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MALAYSIA

Exotic Ethnic
Heritage







Dusun Tindal costume



Kadazandusun

The Largest Community

Kadazandusun is the largest ethnic community in Sabah. The term Kadazandusun was coined to foster harmonious unity among the two groups, Kadazan and Dusun. There are numerous sub-groups within the community such as Dusun Tindal, Dusun Lotud, Dusun Ranau and many more. The official language of this community is Kadazandusun while the official dialect is known as Bunduliwan.

The musical instruments of the Kadazandusun people include *sompoton*, *bungkau*, *kulintangan* and *togunggak*.

The traditional Kadazandusun dance is known as Sumazau, which literally means 'dancing'. The dance is performed by two rows of men and women who face each other and move with a steady hypnotic rhythm. The graceful arm gestures of the dancers resemble the flight of birds. This dance is performed during the Harvest Festival and also at weddings. The costumes are usually black in colour, made from a velvety material and embellished with striking decorations.

Sompoton is a mouth organ made of dried gourd and bamboo pieces arranged in two layers. The Sompoton can be played solo or in a group.

Sumazau Dance





Traditional food of the Dusun community



Paddy husking at Tanak Nabal Homestay



SACRED ANCIENT RITUALS

Rituals are an important part of the indigenous people's cultures. There are rituals for almost every occasion; be it a wedding, festival, birth or death. There are rituals to usher in a harvesting season or rituals in the form of séance to appease the spirits.

The Kadazandusun people are traditionally paddy cultivators. To these farming communities, the rice yield is one of the most important things in life. Therefore, it is only natural that there are numerous rituals associated with rice farming and harvesting.

Monolob

For Sabah's indigenous people, Mount Kinabalu is a sacred abode of spirits. It is known locally as Aki Nabal, meaning resting place of the deceased. The mountain is a spiritual symbol of ancient beliefs, customs and revered traditions. Every year, a ritual called Monolob is conducted to appease the mountain spirits and obtain permission before hiking to its peak. During the ritual, a priestess (Bobolian) will offer seven white feathered chickens and seven white eggs along with other items. Mount Kinabalu was closed to the public following an earthquake which took place in June 2015. It was reopened after restoration works were done to the pathway.

Magavau

Magavau is performed by a Bobohizan or high priestess. The task is to search and salvage the lost Bambazon (rice spirit) who is hurt or separated from the main mystical body. Other important rituals include *molukas*, a housewarming ritual of the Dusun Lotud community and *humabot*, a ritual to summon Bambazon or the rice spirit by the Penampang Kadazan community. Madsuwau is a ritualistic dance to appease spirits. It is observed by the Kadazandusun community.

ENTHRALLING FESTIVALS

The Kadazandusun community has numerous festivals and celebrations. The main festival is known as Tadau Ka'amatan Harvest Festival.

Tadau Ka'amatan

Tadau Ka'amatan is a harvest festival celebrated in the month of May. Festivities begin on 1 May and extend throughout the month, culminating in the grand celebration on 30 and 31 May. The curtain-raiser for the festival takes place at different locations on a rotational basis so that every district has a chance to organise it.

Other colourful festivals include Magavau and Moginakan.



The Legend of Huminodun

Huminodun is the only child to God Kinoingan and Suminundu. Beautiful, kind and wise, Huminodun was famed throughout the land. The land was fertile and everyone had plenty of food and grains to eat. Unfortunately, a severe drought befell the land. Kinoingan was distressed and worried that his people would die of starvation. To save the people, Huminodun offered to sacrifice herself. She gave her body, soul and spirit to be sacrificed and offered to the earth so that there would be seeds again for planting.

Despite pleas, tears and protests, Huminodun was determined to proceed with her selfless act. She requested that after her body was strewn over the land, nobody should come and see her for seven days and seven nights. Huminodun requested that when the grains have ripened, the farmers should take seven stalks of the new rice and tie them to a long bamboo pole and place it in the middle of the rice field. She also instructed that the first day's harvest should be stored in a big jar (kakanan), and not be given away. Till today, locals do not part with their first harvest.

As predicted, that year, the harvest was plentiful and abundant as never seen before. The seven stalks of rice were used to honour the seven Bambazon or the spirits of rice. There was another miracle on the seventh day of the sacrifice, a beautiful maiden rose from the rice jar (kakanan). She was Unduk Ngadau, the beautiful, selfless Huminodun who would care for the people hereafter.

Today, Unduk Ngadau is a beauty pageant and important part of the Tadau Ka'amatan Harvest Festival. It embodies the legend of Huminodun. The pageant symbolises Huminodun's sacrifice and the gift of life that she bestowed upon her people. The festival inculcates values such as helping, sharing and caring for others.



Sazau Papar, a traditional dance of the Kadazan community in Papar



Run by the direct descendants of Monsopiad, the Monsopiad Heritage Village gives a glimpse into the life of this legendary warrior.



Monsopiad Cultural Village



Serunding Tuhau,
a traditional dish



Dusun Liwan
community

PLACES TO VISIT

KDCA Cultural Village, Penampang

Situated in Penampang, about 15 minutes' drive from Kota Kinabalu, this cultural village showcases the lifestyle of the ethnic groups in Sabah. Led by experienced guides, the tour will give a glimpse into the state's traditional houses as well as the customs of the communities. Enjoy the experience of being welcomed by staff in their traditional costumes, and participate in mock rituals conducted by staff dressed as Bobohizan (high priestess). Visitors can learn more about communities such as Dusun Tindal, Dusun Papar, Rungus and Murut. The village is located within Kadazandusun Cultural Village, Hongkod Koisaan.

Monsopiad Heritage Village, Penampang

Touted as a 'living museum', this village was established to honour Monsopiad, a legendary warrior who lived in the Kuai village nearly 200 years ago. Run by Monsopiad's direct descendants, the village offers a glimpse into the Kadazandusun culture with activities such as dancing lessons, cooking classes as well as rice wine and handicraft-making sessions. The highlight of a visit here is entering the House of Skulls, where Monsopiad kept his 'trophies' or skulls of those who dared to oppose him. The village is situated about 16km from Kota Kinabalu city centre.

Linangkit Cultural Village, Tuaran

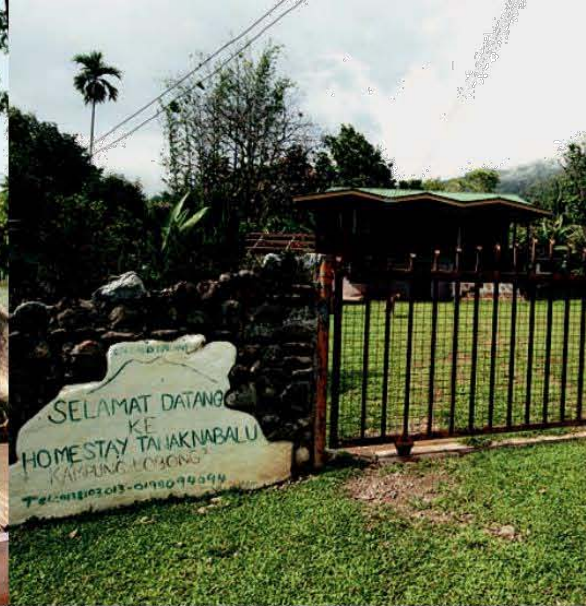
Linangkit Cultural Village showcases the culture of the Lotud community. Join a guided tour, try on the traditional costumes or watch how locals go about their usual activities such as tapioca plucking, cooking or handicraft-making. This village is situated in Kampung Selupuh, about one hour's drive from Kota Kinabalu.

Tagal Sungai Moroli Kampung Luant, Ranau

Fancy a novel method of rejuvenating your skin? Try the traditional 'fish spa' where the fishes give a little help in cleaning and healing your skin problems. Tagal, which means 'no fishing', is a prohibiting system that is meant to prevent overfishing and preserve the ecosystem. The villagers have put the abundance of fish to good use by providing the fish spa service.



