



By HERMAN SCHOLZ, The Flying Dusun

History

Kudat, in the very north of Sabah, is an intriguing place and well worth visiting, but until recently it has received little attention. However, its past was agitated. In Sabah's early colonial history, Kudat and especially the island Balambangan played an important role, but that is nearly forgotten. Even before that, the northern tip of Borneo played an important role as an outpost for various traders, such as the Bajau from the southern Philippines, and the Bugis from the Celebes who continued to sail until the middle of the 20th century around Borneo to Singapore and back each year. We also know that Magellan's chronicler, Pigafetta, who has left a wonderful account of Brunei's capital in 1521 sailed to Balambangan and Banggi to repair their vessels after their stay in Brunei. Magellan's fleet by then consisted of only two ships of the original five, and both were loaded with valuable spices. Only one ship, the Victoria, made it back to Spain.

For times immemorial Kudat has been the home of the Rungus people (see below for links), many of whom still live in traditional longhouses and maintain even in a time of rapid change a very traditional life style. Kudat is where much of the traditional and uniquely Sabah handicraft and souvenirs are manufactured, where gongs are wrought, and honey is produced, next to coconuts and copra, some rubber and – the longer the more – palm oil. Around Kudat you find the most beautiful and unspoilt beaches, wonderful sunsets and glorious mornings for long walks and bird spotting.

PLACES OF INTEREST IN KUDAT

Maybe it is lucky that Kudat has escaped the majority of visitors to Sabah so far. Much of its charm is due to its friendly and unpretentious people, and its little developed environment. It is thanks to the upgraded road and our present Chief Minister, Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, that Kudat has received a little more attention, and the development of a tourism infrastructure that also satisfies the demands of international tourists. Driving to Kudat takes close to four hours, but with many stops on the route you might as well take an entire day. Driving there on a Sunday is a good choice if you like local markets – Tuaran, Kota Belud, and Kota Marudu, all have a Sunday tamu! The Kota Belud Tamu is of course the most famous and invites for a longer stop-over to watch the colourful displays and the traditional trading. Have lunch in Kota Belud, too, before you head for the longer stretch up north. You will encounter several road-stalls on your way, some of them selling deliciously charcoal-fire roasted maize, others handicraft, and others again local medicinal herbs and roots. A stop-over is a must if you are interested in native medical lore, you will find anything, from concoctions to 'buang panas' (remove heat from the body), to herbs for gastric problems, high blood pressure, diabetes and fevers. Of course, the area is also home to the famous 'tongkat ali', Sabah's own, natural 'Viagra'. Here you can buy entire roots at reasonable prices. And if you want some traditional Sabah handicraft you also have to stop at some of the stalls: bubuk (traditional fish traps) of all sizes, woven rattan baskets and carriers, winnowing trays and even blow-pipes. The 'souvenirs' – the local people here still use their handicraft themselves in their daily life! – are sold at local prices, before they hit the real souvenir shops in Kota Kinabalu!

There is a moment when you come to a t-junction, where you have to turn left. You can't really get lost on your way to Kudat. For one, the signboards are very clear, and secondly, there is only one road with one junction after Kota Belud! No traffic lights! And generally very light traffic, so the driving on the good road is a real pleasure. But be

KUDAT

The Tip of Borneo



careful and watch out for pedestrians, domesticated animals, and the odd monitor lizard, as well as civet cats!

About 45 kilometres before Kudat you come to one of the first tourism attractions developed in the area: Kg Gombizau, the 'Honey Village'. Kg Gombizau is a 'one village, one trade' example, and most of its inhabitants are rearing honey bees. You can drive up to the village, where you have to pay a small entrance fee to go and see how the honey is collected. It is a good idea to buy some local honey here, which has many benefits for your health. A bit further north from Kg Gombizau is Kg Sumangkap, another 'one village one trade' example, and an extraordinary one: Kg Sumangkap is the gong-village of Sabah. A visit to the village will show you how gongs are made, and the locals will be happy to tell you more about the importance of this instrument, so typical throughout Borneo.

The next stop-over is just after Kg Sumangkap: Kg Bavanggazo. The Rungus traditionally live in longhouses of a uniquely practical architecture. There are over 200 longhouses on the Kudat Peninsula, but you hardly will see them as they tend to be a bit off the beaten track. Not many are built in an entirely traditional style any more with bamboo flooring and palm thatch. The longhouse of Bavanggazo was built as an example of the traditional style, and it is open to tourists with comfortable and quiet, traditional rooms to stay overnight. If you want to experience the Rungus life style the Bavanggazo longhouse provides you with a safe and clean alternative to roughing it out in a 'real' Rungus village where dogs and pigs roam under the houses and kids jump up and down the longhouse gallery, making sleep sometimes rather difficult. The hosts of Bavanggazo are as friendly as Sabah people can be, and will go out of their way to prepare you some local specialities for dinner, and later don traditional outfits to entertain you with their age old dances and gong music.

Don't worry of making a fool out of yourself when you are asked to take part in the dances – this just belongs to the traditions, and it would not be polite to refuse! For those who, after all, rather stay at a hotel, they can travel onwards to Kudat. Kudat itself is a small town that has kept some of its rural charm, and one sees still elderly Rungus folks in traditional attire. The restaurants and coffee shops offer good foods, and seafood is inexpensive. Passing your time either talking to locals or eating is a good option in Kudat, because you will have seen the whole town in a few minutes. You can walk from the Chinese temple to the newly built waterfront in fifteen minutes, passing by the mar-

ket. There are a few budget hotels that are clean and reasonably priced, and of course there is the newly opened Kudat Golf and Marina Resort, the flagship of Kudat's developing tourism industry.

Kudat is so quiet and devoid of any of the hectic town life that staying there for a couple of days will be balm for your soul. Some day tours that are a must if you stay longer: the Bak-Bak Beach, where you can mingle with the locals; Tanjung Sempang Mengayau, the very Tip of Borneo with its dramatic landscape and white beaches; and the islands Balambangan and Banggi. There are daily ferries to the islands. The surroundings of Kudat are made for walks, and cycling. You can discover secluded beaches, and remote villages where people live an age-old traditional, and quiet life. If you are a bit more adventurous you can hire a four wheel with driver who knows the area, and you can follow little beaten tracks along the coast. If you like camping, this is heaven for you. Or you ask to stay at one of the villages and in the evening listen to the legends and myths the village elders have to tell. To spoil yourself on the way, you might just stay over at the Sunjamal Resort, a uniquely designed, small retreat run by a Swiss lady that will appeal to the most discerning traveller. Kudat has still a lot to offer. Visit our site for more information, or contact us through our help line to arrange a custom tour to a unique and little frequented destination for a truly unique holiday!

HOW TO GET TO KUDAT & ACCOMMODATION

By car, van, bus or taxi; tour operator; ca 180 km / 2 hours; there are several simple but new and clean hotels in town, and there is the Kudat Marina & Golf Club Resort - of course you can also spend a night at Bavanggazo, a traditional (but for tourism purposes only) longhouse.

