

Sabah

A distant, different destination

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Sabah, part of Malaysian Borneo, offers new interests and a touch of excitement with opportunities for rain forest trekking, white water rafting and climbing 14,000 ft Mount Kinabalu, - the highest mountain in South East Asia. Floral colours in hotels, streets and parks are eye catching.



Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Hotel.

فندق شنغاري-لا بشارع تانجونغ.

The Shangri-La Rasa Ria hotel, an hour's drive from Kota Kinabalu, is unique in having an outpost of Orang Utan Rehabilitation within its own grounds only 10 minutes walk into the reserve. How much closer to nature can you get while staying in such a luxurious resort? Young orangutans are fed twice daily and close encounters can be an enjoyable experience. This is only one of six trails at the hotel. The hikes vary from a leisurely twenty minute walk to a three hour trek. There are bird feeding stations, salt-licks, hides and observation platforms. With a ranger's guidance you see many species of birds, animals, butterflies, and orchids. A pair of Hornbills have taken up residence in a tree by the hotel entrance.

I stayed at the Rasa Ria's sister hotel, the Tanjung Aru Resort, close to the capital city

Kota Kinabalu, with a regular shuttle bus. With 25 acres of established gardens there are free form swimming pools, a choice of excellent restaurants and a sandy beach on the South China Sea. Spacious bedrooms are well equipped, many with superb sea view balconies.

An extensive children's centre is run by enthusiastic staff. Many adult activities include water sports, yoga, aerobics and craft classes, plus an interesting tour of the behind the scenes hotel. The peaceful gardens offer perfect relaxation.

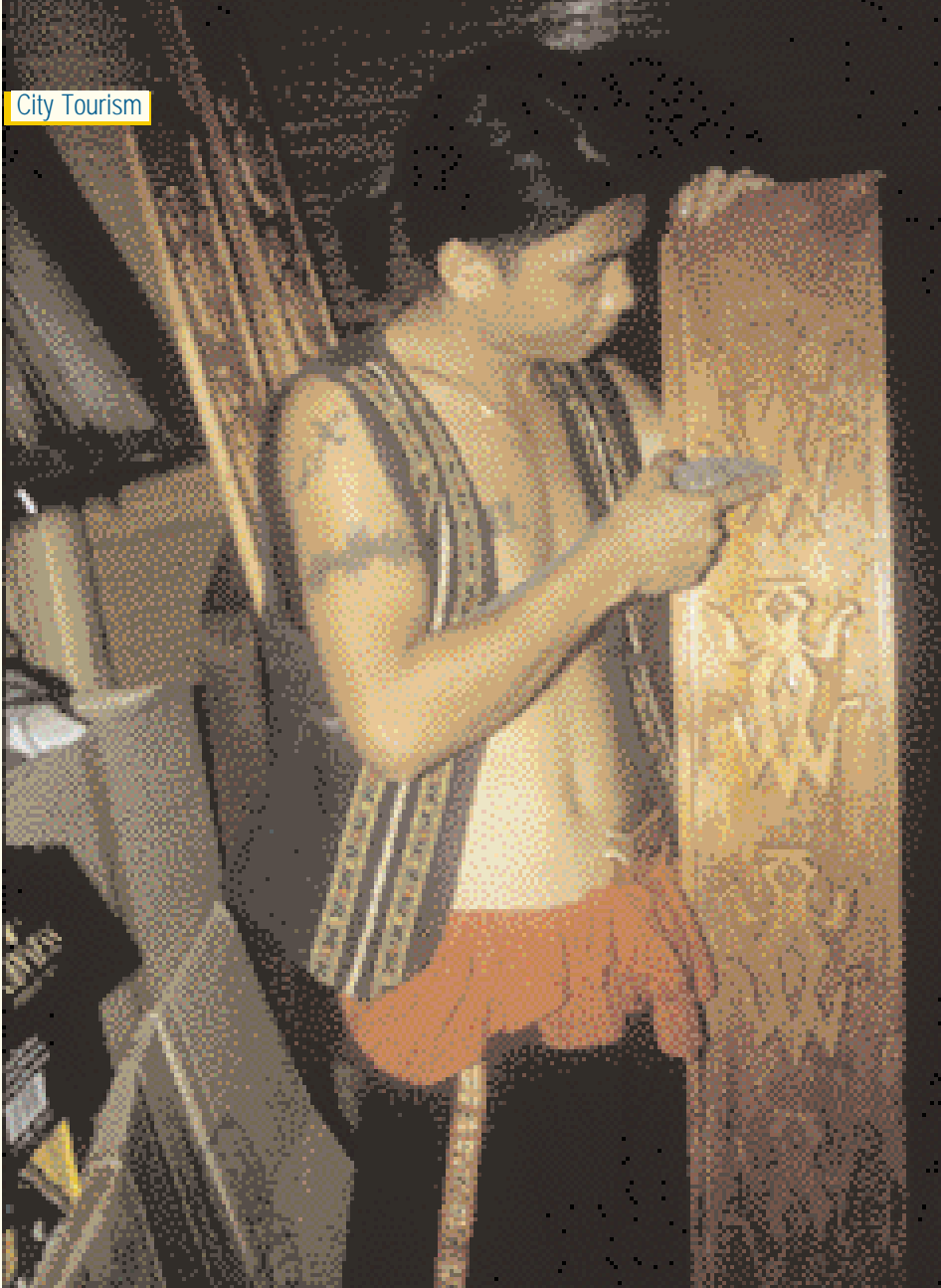
Mount Kinabalu (14,400 ft) is impressive. Sometimes clear in the early morning it tends to be obscured by cloud in the afternoon. A day trip to the Kinabalu National Park goes to the 5,000 ft. level. The winding road gives great mountain views of the summit peeping