Weaving the Siung, a traditional hat, in Kuposizon Homestay, Papar



Tagal Tinopikon Park, Penampang

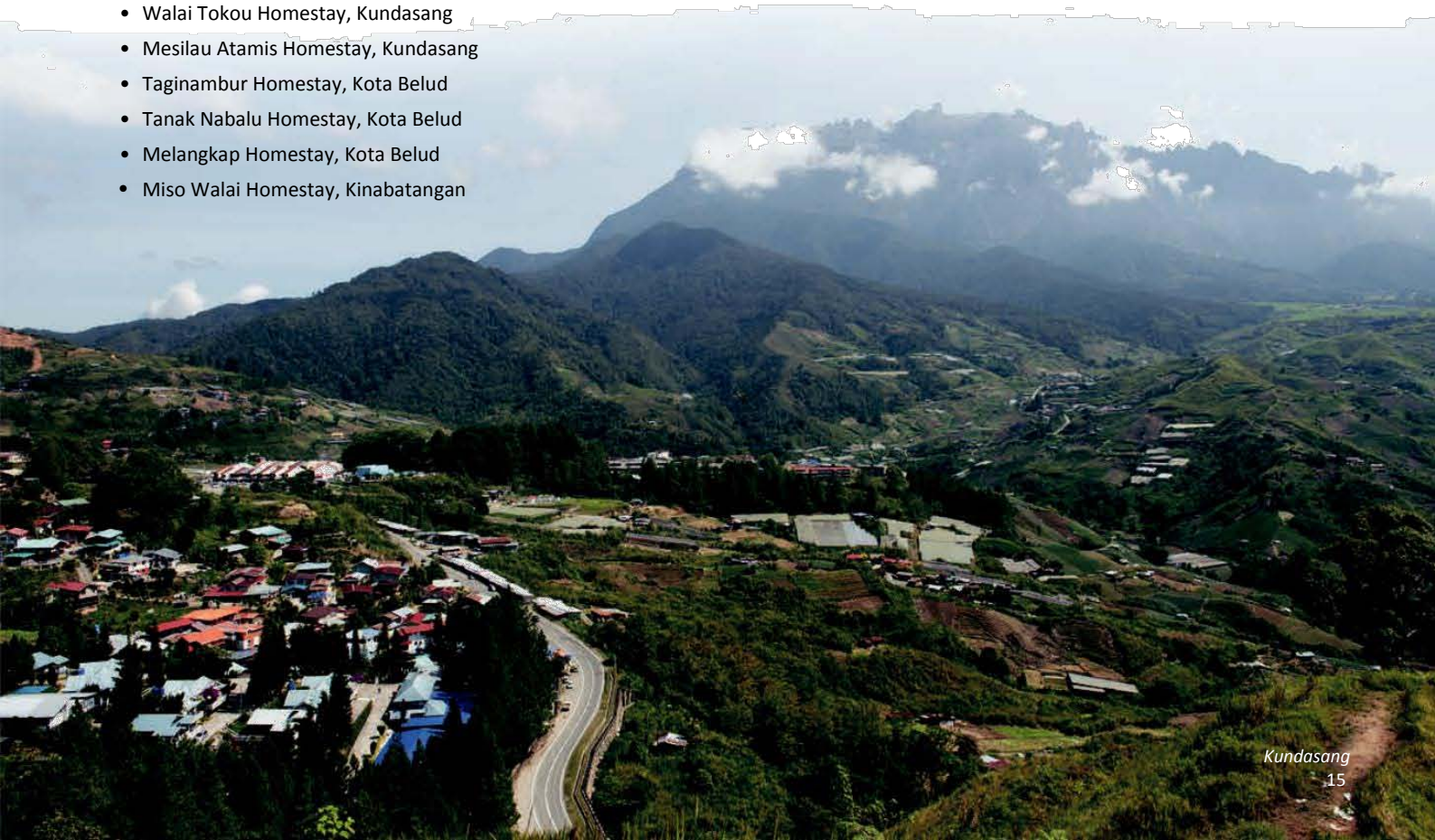
Kampung Notoruss operates one of the most successful Tagal or prohibition systems. Managed by the Department of Fisheries, the Moyoq river is a serene and picturesque site. Visitors can relax while the gentle Pelian fishes (known as the gem of the river) nibble the dead cells away and leave your feet feeling fresh. Other activities include jungle-trekking, orchard visits, cooking demonstrations and traditional games. The park is about 40 minutes' drive from Kota Kinabalu, passing through Donggongan town.

Homestays

Homestays offer a unique way to experience the local culture and lifestyle.

Consult the Tourist Information Centre or authorised tour agents to enjoy a homestay experience. Some homestay villages have websites for visitors to make enquiries or bookings.

- Tambunan Village Homestay
- Penampang Village Homestay
- Kuposizon Homestay, Papar
- Mitabang Homestay, Kiulu
- Walai Tokou Homestay, Kundasang
- Mesilau Atamis Homestay, Kundasang
- Taginambur Homestay, Kota Belud
- Tanak Nabalu Homestay, Kota Belud
- Melangkap Homestay, Kota Belud
- Miso Walai Homestay, Kinabatangan





Rungus

Artisans of Tribal Beads

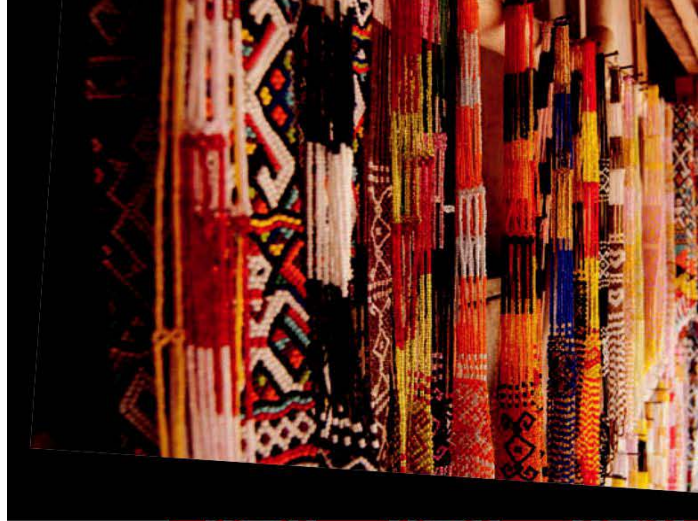
Kudat, situated in the northeast corner of Sabah, is the heartland of the Rungus community. Although a sub-group of the Kadazandusun, the Rungus people speak a different language and have their own cultures and costumes. The Rungus people are talented artisans, famed for their intricate and colourful beadwork.

A Rungus Longhouse is known as Vinatang. It comprises seven to 15 homes or family apartments. A traditional longhouse is built from wood, bamboo and dried palm leaves. These days, homes are built with wood and corrugated zinc is used as the roof. A longhouse is separated into two areas – the *apad* or common gallery and *ongkod* or compartment area. There are many taboos concerning the longhouse. The locals rely on signs to guide them in building the longhouse.

A tortoise is an auspicious symbol while a python is considered to bring bad luck.

RESPLENDENT COSTUMES

The simple but beautiful Rungus costume consists of a black blouse and a knee-length skirt of the same colour as well as a slipover that drapes over the arms like sleeves. The costume is embellished with *orot* (a hipband bearing brass rings and antique beads) and *pinakol* (two beaded shoulder bands worn diagonally across the chest). Other accessories include *sandang*, a long necklace made of animal bones and white discs, *suldau* (a choker), *burambun* and *giring* (glass bells), *titimbok* (floral headpiece), *sisingal* (beads tied around the forehead) and *rampai* (pieces of cloth that are sewn together in pigtails).



