Eagle-Eye Tours

# Borneo: Bristleheads & Orangutans Itinerary

Link: Borneo: Bristleheads & Orangutans

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## Tour Overview

Borneo's rainforests support a remarkable variety of birds and mammals, from broadbills, barbets and pittas to Orangutans, gibbons and Proboscis Monkeys. Our Borneo birding tour explores Sabah's mountain forests, lowland rainforests and wildlife-rich rivers.

From Kota Kinabalu, we travel into the Crocker Range and visit the Trusmadi hide before continuing to Mount Kinabalu. These highland forests hold many Bornean endemics, including Mountain and Bornean Barbets, Bornean Green-Magpie and the sought-after Whitehead's trio—trogon, broadbill and spiderhunter.

Descending through Poring Hot Springs, we continue to Sepilok, where we search for Bornean Bristlehead, Black-crowned Pitta and Diard's Trogon. A visit to Gomantong Cave is followed by boat trips along the Kinabatangan River, looking for Storm's Stork, hornbills and Proboscis Monkeys.

We finish our birding at Danum Valley's Borneo Rainforest Lodge, exploring forest trails and canopy walkways for Blue-headed Pitta, Great Argus and other rainforest specialties. Nocturnal outings offer a chance to discover another side of Borneo's wildlife.

Throughout the tour, an experienced Eagle-Eye Tours guide and local guides help us discover Borneo's birds and wildlife.

This tour can be combined with our Peninsular Malaysia birding tour.

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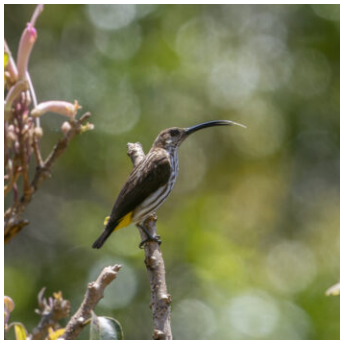
## Itinerary

**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, it is a modern city of diverse ethnic communities. Kota Kinabalu is the entry point to the state of Sabah, known as the “Land Below the Wind”, below the typhoon belt. Its coastal location and mountain backdrop make this a spectacularly set city. When skies are clear, massive Mount Kinabalu is a prominent feature. Depending on arrival times, there may be an opportunity to sample some local birds. Possibilities include Spotted and Zebra Doves, Plume-toed Swiftlet, Little Swift, Pacific Swallow, Yellow-vented Bulbul, White-breasted Woodswallow, Asian Glossy Starling and Eurasian Tree Sparrow, with perhaps White-bellied Sea-Eagle along the shoreline. Blue-naped Parrot and Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker are other birds we may look for around Kota Kinabalu. Night in Kota Kinabalu.

**Day 2: Crocker Range and Tambunan**



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, Fruit-hunter, Bornean Leafbird, Bornean Bulbul and Whitehead’s Spiderhunter. We continue birding around Tambunan in the afternoon. Night at Padi View Lodge or similar, Tambunan.

**Day 3: Trusmadi Forest and Kundasang**



We depart early this morning for the hide in Trusmadi Forest. Trusmadi is the second-highest mountain in Borneo and is surrounded by forest ranging from about 1,000 to 2,600 metres in elevation. We will be looking for Bulwer’s Pheasant, Crested Partridge and possibly Bornean Banded-Pitta. Other possibilities include Sunda Scimitar-Babbler and Orange-headed Thrush. In the afternoon, we continue to Kundasang, our base for exploring Kinabalu Park. Night at Pines Resort or similar, Kundasang.

