

*On the Sandakan Trail.....*

By REKHA BHABRA

# Labuk Bay Proboscis Monkey Sanctuary

**M**y passion for this land seems to grow day by day. We live in one of the most beautiful parts of the world, definitely unique in regards to flora and fauna, blessed with adequate sunshine and water.

On my latest trip to Sandakan I realised there's so much to see and do. Over the next few weeks I hope to tell you all about these wonderful places and those of you that take my advice and visit Sandakan will definitely be richer for that experience.

The short 45 minute flight from Kota Kinabalu was so scenic, the view of the mountain spectacular and then there was this carpet of green rainforest, dotted with some of the most remote palm plantations. We landed at around mid afternoon the look and feel you get from the airport begins to alert your senses to expect something special, you feel like you are in a truly remote part of the world where nature remains largely undisturbed.

Labuk Bay was about a 90 minute drive from where I stayed in Sandakan town, the proboscis monkey sanctuary sits on the mouth of the glorious Kinabatangan River and covers 500 acres of lush mangrove forest. Protruding tree barks and the silver trees sets a mythical mystical aura, something Harry Porter readers will appreciate.

The Labuk Bay guides are so friendly and make you feel so welcome straight away, its that inherent trait of true smaller town people which big city dwellers seem to have lost. The service we received was faultless, the drive to the Sanctuary through lush palm plantations makes me realise what's the real driving force of the economic boom on the east coast of Sabah. The occasional buffalo might cause the driver to drop gears and that's peak hour traffic on the road to Labuk Bay.

Some of us are lucky to own land, but those that have wild life are blessed. In a world where global warming is eliminating species on an unprecedented scale, people with foresight that sacrifice financial gain to preserve nature for all of us and future generations are rare to find. As chance would have it, I met Michael Lee the man who set aside 500 acres of fertile land to provide a safe haven for the proboscis monkey.

In 1994, Michael Lee and his brother Lee Wing Hin decided to get into the oil palm business, they acquired the land and then learnt about this troop of monkeys. The business plan was quickly dropped so that



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