

St. Sometimes in Borneo



There are thousands of orchids indigenous to Borneo.

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Borneo Quick Facts:

- a SIM card costs about \$2US
- one US\$ = 3.6 Malaysian Ringgit
- The island of Borneo is shared by Kalimantan, Brunei, and Malaysia
- Borneo has the oldest rainforests with trees towering over 100m
- Orangutans share 97% of our genes
- Mt. Kinabalu is 4100meters high

Borneo? - Where is my MAP?

Once again, I have been able to take ANOTHER trip of a lifetime. Who ever thought I would travel to the jungles of Borneo. What comes to mind? The Seinfeld episode in which Elaine loses the expensive hat while her boss is in the remote jungles of Borneo? Do you think of headhunters? Rare flowers? Dense, uninhabited jungles? Undeveloped villages of natives living among Orangutans?

When I boarded the plane and headed to Bangkok, I didn't even really know my destination. Kathleen had set it all up. School life had been so busy that I didn't care. "Just get me outta Cambodia" was all I could think of during the first leg of my trip.

Nothing could have pre-

pared me for going to Borneo. Well maybe. I can certainly paint a picture for you, in hopes that you may go there someday.

Basically, Borneo is a small island in the South China Sea. You can find it by literally putting your finger on the EQUATOR somewhere and moving East or West until you can see South East Asia countries like Thailand, Vietnam, or even China's Coast. Your finger will be very close to Borneo.

Malaysia still shares this island with Indonesia (but your finger may not understand that). I point this out because most Westerners know about Malaysian Borneo because of the great scuba diving! Pulau and Sipadan are two of the world's greatest diving sites that the



No Durian? This is a popular sign in hotels and airports of SE Asia. This fruit, though popular to eat, smells like a cadaver! No Kidding.

US has put money into since the 1980's. That is the only part of Borneo that was developed until about ten years ago.

Malaysia is split into Kingdoms. The Kings, there are several, rotate the responsibility and ruling power on a rolling basis. **Pretty Cool!**

What Greg? Not a Diving Trip?

Not this time! Next time. This was a reconnaissance mission. I opted to go in, undercover as a traveler interested in Orangutans and Orchids. It gave me a chance to see the sights that might otherwise be scheduled by a dive group just because it is Borneo. Really. There is so

much to do in Borneo you could plan a few weeks. Inside this issue you will read about: Proboscis Monkey Sightings, Orangutans, Priceless Orchids, Jungle Canopy Tours, Mt. Kinabalu Park, butterflies, leaves the size of a human being, trees taller than buildings, large

insects, rude resort managers, and flying cheap and dirty.

I was able to dive one day on the North Western side of the island and managed to get the worst sunburn in Greg Lemoine history. Ughh. Nothing short of a t-shirt suffices.



The Female proboscis with one of her babies.

What is a Proboscis Monkey?

In the mangrove forests of Borneo lives one of the strangest looking monkeys - the Proboscis. Loosely translated from the local dialect, the name was given to the monkey that reminded the natives of the Dutch explorers that “discovered” Borneo. The likeness was both in the long, protruding, red noses and the swollen bellies. (side note: the belly

is 1/4 of their total body weight due to the amount of digestive bacteria needed to support their diet of leaves).

The Proboscis is only naturally found on the island of Borneo. The CITES index of endangered species lists a approximation of only 6,000 monkeys left. They face rapid deforestation of Borneo’s mangrove forests

and animal trafficking.

Since they exclusively eat the younger leaves of mangrove trees, the monkey families of 12-27 will usually live within 600 meters of freshwater rivers and the mangroves along the edges. They are exciting to watch as they swing through the tree branches with their protruding bellies.

“We were already headed back, when someone in the boat spotted movement!”

After a day of resting at the Hotel, we decided to book a few tours. The climb up Mt. Kinabalu was booked for a couple days and we decided the most important thing was to see the Orangutans. That left an afternoon to spare.

The mini-bus picked us up right after lunch. With only a few other people in the group, we had plenty of room to stretch out and watch the landscape go by as we headed towards the mangrove swamps. The first animals we saw were the macaques. To the locals, these are pests. They get into everything and steal anything that is not secured.

I had bought some bananas along so we could get them closer to the boat. It worked. Mario almost fell into the river trying to set a few bananas in the overhanging tree limbs. But we wanted to see Proboscis.

We ended up finding four separate families of Proboscis. They are not easy to spot but the last group we found was on the move. We were already headed back to base camp when someone in the boat spotted movement. It turned out to be a small group of about 15 monkeys jumping from tree to tree. At one point, we were watching them all jump between two trees over the water. One of the larger males almost ended up in the river when the branch he chose turned out to be a little less stable than the others.

