

BORNEO'S CROWN JEWEL

A journey through the wonders of

Sabah

WHERE RAINFOREST MEETS REEF, AND LUXURY MEETS ADVENTURE, SABAH, THE MALAYSIAN STATE ON THE NORTHERN TIP OF BORNEO, OFFERS TRAVELLERS A RARE BLEND OF WILD BEAUTY, RICH CULTURE, AND FIVE-STAR COMFORT.

Borneo, the third largest island in the world, defies expectation. Shared by Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei, this is a land of deep green jungles, ancient rainforests, coral-fringed coastlines, and rare wildlife found nowhere else on the planet. Yet amidst this natural grandeur, Borneo also offers something unexpected: luxury. Think five-star rainforest lodges, overwater villas on turquoise seas, and private encounters with orangutans and pygmy elephants.

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For the discerning traveller, Sabah, the Malaysian state on Borneo's northern tip, is the ultimate base to experience this unique blend of wilderness and comfort. From its highland peaks to its pristine islands, Sabah is Borneo's crown jewel, a magical region where adventure, conservation, and indulgence coexist beautifully.

KOTA KINABALU: GATEWAY TO PARADISE

Your journey begins in Kota Kinabalu (KK), Sabah's vibrant coastal capital. This is a city where modern luxury meets island charm with its mix of bustling markets, seaside promenades, and world-class resorts. Stay at the Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Resort & Spa, where ocean-view suites and sunset bars redefine tropical elegance, or retreat to the Magellan Sutera Resort, part of the Sutera Harbour complex, with its marina, golf course, and infinity pools overlooking the South China Sea.

KK's appeal lies in its effortless combination of city and sea. Just offshore lies the Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park, a cluster of five idyllic islands only 15 minutes by boat. Each offers something different: the powdery beaches of Manukan, the vibrant reefs of Sapi, and the shaded forest trails of Gaya. For barefoot luxury, Gaya Island Resort delivers sustainability and serenity in equal measure: villas hidden among mangroves, sea-view infinity pools, and a marine ecology centre where guests can help replant coral.

Back on land, Sabah's warmth extends beyond the weather. Visit the Mari Mari Cultural Village, where the traditions of the Kadazan-Dusun, Rungus, Bajau and other ethnic groups are celebrated through bamboo cooking, tribal crafts, and rhythmic dances. Or wander through KK's Sunday market at Gaya Street, where local artisans, coffee roasters, and food vendors showcase the island's creative spirit.

In the evening, dine on fresh seafood: butter prawns, soft-shell crab, and steamed grouper, as the sun dips below the horizon in a blaze of gold. KK's sunsets are famous, and they seem to linger longer here, as if reluctant to leave.

KINABALU PARK AND THE CALL OF THE MOUNTAIN

A two-hour drive inland brings you to Kinabalu Park, Malaysia's first UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to Mount Kinabalu, Southeast Asia's highest peak at 4,095 metres. The mountain's jagged granite spires rise above the clouds, and are sacred to the local Dusun people who believe ancestral spirits dwell among its mists.

For the adventurous, climbing Mount Kinabalu is a bucket-list challenge, with a two-day trek through rainforest and alpine meadow rewarded by views over the whole of Borneo. Yet even those who prefer gentler pursuits will find beauty in the park's trails, where orchids, pitcher plants, and butterflies thrive in cool mountain air.

Stay within the park at Sutera Sanctuary Lodges, where wooden chalets with log fires overlook forested valleys, or in nearby Kundasang, surrounded by flower farms and tea plantations. Don't miss the Poring Hot Springs with its thermal pools and rainforest canopy walkway high above the jungle floor.

Further afield, the Ranau and Tambunan valleys reveal another side of Sabah: rolling rice terraces, bamboo houses, and rural communities living in harmony with nature. It's a reminder that in Sabah, life still moves to the rhythm of the land.

SANDAKAN & SEPILOK: MEETING THE WILD

From mountain heights to coastal lowlands, the journey east to Sandakan reveals Sabah's wild heart. Once a thriving colonial port, Sandakan is now a hub for wildlife conservation.

Here, the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre rescues and rehabilitates orphaned orangutans, offering visitors a chance to watch these remarkable creatures swing through the trees during feeding sessions.

Next door, the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre protects the world's smallest bears, while the Rainforest Discovery Centre introduces you to Sabah's astonishing birdlife from its elevated canopy walkways: hornbills, broadbills, and the occasional giant red flying squirrel.

