

Borneo: Bristleheads & Orangutans Itinerary

[Link: Borneo: Bristleheads & Orangutans](#)

Tour Overview

The island of Borneo, once a land of the mythical and mystical, has rapidly become one of the most exciting and richest destinations for wildlife. There are still vast tracts of forest remaining, despite widespread logging and clearings, supporting a wonderful and truly exotic array of animals and plants. Broadbills and barbets, hornbills and trogons, bee-eaters and bristleheads, as well as flying foxes, colugos, slow lorises, elephants, gibbons and monkeys including the bizarre Proboscis Monkey and the marvellous Orangutan.

Rising out of the lowland rainforests is the superb and spectacular Mount Kinabalu, over 4000 metres to its bare granite summit, the highest peak between the Himalayas and New Guinea, and an area of a high degree of endemism - birds with names like wren-babblers, stubtails, blackeyes, Mountain Serpent-Eagle, the rather unfriendly Kinabalu Friendly Warbler, and the Whitehead's trio - trogon, broadbill and spiderhunter.

We start our Borneo birding tour in the modern city of Kota Kinabalu, where we encounter lowland coastal species, and then travel to the superb Danum Valley and the Borneo Rainforest Lodge, one of the most diverse and richest wildlife areas on the planet.

We then move to a rainforest lodge for boat rides along the Kinabatangan River for kingfishers, darters, storks and Proboscis Monkeys - we will see an impressive number of species! A trip to Sepilok for Orangutans and a surprisingly rich avifauna is followed by several days at Mount Kinabalu, with its unique and exciting fauna and flora. A visit to Borneo is a marvelous and unforgettable experience.

This tour can be combined with our [Malaysia Peninsula](#) tour.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Kota Kinabalu



Arrive in Kota Kinabalu where our Borneo birding tour starts with a welcome dinner. Kota Kinabalu (KK) is the modern name of Jesselton, named after Sir Charles Jessel, director of the British North Borneo Chartered Company. The town was established in 1897 when the small British settlement was moved from Gaya Island to the mainland after it was razed by Mat Salleh, the local native chief. Jesselton was almost completely destroyed during World War II save for three buildings. Today, this city of over 200,000 people of various ethnic groups is completely transformed. KK is the entry point to the state of Sabah, known as the “Land Below the Wind” (actually, below the typhoon belt). KK’s coastal location and mountain backdrop make this a spectacularly set city. When skies are clear the most prominent feature is massive Mount Kinabalu, the highest mountain between the Himalayas and New Guinea. Around our hotel, we sample some common Bornean birds - Spotted and Zebra Doves, Glossy Swiftlet, House Swift, Pacific Swallow, Yellow-vented Bulbul, White-breasted Wood Swallow, Asian Glossy Starling and Eurasian Tree Sparrow, with perhaps White-bellied Sea-Eagle along the shoreline. Night in Kota Kinabalu.

Day 2: Trusmadi forest



This morning we will head to the Trusmadi Forest. Trusmadi is the second-highest mountain in Borneo and is surrounded by a pristine forest, ranging from about 1,000 to 2,600 meters in elevation. We will be looking for the Bulwer's Pheasant, Crested Partridge, Bornean Banded Pitta. Overnight Tambunan.

Day 3: Crocker Range and Kinabalu



Today we make an early start for the Crocker Range. This mid-elevation forested area holds several species which are particularly difficult to find - the endemic Bornean and Mountain Barbets, Black-breasted Fruit-hunter, Blue-winged Leafbird, Ashy and Bornean Black-crested Bulbuls, and Whitehead's Spiderhunter. In the afternoon, we will head to Kinabalu Park.

Days 4 - 5: Kinabalu Park



We have two days to explore this marvelous area. The imposing granite massif of Mount Kinabalu towers above the lowland rainforest and cultivated areas. The summit is generally visible in the early morning, allowing stunning views, but thereafter is frequently cloaked in mist. Mount Kinabalu is a naturalist's paradise, and the park is an excellent location to view some of Borneo's montane bird life. We will see a good range of lowland and upland species confined to areas above 1500m. Many of these montane species are endemic to Borneo. We look for Sunda Cuckoo-shrike, Whitehead's Trogan, Temminck's Sunbird, Short-tailed Magpie, Everet's Thrush, Gray-throated Babbler, Snowy-browed Flycatcher, Ashy and Hair-crested Drongos, and Mountain Leaf-Warbler, and we also target Kinabalu's local specialties such as Whitehead's Broadbill, Mountain Serpent-Eagle, Red-breasted and Crimson-headed Partridges, Bornean Whistler, Mountain Wren-Babbler, Black-sided Flowerpecker and Bornean Stubtail. In addition our walks may turn up mammals such as the remarkable Mountain Treeshrew and several species of squirrels including Whitehead's Pygmy-squirrel. Weather permitting, we have an option to start along the steep summit trail into the upper montane zone. We will hopefully find Friendly Bush Warbler, a bird which has recently not lived up to its name, as well as Flavescents Bulbul, Sunda Bush Warbler and Mountain Black-eye. An excursion after dark near our chalets should allow us to hear the reclusive Mountain Scops Owl.