through clouds way above. Twenty-four species of rhododendrons and many unique orchids can be found in the surrounding area. Anyone fit enough may wish to climb to the top. A two day trek involves an overnight stay in a hostel at 11,000 ft then an early start for the final half mile of stark granite rock to the peak! Forty kilometres away Poring Hot Springs have a canopy bridge over the rainforest. Not for the faint hearted but offering superb birds-eye views.

Kota Kinabalu is a growing modern city with air conditioned shopping malls complementing small shops and colourful markets. There are two fine mosques and the Sabah National Museum.

The earliest development was in water villages, many of which still exist throughout Sabah. Perched on stilts there are board walks between the family dwellings. People are very friendly and eager to talk. When invited inside I was surprised to see modern furniture, TV, washing machines and parquet flooring.

A forty minute drive from town is rural countryside with jungle, paddy fields, water buffalo and kampungs,(village houses). It cannot have changed much through the ➤



Village wood carving.

الحفر على الخشب.



A Cultural Melting Pot.

ماليزيا المتعددة الثقافات.

years. In the wooded valley, a shangri-la of peaceful beauty surrounded by the jungle, is the Orchid De Villa. A must for orchid enthusiast! As interested if somewhat inexperienced amateurs we learned much in a half-day visit. In addition to the vast displays and cultivation of orchids, we also admired the pitcher plants which hang from the trees, deceptively waiting for small insects to be caught in their elongated sticky interior from which there is no escape! A fish pond is the home of carp, but there is no other wild life beyond butterflies, birds and the occasional dragon fly. A semi enclosed wooden bridge and several thatched kampungs provide attractive views.

Other places of interest close to Kota Kinabalu include the colourful Turan market (Sundays) attended by the Bajau, Dunsun and Lotud tribal people selling fruit, vegetables and fish; the train to Papar, is a nostalgic one hour journey ending with Monsopiad Cultural Village, constructed by traditional methods in colourful rainforest surroundings to show the culture of tribal life and the head-hunters in authentic surroundings.

Although primarily a Muslim country, all religions are freely acceptable and by consensus Sunday is the rest day. Everywhere I was greeted with smiles and a genuine friendliness of the people in the hotels, markets and shops. Nothing was too much trouble and service is still a meaningful word. Possibly this memory is the one which will last longest of my time in this distant, different destination.

I travelled with Royal Brunei Airlines from Heathrow to Sabah. A stopover in Brunei is well worth while.

The Insight Pocket Guide to Sabah was a convenient useful companion.

National Express coaches run excellent services to Heathrow terminals from many UK towns.

I used Chefaro Extra Strength insect repellent (available from Boots etc) and I was not bothered by insects during my stay.

For further information :

Tourism Malaysia, tel. 023 7930 7932.

(Website: www.tourism.gov.my).

Shangri La Hotels Tel. 020 8747 8485 ■