

Hunger games: eating is by far the leading pastime in Malaysia and Little India is a great place to start



IF YOU ASK A MALAYSIAN WHICH ARE THE MUST-SEE ATTRACTIONS IN ANY GIVEN PART OF THE CITY, DON'T BE SURPRISED TO HEAR THE PERSON REEL OFF A LIST OF POPULAR RESTAURANTS

ON FOOT

There's simply nothing Malaysians love more than food. They typically can't last more than a few hours without eating and regularly enjoy six meals a day (breakfast, brunch, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and late-night snack). Their obsession is such that tourists who ask a Malaysian which are the must-see attractions in any given part of the city are likely to hear that person reel off a list of nearby restaurants.

It makes sense, then, that the best way to see the real Kuala Lumpur is by taking a food tour – such as those run by Food Tour Malaysia. While the evening Off the Eaten Track Tour is a bestseller, we signed up for the Kuala Lumpur Walk Tour as the earlier time better suited our young children.

Initially, prospects were not good – amid a downpour, our guide Charles approached our waiting group at Bangsar LRT station with a smile on his face and a poncho wrapped around his shoulders.

The first meal on our tour was “banana



leaf”, named after the wrapping and “bed” for the dish's mix of vegetables, curried meat and *poppadam* (thin, crisp fried dough), which is served with steamed rice. It's a traditional South Indian dish and was brought to Malaysia by ethnic Tamil workers in the early 20th century. Just like all the best Malaysian food, it's simple, cheap and delicious. En route to our next destination, Charles ran through some of the high points in the history of the neighbourhood, known as Brickfields.

Also known as Little India, it took its name from the numerous brick-making factories once found in the area. The clay bricks they produced were used to build Kuala Lumpur, after most of the nascent settlement's original wood and thatch dwellings were destroyed in a devastating fire in 1881. Pondering the magnitude of such an event, we headed down the street for a refreshing dessert of *chendol*, a classic dish of shaved ice, coconut milk, green starched noodles with pandan flavouring and palm sugar.

Though the culinary journey subsequently carried on to Chinatown, where we drank sweet iced coffee and ate bowls of sour *assam laksa* next to crates filled with squawking chickens, it was at this point that I finally understood: to experience its food is to understand Malaysia – everything else is just an appetiser.

The Kuala Lumpur Walk Tour, which costs S\$43 per person, includes a guide, transportation and all food and drinks. www.foodtourmalaysia.com ◊