

# Geographic Names Standardization Policy for Malaysia

United States Board on Geographic Names  
Foreign Names Committee



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## 1. Introduction

This geographic names standardization policy has been prepared as an aid to those geographic names experts who are the working staff for the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) in the standardization of the geographic names of **Malaysia** for United States Government use. The BGN and its staff work to effect consistent treatment of geographic name spellings in U.S. Government databases, publications, maps, and charts. The country policies are intended to satisfy, in part, the statutory requirements levied upon the BGN in Public Law USC 80-242 to develop principles, policies and procedures for geographic names standardization, and to promulgate decisions with respect to the principles of geographic nomenclature and orthography.

## 2. Languages and Language Policy

### *a. Demographics*

The population of Malaysia is estimated to be 33.5 million. The largest ethnic group is the Malay,<sup>1</sup> which comprises 62% of the population. Two other significant but smaller ethnic groups are Chinese (21%) and Indian (6%). The official religion of Malaysia is Islam.<sup>2</sup> Adherents make up 61% of the population. Other religions of the country include Buddhism (20%), Christianity (9%), and Hinduism (6%).<sup>3</sup>

### *b. Languages*

Malay<sup>4</sup> (ISO 639-3 code 'msa') is the official and national language.<sup>5</sup> English ('eng') remains an active second language and is still widely used in business. Article 152 of the Constitution of Malaysia allows for continued official use of English. Other commonly spoken languages include Chinese (predominantly dialects from the southern provinces of China; e.g., Cantonese ('yue') and others), Tamil ('tam'), Telugu ('tel'), Malayalam ('mal'), Punjabi ('pan'), and Thai ('tha'). Approximately 137 languages are spoken in Malaysia.

### *c. Geographic Names Standardization*

The Malaysian National Committee on Geographical Names (MNCGN) was established on September 11, 2002 by the Malaysian Cabinet, and is responsible for coordinating

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1 Bumiputera (or Bumiputra) is a Malaysian term to describe the Malay race and other indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia, and used particularly in Malaysia (Freebase via <https://www.definitions.net/definition/bumiputera> accessed February 26, 2020)

2 Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Article 3, 1957

[https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Malaysia\\_2007.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Malaysia_2007.pdf?lang=en)

3 Malaysia: People and Society. CIA World Factbook (2021). <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/malaysia>

4 Designated as *Bahasa Malaysia* or *Bahasa Melayu* in Malaysia

5 Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Article 152, 1957

geographical naming activities in Malaysia. Malaysia has been active in the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, but has not participated since 2017.

The Department of Standards Malaysia published “Guidelines for the Determination of Geographical Names” in 2009. This document serves as a Principles, Policies, and Procedures guide for the country’s toponymy. More recently, the MNCGN have prepared a “Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors for International Use” (2017), which serves as a useful reference document. These guidelines, as well as a number of other useful resources are available at the MNCGN website.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. Toponymic Policies**

#### ***a. Script and/or Orthography***

Geographic names in Malaysia are written in Roman script and orthography. The National Language Act 1967 specifies the Latin (*Rumi*) script as the official script of the national language, but does not prohibit the use of the traditional Jawi script,<sup>7</sup> a writing system derived from the Arabic alphabet.

#### ***b. Romanization***

Romanization is not necessary. However, there is a growing trend of support of the use of Jawi.<sup>8</sup> BGN and PCGN have begun the development of a draft romanization system for Jawi, which is official in Brunei.

#### ***c. Diacritics***

No diacritic marks are used in Malay.

#### ***d. Generic Terms***

A generic is a term in a geographic name that describes a feature (e.g., ‘river’, ‘hill’, ‘lake’). The generic term of a name typically precedes the specific term. If the term does not identify the actual feature, it should be considered a false generic and not be added to the generic field of the Geographic Names Database (GNDB). Generic terms are not collected for populated places. Appendix A contains a glossary of common Malay generic terms. As is the case in Indonesia, there has been a move to adjust and standardize the spelling of generic terms (e.g., formerly *tanjong* (cape), now *tanjung*).