Stay at the Sepilok Nature Resort, where wooden chalets sit around a tranquil lake shaded by orchids and ferns. From Sandakan, venture deeper along the Kinabatangan River, one of the richest ecosystems in Southeast Asia. At the luxurious Sukau Rainforest Lodge, you can glide silently by electric boat through mangrove-fringed waterways, spotting proboscis monkeys, pygmy elephants, and crocodiles basking on the riverbanks.

DANUM VALLEY & MALIAU BASIN: BORNEO'S LIVING MUSEUM

For true immersion in the rainforest, journey south into the Danum Valley Conservation Area, 130 million years old and largely untouched by modern civilisation. Here, at the award-winning Borneo Rainforest Lodge, luxury means connection with nature, silence, and the heartbeat of the jungle itself.

Spacious villas overlook the Danum River, outdoor bathtubs face ancient trees, and guided treks reveal a world of wonders: orangutans building nests, gibbons calling at dawn, and rare hornbills gliding between the canopy layers. Night safaris bring encounters with civets, flying squirrels, and luminous fungi glowing in the dark.

Nearby lies the Maliau Basin, often called Sabah's Lost World, a vast crater-like wilderness of cloud forest and waterfalls that

feels rather primeval. It's harder to reach but infinitely rewarding, offering expedition-style eco-lodges and guided treks for those seeking the ultimate off-grid adventure.

ISLANDS, BEACHES & UNDERWATER WORLDS

If the jungles of Borneo are its lungs, then Sabah's islands are its heartbeats, each one pulsing with coral life. To the northeast lies Lankayan Island, a small coral atoll within the Sugid Islands Marine Conservation Area. Its crystal-clear waters attract whale sharks, sea turtles, and reef fish in dazzling abundance. Guests at Lankayan Island Dive Resort can watch turtles nesting under the stars and release hatchlings back into the sea.

South of KK, Gayana Marine Resort and Bunga Raya Island Resort on Gaya Island offer five-star indulgence just minutes from the city with overwater villas, private beaches, and world-class dining framed by the sound of waves and cicadas.

Further south still, near Semporna, the islands of Pom Pom, Matak, and Mabul promise secluded stays and effortless access to Sipadan, one of the world's greatest dive sites. Descend into a world of colour: barracuda tornadoes, turtles gliding through crystal blue seas and coral walls alive with motion. For non-divers, these islands offer equally idyllic pleasures with their spa pavilions over the sea, hammocks between palms, and picnics on deserted sandbanks.





CULTURE, COFFEE & COUNTRYSIDE

Beyond Sabah's wildlife and beaches lies a cultural richness often overlooked. Inland towns such as Tenom are known for their coffee plantations, where visitors can tour family-run roasteries and sample the island's rich arabica and liberica blends. In Kudat, at Borneo's northernmost tip, the Tip of Borneo viewpoint offers spectacular coastal panoramas, while nearby Rungus villages showcase traditional longhouses and intricate beadwork.

Sabah's people, a mosaic of more than 30 ethnic groups, are as warm as the climate. Markets burst with colour, from jungle fruits and handwoven baskets to pearls harvested from the sea. Wherever you travel, a smile and a simple "kopivosian" (hello) will open hearts and doors.

SUSTAINABLE LUXURY: PROTECTING PARADISE

Sabah's true luxury lies not just in its beauty, but in how it's protected. Many of the state's top resorts and lodges are pioneers of eco-tourism. Sukau Rainforest Lodge and Borneo Rainforest Lodge both employ and train locals, fund conservation projects, and offset their carbon footprints. Gaya Island Resort rehabilitates injured turtles through its Marine Ecology Research Centre, while park entrance fees and eco-permits directly support preservation efforts. This commitment means that travellers can enjoy the best of Borneo while contributing to its future.

WHEN TO GO & HOW TO GET THERE

Sabah enjoys a tropical climate year-round, with warm days and occasional rain. The dry season (February to August) is perfect for climbing Mount Kinabalu and island-hopping, while the wetter months (October to January) bring lush greenery and quieter trails.

SWEALTHY LUXURY HOME & LIFESTYLE

Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI) is well-connected, with direct flights from Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Hong Kong. From there, short domestic flights and scenic drives open up the rest of Sabah, from Sandakan's coastal jungles to the dive islands of Semporna.

THE SPIRIT OF BORNEO

In Sabah, adventure and elegance partner to create a journey that will linger in your memory long after you've left. Every trail, river, and canopy holds a story, inviting travellers to witness nature's wonders whilst enjoying the warmth of local hospitality. Borneo is more than a destination, it's a place where the spirit of the island seeps into your soul, leaving you with a sense of awe, connection, and an irresistible urge to return.



Want to find out more about Sabah? Head to:

www.sabahtourism.com

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