**Days 4 & 5: Kinabalu Park**



We have two days to explore this marvellous 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 look for montane birds, many endemic to Borneo. We look for Sunda Cuckooshrike, Whitehead's Trogon, Temminck's Sunbird, Bornean Green-Magpie, Everett's Thrush, Gray-throated Babbler, Snowy-browed Flycatcher, Ashy and Hair-crested Drongos, Mountain Leaf Warbler and Yellow-breasted Warbler. 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 and conditions permitting, there may be an opportunity for an optional walk along the steep summit trail into the upper montane zone. Possibilities include Friendly Bush Warbler, Pale-faced Bulbul, Aberrant Bush Warbler and Mountain Black-eye. We may also venture out after dark near our accommodation to listen for Mountain Scops-Owl. Nights at Pines Resort or similar, Kundasang.

**Day 6: Poring Hot Springs and Sepilok Forest**



We will depart this morning for 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's White-eye, Orange-bellied Flowerpecker, Bornean Spiderhunter and Crimson Sunbird. Rafflesia, with its enormous flowers, is sometimes in bloom close by. In the afternoon, we will continue to Sepilok Forest. Night at Sepilok Jungle Resort or similar.

**Day 7: Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Centre**



We spend the morning and afternoon birding at the Rainforest Discovery Centre, exploring its rich lowland tropical rainforest. We search for the enigmatic Bornean Bristlehead, along with Black-crowned Pitta and Diard's Trogon. Woodpeckers are particularly well represented—White-bellied, Gray-and-buff, Rufous and Buff-necked among them. Other pittas and kingfishers will also vie for our attention. Night at Sepilok Jungle Resort or similar.

**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 visit Gomantong Cave to look for Black-nest Swiftlet, Plume-toed Swiftlet, White-nest Swiftlet and possibly Mossy-nest Swiftlet. Night at Borneo Nature Lodge or similar, Kinabatangan River.

**Day 9: Kinabatangan River**



Today we explore the Kinabatangan River by boat, with morning and afternoon birding excursions. The Kinabatangan River is Sabah's longest river, with rich wildlife 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, together with dipterocarp forest and mangroves. Within the swamps, scattered lakes and small hills dot the landscape. Various wildlife species occur here, including elephants and Bornean Orangutans. The Proboscis Monkey, a species confined to Borneo, is a particular attraction. Groups may gather in trees along the riverbanks in the late afternoon before retiring for the night. Bird possibilities 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, flycatchers, Oriental Darter and several barbets. Hornbills may include Rhinoceros, Wrinkled and White-crowned Hornbills. We could also encounter the enigmatic Bornean Ground-Cuckoo. Night at Borneo Nature Lodge or similar, Kinabatangan River.

**Day 10: Kinabatangan River to Danum Valley**



We have a morning boat trip, targeting species not yet found, before we transfer approximately two hours to Lahad Datu for lunch and on to Danum Valley. The onward journey takes around 2.5 hours and includes travel along logging roads. Elephant sightings along the way are uncommon, but possible. The Danum Valley Conservation Area spans 438 square kilometres of rainforest west of Lahad Datu and lies within the forest concession of the Sabah Foundation. Established in 1981 for rainforest-related conservation, research, education and recreation, the Conservation Area demonstrates how tourism can aid rainforest protection. Within Danum, a network of trails and canopy walkways provides opportunities to experience the wildlife. Our 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 Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum Valley.

**Days 11 & 12: Danum Valley & Borneo Rainforest Lodge**



Danum Valley contains some of the most accessible untouched lowland rainforest in Sabah. Huge trees support a myriad of lianas and epiphytes, which in turn support a profusion of wildlife. Butterflies are numerous and prominent. Over these two full days, we enjoy the lush tropical forest with its many distinctive plants and animals, birding in the morning and afternoon. We look for the spectacularly plumaged Great Argus, Bornean Crested Fireback and the shy and reclusive Sabah Partridge. Raptors include Wallace's Hawk-Eagle, Black Eagle and Jerdon's Baza. Opportunities for nocturnal walks and/or drives may bring Buffy Fish-Owl, Brown Wood-Owl and perhaps Blyth's, Gould's or Large Frogmouths. Blue-headed Pitta is a particular target. Other possibilities include Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot, Rufous-collared Kingfisher, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Malayan Forktail and a host of babblers, tit-babblers and broadbills. An array of woodpeckers, from Great Slaty Woodpecker to Rufous Piculet, is joined by barbets, minivets, fantails, cuckoos, malkohas, Red-naped Trogon, spiderhunters and Crested Jayshrike. Hornbills include the 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 Muller's (Bornean) Gibbon, Red Leaf Monkey, Malayan Flying Fox, civets, flying squirrels, Sambar Deer, Greater Mouse-Deer, Leopard Cat, colugos, Sunda Slow Loris and tarsiers. We may even chance upon a wild Bornean Orangutan! Nights at Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum Valley.