Tribal Treasures

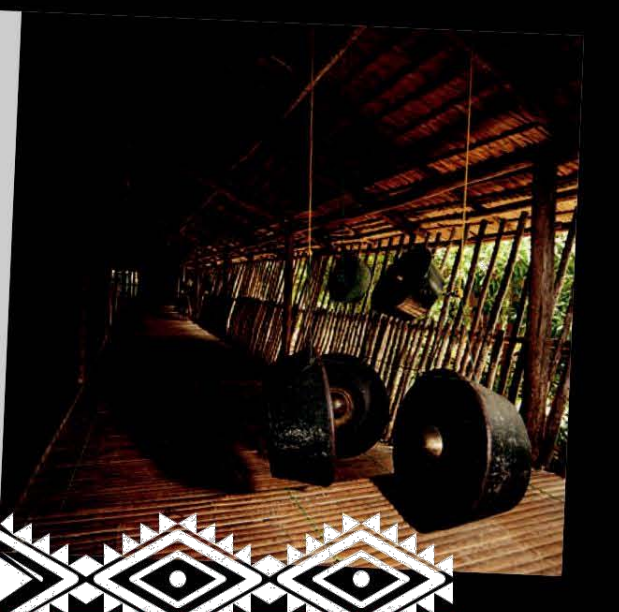
Rungus people are known for their skills and craftsmanship in weaving. They produce beautiful beadwork, handicraft and textiles. Many of these beads are available as souvenirs.



Misompuru Homestay, Kudat



*Mongigol Sumundai
dance*



EXOTIC TRIBAL FESTIVALS

Magahau

Magahau is an annual festival that showcases the fascinating cultures and traditions of the Rungus people. It will be an excellent time to watch the Rungus dance known as Mongigol Sumundai as well as rituals such as *mongingivit* and *mongirik dot bambarazon*. Visitors can also watch the traditional sports of the Rungus community, known as *hontira*.

Gong Matungong

In the local culture, gong is one of the most important musical instruments – its reverberating sound will fill the air during festivals, rituals, weddings, ceremonies and even during funerals. As the name suggests, Gong Matungong is a festival that features the gong as an essential part of the hypnotising ethnic melody. Enjoy an array of great programmes such as the Gong Fashion Queen contest, choirs, cooking competitions and many more.

PLACES TO VISIT

Kampung Sumangkap Gong Factory, Kudat

The Rungus people make their own gongs at a village called Kampung Sumangkap. Although it is called a factory, Kampung Sumangkap is actually an authentic village with modest homes where skilled craftsmen create various types of gongs. Visitors can watch the gong-making process and even enjoy cultural performances. Kampung Sumangkap is situated en route to Kudat.

Kampung Bavanggazo (Rungus Longhouse), Kudat

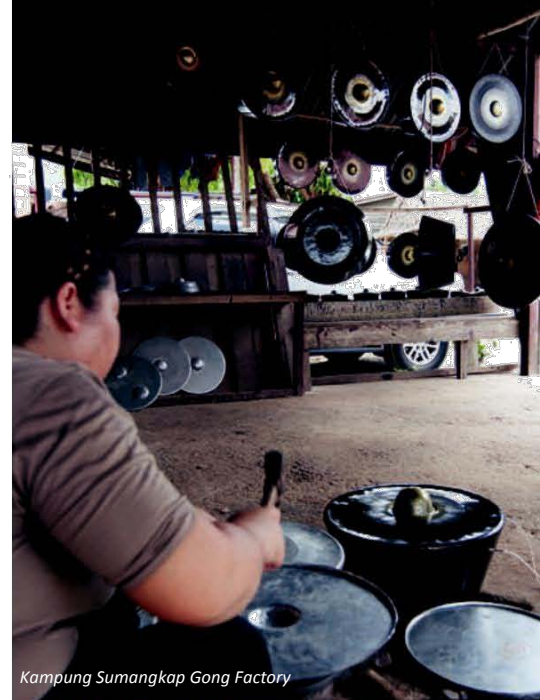
Constructed using traditional materials, the longhouse takes visitors back in time to experience the authentic lifestyle of the friendly Rungus people. Enjoy local food, mingle with the Rungus folk and learn the local culture. Kampung Bavanggazo is situated in a valley about 41km south of Kudat town. Visitors can opt for self-drives or arrange a trip through local tour operators.

Tinangol Beads Centre, Kudat

Tinangol Beads Centre, situated about 10 minutes from Kampung Bavanggazo, is the place to browse through and purchase the beautiful Rungus beads. The beads are fashioned into accessories, bags, baskets and many other intricate items. Many of the crafts are available for sale.

Meranjak Longhouse Homestay, Kudat

This is a very unique longhouse built with natural materials such as bamboo and palm leaves. Join in the daily activities of the Rungus people such as crab catching and accessory-making. Visitors who love eco-adventures can trek out to enjoy the luxuriant nature. Misompuru Homestay, situated in Kudat, also offers similar attractions.



Kampung Sumangkap Gong Factory

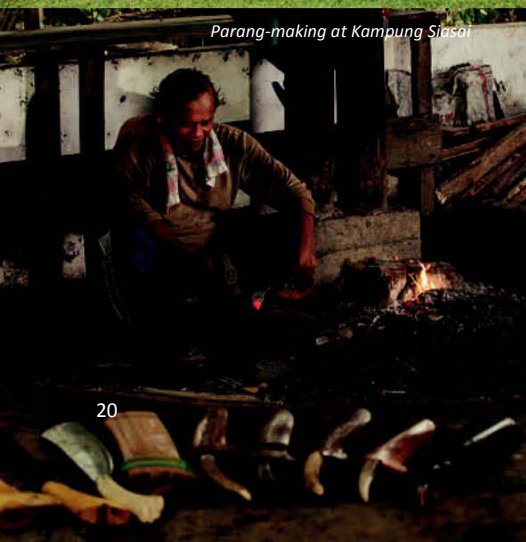


Meranjak Longhouse Homestay



Rungus Longhouse,
Kampung Bavanggazo





Bajau People of Kota Belud

The Cowboys of the East

The colourful Bajau community occupies the area of Kota Belud. The Bajau people are skilled horsemen, hailed as the Cowboys of the East for their riding skills.

The Bajau men are also famed for their colourful costumes, worn during festive occasions such as the annual Tamu Besar. Dastar, or a handwoven headdress, is also synonymous with the community.

During festive occasions, these horsemen dress their ponies in bright costumes complete with antique bells called *seriau*, colourful reins called *tingalu* and bridle called *kekang*. The horsemen wear a long-sleeved shirt called *bade sampit* – either in black or white and embellished with gold buttons and silver flowers. The trousers, called *seluar sampit*, is black in colour and laced with gold trimmings. Colourful and resplendent, both the horse and the rider create a striking sight.

PLACES TO VISIT

Tamu Besar

To most Malaysians, mention Kota Belud and the word that springs to mind is 'tamu'. Tamu means 'open market' while Tamu Besar means 'a grand open market' which is celebrated with an air of festivity.

The *tamu* in Kota Belud is the biggest in Sabah. It features a variety of items from food, drinks, seafood, vegetables to handicraft and many more. Held annually, the Tamu Besar is a hive of activity – aside from the assortment of merchandise, it will be bustling with cultural performances, buffalo races, beauty contests and more. The highlight of the show is the parade of the flamboyant Bajau horsemen. Dressed in colourful costumes, the Bajau horsemen parade the town, at times making their ponies seem even more attractive than the riders!

Kampung Siasai – Parang-making Centre

A parang is a machete, used as a tool and even a weapon. Visitors can watch how *parang* is made in Kampung Siasai, Kota Belud.

Taun Gusi Village Homestay

For a taste of local life, visitors can opt to stay at the Taun Gusi Village Homestay in Kota Belud.



Tamu Kota Belud



Bajau horsemen



Seaweed processing in Pulau Maiga

Seaweed farming

Many Bajau people are turning to seaweed processing for extra income. Carageenan, extracted from seaweed, is widely used as a stabiliser in food and cosmetics.



