



island

By Melissa Leong

Some prefer the rugged terrain of Sabah's many rainforests, while others rise to the challenge of Mount Kinabalu. Sabah's allures are aplenty, but if you really want to fall in love with her, an island escape will have you swooning for more.

The combination of soft sand under your feet, the tropical heat on your skin and blue green waters beckoning you is nothing short of romantic. Sabah is home to many island escapes, some renowned for their diving sites while others are the perfect getaway for doing absolutely nothing at all. Whatever your choice, the perfect pulau (island) awaits you. Don't forget the sunblock!

Tunku Abdul Rahman Park

The nearest group of islands to Kota Kinabalu city, the Tunku Abdul Rahman Park is the island hoppers' haven. It is made up of five islands – Manukan, Mamutik, Gaya, Sapi and Sulug. Manukan, Mamutik and Sapi are popular picks, famous for the variety of water sports. Sapi and Sulug are ideal for sunbathing and a lazy day out while Gaya's charm lies in its resort. The best part is these islands are a mere 20 minutes away from KK city.

Mabul Island

Travel to the east coast of Sabah to the town of Semporna, the gateway to some of the best dive spots and breathtaking

beaches in the region. If you are an avid diver, chances are that Mabul would be on your to-dive list (right next to Sipadan, of course). Great for muck diving, Mabul boasts of being one of the best macro dive sites in the world. A seasoned scuba diver from the U.S once commented, "It was like being in an aquarium!" Mabul is also home to some of the best island resorts. But non-divers fret not. There's also a fantastic floating spa with a glorious view of the sea!

Kapalai Island

Ironically, Kapalai isn't quite an island. This floating marvel (also off the coast of Semporna) is made up of stunning water bungalows connected by an extensive wooden boardwalk. The water is so clear that visitors can spend hours just staring at the myriad of marine life swimming below, from beautiful lionfish to graceful squid. When the sun sets, go kayaking or simply enjoy the view from your bathroom as you luxuriously soak yourself in your bathtub.

Mataking Island

Mataking Island is located furthest from the east coast of Sabah, but the one-hour journey by speedboat is worth it. The Mataking Dive Resort (the sole operator on the island) will welcome you like a king and ensures you are treated like nothing less than royalty throughout your stay. Mataking, like all its neighbouring islands, offers great dive spots but the island also

wins the award of being Most Romantic Island Escape, hands down. Maybe it's the long walks with a loved one along the sandbank during low tide or the constant breeze caressing your face as you enjoy a cocktail by the bar. Whatever it is, Mataking has that magical something that keeps honeymooners and love-struck twosomes falling in love over and over again! Visit www.mataking.com

Lankayan Island

Sandakan may be famous for its wildlife and historical sites, but if you care to venture further off the coast, Lankayan island promises a pleasant surprise. The first thing you'll notice is the soft white sand and sparkling waters. This postcard-perfect setting will make you wish you never have to leave! Apart from diving, Lankayan is great for sunset swims, afternoon siestas in a hammock outside your cabin or marvelling at the black-tip baby sharks that swim right up to the shore. Visit <http://www.lankayan-island.com/>

Without a doubt, Sabah will spoil you with its variety of island escapes, be it on the west or east coast. For more information or a complete list of islands to visit, log on to www.sabahtourism.com or check with your local dive operators.