#### ***e. Hyphenation, Capitalization, and Spelling***

The first letter of each word element, except for articles and prepositions, in Malay names is capitalized. Hyphens are not typically found in Malaysian sources.

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6 Available at <https://www.jupem.gov.my/page/main-1>

7 National Language Act, 1967

8 Please see paper on Jawi prepared for the 33rd BGN/PCGN Conference (2019)

“Hyphenation and apostrophe may be used only when their usage have been well established.”<sup>9</sup>

**f. Long and short forms**

Administrative division names are accorded long and short forms. Short form names are ranked as the primary approved name and the long form as the secondary approved name. Short forms may also be found for railroad stations and major islands.

**g. Numbers**

Cardinal and ordinal numerals that occur as integral parts of geographic names are replaced by their word equivalents.

**h. Abbreviations**

A list of abbreviations of generics which are commonly found on cartographic products of Malaysia is at Appendix B.

## 4. Political Geography Policy

**a. Country Name**

Approved Name	Malaysia
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**b. Capital Name**

Approved Name	Kuala Lumpur
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**Note:** Putrajaya is the federal government's administrative center. Many federal agencies were relocated to Putrajaya beginning in 1999 due to overcrowding and congestion in Kuala Lumpur.

**c. First-order Administrative Divisions**

Malaysia is composed of 13 states (*negeri*) and three federal territories (*wilayah persekutuan*). Each state is divided into districts<sup>10</sup>, which are then divided into townships (*mukim*).

	Name	GEC	GENC	Seat
1	Johor	MY01	MY-01	Johor Bahru
2	Kedah	MY02	MY-02	Alor Setah
3	Kelantan	MY03	MY-03	Kota Bharu

<sup>9</sup> “Guidelines for the Determination of Geographical Names” Department of Standards Malaysia, 2009

<sup>10</sup> *daerah*; collectivity (*jajahan*) (in Kelantan); division (*bahagian*) (in Sabah and Sarawak)

	Name	GEC	GENC	Seat
4	Kuala Lumpur*	MY14	MY-14	Kuala Lumpur**
5	Labuan*	MY15	MY-15	Labuan
6	Melaka	MY04	MY-04	Melaka
7	Negeri Sembilan	MY05	MY-05	Seremban
8	Pahang	MY06	MY-06	Kuantan
9	Perak	MY07	MY-08	Ipoh
10	Perlis	MY08	MY-09	Kangar
11	Pulau Pinang	MY09	MY-07	George Town
12	Putrajaya*	MY17	MY-16	Putrajaya
13	Sabah	MY16	MY-12	Kota Kinabalu
14	Sarawak	MY11	MY-13	Kuching
15	Selangor	MY12	MY-10	Shah Alam
16	Terengganu	MY13	MY-11	Kuala Terengganu

\* federal territory

\*\* Kuala Lumpur is also the national capital

#### ***d. Conventional and/or Anglicized Variant Names***

##### **Conventional Names**

Conventional Name	UFI	UNI	Designation
East Malaysia	-2381737	-3291725	RGN
Johore Strait	-2405147	-3320787	STRT
Peninsular Malaysia	-2392860	-3304819	RGN
Strait of Malacca	-1506398	-2149870	STRT (OS file)

##### **Anglicized Variant Names**

None

##### **International Features**

Name	UFI	UNI	Designation	Countries
Borneo	-2674017	-3695276	ISL	BX, ID, MY
Brunei Bay	-2404317	-3319521	BAY	BX, MY
Gunung Berumput [MY]/ Gunung Rumput [ID]	-2694428	-3735451	MT	ID, MY
Pulau Sebatik	-2695580	-3737691	ISL	ID, MY
Singapore Strait	-73767	-108093	STRT	ID, MY, SN
Sungai Kolok [MY]/ Mae Nam Kolok [TH]	-2403721	-3318645	STM	MY, TH
Tanjung Datu	-2401410	-3268364	CAPE	ID, MY