Bajau Laut of Semporna

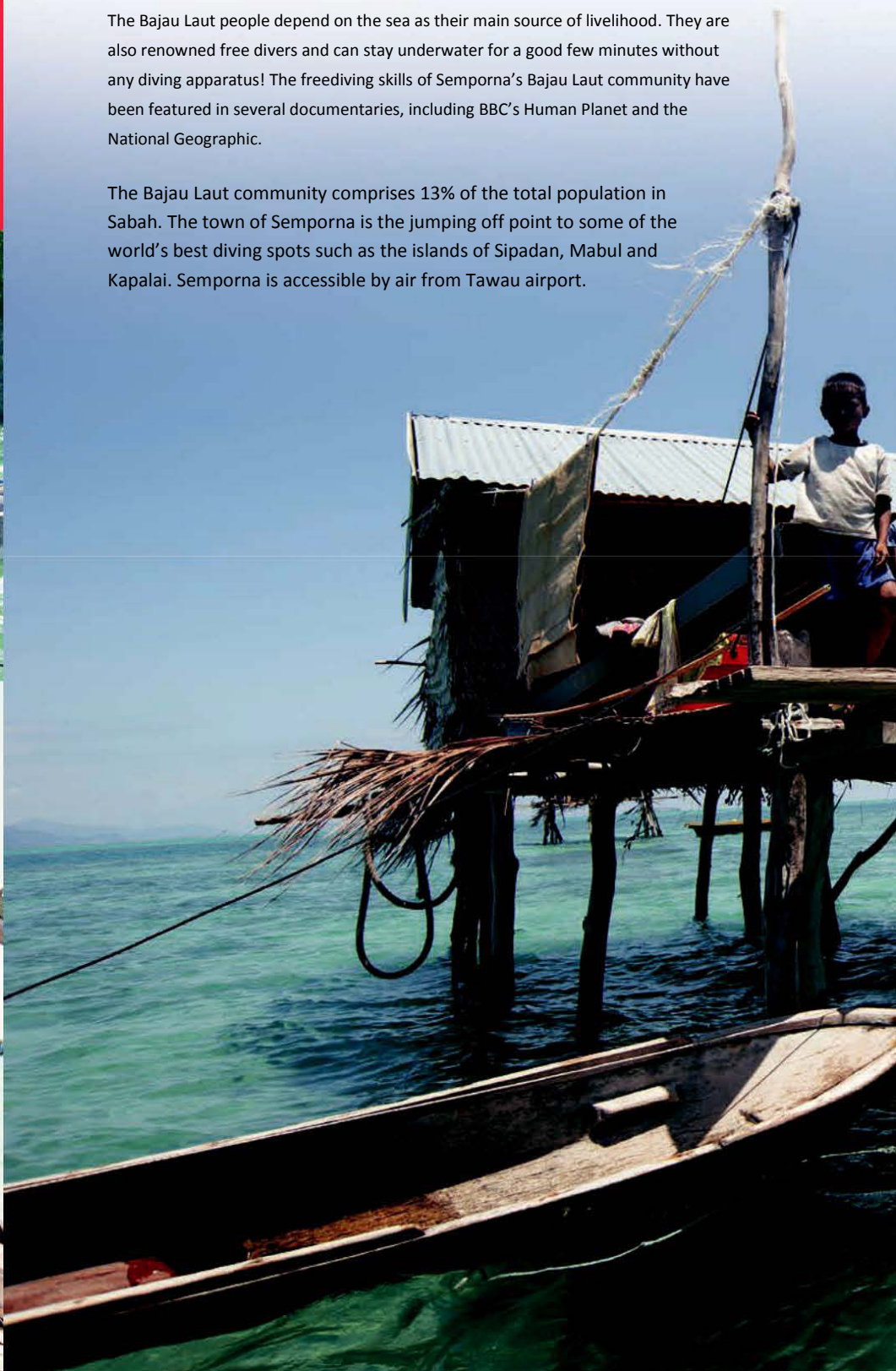
The Sea Gypsies

The seafaring Bajau Laut people of Semporna live predominantly in the waters off the Sulu Sea. They are known as 'sea gypsies' for their nomadic lifestyle.

Set against jungle-clad hills and crystal-clear waters, the floating villages of the Bajau Laut community make for picture-postcard views. The villages are primarily made up of houses on stilts, lapped by the sea water. Boats are the main mode of transport and used by everyone – from children, adults to older folk.

The Bajau Laut people depend on the sea as their main source of livelihood. They are also renowned free divers and can stay underwater for a good few minutes without any diving apparatus! The freediving skills of Semporna's Bajau Laut community have been featured in several documentaries, including BBC's Human Planet and the National Geographic.

The Bajau Laut community comprises 13% of the total population in Sabah. The town of Semporna is the jumping off point to some of the world's best diving spots such as the islands of Sipadan, Mabul and Kapalai. Semporna is accessible by air from Tawau airport.



AN ANCIENT SPORT: REGATTA LEPA

Although Semporna is usually a tranquil fishing village, the atmosphere turns festive and merry during the annual Regatta Lepa. Dating back to the 1900s, this ancient sport pays homage to the *lepa*, or the traditional single mast sailing boat of the Bajau people.

The boats are decorated with carvings and vibrantly decorated sails, making it one of the most awaited events in the region.

As the *lepas* set sail, the sea will be dotted with colourful boats vying for the title of the Most Beautiful Lepa. On board the boats are musicians playing the drum and gongs while a bevy of beauties sway gracefully to the music.

The two-day festival will also feature traditional games, a Lepa Beauty Pageant, cultural performance and fireworks displays.

PLACES TO VISIT

Island-hopping trips can be arranged to water villages and the nearby islands. The most popular places to visit are Pulau Maiga, Pulau Bongaya and Pulau Selakan.



Pulau Bongaya, Semporn



Tree bark processing



Murut

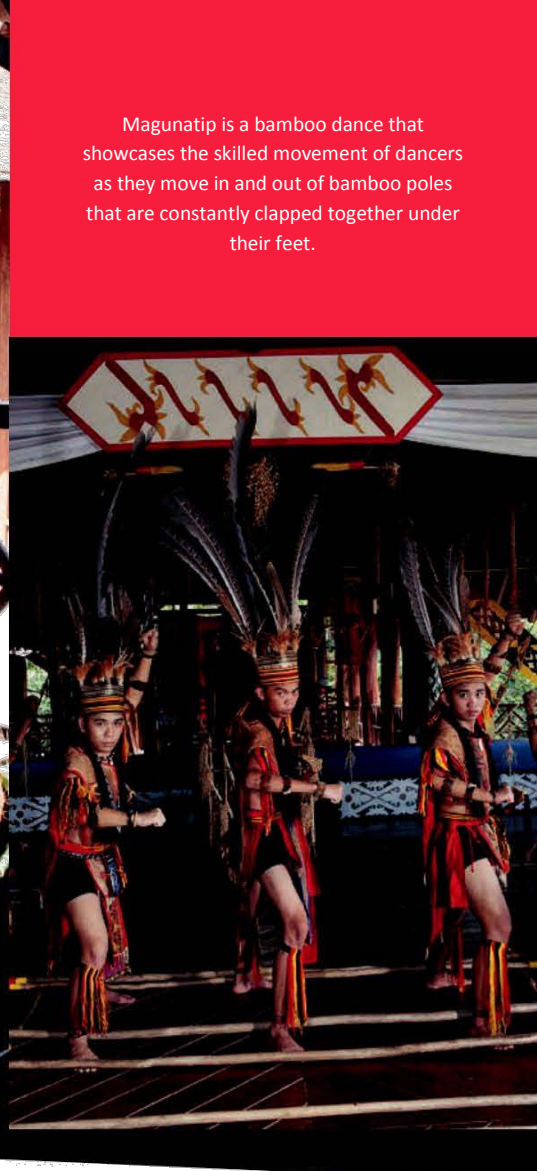
People of the Hills

Meaning 'People of the Hills', the Murut community occupies the southeastern part of Sabah as well as the areas fringing the neighbouring state of Sarawak and Kalimantan in Indonesia. Traditionally, they led a semi-nomadic lifestyle with cultivation, hunting

and riverine fishing being the main sources of livelihood. The Murut community uses Murutic languages with 21 dialects. However, the main Murut dialect that is understood by all is Tanggal.

