

Negeri Sembilan

The folk of Negeri Sembilan are extremely proud of their state and its heritage. The Minangkabau legacy dictates that women are the leaders in society and that inheritances are passed down to daughters and not sons. Like every state steeped in history, Negeri Sembilan's began in the 14th century when western Sumatran settlers came under threat from the Javanese.

As a result, a fight ensued between a bull representing Sumatrans and a tiger signifying the Javanese. The bull miraculously defeated the ferocious tiger, which accredited the victors the title of Minangkabau, which means 'Victorious Bulls'.

Later during the 16th century, these Minangkabau migrated to Peninsular Malaysia. They brought with them the cultural and social system called Adat Perpatih, which is a matrilineal system that dictates women as the leaders of society and inheritances are passed down to daughters, not sons. Also evident around the state is the horn-roof style of architecture typical of the predominant 'element of the Minangkabau. Geographically, the state covers a large mass from sandy seaside hotspots to tranquil kampung-style districts.

GETTING THERE

Seremban is only 60km north of Kuala Lumpur and is a mere 30 minutes from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). Taxis and buses go to all parts of the state. The main bus-cum-taxi terminal is at Jalan Sungai Ujung, Seremban. Taxi services also link Seremban to other major towns around the peninsula.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS

Seremban

Only 35 minutes from the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) via the North-South Expressway (NSE), the capital could be your first stop off the plane. Also the administrative centre of the state, Seremban is a quaint district with many Minangkabau-inspired buildings.

State Legislative Assembly Building

Housed within the Wisma Negeri Complex, the building is an important government building fashioned in the traditional styles of the Minangkabau. The eight-pointed roof emulates the horns of the buffalo while the elegantly carved wood panels, interiors and furniture of the main chamber complement the traditional exterior, which is closely linked to the Pagarruyung Palace in Sumatra.

Negeri Sembilan State Museum/Complex Centre

A restored palace, the once magnificent Istana Ampang Tinggi is today the State Museum as well as the Cultural Complex. Located at Jalan Labu within the Cultural Handicraft Complex, these edifices are the epicentres of Negeri Sembilan's socio-cultural heritage. Comprising three main buildings, they are the Teratak Perpatih, the Ampang Tinggi Palace and the Minangkabau House. Teratak Perpatih features exhibits like artefacts, handicrafts, traditional clothes, woodcarvings and photographs. Next to the museum is the authentic Minangkabau House where visitors may roam and learn in greater detail the state's history and culture. The tourist information centre is also here.

Seremban Lake Gardens

The Lake Gardens is a popular spot among visitors. It has something for everyone – from jogging paths for the health conscious to two lakes with boating activities for families and playgrounds for children. Cultural shows are also often organised on a floating stage here.

State Library

Not far from the Lake Gardens is the State Library. Once the State Secretariat Building, English architect D.B. Hubback built it in 1912. The structure is a poignant reminder of the country's colonial period. Walls of back-to-back references comprising journals, photographs and other materials from the country's post-Independence era occupy the library.

Jelita Ostrich Farm

This is an ideal setting for the world's largest bird. Located along Jalan Pantai the farm was erected on a piece of grassland approximately nine kilometres from Seremban. Visitors may feed the ostriches here that roam freely. If you can gather the courage to ride one you will go home with an Ostrich Jockey certificate.

KUALA PILAH

The home district of the royal family of the Yang-Di-Pertuan Besar or ruler of the state until 1931, the Seri Menanti Palace is the district's most significant edifice. About 38km from Seremban, the district resonates with nobility and heritage with its bull-horned buildings. Due to the palace's location within the district, it is also known as the Abode of Culture. It is definitely worth a stopover.

Seri Menanti Grand Palace

The official residence of the ruler, this modern palace sits just 200 metres from the old Seri Menanti Palace. Built in 1933 the turret rises proudly amidst the rolling greenery of landscaped grounds. Located within the palace is the Balairong Seri or Throne Room where the ruler and his consort, the Tengku Ampuan hold audience. It is also the venue for all major state functions like swearing-ins and the pledging of allegiance by state leaders and clan chieftains.

The palace also houses regalia belonging to the royal family. The keris, spears, swords, umbrellas and other royal paraphernalia are permanently displayed here. Located nearby is the Royal Mausoleum where past rulers and members of the royal family are buried, including the first King of Malaysia, the late Tuanku Abdul Rahman and his consort.

Seri Menanti Royal Museum (Sri Menanti Old Palace)

An architectural wonder, this former palace was built without a single nail and put together entirely by wooden pegs. Built in 1908 based on traditional Minangkabau architecture it remains sturdy to this day. The structure incorporates 99 pillars, representing the 99 warriors who served at the palace. The palace is now a royal museum and is open to the public. Visitors can also take a horse-carriage ride to tour Sri Menanti or watch demonstrations of songket weaving.

Terachi Cultural Village

This cultural village is located at the junction of Seri Menanti. Here you can see Minangkabau culture and traditions at their best with dances, music and handicrafts to charm visitors.

JELEBU

This district is renowned for its acres and acres of fruit orchards such as rambutans, mangosteen, mangoes and other local favourites.

