

Revealing Ranau

By Melissa Leong

Growing up in Kota Kinabalu means a childhood filled with road trips. Until today, my all-time favourite would be weekend getaways to Kundasang, Ranau. I love the milder temperatures, rolling hills and valleys and, of course, front row seats to Mount Kinabalu! Ranau is only 108 km from Kota Kinabalu, which translates to a leisurely 2-hour drive. The mere mention of Ranau conjures up thoughts of Kinabalu National Park and the majestic peak of Mt Kinabalu. However, not many people realize Ranau is teeming with treasures, awaiting to be unravelled.

Daily Kundasang Market (Tamu)

Ranau sits in the shadow of Mt Kinabalu, and with its fertile soil and cool climate, this area is ideal for growing a variety of vegetables, fruits and flowers. When in Kundasang, a must-stop is the famous open-air market where you can find a large selection of fresh vegetables. The market is a kaleidoscope of colours including bright red tomatoes, rows of fresh green cabbages and broccoli and brown mushrooms. Check out other local produce such as honey and rice wine (tapai or lihing) and freshly cut flowers. On the other side of the road are rows of fruit stalls selling rambutans, bananas, buah salak and sometimes even fresh strawberries.

Kinabalu Park

Kinabalu Park is located 1,585 metres above sea level and is Malaysia's first World Heritage Site, joining the ranks of sites such as the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and the Grand Canyon National Park in the USA. It has been designated as a Centre of Plant Diversity for Southeast Asia and is exceptionally rich in species with examples of flora from the Himalayas, China, Australia, Malaysia, as well as pan-tropical flora. The Park is a great place for a getaway whether for day trips or week-long stays to explore the rare and endless eco-treasures found within. There are plenty of accommodation options to suit every budget. This is also where your climb up Mt Kinabalu begins. One of Mt Kinabalu's signature residents is the Nepenthes rajah, the largest pitcher plant found in Sabah. Rhododendrons and exotic orchids also grow in abundance. In fact, the Rhododendron ericoides is found nowhere else in the world. (Contact Sabah Parks at 088-889098)

Poring Hot Springs

After a challenging trek up and down Mt Kinabalu, soothe your aching muscles at the Poring Hot Springs, located 39 km from Kinabalu Park headquarters. Many swear by the skin-curative properties of a hot sulphur bath. A must-do when in Poring is to go on a scenic trek on its canopy walk. Simply breathtaking! Also within Poring is the beautiful Kipungit Waterfall, just a 20-minute walk from the hot springs. If you are lucky, you might even catch a glimpse of the world's largest flower, the Rafflesia, in full bloom! (Contact Sabah Parks at 088-211881)

Kundasang War Memorial

The Kundasang War Memorial, established in 1962, was the first memorial to remember all the Australian and British prisoners of war (POWs) who died in Sandakan and the death marches to Ranau, as well as the people of then North Borneo who risked their lives (some were tortured to death) to help the POWs. The Kundasang War Memorial, which is located at the foot of Mt Kinabalu, has four gardens – the Australian Garden, the English Garden, the Borneo Garden and the Contemplation Garden and Pool – to represent the various nationalities. (Contact Mr. Sevee Charuruks at 019 899 2041)

Mt Kinabalu Golf Course

Tee off to breathtaking views of the mountain at Sabah's highest golf course. Designed by Graham Muir Graves, many golfers agree that this 18-hole course is both physically and mentally challenging with its ever-present winds, steep slopes and surrounding mists. With occasional thick fogs, some even say it feels like you're playing in the clouds! One of its notable holes is the 14th (par 3, 142 metres), which features a gushing river at the bottom of a deep ravine. It is a true test of skill once you get here: you will need an accurate shot from the elevated tee across the Mesilau East River to land on the green perched on the edge of a cliff. (Call 088-889445)

Don't miss the TM 21st Mt Kinabalu International Climbathon on 25 & 26 August 2007 More details of this exciting mountain race on page 3.