TIME-HONOURED TRADITIONS

The Murut way of life is governed by distinct traditions. These include traditions of feasting and merrymaking, dressing and funeral rites. Held annually in April or May, the Kalimaran Festival offers a great opportunity to experience the Murut culture and traditions.



Magunatip is a bamboo dance that showcases the skilled movement of dancers as they move in and out of bamboo poles that are constantly clapped together under their feet.

One of the most unique aspects about a Murut gathering is the celebrative spirit. At the very least, a festival or gathering will continue into the wee hours of the morning. When done on a large scale, the merrymaking may stretch up to seven days. Wedding ceremonies last up to a week. Murut people are also said to have an elaborate dowry system, where the groom may have to pay for life.

Equal emphasis is given to rituals associated with death and funeral rites. In the olden days, Murut people honoured the deceased by storing their bodies in a jar. The jar was then placed in a decorated hut, along with the personal effects of the deceased. This custom is rare and hardly practised anymore.

PLACES TO VISIT

Murut Cultural Centre

Covering about 33 acres, the Murut Cultural Centre has galleries that showcase artefacts and designs of the Murut culture. The building reflects the traditional elements of an authentic Murut house. Murut Cultural Centre is situated in Pulong, about 10km from Tenom.





Lundayeh

Courageous yet Gentle

Concentrated around Tenom, Sipitang and Long Pasia, the Lundayeh community is known for its graceful culture and charming arts. There are about 10,000 Lundayeh people in Sabah.

GLORIOUS PAST

In the past, the Lundayeh people were known as valiant fighters and headhunters. Back in the days when headhunting and raids were the norm, an earthen mound would be built in the shape of a crocodile, high on the hill, as a celebration of the tribe's prowess and victory. Some of these mounds still stand to this day in places such as Long Pasia and Long Semadoh.

The dauntless spirit and courage of the Lundayeh community is reflected in the Ulung Buayeh ceremony. During this ceremony, a sword is symbolically placed on a crocodile to show the community's fearless nature in defeating the enemy. The Tugu Buaya or Crocodile Monument is a reminder of the glorious past.

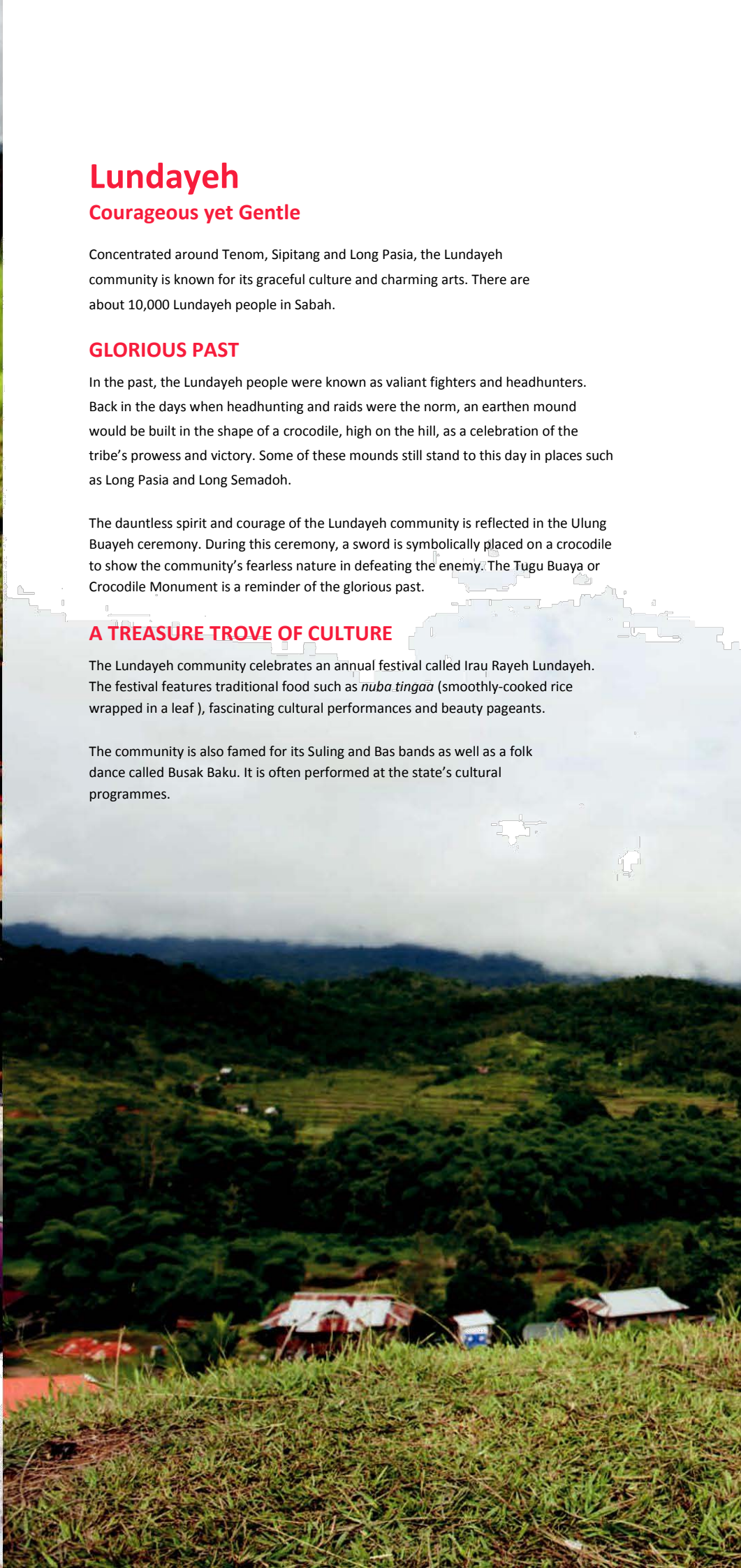
A TREASURE TROVE OF CULTURE

The Lundayeh community celebrates an annual festival called Irau Rayeh Lundayeh. The festival features traditional food such as *nuba tingaa* (smoothly-cooked rice wrapped in a leaf), fascinating cultural performances and beauty pageants.

The community is also famed for its Suling and Bas bands as well as a folk dance called Busak Baku. It is often performed at the state's cultural programmes.



Preparing nuba tingaa, a traditional food





*Paddy Dance performed
by Orang Sungai
Buludupi, Bilit Homestay*



Orang Sungai A Riverine Community

Literally meaning 'River folk', the heartland of the Orang Sungai community is the riverine area of Kinabatangan and Sukau. This is a varied ethnic group with different languages and sub-groups. Traditionally a farming community, Orang Sungai used to depend on the fertile soil around the rivers to grow their vegetable and crops.

HERITAGE AND HEIRLOOMS

Orang Sungai people are talented craftsmen, producing intricate designs on tableware, mats, fabric, attires as well as adornments. Among the popular ones are *serimpak*, which is used to adorn a bride and *sempangan*, a home decorative item.

The traditional dance of the Orang Sungai community is fast-paced and vibrant, with musical instruments such as *kulintangan*, *gabbang kayu*, gong and drums. One unique instrument in the musical ensemble of the Orang Sungai community is the *kecapi*. It is usually played during weddings. The traditional dances range from Runsai, Titikas, Menumpos to Sumarikayau.