We were offered dinner as we waited for nightfall. Everyone got back into their boats and headed downriver to a special tree which hosts an unusual sight. Thousands of fireflies light up the tree like it is Christmas. Yawn! Fireflies? Whatever. The trip was well worth it! I recommend it to everyone.



These little beasts (macaques) were fun to watch. I brought bananas.



The mangrove swamps were exciting to see. Surprisingly, there were NO MOSQUITOS!



The best time to go out watching for animals is early evening or morning.

Cheap Airlines

It's not the best idea for traveling with children or any disabilities. BUT, if you want to fly cheap and dirty, go for the Air Asia flying bakala. (bakala is a word for the little shops in Kuwait that sell everything-like a quick mart)

This airline strips off everything that even hints of special treatment. It is open seating - isn't SouthWest similar? - first come first

served. The flight attendants SELL everything from a can of coke to Rhaman noodles or an Air Asia hat. I had to get a hat.

If you want to see how closely related humans are to animals then just witness the boarding gate of an Air Asia flight. It is similar to how cattle are herded into livestock pens or meatpacking plants. If you get up and make the line 30 minutes

before the flight is scheduled to leave, you stand a good chance of choosing a choice seat.

It was OK for a short trip considering the fact that I travel alone. Do not go cheap if you have a family. You don't realize how comforting some nuts and a beverage are until you don't get them on a flight. Our flights were on time, but I hear that was an anomaly.



Air Asia is a no frills kind of airline. It's a great way to travel on a limited budget, but you truly get what you pay for.

The Canopy Tour



There are so many choices to make regarding what to do in Borneo. I jumped at the chance to take a canopy tour in the dense jungles just below Mt. Kinabalu. Now this is NOT a

trip for the unfit anybody needing a little extra help getting up the stairs!

In order to get TO the canopy, you have to hike up a narrow jungle path. It's not easy because of how steep the trail becomes and stray roots are just waiting to send you rolling down the path.

But once you get up there, it is absolutely breathtaking. The jungle floor is

barely visible, the rope bridges are safe but a little wobbly, and they keep extending the bridge length daily.

The tour ended at a sulfur springs touristy area. The trip would have been complete without the sulfur baths. Forget the baths. Take the canopy tour and the Kinabalu park tour for sure! Whatever you do... forget seeing the Organgs!

"There are so many choices to make regarding what to do in Borneo."

"Orchidelirium"

Borneo is home to over 1000 different orchids. The Rothschild Orchid is said to be PRICELESS. In 2006 some scientist was put in jail for hijacking several rare orchids back to England.

This orchid, seen through a

protective fence in the Mt. Kinabalu park, is supposedly a Rothschild Orchid. (as far as you know)

I forgot my wirecutters so I couldn't smuggle it out.

There are so many orchids around Borneo you some-

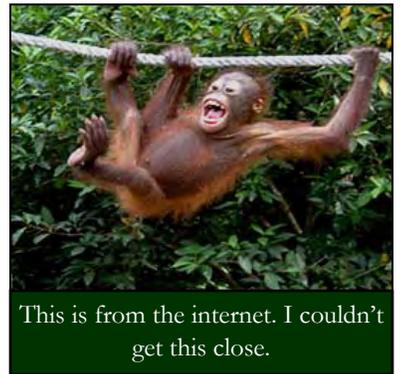
times forget to take a moment and look at them. This is the first trip I have actually stopped and snapped more than one photo of a flower. Try NOT to take photos of flowers in Borneo. It's just not possible.



Orangutans of Borneo



You can barely see the orangutan on the rope. But it is there, swinging.



This is from the internet. I couldn't get this close.

Do you remember the video coverage of Julia Roberts walking down the forest trail with an orangutan that ended up tackling her? Oh boy. It happened in Borneo. Aha. Imagine a preserve of 43 km2 with a clinic run by British (and probably Germans). The first thought was— ooh, feeding the cute babies. I know, I know - getting a picture of me holding hands with an orangutan! “Right turn Clyde”.

Whatever. Along with my friends, Mario and Kathleen, I felt the *most* important trip to make time for in Borneo is to see the orangutans. It involved a flight to the Eastern part of the island, a mere hour flight unless you fly Air Asia - then it might take longer.

We stayed overnight at the beautiful Sepilok Resort, just a few steps - literally - from the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation center. Surrounded by virgin rainforest, we dumped our overnight bags in the cabin and went straight for the apes. 60-80 free roaming orangutans call Sepilok home. Step aside Julia Roberts, I am going to WrestleMania one of these apes!

All my visions of WrestleMania disappeared after five minutes in the dense rainforest. It was a beautiful walk along a wooden boardwalk. You could hear animals all around you. The heat was stifling! The trees and dense flora were amazing. But after five minutes the boardwalk ends and you find yourself with a group of tourists with cameras. Two times a day, a volunteer puts out milk and vegetables for the orangutans. Huge ropes make a connection between the large canopy trees. Around feeding time, hand over hand, the orangutans make their way to the offering. The crowd gets all excited, snapping pictures of these “men of the forest” as they fight over free food. Uggh.

