



# A Trip to The Tamu

The tamu, the local lingo for open-air market, is an integral part of Sabah's community. In the olden days, the tamu was more than a place of trade. Every district holds a weekly (sometimes twice or thrice weekly) tamu. Traditionally, the tamu is not only a place to gather and trade, but for people to fraternize. The origin of the tamu dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The British North Borneo Company introduced the tamu as a neutral meeting ground to foster ties among the vastly divergent ethnic groups and growing numbers of immigrants to the state of North Borneo (Sabah, as we now know it). Each ethnic group specialized in certain produce. For example, the Dusun of the interior valleys and hills produced beeswax and herbs, while the coastal Irranun people traded salted fish. The Rungus tribe had hill rice, vegetables and livestock.

Today the tamu is still a vital part of the local community. Be it in villages or in a city like Kota Kinabalu, the tamu is a great place for good bargains and to experience a variety of sights, sounds and smells! The weekly Gaya Street Fair in Kota Kinabalu is one of the most popular markets. Every Sunday, the side streets along Gaya Street are closed and traders set up their stalls for a busy day of bargains. Here you can find a myriad of things from delicious local cakes (perfect for breakfast) to exotic orchids. The Gaya Street Fair is also unique with its talented street musicians and various charity drives. There's even a corner where you can enjoy a foot massage by blind masseuses, in aid of the Sabah Society for the Blind. But if it's some true-blue Sabahan oddities you want, visit the tamu on the outskirts of KK city, such as Donggongan or Kota Belud. These are great places to buy local delicacies such as bambangan (a mango-like fruit often preserved and enjoyed with other dishes) and noonsom (fermented fish – definitely an acquired taste!). You can also look for rice wine (lihing) here.

The mother of all tamu is, without a doubt, the annual Tamu Besar (literally translated as Big Market) held in Kota Belud. Not only does the tamu come alive with its lively traders, but also with a variety of song, dance and even a beauty pageant for the local girls. In a nearby field, tourists and locals flock to see the 'Cowboys of the East' parade their beautifully adorned horses. Another highlight is the bare-back water-buffalo race. This year, the Tamu Besar will be held on 27–28 October. Time to hit the tamu!