Lata Kijang

Embedded within the dense forest of Jelebu, Lata Kijang is only accessible by four-wheel-drive vehicles. Those wanting to venture here should be prepared for a narrow and steep ride. Along the way you will get to see an Orang Asli (indigenous people) settlement. After about an hour on foot, your bounty will be what Lata Kijang is all about – a 300-foot waterfall worthy of every mosquito bite along the way!

Port Dickson

Only 32km from Seremban, Port Dickson is the place to have fun in the sun. It beckons weekenders and tourists alike with its 18km of fine beaches dotted with accommodation ranging from international-class hotels to more affordable ones. Restaurants and quaint seaside food stalls are also common in this seaside haven. PD – as the locals affectionately call it – also has other attractions such as the Pasir Panjang Recreational Park, the Kuala Lukut Floating Fishing Deck, the Lukut Estuary Fishing Jetty, the Tanjung Tuan Lighthouse (Cape Rachado) and the Pengkalan Kempas Historical Complex.

Pengkalan Kempas Historical Complex

A village along the Port Dickson-Melaka trunk road, Pengkalan Kempas is renowned for three effects: The Rudder, The Sword and The Spoon. These three megalithic stones were named after the shapes they resemble and stand erect next to the grave of Sheik Ahmad Majnun, a fearless local warrior who dared to go against Sultan Mansur Shah of Malacca. Dubbed the Living Stones they are said to glow at night.

REMBAU

Rembau is an area that is home to many superb attractions, not to mention the ever-present Minangkabau inspired buildings. A 30-minute drive from Seremban lies one of its attractions – the Pedas Wet World Resort, which features hot springs that fill the pools of the resort. Also in Rembau is the Sukabumi Village Resort. Revolving around eco-tourism, the resort was privately developed by residents in an attempt to preserve the delicate environment around it.

JEMPOL

A land rich in natural settings, Jempol is the place for the outdoors person. It is home to numerous beautiful recreational parks like the Serting Ulu Recreational Park and the De Bana Recreational Park. Jempol is also home to iconic Malay poet Tan Sri Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad, who contributed greatly to the country's economic, political and social well-being. Nicknamed Pendita Za'aba (Learned Man), his house in Kampung Bukit Kerdas is now known as Teratak Za'aba. The district's geographical terrain also makes it a perfect spot for extreme sports like motor-cross racing and canoeing up the rapids of the Serting River.

TAMPIN

Tampin is 49km from Seremban and borders Johor. In 1992, a railway station was constructed here to ease transportation problems between the two states. The Gemas Railway Station is still fully operational to this day.

NATURE'S PARADISE

Beaches

Port Dickson or PD is the most popular seaside retreat in Malaysia. Ideal for the perfect weekend getaway, the favourite stretches among locals are Purnama Beach, Cahaya Bulan Beach, Telok Kemang, Blue Lagoon and Taman Aman. Offering a panoramic view of the Straits of Malacca, the 137-year-old Rachado Lighthouse stands at Tanjung Tuan (Cape Rachado).

Recreational Forests

Negeri Sembilan has many recreational parks and forests. The 1,240-metre Gunung Hantu (Ghost Mountain) is a favourite among eco-tourists. Located along the Seremban-Kuala Pilah trunk road the Ulu Bendol Recreational Forest is truly a paradise within the Angsi Reserved Forest. The place has magnificent waterfalls, wildlife and priceless wood species such as Keruing and Meranti. Ideal for picnics, visitors can enjoy a swim, camping and also jungle trekking. Facilities like log cabins, camping sites, food stalls, souvenir outlets, a prayer room and children's playground are also available. Other popular places to enjoy nature are the Lenggeng Recreational Forest at Lenggeng Village and the Serting Ulu Recreational Forest near Simpang Pertang.

SHOPPING

For a state as small as Negeri Sembilan, its capital Seremban is a hive of shopping activity with malls such as Seremban Parade, The Store, Parkson Grand, Terminal One Shopping Centre, Seremban Centre Point and Giant Hypermarket. Other places in Seremban that offer wholesome fun for the family are Holiday Planet and Golden Bowl.

EATING OUT

Negeri Sembilan is truly a pot of various cuisines. One of its most popular dishes is masak lemak lada api, a fiery serving not for the weak stomach. A combination of onions, turmeric, lemon grass and lada api (fiery chillies) simmered in coconut milk, this dish is eaten with rice and can be prepared with many types of fish like ikan semilang (catfish) and ikan pekasam (pickled fish) and white or red meats. Sambal tempoyak daun kayu contains no less than 44 types of spices and is a combination of various leaves cooked in thick and rich gravy. Commonly served in Malay homes during the festive periods, lemang is a dish made from glutinous rice packed in banana leaf-laced bamboo stems and cooked over a roaring open fire. It can be eaten plain or with the Malay version of a spicy beef goulash called rending. For sweet endings try the kesirat, a mixture of sugar, coconut milk, glutinous rice and coarse rice flour. Penganan is another dessert of sugar, coconut milk and glutinous rice flour.