

ISLAND & WILDLIFE IN BORNEO

WHEN TO GO: APRIL TO OCTOBER

Borneo is blessed with the oldest, virgin rainforests on earth and waters teeming with a huge diversity of aquatic life. Completely off the beaten track and wonderfully authentic, this beach and safari experience will give you the unique chance to visit an untouched part of the world. The name itself reminds us of deep jungles, explorers in canoes and painted natives peering from behind trees. Nowadays, it's the tourists who do the staring, as the place continues to fascinate the intrepid traveller. If off the beaten track places call upon you, then head for Borneo.

Beach hideaway

After a short connection in KL, arrive into Kota Kinabalu and we'll immediately whisk you off by private speed boat to the idyllic Bunga Raya Resort and Spa on Gaya Island. Set on a perfect arc of ivory beach, this boutique hotel has just 47 villas with private plunge pools overlooking the shimmering South China Sea. Your hideaway is surrounded by virgin rainforests housing thousands of indigenous species; the good news is that your dedicated guides are always on hand to take you straight from poolside into the jungle to meet many of them.

Spend the next three days in total relaxation making sure to squeeze in a visit to the award winning hilltop spa for an indigenous treatment. Then it's a short hop to the other side of the island to Gayana Eco Resort, home to the unique marine ecology research centre. Your ocean view villa rests on stilts over the azure Sulu Sea and we don't think it comes much better than jumping off your private terrace to snorkel over thriving reefs. After days frolicking in the crystal waters or relaxing on the beach, satisfy those hunger pangs at Alu Alu, where you will have the chance to pick your very own living 'catch of the day' from one of the 14 glass fish tanks.

For a spot of local culture we now invite you back to Kota Kinabalu to the Shangri La Tanjung Aru. Whilst the hotel provides both chic rooms and an eye catching infinity pool right on the beach, we think the nearby food markets are the real star attractions here. Take a whistle stop tour of the bustling night markets to enjoy the best satay sticks you will ever try.

Head up river to the monkeys

For the second part of your adventure it's into the jungle. A short flight takes you to Sandakan: the gateway to the interior rainforests of Borneo. Your two night escapade begins with an early morning visit to the Sepilok Orang-utan rehabilitation centre for feeding time. You will have a chance to see the last of the wild orang-utans in Northern Borneo and get up close and personal with these oh-so-human mammals. Your next port of call is the Abai River lodge, two hours up the Kinabatangan River. Accessible only by boat, it's remote to say the least but then again it is one of the best spots from which to glimpse the diverse wildlife. The rooms are comfortable and immaculately presented and are just what you need after a day out in the rainforest. The area is famous for its amazing freshwater prawns and it just so happens that Abai's restaurant serves them up by the netful. To really get a taste of the jungle we will arrange guided walks and cruises through the small Kinabatangan tributaries that penetrate the dense

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jungle. What's more, after dinner you will even be treated to night time excursions to view the creepy goings on.

Have a whale of a time on the beach

There is just about enough time left to sneak in a bit more beach time and what a beach we've found. Lankayan is a tiny coral island that takes just 10 minutes to walk its circumference. Here we'll put you up in a cosy sea-front villa complete with huge comfy beds and large wrap-around balcony. The island happens to be one of the best diving locations on earth with unique chances to spot whale sharks, dive into sunken ship wrecks and marvel at hoards of leather-back turtles, to be honest we found it hard to drag ourselves out of the water.

Sabah: Sabah is located in the north-eastern tier of the island of Borneo. Known as Jesselton in the British era, it was totally destroyed in World War 2. A land of lush mountains, fast flowing rivers, exotic flora and fauna, and 31 indigenous tribes, Sabah is simply mesmerizing. Tunku Abdul Rahman Park is great for camping and sea sports. Mount Kinabalu offers a view of the lush surroundings and is ideal for jungle trekking and mountain climbing. If you are lucky, you can spot Rafflesia, the world's largest flower in its jungle. It has the world's largest Orang Utan Rehabilitation centre, here one can observe these primeval apes roam and play in non-captive breeding. For a thrilling whitewater rafting experience, the Pandas River provides some heart-stopping moments. Turtle-watching is an engrossing activity on Selingan, Bakungan Kecil and Gulisan islands, while Layang- Layang, is the ultimate destination for divers. It has some amazing seascapes and one encounters diverse species like turtles, manta rays and sharks.

Sarawak: Sarawak, on the south-western part of Borneo is an enchanting place. Its natural wonders include vast expanses of rainforests, majestic mountains, caves, unique flora and fauna and diverse ethnic communities. With a history of adventure, romance, piracy and rebellion, Sarawak's culture is equally interesting. A fine example is the Sarawak Museum, which houses a fascinating collection of Bornean ethnological and archaeological artifacts. Other notable buildings are the Cat Museum, Islamic Museum, Chinese Museum, Timber Museum and Police Museum. Fort Margherita, the Sunday market and the Sarawak Cultural Museum are other tourist attractions.

Attractions in Sarawak

The Niah National Park: It is an area of major archaeological significance as the oldest human remains in Southeast Asia, dating back to 40,000 years were found in its world renowned Niah caves. The cave is home to millions of bats and swiftlets and witnessing the collection of guano for use as fertilizer and the hazardous task of harvesting birds' nests can be very interesting.

Mulu Caves: These enormous caverns contain Southeast Asia's largest cave system and other major caves, which are simply awe-inspiring. The spectacular Sarawak Chamber, the largest cave in the world is claimed to be able to accommodate 40 Boeing-747 aircraft. The Clear Water cave and Deer Cave are no less exciting.

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Safari: One of the best ways to explore Sarawak is on a river safari on the waters of the mighty Skrang, Lemanak and Batang Ai. You could stay at a longhouse, once the home of headhunters.

Cottage Industries: Sarawak's traditional cottage industries and agricultural activities possess a charm of their own. The handicrafts of fine craftsmanship include wood-carvings, beadworks, hand-woven Iban textile, the "ajat" baskets, Penan sleeping mats and sunhats. The fine art of pottery-making has flourished into a popular industry in this place and pepper cultivation is the other major industry.

Longhouses of Sarawak: The longhouse is the very center of communal life in Sarawak. When you enter a longhouse, the young maidens and men will perform a dance to the accompaniment of gongs. You are given a glass of tuak or traditional rice wine along with many delicacies. A party lasts late into the night. Finally, you retire to ruai, a covered verandah for resting. We can arrange stays in longhouses.