**Day 13: Danum Valley and flight to Kota Kinabalu**



We enjoy one last morning birding walk in Danum Valley before lunch. Afterwards, we drive to Lahad Datu Airport for our late-afternoon flight to Kota Kinabalu. Night in Kota Kinabalu.

**Day 14: Departure from Kota Kinabalu**

Our Borneo birding tour ends today and you can book flights home anytime from Kota Kinabalu.

# What to Expect

**Overview**

This is a moderately paced tour with early starts to take advantage of the most productive birding hours. We concentrate much of our birding in the early morning and late afternoon, taking midday breaks when the schedule permits. Some days include longer transfers, while optional evening walks and night drives can extend our wildlife watching beyond dusk. Several consecutive days of activity in tropical heat and humidity can be tiring.

**Food**

We usually have early breakfasts and some before-breakfast birding. Breakfasts are usually at our accommodation, although we occasionally take a packed breakfast to allow an early start for birding. Some lunches are picnic-style to maximize time in the field. Dinner is generally at our accommodation, and evenings include time to review our wildlife sightings and discuss the following day’s plans.

**Accommodation**

We stay in moderate to excellent accommodation, including hotels and forest lodges. Our three-night stay at Borneo Rainforest Lodge places us in the heart of Danum Valley, with birding opportunities close to our accommodation.

**Walking**

Walking is generally easy to moderate, along forest trails, roads and boardwalks. Some outings involve prolonged periods on foot, and heat and humidity can make otherwise straightforward walks more demanding. Trails may be muddy, and the boardwalk inside Gomantong Cave can be slippery.

Weather and conditions permitting, there may be an optional, steeper walk along Mount Kinabalu’s summit trail. This is a more demanding outing. Comfortable footwear with good grip is important throughout the tour.

**Driving**

Several days combine birding stops with travel between our overnight locations. We take rest and birding stops along the way. Longer transfer days include the journey from Poring Hot Springs to Sepilok and the move from the Kinabatangan River to Danum Valley. The latter involves approximately two hours to Lahad Datu, followed by another 2.5 hours to Borneo Rainforest Lodge, with lunch en route. The approach to Danum Valley includes travel along logging roads. On Day 13, we drive from Danum Valley to Lahad Datu Airport and take an internal flight to Kota Kinabalu.

**Boat trips**

We take boat trips along the Kinabatangan River, with morning and afternoon excursions to look for birds and mammals along the forested banks.

**Climate**

Expect hot, humid conditions in the lowlands, with daytime temperatures around 30–32°C (86–90°F) and overnight temperatures around 23–25°C (73–77°F). The mountain forests around Kinabalu Park are noticeably cooler, typically around 15–24°C (59–75°F), with cooler conditions possible at higher elevations.

Rain is possible throughout the tour and can be heavy, so bring a lightweight waterproof jacket or poncho, along with warmer layers for the highlands.

A hat and sunscreen are useful, particularly during river excursions. Bring insect repellent and clothing that provides protection from mosquitoes. Leeches may also be encountered on forest trails.

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# What's Included

**Tour Price Includes**

- One internal flight included
- Airport Transfers
- Ground transportation
- All meals, soft drinks and accommodation
- Boatrides on 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

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