

# DESTINATIONS MALAYSIA

## CHECKING IN AT BERJAYA TIOMAN

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The anticipation of travel is almost like falling in love! You choose a destination and an adventure that makes your heart leap and your pulse race. When you arrive, you do not know how it will turn out to be, a casual flirtation, a torrid affair, a long term relationship or if after all the planning and expectation, there is just no chemistry! One is writing this from the cool confines of one's beach-side chalet at Berjaya Tioman Beach Resort at Tioman Island, in the state of Pahang in peninsular Malaysia. There is an interesting legend about the origins of this island. Once upon a time, a dragon princess from China, set out to visit her prince in Singapore. On her way to Singapore from China, she stopped when she saw the crystal clear waters of the South China Sea. She was so enchanted that she decided to discontinue her journey and took the form of an island to offer comfort to passing travelers. That is

how the magical and mythical island of Tioman came into being. Even today, the map of Tioman Island has a striking resemblance with the head of a sleeping dragon.

The board at Larkins Bus Station, Johor Pulau Tioman or Tioman Island is about 56 km. Away from the mainland and is spread over 800 sq. km. Tioman island is one of the volcanic islands that form part of the Tioman Marine Park. One takes the night train from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore and alights at Johor Bahru at 7:00 a.m. One gets a connecting bus to Mercing which leaves Larkin at 8:30 a.m. and arrives at Mercing at 11:00 a.m. The boat jetty is a short walk away from Mercing bus station and one can conveniently board the ferry which departs at 11:30 a.m. It is worthwhile to note that boats, buses, trains and flight maintain their schedules unless due to weather conditions beyond their control. Hence it is advisable for Indian tourists to adjust their watches 15 minutes faster than the exact time, to smoothen one's journey!

One meets tourists from countries as diverse as Singapore to Australia to Kuwait, as one plonks oneself on the many empty chairs scattered on the upper deck of one's ferry, with a bird's eye view of the horizon. The first ninety minutes are over choppy waters. One sees the faint outline of two huge volcanic rocks at a distance. As one gets closer, one sees a splash of green emerging out of the cobalt blue waters. The bottom of the ocean floor can be seen as the water is crystal clear. A speck of green appeared among the dark blue waters. It resembled a green sap- phire nestling in the palm of Nature's hand. The closer

*Sunset as seen from tioman beach*





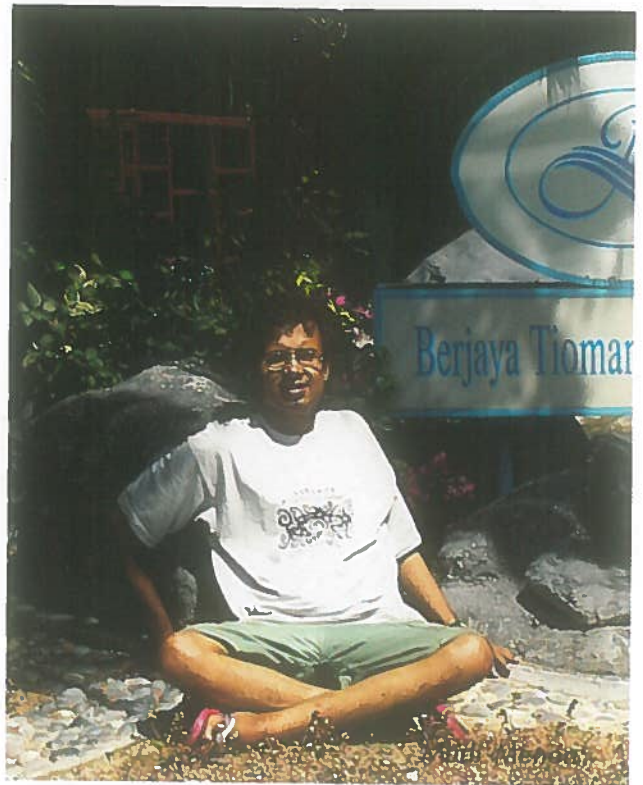
the shores of island it was one's moment of enlightenment at the end of a pilgrimage

However, to one's bewilderment, one discovers that Rava is only the first stop enroute to Tioman. But seeing the unspoilt beauty of Rava, one begins to shiver in anticipation of glimpsing the sleeping dragon princess. The boat ride from Rava to Tioman is eventful. Scores of small islands emerge out of the waters as one picks up speed. Lush green tropical forests cover all these islands giving them a wild look. A few bobbing boats are the only sign indicating that these islands are inhabited. The waters become clearer at the next stop. Finally, one arrives at Tekek jetty which is our destination.