Day 6: Poring Hot Springs and Sepilok Forest



We will depart this morning to Poring Hot Springs, situated at lower altitudes near the foot of the mountain. The hot sulphur springs were developed by the Japanese in the Second World War and are now a popular tourist attraction. They are surrounded by lowland rainforest which harbours a good range of birds not found at higher altitudes on the mountain, including Rufous and Maroon Woodpeckers, Puff-backed, Spectacled, Red-eyed, Black-headed, Scaly-breasted and Streaked Bulbuls, Moustached Babbler, Oriental Magpie-Robin (of a distinctive near-black form), Hume White-eye, Orange-bellied Flowerpecker, Bornean Forktail, and perhaps White-fronted Falconet. The world's largest flower, Rafflesia, is sometimes in bloom close by. Nights at Mount Kinabalu. In the afternoon, we will continue to Sepilok Forest. Overnight: Sepilok

Day 7: Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Centre



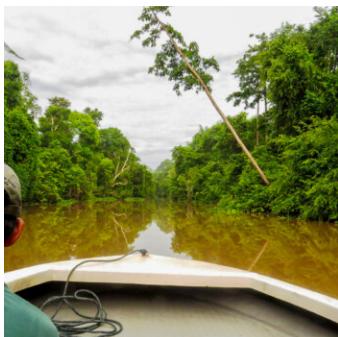
The Discovery Centre's rich tropical rainforest is a good example of lowland primary forests with over 277 different species of birds and at least 300 types of trees. Recently, this has been a good place to find the enigmatic Bristlehead, Woodpeckers are particularly well represented - White-bellied, Gray-and-buff, Rufous, Buff-necked among them. Pittas and kingfishers will also vie for our attention. Night at Sepilok.

Day 8: Gomantong Cave and Kinabatangan River



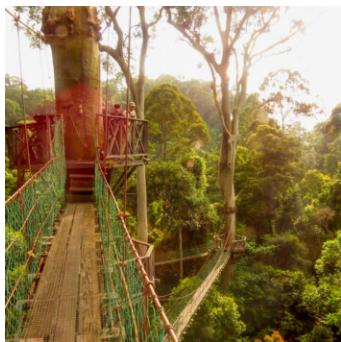
After breakfast, we leave Sepilok, and head toward the Kinabatangan River, where we will spend the next couple of days birding. On the way we will visit the Gomantong Cave to look for Black-nest Swiftlet, Glossy Swiftlet, White-nest Swiftlet and possibly Mossy-nest Swiftlet. In the afternoon, we will head out of the Kinabatangan River for some birding.

Day 9: Kinabatangan River



Today will be having morning and afternoon birding along the river along the Kinabatangan River. The Kinabatangan River at 560 km long and with a catchment area of 16,800 square kms is Sabah's longest river. The greatest concentration of wildlife in Malaysia, and all of Borneo, can be found along its lower reaches. The main river is lined with forest on fertile alluvial terraces. Behind these are extensive, low-lying seasonally flooded forested swamps which are usually water logged and Dry Dipterocarp Forest & Mangroves. Within the swamps, scattered lakes and small hills dot the landscape. Various wildlife species abound here, including elephants and Orang-utans. The Proboscis Monkey, a species confined to Borneo, is most readily seen and particularly abundant in the mangrove forests of the lower Kinabatangan. They live in groups of up to twenty or more, and these placid vegetarians can usually be found among the mangrove forests along the river banks in late afternoon before they retire for the night. On one day, we travel upriver and visit one of the oxbow lakes. Possibilities here include Stork-billed and Blue-eared Kingfishers, Great Slaty Woodpecker, Black-and-red Broadbill, White-chested Babbler, the rare and sought-after Storm's Stork, Lesser and Gray-headed Fish-Eagles, Lesser Adjutant, Jerdon's Baza, three species of blue flycatchers, Oriental Darter, and several barbets and hornbills. We could also encounter the enigmatic Bornean Ground-Cuckoo. On another day, we venture on another river cruise down the Menangkul River and along the Kinabatangan River, returning to the lodge at dusk. Nights near Sukau.

Day 10: Morning River birding followed by transfer to Borneo Rainforest Lodge



We have a morning boat trip, targeting species not yet found, before we transfer 2 hours to Lahad Datu for lunch and on to Danum Valley. The 2.5 hour journey passes through logging roads; occasional sightings of Bornean Pygmy Elephants en route are not uncommon. Overnight Borneo Rainforest Lodge. The Danum Valley Conservation Area spans 438 sq kilometers of primary and secondary rainforest west of Lahad Datu and lies within the forest concession of the Sabah Foundation. Established in 1981, for the purpose of rain forest related conservation, research, education and recreation, the Conservation Area attempts to show that tourism can positively aid the protection of the rainforest. Within the Danum domain, there is a fine network of trails and canopy walks providing opportunities to experience the abundant wildlife to be found there. Our superb lodge is situated near the banks of the Segama River and is surrounded by luxuriant forest with excellent birding right on the grounds. Night at Danum Valley Borneo Rainforest Lodge.