PLACES TO VISIT

Bilit Homestay

The Bilit Homestay, situated about 130km from Sandakan, offers a back-to-basic experience amidst the diverse natural attractions of the Kinabatangan area.

Stretching 560km in length, the Kinabatangan river is home to one of the world's most diverse ecosystems. The lower reaches of the river is home to the most varied wildlife in Southeast Asia. Enjoy a boat trip to take in the breathtaking natural attractions.

Other homestay villages in the Kinabatangan area are Balai Kito Moyu Homestay and Moido Waloi Homestay.

In 2005, the Runsai Dance was listed in the Malaysia Book of Records as the Longest Non-stop Runsai Performance in Malaysia. The performance was done continuously for 37 hours with the participation of 500 dancers.

Iranun

Warriors of the Sea

In the local dialect, Iranun means 'loving', a term which refers to the close-knit society. Occupying the area of Kota Belud and Lahad Datu, the Iranun people are also sometimes referred to as Irranun, Illanun, Iranon-Meranao or Merano.

WEAVING A LEGACY

The Iranun people are known for their excellent weaving skills, creating beautiful art pieces known as *mugah*, *siambitan*, *dastar*, *balburu*, *tapak sila* and *ampik*. One of the main tools in weaving is *aulon* or a back-strap loom. Fabric that is weaved by using this method is fashioned as a traditional attire.

The motifs of the *mugah* and *siambitan* fabrics are inspired by the daily lives and culture of the people. Some designs are passed on through generations. The motifs vary from *anunan* (plants), *tuara* (flowers), *daun ubi* (tuber leaf), *kaligowan* (a type of leaf), *unsud* (bamboo shoot), *pinang apat* (betel nut) to *apir* (fan), *siku* (elbow) and many more.

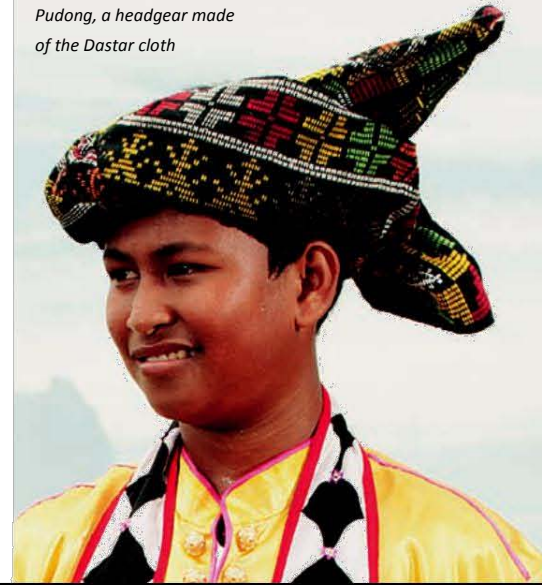
MARITIME WARRIORS

Historically, the Iranun people are touted to be maritime warriors who fiercely defended their waters. Together with the Balingingi community, they raided the Spanish, Dutch and British vessels and were said to have been the biggest enemies of the colonial forces.

PLACES TO VISIT

Weaving Centre (Bengkel Tenunan Kain), Kampung Rampayan Laut, Kota Belud

Pudong, a headgear made of the Dastar cloth





Sarawak Cultural Village

Set amidst 14 acres of sprawling tropical vegetation, Sarawak Cultural Village showcases the heritage of the major ethnic groups in Sarawak. This award-winning attraction depicts the traditional homes of the various races such as Malay house, Iban Longhouse, Orang Ulu Longhouse, Melanau tall house and Penan hut. Visitors can watch cultural performances and experience the lifestyle of the ethnic communities. Sarawak Cultural Village is also the venue for the annual Rainforest World Music Festival and World Harvest Festival. It is situated about 35km from Kuching, in the foothills of the legendary Gunung Santubong.





Iban

The Fearsome Warriors of Yester year

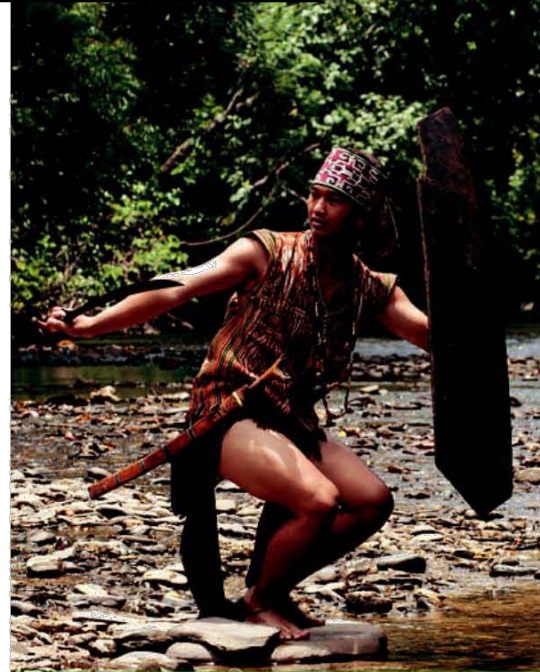
The Iban people were once the legendary warriors of Borneo. They are the largest ethnic group in Sarawak, making up about 30% of the population. The Iban people were feared headhunters who expanded their territories through ferocious battles. However, all that is a thing of the past. In the present day, the community leads a modern life while retaining their heritage and culture. Most people of the Iban community live in a traditional longhouse. An Iban longhouse is divided into three areas – a main hall in the middle called *ruai*, rooms called *bilik* and a verandah called *tanju*. The headman is known as Tuai Rumah.

TREASURED TRADITIONAL TEXTILE

Pua Kumbu is the handwoven *ikat* cloth of the Iban community. The textile has great significance in the life of an Iban - it is used in almost all ceremonies from birth, marriage, funeral, to farming and healing rituals. Representing the quintessence of Iban culture, every Pua Kumbu design tells a story. Its designs weave the tale of spirits, environment, religion or even traditions. Weaving the Pua Kumbu reflects the artistic skill of the weaver, and Iban women are said to be the finest weavers of this textile. The technique is passed from one generation to another and many of the patterns are weaved from memory. In the olden days, before thread was available, the cloth was made with yarn derived from a locally grown plant called *taya*. Dyes were painstakingly obtained from tree barks, roots or plants.

The Iban traditional costume is said to be one of the most unique and difficult to wear. For ladies, the ensemble consists of a *kain pandak* (short skirt) or *kain tating* (weighted skirt), *lampit* (girdle) and *rawai* (a corset belt with silver coins), *marik empang* (a beaded collar), *selampai* (shawl), *sugu tinggi* (headdress) *tenggak pirak* (silver necklace), *tumpa pirak* (silver bracelet), *sabit* (silver or brass chain) and *kelunchong* (anklet).

The gallant Iban warriors don an outfit made up of two pieces. A loincloth called *sirat*, beautifully decorated at the ends and a jacket called *kelambit*. The jacket is adorned with beads, shells and coloured cloth. A head turban called *labong* or a rattan cap with feathers and a shoulder shawl complete the ensemble.



The traditional Pua Kumbu design symbolises a story or reflects the interaction between the weaver and her environment. Pua Kumbu is available as shirts, tablecloth, table runners, women's attire, shawls, decorative pieces, stylish bags, purses and many more.



The Dayak Laut seafarers were dubbed 'the Vikings of the Eastern Seas' by English historian, novelist and travel writer Owen Rutter in his book *The Pirate Wind* (1930).



HOMAGE TO TRADITIONS

Hari Gawai

Hari Gawai or Gawai Dayak is the most important festival in Sarawak. Celebrated over two days on the 1st and 2nd June, Hari Gawai marks the end of the harvest season. This festival is celebrated by Iban, Bidayuh and Orang Ulu communities - Sarawak's native races who are collectively known as Dayak. Hari Gawai's origins are associated with the local folklore when men travelled to the world of the gods and spirits. Essentially a thanksgiving day, Hari Gawai is held to express gratitude for a bountiful harvest and to usher in another year of good harvest. It will be a day to showcase the many varieties of ethnic dishes with free flow of *tuak* or rice wine, lots of merrymaking, as well as display of the local crafts. There will also be beauty contests, games and competitions held to commemorate the event. Miring ceremonies are conducted to appease the spirits.