### ***e. Unique Geopolitical Situations***

For the latest country-specific boundary dispute information, consult the U.S. Department of State, Office of the Geographer and Global Issues <internationalboundaries@state.gov>

In 2008, the ICJ awarded sovereignty of Pedra Branca (Pulau Batu Puteh/Horsburgh Island) to Singapore, and Middle Rocks to Malaysia, but did not rule on maritime regimes, boundaries, or disposition of South Ledge; land and maritime negotiations with Indonesia are ongoing, and disputed areas include the controversial Tanjung Datu and Camar Wulan border area in Borneo and the maritime boundary in the Ambalat oil block in the Celebes Sea.<sup>11</sup>

Labuan is an offshore financial center.

## **5. Source Material**

The primary source of geographic names are the topographic maps published by the Department of Survey and Mapping of Malaysia (JUPEM). The Hydrographic Department of the Royal Malaysian Navy is the official source for nautical charts. The following is the preferred series for collecting geographic names:

The 5101 (Peninsular Malaysia) and 5201 (Sabah and Sarawak) series of 1:50,000-scale map sheets is to be considered the primary official source.

The MNCGN maintains the Malaysian Geographic Names and Web Gazetteer Application (MyGeoName).<sup>12</sup> MyGeoName has both a Malay and English user interface to search the portal for geographic names information. Downloadable gazetteer extracts are available in Malay only.

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11 Malaysia: Disputes-International. CIA World Factbook (2021). <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/malaysia>

12 <http://mygeoname.mygeoportal.gov.my/index.jsp>



**Appendix A. Glossary of Generic Terms**

<b>Generic</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Description</b>
Alor, alur	CHNM	channel
Bukit	HLL	hill
Cangkat	HLL	hill
Goa, gua	CAVE	cave
Gosong	RF	reef, shoal
Gunong, gunung	HLL, MT	hill, mountain
Jambatan, jembatan	BDG	bridge
Jeram	RPDS	rapids
Kepulauan	ISLS	islands
Kuala	BAY	bay, estuary
Loagan	LK	lake
Lok	BAY	bay
Permatang	BNK, RF, SHOL	bank, reef, shoal
Pulau	ISL	island
Selat	STRT	strait
Seminanjung	PEN	peninsula
Sungai	CNL, STM	canal, river
Tanjung	CAPE	cape, headland
Tasik	LK	lake
Telok, teluk	BGHT, COVE, RSV	bay, bight, cove, reservoir
Terusan	CHN, CHNM, CRKT	channel, tidal creek



## Appendix B. Glossary of Common Abbreviations

This list is not exhaustive, and other abbreviations may be found. Any abbreviations must be spelled out in the GNDB. Some abbreviations and word spellings have changed over time (e.g., *kampong* is now typically *kampung*).

Abbreviation	Expanded Form	Meaning
A.	Alor, alur	River, Channel
B	Besar	Large
Bt.	Bukit	Mountain
Ct.	Cangkat	Hill
G.	Gunong, gunung	Mountain
K. (before name)	Kuala	River Mouth
K. (after name)	Kechil	Small
Kpg.	Kampong, kampung	Village
Krgn	Kerangan	Boulder, rock
Lbk	Lubok	Deep pool
Ldg.	Ladang	Estate
Mdg.	Mudong	Hill
M.	Muara	Mouth of a large river
P.	Pulau	Island
Pdg.	Padang	Field
R.	Rumah	Long house
Rm.	Riam	Rapids
S.	Sungai	River, stream
T.	Timur	East
Tk.	Telok, teluk	Bay, bend in river bank
Tg.	Tanjong, tanjung	Headland, river bend
Tr.	Terusan	Channel
U.	Utara	North
W.	Wong	Rapids