

# Brunei

## An abode of peace and wealth

By Derick McGroarty

I was impressed at the start of the 17 hour flight from London Heathrow to Brunei with Royal Brunei Airlines: a prayer said in Arabic was shown with English translation on the video screens. I found it comforting. Throughout the flight an indicator pointed to the direction of Mecca.

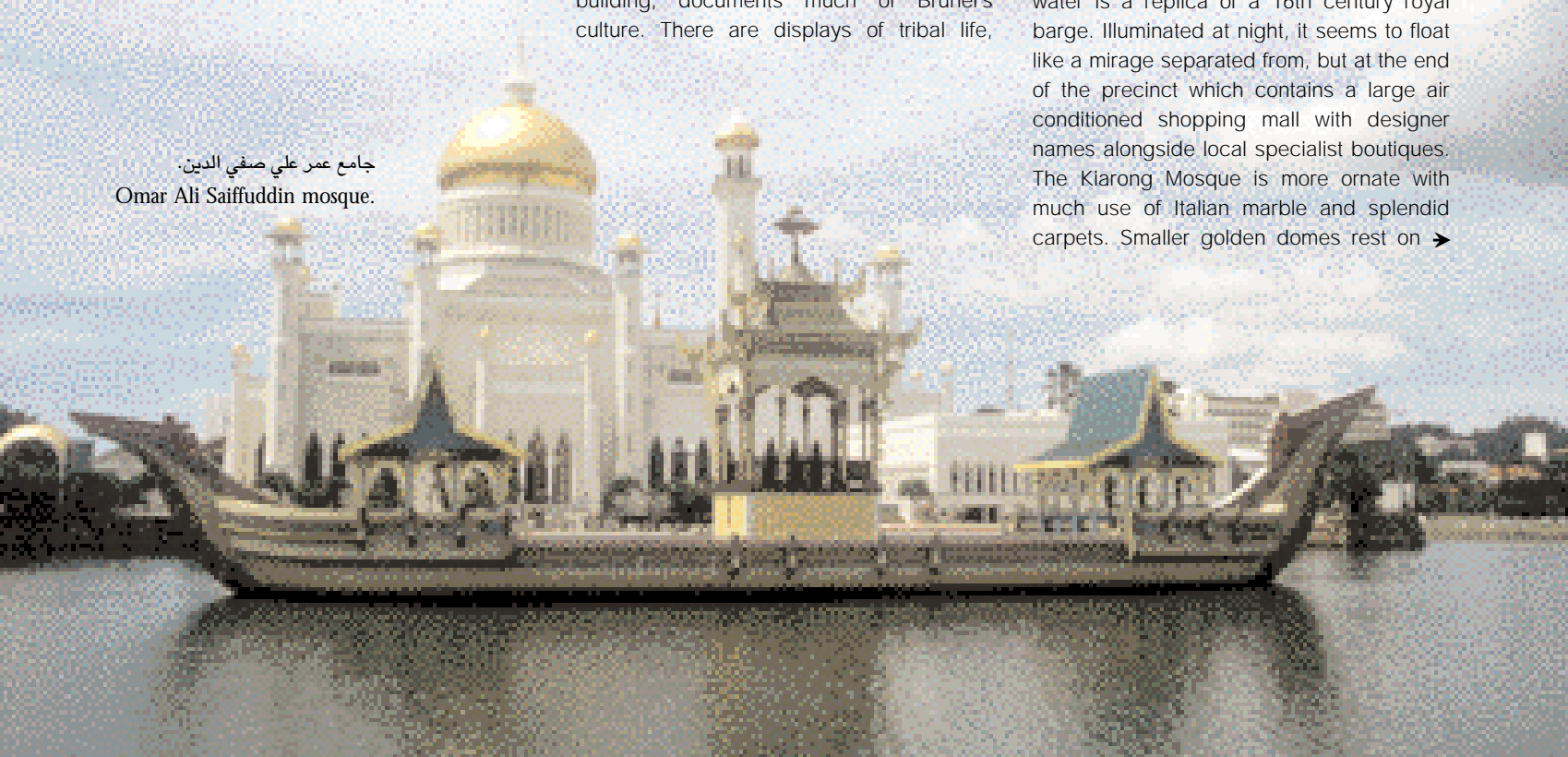
In Brunei, the sale of alcohol is not permitted but fruit juices, coffee and tea were served throughout the journey. The cabin service was excellent with a good choice of menus and the latest release films available on individual screens. There was a brief stop at Dubai and my flights were all on time. Onward flights are possible to many S.E. Asian destinations and beyond. Transfers and tours within Brunei can be custom built by Sunshine Borneo Tours. I appreciated the air conditioned transport and the efficiency and ease whereby I saw a variety of what Brunei can offer.