Days 11 - 12: Borneo Rainforest Lodge



The Danum Valley contains some of the most accessible untouched lowland rainforest in Sabah. Huge trees up to 80m tall create the tallest canopy of any rainforest, and support a myriad of lianas and epiphytes which in turn support a profusion of wildlife. Indeed, these rainforests are among the richest habitat on earth; there are more tree species here than other comparable areas, the Danum Valley list includes more than 275 species of birds and 110 species of mammals, and butterflies are numerous and prominent. Over the next three days, we'll enjoy this lush and verdant tropical forest with its many unique flora and fauna. We'll look for Great Argus, the world's largest and a spectacularly plumaged pheasant, Crested Fireback and the shy and reclusive Chestnut-necklaced Partridge. Raptors include Wallace's Hawk-Eagle, Black Eagle and Jerdon's Baza, and we have the opportunity for nocturnal walks and drives for such prizes as Buffy Fish Owl, Brown Wood Owl, and maybe Gould's and Large Frogmouths. Possibilities seem endless: up to three species of pittas including the magnificent Blue-headed and Black-and-crimson Pittas (well-named "Jewel-Thrushes"), Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot, kingfishers including Rufous-collared, and a host of babblers and tit-babblers, broadbills, an array of woodpeckers from Great Slaty to Rufous Piculet, barbets, minivets, fantails, cuckoos and five species of malkohas, Diard's and Red-naped Trogons, spiderhunters, Crested Jay and nearly all of Borneo's hornbills, including trumpeting Rhinoceros Hornbill and the strange Helmeted Hornbill. Endemics here include the bizarre and still mysterious Bornean Bristlehead, as well as White-crowned Shama, Bornean and Black-throated Wren-Babblers, Bornean Black Magpie, and Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker. The region is also rich in mammals and we may see Bornean Gibbon, Red Leaf Monkey, Malayan Flying Fox, several species of civet, flying squirrels including Giant Red, Sambar Deer, Greater Mouse-Deer, Leopard Cat, and the bizarre Malay Colugo, Slow Loris and Bornean Tarsier. We may even chance upon a wild Orang-utan! Nights at Danum Valley Borneo Rainforest Lodge.

Day 13: Danum Valley and transfer to Kota Kinabalu



We will spend the morning birding in the Danum Valley and then transfer to Lahad Datu Airport for a late afternoon flight to Kota Kinabalu.

Day 14: Departure from Kota Kinabalu

Our Borneo birding tour ends today and you can book flights home anytime from Kota Kinabalu. You can also combine this tour with Malaysia Peninsula, which will begin today in Kuala Lumpur.

What to Expect

Overview

The Borneo tour is a moderately paced trip. We typically begin each day with an early, before-breakfast walk, as birding in the tropics is most productive at daybreak. With roughly 12 hours of daylight—dawn around 6:00 am and dusk around 6:00 pm—our main birding efforts focus on the early morning and late afternoon when activity is highest. During the quieter midday period, we schedule an afternoon break to allow time for rest, personal downtime, or optional relaxed birding around the lodge.

Food

We usually have early breakfasts and some before-breakfast birding since it is best to begin birding at daybreak. Some lunches will be picnic style to maximize our time in the field. In the evenings, we eat at the hotel or lodge where we are staying and review the list of birds and other wildlife that we have encountered, as well as discuss the following day's activities.

Accommodation

During the tour we stay in moderate to excellent accommodation.

Walking

Walking conditions will generally be easy to moderate. Time permitting, there may be an optional, steeper walk to higher altitudes on the Mount Kinabalu trail for the Friendly Warbler. Trails anywhere may be muddy depending on recent rainfall. Please also note that cumulative days of activity in the tropical heat can lead to fatigue, so pacing yourself and staying well-hydrated is important.

Boat trips

We will take boat trips along the Kinabatangan River.

Climate

Be prepared for hot, humid and sunny weather at low altitudes, with showers in the afternoon. It is recommended to take a light rain-jacket or poncho, although we try to avoid birding in any rain worse than a light drizzle. It will likely be cool at higher elevations on Mount Kinabalu.

Bring mosquito repellent or mosquito-proof clothing because bugs can be a problem, especially at low elevations in moist humid conditions. Leeches can be a nuisance, but can usually be deterred with insect repellent. You will need to bring a hat and sunblock, especially on the boat trips on the Kinabatangan River.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- One internal flight included
- Ground transportation
- All meals, soft drinks and accommodation
- Boatrides along Kinabatangan River
- EET guide plus a local guide with 4 - 8 participants
- All park, conservation and entrance fees
- Gratuities to local guides and drivers

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flights to and from start/end location
- Travel Insurance
- Items of a personal nature
- Alcoholic beverages
