

By HERMAN SCHOLZ, The Flying Dusun Sdn Bhd

KENINGAU



History

At this moment there is little to no historical documentation of present-day Keningau before the advent of the British though there seems to have been a village - just like there are still many villages scattered around that huge and fertile plain encircled by the Trus Madi and Crocker Ranges. The plains, from Tambunan onwards, have been inhabited by Dusun (Kadazandusun) for times immemorial. To this day vast rice fields await the travellers along the only road from Tambunan to Keningau. In the hilly hinterland to the south of Keningau the Murut have claimed their territory, though they never seem to have encroached into the plains, preferring to live in the hills (Murut

means 'men of the hills').

The English, in their search of arable territory opened up Tenom, Tambunan and Keningau for various plantations, especially spices, rubber, coffee and sisal. Keningau was famous for its abundance of cinnamon trees, and the English bought up the locally produced spice and sold it internationally. In the local languages here 'kendingau' means 'cinnamon', hence the name of Keningau Town.

When Sabah joined the Malaysian Federation in 1963 Kuala Lumpur looked at her forests and Keningau soon became a major logging town. The big boom lasted not long as timber resources were depleted very rapidly. By the beginning of 1990 the interior district was stripped clear of its forests and Keningau is now surrounded by bare hills and only a few sawmills still operate, often working with imported timber as local timber plantations do not yet yield enough. In recent years palm oil estates have appeared in some parts of Keningau and as there is still a lot of bare land experiments with other crops have been taken up, together with dairy farming and fish rearing and Keningau is now headed for an agricultural town. This in turn profits the local smallholders and may in time improve the life standard of the indigenous population.

During the logging boom most areas in the interior were made accessible by roads and the indigenous Murut, living their age-old hunter-gatherer's life in the rainforest were deprived of the jungle. There are still some long-houses in the interior but not many young people live there as they cannot continue to live their ancestors' way of life: there is not enough jungle left... Or, they have had to much missionary and TV influence and they have simply a totally different idea of what life should be. Thus most young Murut men look for better opportunities in town but as unskilled labourers they most often only just survive in towns, few 'make it'. However, the Murut have always been known to be fearless warriors and already back in pre-colonial times the British constabulary liked to employ Murut in their services. In many families this has become a tradition and the young men join the Malaysian army or police forces, thus the Murut are maybe not as marginalised as other ethnic entities throughout Malaysia and the world.

Keningau remains a bustling town, especially early in the morning, but it is a likable town. Despite its beehive activity there are never any traffic jams and normally one finds parking space without problems. As night falls an incredibly vast night market appears, occupying many streets and offering a profusion of local vegetables, fish (dried and life), tobacco, clothes and lots of food. If you are lucky you will find the occasional Murut elderly selling beautiful 'buyuung movatik' (intricately woven rattan carrier baskets) or even old beads, once highly valued by the Murut.

Places of Interest in Keningau

Again not exactly a town that is on every traveller's list, even though it is Sabah's fourth largest town. Usually Keningau is only briefly visited by those travelling to Tenom and the world famous Sabah Agricultural Park there, or by those who travel to the Maliau Basin in the far interior. Keningau is the gateway to more adventurous tours such as to Batu Punggul, or a journey around Sabah. The new highway linking Keningau with Tawau is presently (2006) complete up to Sepulut; from there it is still a challenging 4x4 trip to reach Maliau Basin, or the Luasong Rattan Plantation on the way to Tawau - especially by rainy conditions!

If you have to spend a night in Keningau there are a couple of clean hotels, and the day and night markets are well worth a visit. There are also a lot of restaurants and some of them serve bahar (palm toddy) in the evening!



WHERE TO STAY

Winner Hotel
Phone: 60 088 243222
Fax: 60 088 217345

Hotel Deleton
Phone: 60 088 252222
Fax: 60 088 267999

Best Western Kinabalu Daya Hotel
Phone: 60 088 240000
Fax: 60 088 263909

Berjaya Palace Hotel
Phone: 60 088 211911
Fax: 60 088 211600

Hotel Shangri-La
Phone: 60 088 212800
Fax: 60 088 212078

Likas Square Business Suites
Phone: 60 088 252233
Fax: 60 088 251122

Tang Dynasty Hotel
Phone: 60 088 263389 / 251155
Fax: 60 088 263989 / 265566

Beverly Hotel
Phone: 60 088 258998
Fax: 60 088 258778

Promenade Hotel
Phone: 60 088 265555
Fax: 60 088 246666 / 253980

Hyatt Regency Kinabalu
Phone: 60 088 221234
Fax: 60 088 225972

Le Meridien Kota Kinabalu
Phone: 60 088 322222
Fax: 60 088 322223

Nexus Resort Karambunai
Phone: 6 088 411222 / 411030
Fax: 6 088 411020 / 412028

Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Resort
Phone: 60 088 225800 / 41800 / 293306 (Reserv)
Fax: 60 088 244871 / 217155

Sutera Harbour Resort - Magellan Sutera
Phone: 6 088 318 888
Fax: 6 088 317 777

Sutera Harbour Resort - Pacific Sutera
Phone: 6 088 318888
Fax: 6 088 317777

Imperial International Hotel Kota Kinabalu
Phone: 6 088 522888 / 447200
Fax: 6 088 522999 / 442300
Email: www.imperialkk.com