

# Off the beaten track



By Anna Vivienne

**S**ABAH Land below the Wind...how we extoll the beauty of this land! And rightly so, because we have no other home but this, which we are showing off to our visitors; tourists both domestic and international.

Before we promote this beautiful land to our tourists, we have to share some information on the geography and topography of our State.

For instance it is generally mountainous on the western side. This is where the three highest mountains in Malaysia are located.

They are located on the Crocker Range. The most prominent is of course Mount Kinabalu within the Kinabalu National Park which was inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 2000 due to plant diversity, unique geological, topographical, and climatic conditions.

Besides Mount Kinabalu, there is Mount Tambuyukon nearby. And then of course there is the Mount Trus Madi. There are lower ranges of hills extending towards the east coast and the northern as well as the southern part of Sabah.

These hills and valleys are laced with an extensive network of rivers, brooks and streams. And they are covered with dense rainforests.

The fauna of Sabah is many and diverse. The main area of habitat include Maliau Basin, Danum Valley, Tabin, and Sepilok. These areas have been gazetted as national parks, wildlife reserves and protected forest reserves.

Some visitors may be at loss as how to see these sites during their visit. A recommended activity is jungle trekking. The Danum Valley Conservation Area is a good place to start. This area is sprawled on 438 square kilometres of pristine jungle, just 70 Kilometres west of Lahad Datu.

It is believed that 200 species of tree per hectare thrived in this area. This area is a natural habitat for endangered species which include the Sumatran Rhino, Asian Elephant, Orang Utan and Proboscis Monkey to name a few. It is quite remote from villages and settlements so naturalists will simply love this tranquil valley of ancient trees.

The Crocker Range Park at Keningau is another recommended site. This site is located a little more than 10 kilometres from Keningau.

There is a Sabah Park facility there that can be used as base camp. However when you trek in this area, the park rangers have to be informed. This is to ensure that you stay safe and sound. The forest can be quite tricky at times.

After a while you may seem to see just green everywhere and this can mislead you. Just so you don't spend too much time trying to find your way back, a guide is recommended.

The diversity of flora and fauna there is tremen-

dous, so long walks are recommended to enable you to see as much of the site as possible. Just have a guide with you and you will enjoy the trek tremendously.

The other place to go is the Labuk Bay Proboscis Monkey Sanctuary in Sandakan. This site may not be a good idea for a traditional jungle trek as it is located in the middle of an oil palm plantation, but there are interesting animals roaming there. The Proboscis monkey for instance, can be sighted up close if not personal. They actually come to feed at the resort there and so you can see them by the dozens.

However, you can arrange for the Sanctuary staff to guide you on a night tour and you will be able to enjoy better sightings of our nocturnal friends.

These include wild boars, fireflies and crocodiles. If you naturally gravitate towards caves, the Madai- Baturong Forest Reserve Nature centre is the place to go. This site is located some 50 kilometres from Lahad Datu Township, nearing Kunak.

It is actually a cave where birds nests. The popular bird nest is acquired here. In Baturong there are several caves with ancient coffins in it. It is always interesting to take a good look at old coffins, especially if you are naturally morbid.

The area around Madai-Baturong is a forest reserve and is ideal for jungle trekking and caving. There are various types of interesting trees here that are worth scrutinizing.

A canopy walkway is also accessible there. After the canopy jaunt, you can always relax in the streams there.

Another site to visit is the Maliau Basin, located in Tawau, almost at the centre of Sabah.

Its claim to fame is its seven tiers waterfall and 12 types of forest types.

This area however is quite remote so extensive preparation have to be made before plunging into the bushes here.

While still in Tawau, you can travel on to the town area and proceed to Balung. For a good rest check into the Balung River Eco Resort.

This resort is located within the Balung River Estate where you will be able to see an innovative plantation in progress.

A trek around the 3500 acres of plantation is worth your while. In fact it can be quite educational as you will be able to see plantation crops thriving including oil palm, cocoa, sugar palm, cats whiskers, noni, teak tree and agarwood, all in one place.

You will also be able to see an old architectural wonder; a mosque built more than a century ago.

To see more of this eco resort, get a guide to walk with you and you will see an innovative plantation in operations.

Information on all these areas and sites can be acquired from the Sabah Tourism Board (STB) in Kota Kinabalu or call them at 088 212121.



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