



By HERMAN SCHOLZ,
The Flying Dusun

History

Even though in prehistoric times the area around Tawau must have been known to early man little to nothing is yet known about that era. It is a bit further to the north where we find more testimony and proof of prehistoric settlements: the Baturong, Tapadong and Madai Caves have yielded pottery and other remains of ancient inhabitants, going back 25,000 years. For probably as long as 2000 years Chinese traders have sailed along Sabah's coast and traded for damar and other in perfume and incense industry used tree saps, rattans, medicinal plants, hornbill 'ivory', rhinoceros horn and birds nests (from Baturong, Tapadong and Segarong) with the coastal dwelling people, who in turn traded with the interior people of Sabah.

Due to its strategic location and safe harbour Tawau got the attention of the English and the township's foundation goes back to 1893. It became quickly an important port for the export of jungle 'colonial' products such as spices, cocoa and tobacco. We must not forget that before WWI Borneo tobacco was traded at the London stock exchange!

When Sabah joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963 Tawau became one of the major ports for the export of tropical timber, and a lot of cocoa was planted, the volcanic soil around Tawau being ideal for this crop. With the decline of the cocoa



price on the international market many cocoa estate holders have changed to palm oil and Tawau's surroundings offer now a rather uniform aspect throughout - palm oil plantations as far as the eye can reach and beyond.

With its busy port and market nearby Tawau is a bustling town, yet you never feel any hectic. It is most interesting to visit the town early in the morning when the markets are liveliest. In the evening Tawau comes alive with hawker stalls at every street corner but goes to sleep early.

Places of Interest

Even though Sabah's third largest town Tawau is usually only visited by divers on their way to Sabah's dive paradises Sipadan, Mabul, Kapalai and other islands, which are in the world's 'epicentre of marine biological diversity'. As such the town offers good hotels but not much worth while visiting there except of course the restaurants that offer, like everywhere in Sabah, a huge variety of highly delectable specialities. For those who stay a day or two there are, however,

a couple of things to do: Sabah's foremost rainforest interpretation centre is in Tawau, adjacent to a forest reserve that surrounds the landmark hill 'Bukit Gemok'. Then there is the very well maintained 'Tawau Hills Park', which is actually a national park! Simple but clean and well conceived accommodation allows overnight travellers to stay there and explore the many trails into the deep heart of the park. There are hot springs in pristine natural conditions - and generally no tourists! Wildlife in the park, which itself is adjacent to Sabah's largest forest concession, the Yayasan Sabah Concession (ca 30% of Sabah's land mass), is abundant and the patient observer can spot many rare birds and mammals, including primates such as the Borneo gibbon. One can also visit cocoa plantations and learn more about how cocoa powder, and ultimately chocolate, is processed from cocoa beans at cocoa factories.

Tawau is also the port from where you can take boats and speedy ferries to neighbouring towns in Kalimantan: Nunukan and Tarakan.

How to Get to Tawau & Accommodation

Bus/share taxi (ca 560 km / up to 10 hours depending on road conditions); flight (several flights daily, 1 hour 20 mins from KK), boat/ferry (from Nunukan or Tarakan in Kalimantan - Indonesia); there are a couple of good hotels in Tawau, such as the 'Marco Polo' and the 'Hotel Emas', and many 'penginapan', which can loosely be translated as 'hostel'.