The ocean resembles a blue looking glass as one alights at Tekek. One can clearly see brightly coloured fishes swimming beneath the surface of the sea. Colourful coral and undersea gardens come into view as the visibility gradient improves with very passing second. One feels that the journey is as exciting as the destination!

One alights here to find a piece of India, waiting to receive us. The escort bus is a Tata vehicle! It ambles along the gentle slopes and drops you at the plush lobby of the Berjaya Beach Resort. The chalets have a French design and are exclusively made of wood. These polished wood cabins transport you into an ambience of a bygone era, except for the remote controlled air-conditioning and modern bathrooms. Each chalet has a small outdoor sit-out, lawn, study-table and sofas.

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*View form the Ferry*





### *Unexpected guest at Tioman*

the tiny island of Tioman which generations after generations must enjoy. The duty free status of Tioman makes it is an added attraction for shopping freaks! Several kiosks sell souvenirs ranging from T-shirts to handicrafts.

Thus Tioman offers a unique combination and is an attractive option for enjoying the bounties of nature. One can sunbathe on the beach, soaking in the gentle sunlight throughout the day, or curl up with a book in the cool confines of your chalet or play around in nature's own Jacuzzi, which is a short walk from one's abode. Those seeking tranquility can climb up the hill and rest under the numerous trees that crave to reach the skies, in the dense rain forests that cover the hills.

Fire, water and earth, one can watch the changing phases of these primordial elements at dawn and dusk, One also has the option of spending the night at the beach huts, soaking in the moonlight and watching the twinkling stars all over the horizon. The cool ocean breeze, the moist sand and the gurgling lullaby of the gently rolling waves ensure a refreshing night's rest under the starlit sky. Underwater exploring by traveling on a glass bottomed boat, is another fascinating experience, if one wants to explore these underwater gardens without getting oneself wet. One can observe the colonies of corals and the marine life which shelters under these corals. At times one sees a symphony of colourful fishes swimming in synchronicity across the transparent deep blue waters. The symmetry, harmony and telepathic communication between these tiny fishes, which move as one seamless whole needs to be seen to be believed.

Unexpected showers are a constant feature of these tropical rainforests and to see millions of thick water droplets plunge into the azure sea as one sits under the canopy of one's boat, is an encounter with nature which is welcome. The bobbing boat, the turbulent sea and the incessant splatter of rain on the roof of the boat, under the overcast sky makes this experience seep into every pore of one's being. The attractive monsoon promotional offers at Berjaya Tioman during September to November, is all the more reason to visit this exciting place. ◆

### *Mushroom corals of Tioman*





Each chalet is surrounded by a canopy of green



cool coconut water, while sunbathing under the gently setting sun is the balm one needs to rejuvenate one's aching bones. The water is extremely shallow and one can walk into the sea for about a mile. One can watch one's feet throughout one's adventure into the sea. Tioman is nothing but the sun drenched beach, the rust coloured sandy shore, crystal clear waters teeming with marine life, corals of myriad colours stretching under the sea as far as one can see. The jewel in the crown are the rain forests and hills that surround this secluded cove, that time for got.

Island hopping, boating, snorkeling, scuba diving and bird-watching are some of the other activities one can indulge in once the novelty of the sea wears off. One can swim alongside a symphony of colourful fishes while enjoying the beauty of the coral reefs that adorn the ocean floor. Mushroom shaped cor-



Trance Meditation on the Golden Beach



als, fan shaped corals and rainbow corals can be clearly seen exploding in a riot of colours. The marine life is no less enchanting. Fishes of myriad colours swim in endless turns, making their way deli. Some of the other activities which can be indulged in, while at Tioman Island, include cycling, sea kayaking, windsurfing or simply island hopping. Guided boat tours are available to the villages that are scattered around Tioman. Explorers who prefer solitude can meditate at several smaller, uninhabited islands which are a short boat ride away from Tioman. One can see the outlines of these volcanic islands on the ferry ride from Mercing to Tioman. Golden beaches, crimson sunsets, tropical rainforests, coral reefs, wooden chalets and azure waters, nature has generously blessed