Miring

Led by elder members of the community or special guests, the Miring ceremony is held to honour the gods, spirits or ancestors. It can also be explained as an offering to the dearly departed members of the community, in order to make a wish or to get their blessings. During the ceremony, a pig or rooster will be sacrificed. Grand scale ceremonies are performed during the Gawai Dayak and Gawai Antu festivals or to welcome important dignitaries.

Ngajat

The traditional dance of the Iban community is known as Ngajat. There are several types of Ngajat - Ngajat Bujang Berani is a warrior dance while Ngajat Ngelalu Pengabang is performed as a welcoming dance. In the olden days, the dance was performed to mark the return of warriors from battles in faraway lands. These days, the dance is performed during festivals such as Hari Gawai and to welcome guests. The male dancers are dressed in a loincloth, with long feathers on their headdress and hold a shield. The ladies wear an elaborate headdress ceremony and an ornate knee-length costume. A dramatic performance, Ngajat showcases agile movements by its dancers.





Tradition of Tattooing

For the Iban community, tattooing is an important ritual in life as it indicates the social status. The Iban men were tattooed to show off their prowess in headhunting and warfare. The Iban women, on the other hand, had tattoos to reflect their artistic skills in weaving or singing.

Traditional tattoos are blue black in colour, made of soot or crushed charcoal. These ingredients are purported to have the power to keep evil spirits away. One of the most popular patterns is *bungai terung*, inspired by the flower of the eggplant. The positioning of the tattoo also carries its own significance and meaning.

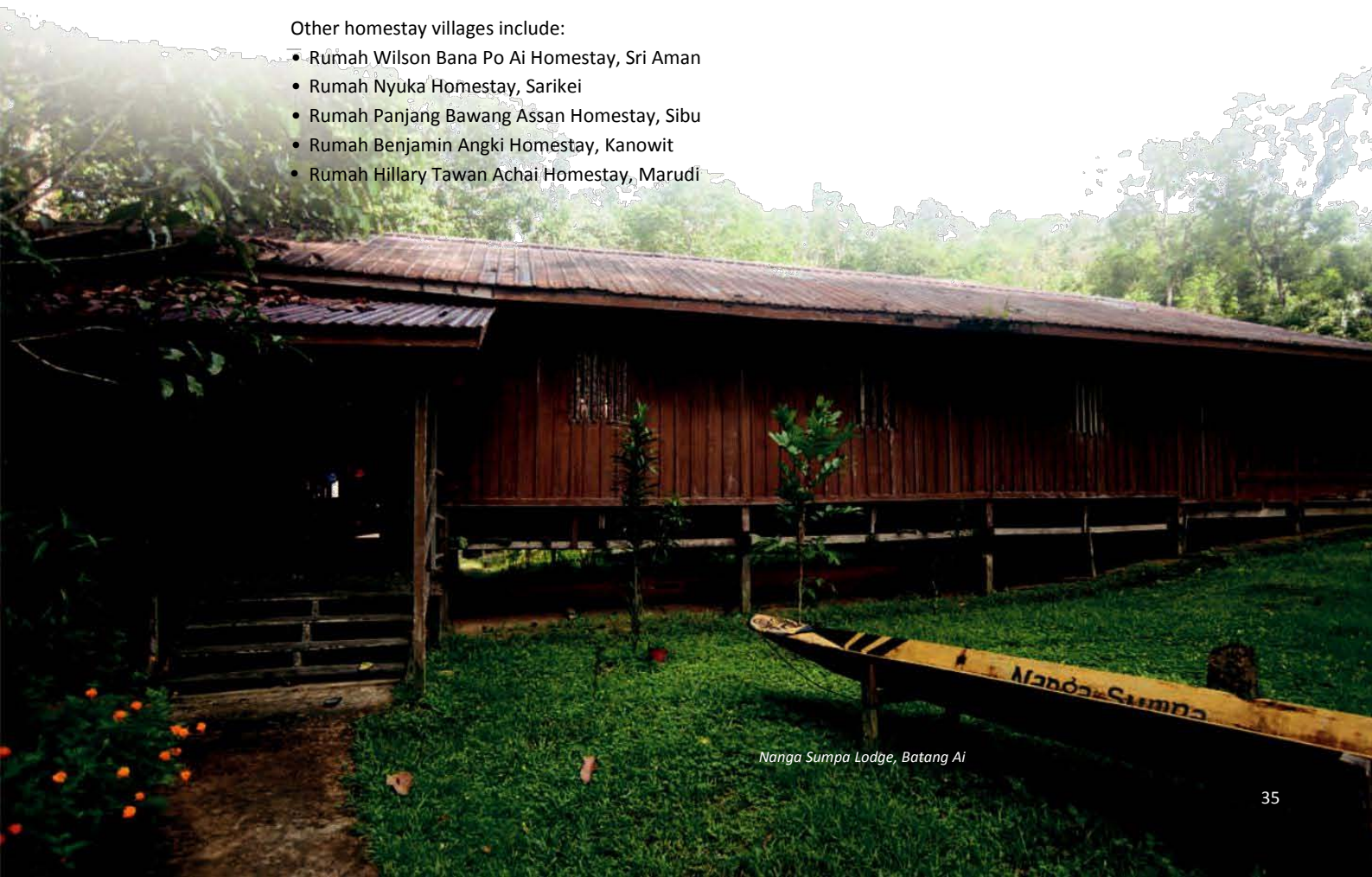
PLACES TO VISIT

Rumah Panjang Patrick Libau

Situated next to the fascinating Niah National Park in Miri, Patrick Libau Longhouse offers a glimpse into the traditional lifestyle of the Iban community. Savour authentic Iban delicacies such as *manok pansoh* (chicken cooked in bamboo tubes), enjoy traditional dance and music and watch activities such as weaving or paddy processing. The longhouse is connected to the Niah National Park Site Office via a 3.5km plank walk.

Other homestay villages include:

- Rumah Wilson Bana Po Ai Homestay, Sri Aman
- Rumah Nyuka Homestay, Sarikei
- Rumah Panjang Bawang Assan Homestay, Sibul
- Rumah Benjamin Angki Homestay, Kanowit
- Rumah Hillary Tawan Achai Homestay, Marudi



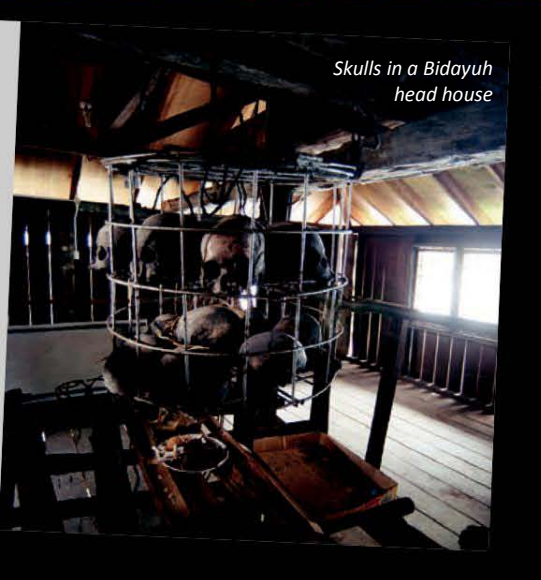
Nanga Sumpa Lodge, Batang Ai



Baruk head house
resembling a pavilion



Skulls in a Bidayuh
head house



Bidayuh

Architects of Baruk Homes

The Bidayuh community is the fourth largest ethnic group in Sarawak, making up about 7.8% of the population. They are found mainly in the southeastern parts of Sarawak – in Lundu, Bau, Padawan, Penrissen and Serian. The traditional Bidayuh settlement was in the interiors and hillsides to protect themselves from enemies and to get access to fresh water.

