you needed a little extra time for follow-up visits to the hospital. Have a conversation with your UK doctor or dentist before you book anything. I don't fancy liposuction, a facelift or

getting my teeth done but I did try out acupuncture at a Traditional Chinese Medicine facility – not sure what to make of that. Back to my holiday – touring round Kuala Lumpur is easy. The Pink Buses are free and run from 6am to 11pm so you can hop on and hop off when you want. Watch out for the taxis; some will try not to use their meters and just charge what they want. The government is trying to stamp out the practice but it is still going on. The National Monument is well worth a visit. Malaysia has had a troubled past and



Clockwise: The National Monument remembers Malaysia's wartime years; the Buddhist Temples in Penang are magical and spectacular; seafood in Penang and the cheeky monkeys at Penang Hill



◀ this massive bronze sculpture honours those who fought and died in the Second World War and the battle against communists from 1948 to 1960.

Independence Square in the city centre is steeped in history. Beautiful buildings surround the massive grass square and a huge 330ft-high flag pole flies the national flag as it has done since August 31, 1957 when the country gained independence from Britain – visit at night time, it's quite special.

Moving on from Kuala Lumpur, it's back to the airport for a short flight to Penang – just off the west coast of mainland Malaysia.

There's one final stop just a couple of miles before the airport, Sepang Formula 1 circuit. It's closed and I can't go in but I press my nose up to the wire fence and imagine race day. If I remember correctly, Hamilton won here in 2014.

Penang is different; flying in gave me an overview. Two long bridges link it to the mainland, heavily built up around the capital, George Town, green and lush in the centre.

From the airport, as I near George Town, the traffic builds up. It's the evening rush hour and the roads are buzzing with thousands of motorbikes and mopeds.

They all seemed to be based around the Honda 50s that I remember from the Sixties – this is one design they got right the first time. I don't doubt that the newer models are improvements on the originals, but so they should be – they've made more than 60 million of them.

Time for dinner. Seafood is big here and there is also a thriving street food scene, but for me lobster wins the day.

Next morning it's time for sightseeing. Buddhism is strong on the island and there are some fabulous temples to visit – all open to the public. The Thai

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Buddhist Temple is amazing – it houses the fourth largest Buddha in the world: the 108ft-long Phra Buddha. Just as spectacular is the Burmese Buddhist Temple just across the road, with gold gilt everywhere – simply stunning.

Out of town there's the 2400ft Penang Hill. Don't try to walk up; it's pretty steep and the funicular railway will save your

legs. Watch out for the monkeys at the base of the hill – they are definitely on the cheeky side of well-behaved.

At the other end of the island is a war museum spread over 20 acres. Once a British fortress, it was taken over by the Japanese in 1941 and earned a reputation as a centre for death and torture. The visit is certainly sobering

and, for added eeriness, you can take the tour at night. It's wooded and lush here so it's worth having a squirt with the mossie spray before the tour.

I like Penang. Strolling along the waterfront is special, with local anglers trying their luck, ships and ferries cruising past, wading birds picking over the scraps at the water's edge. The Clan Jetty, with homes built on stilts over the water, is fascinating, the historic Blue Mansion, enchanting. It's a great place for food, culture, relaxation and getting a bit of warmth through your bones. ▶

Malaysian medicine

If Malaysia sounds like a good place for recuperation, here's a look at some of the hospitals and clinics in Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Penang facilities may have a price advantage over Kuala Lumpur but need an extra flight or longer land transfers



Golden Horses Health Sanctuary, Kuala Lumpur

Website: (www.ghhs.com.my)
Offers a full health-screening programme with emphasis on preventative treatment. All facilities on site. Go here for a plan to change your lifestyle for a longer healthier life. Traditional Chinese Medicine is available.



Imperial Dental Specialist Centre, Kuala Lumpur

Website: (www.imperialdsc.com)
Dr How leads the team - he specialised in orthodontics in London in 1993. Implants normally require two visits, but at a little over £1000 per implant, the prices are about one third of those in the UK. If you are planning a full mouth rehabilitation or several implants, the prices start to make sense.

Gleneagles, Kuala Lumpur

Website: (www.gleneagleskl.com.my)
A large, modern, well-equipped hospital with 163 consultants covering almost every speciality. The specialist Gamma Knife equipment can destroy brain tumours without invasive surgery and allows physicians to tackle brain lesions that were considered inoperable. Orthopaedics is a huge department. Airport transport is arranged and liaison with the patient's own doctor is normal: impressive.



Loh Guan Lye Specialist Centre, Penang

Website: (www.lohguanlye.com)
A large hospital in the centre of George Town, 30 minutes from the airport and 20 minutes from the beaches of Batu Ferringhi, it has its own International Desk in the lobby to welcome in overseas visitors. Prices are reasonable and you can even stay in its Presidential Suite for about £300 a night. All the latest diagnostic scanning equipment is on site and it even has a specialist fertility centre.



Island Hospital, Penang

Website: (www.islandhospital.com)
The former chief executive and hugely charismatic ambassador for the hospital, Dr Chan (now 82 and semi-retired), started the hospital 18 years ago. When he says "it's not all about the money - we make friends here" he really means it. He loves Britain and the British and spreads his ethos throughout the hospital. The hospital is equipped with the best technology and staffed by people who care. Overseas patients are charged the same as locals. It treats everything you would expect from a major hospital, including sports rehab. Orthopaedic surgeon Dr Aaron Lim trained with the consultant to Liverpool football team from 1987-94.



Beverly Wilshire, Kuala Lumpur

Website: (www.beverlywilshiremedical.com)
Specialists in all forms of cosmetic surgery including dental, facelifts, tummy tucks, liposuction, hair transplants, breast lifts, Botox, dental implants, whitening, crowns and veneers. Get two or three procedures done at the same visit and the trip to Malaysia becomes well worth the long flight. A facelift here will cost around £4000.



Adventist Hospital, Penang

Website: (www.pah.com.my)
Housed in the only Japanese building constructed in the Second World War, it is a heritage asset.

'God heals, we help' is the catchphrase for this major hospital. Known as a leading heart centre, it takes a lot of overseas patients including 400 to 500 from the UK each year. With 80 specialists and 25 specialisations, there's not much that they can't take on here.

This is a 'not-for-profit' hospital that was established 90 years ago so there's plenty of experience.



Find out more

- Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council, tel: 603 272 68 688, website: (www.mhtc.org.my), email: (callcentre@mhtc.org.my)
- Facebook: ([/mhtcmalaysia](https://www.facebook.com/mhtcmalaysia))
- Twitter: ([/mhtcmalaysia](https://twitter.com/mhtcmalaysia))
- YouTube: ([/mhtcmalaysia](https://www.youtube.com/mhtcmalaysia))
- Medical tourism, website: (www.medicaltourism.com.my).