

# travel



Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Towers, as viewed from the newly refurbished, 33rd-floor SkyBar, anchor the city's skyline and briefly enjoyed status as the world's tallest building before being surpassed by Taipei 101. John Brunton for The National

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**John Brunton explores** Kuala Lumpur, Asia's dynamic and futuristic insider's city that offers its best culture, food and nightlife only to those in the know

**T**he sun has only just started setting, but the crowd of movers and shakers that flock to Kuala Lumpur's SkyBar every evening is already firmly ensconced in a comfy cabana or poolside table, sipping exotic drinks and nibbling sushi from a metre-long silver platter. Everyone is fixated, gazing out of the enormous windows at the ultimate city panorama, a glittering skyline of futuristic buildings, dominated by the Twin Towers, whose flickering lights resemble a space rocket preparing for take off.

The towers enjoyed 15 minutes of fame at the end of the 1990s when they were briefly the world's tallest building, but even today they symbolise the metamorphosis of Kuala Lumpur from a sleepy colonial backwater into one of Asia's most dynamic hubs. The scene in the bar could come straight out of *Blade Runner*, but then KL, as everyone calls this intriguing Malaysian metropolis, is an

electrifying mix of contradictions: cutting-edge technology and avant-garde architecture alongside a vivid colonial heritage; fabulous street food where you feast for a king for less than US\$10 (Dh37) or inventive, gourmet cuisine that would easily merit a Michelin star; and a colourful, dynamic melting pot of races and religions that span Malay Muslims, Chinese Buddhists and Hindu Indians, benevolently tolerating each other to concentrate on the greater good of making money.

KL is a genuine "insider's city", a hidden destination that most tourists never spend enough time in, always in a hurry to speed off to an idyllic beach resort. Friends in Europe always ask me why I spend time in KL, but you need to spend a few days here to scratch the superficial surface and discover what is one of Asia's hidden, secret destinations.

**Kuala Lumpur, continued on 7 →**

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