Two museums are outstanding. In The Royal Regalia building dedicated to the history of the sultans, a massive gilded coronation chariot dominates the entrance hall. Additionally, much of the ground floor is taken up with a royal chariot built and used for the 1992 Silver Jubilee with an impressive procession. On the upper floors are displayed gifts received by the Sultan, his uniforms, photographs, a replica of the throne and, under armed guard, the coronation crowns and regalia. If you see nothing else do not miss a visit here. The Brunei Museum, an attractive elongated building, documents much of Brunei's culture. There are displays of tribal life,

weddings, clothing, pottery, coins, tools and jewellery. I particularly admired the collection of early Holy Qur'ans illustrated with intricate patterns. One complete section displays blue and white Chinese jars and porcelain from a recently discovered shipwreck off the coast of Brunei. Everywhere in the city your eye is drawn to golden domes and minarets of the mosques. The two largest were built by the present Sultan and his father. The latter Omar Ali Saifuddien completed in 1958 has a massive gold dome above dazzling white arcades and towers reflected in a lagoon. On the water is a replica of a 16th century royal barge. Illuminated at night, it seems to float like a mirage separated from, but at the end of the precinct which contains a large air conditioned shopping mall with designer names alongside local specialist boutiques. The Kiarong Mosque is more ornate with much use of Italian marble and splendid carpets. Smaller golden domes rest on ➤

جامع عمر علي صفي الدين.

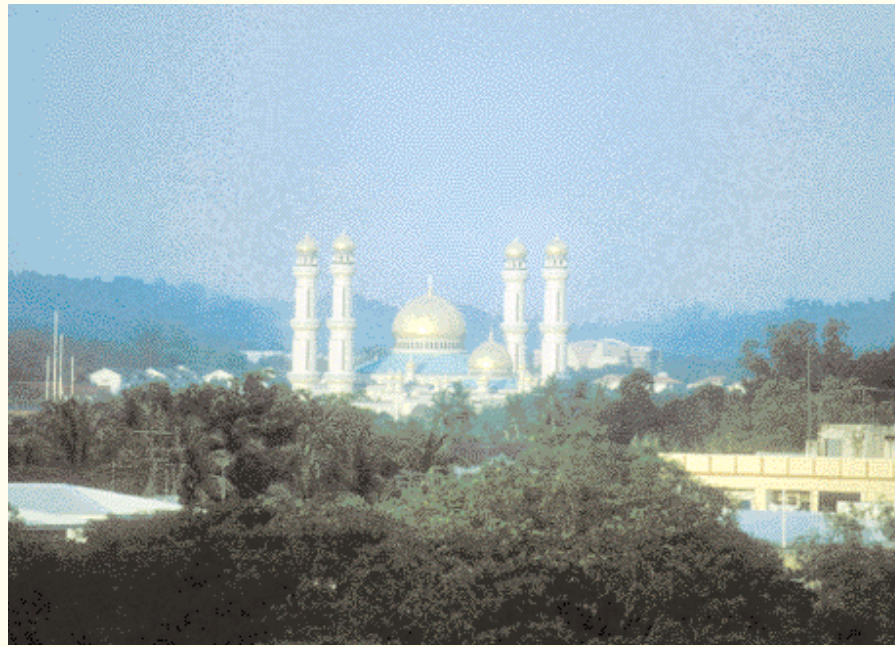
Omar Ali Saifuddin mosque.





Empire Hotel and Country Club.

فندق إمباير.



Kiarong mosque.

جامع كيارونغ.



Empire Hotel- Golf Club.

فندق إمباير – ساحة الغولف.

intricately designed blue towers. Both have aesthetically beautiful architecture where the best materials in the world have been used to achieve perfection.

In contrast is the dense virgin rain forest. An hour's river cruise by public launch goes to Temburong and the rural countryside. Local Iban people still live in longhouses but with modern comforts. Beyond, the National Park is only accessible by Iban long boat. The duration of the journey varies with the state of the river. Despite the shallow draft of the long boat, if there has been a long spell of dry weather visitors have to walk whilst the long

boat is manoeuvred in the shallow water. There is a Park Headquarters from where after a steep walk, crossing the river on a hanging bridge is a thrilling experience.

The Empire Hotel and Country Club is very luxurious – one of the world's leading hotels. Gold trimmed marble columns stretch six stories high in the atrium. The view through the glass "wall" of the gardens and pools to the beach on the South China Sea is impressive. All rooms are spacious and well equipped. There are plenty of activities including an award winning golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus, a bowling alley and a wide range of spa

treatments. Treat it as a memorable "palace" in which to relax in splendour at a reasonable price for this standard. Truly an abode of peace.

I can recommend Sunshine Borneo Tours for effortless visits to places of cultural interest or adventurous trekking in unspoilt tropical rain forest. ■

Transfers and accommodation at the Empire Hotel can be included. (Tel. 00 2 441791; Fax 00 2 441790; Email sunshine@brunei.bn)

Empire Hotel and country Club:

Tel. 00 6 732418888

Website: www.theempirehotel.com