Although I was not too excited about this set up, the rehabilitation center is vital for the orangutans. Kathleen and I decided to stay after the feed and watch the documentary about the rehabilitation center.

The center has been around since 1964. The center is set up to reintroduce the apes into a protected rainforest area after they are rescued from idiot humans. The ropeways lead from the clinic to a series of feeding platforms. The first platform is the viewing area. The apes are used to human interference (I guess) so they are not immediately bothered by tourists with cameras. Then, progressively farther into the jungle, the feeding stations navigate the apes farther away from human contact. The goal is for them never to see humans again. Interesting, but not really worth the trip.

If you are interested in more information or feel like donating to the cause:

<http://www.orangutan-appeal.org.uk/sepilok-rehabilitation-centre/>



Check out the leaf! The railing is about 4ft high. The leaf is easily 3 Marios high.



The rehab center has an educational presentation. Above are collected tourist items that the orangutans have stolen.

“Step aside Julia Roberts, I am going to WrestleMania one of these apes!”

Butterfly Heaven

If you want to know more about the butterflies in Borneo, check on the internet. I just cannot get myself into it. The proboscis, orangutan, and orchid research has devoured too



much of my writing time already.

If you go on the canopy tour, there is a butterfly farm at the base. You can spend a few minutes surrounded by some beautiful butterflies and check out their little museum afterwards.

It takes a lot of practice, time, and luck to take pictures of these little beasts.

They don't like to sit still.

Kathleen and I probably spent about 20 minutes snapping photos of butterflies and orchids. We just didn't feel like soaking in the sulfur baths for two hours. It was worth the dollar entrance fee!

And... it was a better activity than watching Orangutans in Sepilok. .



Butterflies up close! Yeh baby! I took this shot.

Diving Borneo

As I pointed out before, this was not a diving trip. Kathleen and Mario don't dive. This was a chance to see the non-diving side of Borneo. But I just HAD to dive one day.

Three dives cost roughly \$80 U.S. We dove right off of the West coast of Kota Kinabalu, a quick 15 minute boat trip to the small islands. Now, I started out a bit pessimistic because some of the world's greatest diving spots - Pulau and Sipadan - are just two hours away by plane.



YBYSAlA - this sea turtle stuck with us for 10minutes

These dive sites were the local sites. The dive center kept trying to sell me on Whaleshark sightings - give me a break!

It turns out I had three great dives. It wasn't much of a dive operation but there were only three divers, one DM (that was adequate), one instructor, and three DSD's. Basically, the only rubber fins I saw were on the three divers with me. Pretty cool in itself.

We dove the first two dives on the North West side of the islands and had about 15 meter visibility. I saw turtles, large nudi branches, scorpion fish, barracuda schools, and a lot of lion fish. The Sri Lankan diver was capable, but the Norwegian was a loser. Any-

one that boasts of 68 dives on the way out to the first dive site is bound to be. He definitely had buoyancy issues. Even though the DM was in charge of the dive, all responsibility lay on my shoulders as the most experienced.

This is the first time I have been with a dive outfit that didn't even offer water and fruit between dives. After dive 2, we stopped on the larger island and got sack lunches (rice and shrimp). The captain steered us towards a more secluded part of the beach so we could munch lunch.

Dive three left me with an empty feeling. Next trip to Borneo will be solely for diving on the east coast. I cannot wait.

"Pulau and Sipadan are just two hours away by plane [from KK]"



One of my favorites. Can you see the scorpion fish?

Google Earth?



If you haven't been using Google Earth to follow my travels, then you should start now! Download it for free and take a tour of the world. You cannot beat it. The picture below shows you my trip originating in Phnom Penh. I picked up Kathleen and Mario in Bangkok, flew to Kuala Lumpur (KL) and then flew to Kota Kinabalu (KK) on the Malaysian island of Borneo.



Bangkok is one of the main Hubs for air travel around SE Asia. My trip started there to pick up M and K.



Kuala Lumpur (KL) is another Hub for SE Asia air travel. Next time I will fly straight there on the way to Borneo.



Kota Kinabalu—The campital of Sabah, Broneo. This is where you will fly in.



Borneo is breath-taking to say the least. It is so remote and far away that many people will never experience it. Hopefully you are a bit more enlightened after this issue. I look forward to many more trips to the islands while I live in Cambodia.

Keep your eye on St.Sometimes. Soon there will be an issue devoted solely to the diving off of Borneo.

Remember, if you want to see more pictures from this trip, move your mouse to:

<http://itre.us/sts somewhere>