The Bidayuh community relies heavily on bamboo to create their facilities. Bamboo tubes are used as pipes for irrigation while poles are used to build bridges.

A Bidayuh longhouse is similar to other longhouses and is catered to communal living. However the main entrance to the Bidayuh home is beautiful and unique, resembling a pavilion. This circular structure is known as a head house or Baruk. Baruk has many interesting features; it is the highest point in the village and serves as a lookout tower. It is the congregation point for warriors and an artillery centre where the weapons are stored. Skulls of enemies are hung above the fireplace. Baruk is also a ceremonial centre where gongs and other belongings are kept.

PRIZED POSSESSIONS

The pretty Bidayuh costume for women comprises a knee length skirt called *jomuh*, short sleeved or sleeveless blouse and matching accessories such as *selapai* (a sash), *pangiah* (a beaded necklace), *porik* (a copper belt) and *sipiah* (headgear).

For the Bidayuh men, the costume is made up of *tawuop* (a long loin-cloth with its ends hanging) and the *burang sumba* headgear. The ensemble is completed with a sleeveless vest in white and red stripes. Bidayuh women are adorned by copper bangles. Bangles worn on the hands are called *luyang* while bangles that resemble anklets for the legs are called *lasung*.

PLACES TO VISIT

Annah Rais Longhouse

Situated about 60km from Kuching, this is an authentic Bidayuh settlement housing about 80 families in a traditional longhouse. Visitors have the opportunity to not only visit but stay with a local Bidayuh family and join in their way of life. Enjoy a traditional Bidayuh meal or visit the nearby stream to enjoy a dip in the cool, crystal clear mountain water. There are also guided tours to a beautiful three tiered waterfall. Homestays are equipped with basic but comfortable facilities such as mattress, pillows, fan, etc.

Kampung Darul Islam Belimbing Homestay

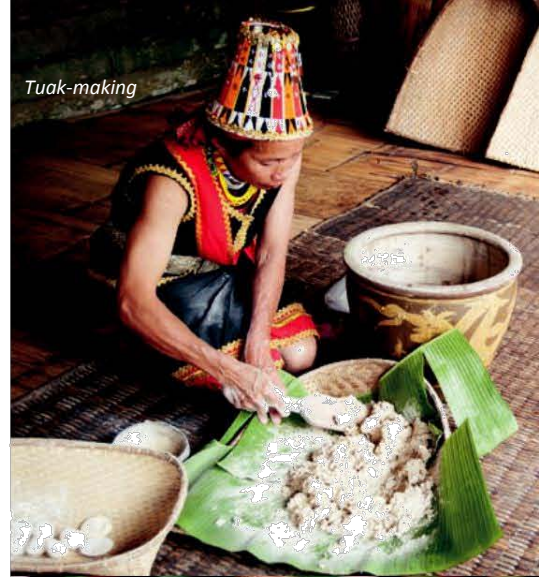
Kampung Darul Islam Belimbing Homestay is the only Bidayuh Muslim homestay in Sarawak. It derives its name from 'belimbing' or starfruit that is found abundantly in the area. Visitors can experience the unique Bidayuh lifestyle while enjoying the

surrounding attractions such as a visit to the Rafflesia site (largest flower in the world), trekking, mountain-climbing and bamboo raft safari.

Visitors can also go on a homestay visit to the following villages:

- Kampung Benuk Homestay, Padawan
- Kampung Senah Rayang Homestay, Padawan
- Kampung Mongkos Homestay, Serian
- Kampung Krokong Homestay, Bau

Tuak-making



Bidayuh people are famed for their decorative baskets and bamboo carvings.



Kampung Darul Islam
Belimbing Homestay

Traditionally, the Melanau people lived close to the sea. The Melanau Tall House is sturdy and built about 40 feet above ground! There are very few of such homes left in the state.



Melanau

Occupants of the Tall House

Occupying the central coastal region, the Melanau community makes up about 5% of Sarawak's population. The heartland of this community is Mukah. Melanau people are known for their distinct traditional homes, raised up to 40 feet above ground. The main structure is linked to the ground via a long timber stairway. It is said that the house was built in such a way to protect themselves from pirates. During an attack, the members of the household would hurry into the house and the timber ladder would be pulled away, giving the occupants a vantage point to defeat their enemies. However, today, the Melanau Tall House is a rare sight and can be seen at the Sarawak Cultural Village.



Creating Versatile Dishes from the Humble Sago

While most of the state's indigenous communities consume rice, the Melanau people consume sago as their staple diet. In fact, the Melanau community has the distinction of being the first to cultivate sago, which was originally found in the wild. The humble sago is used to create a number of delicacies, from main courses to snacks and desserts.

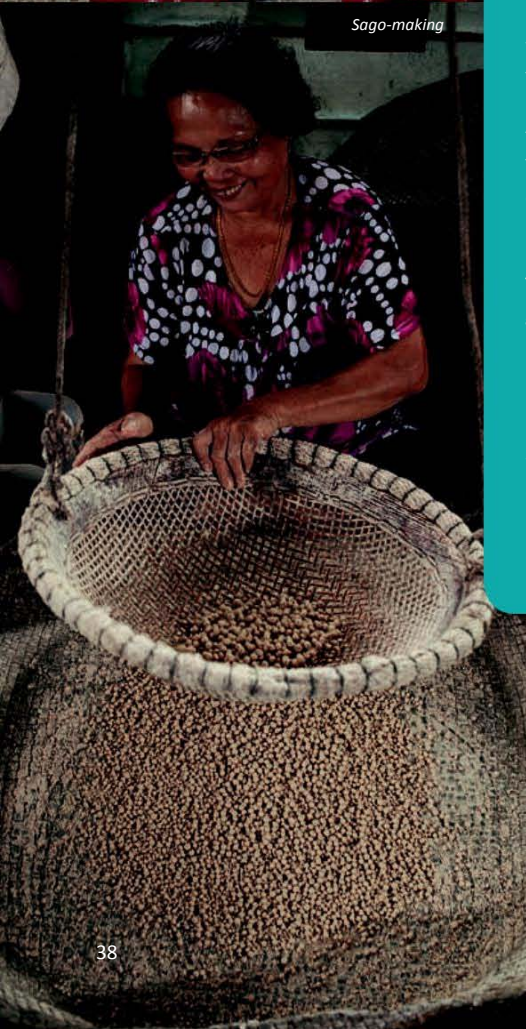
Among the exotic Melanau fare are *umai*, a raw fish salad similar to the Japanese sashimi. It was traditionally taken by fisherfolk going out to sea as it was convenient and ready to eat. Tangy and savoury, the salad consists of raw fish, finely sliced onions and chilli sprinkled with black pepper, salt and lime or tamarind juice. It is usually eaten with a bowl of toasted sago pearls.

The sago worm is another interesting if not unusual delicacy. Found in the sago stumps, these plump, white grubs can be eaten raw or cooked.

If that's not your thing, try *tabaloi*, a dry cracker made of sago powder.

Linut or sago starch is the main fare, commonly available in powder form. It is cooked with hot water and stirred until it turns thick and slightly brown. Although bland by itself, *linut* is tasty when savoured with accompaniments such as fish sauce, cooked vegetables and sambal belacan, a traditional sauce.

For dessert, try the sago pearls with brown sugar, or *tetupek*, which is a dry mixture of sago flour and desiccated coconut. *Bon appetit!*



Sago-making



Umai



Linut



PESTA KAUL

Pesta Kaul is the most important thanksgiving festival for the Melanau community. It is usually held at the end of the northeast monsoon season. In the past, the festival was held to appease all spirits - be it spirits of the sea, land or forest. Pesta Kaul is usually celebrated along the banks of the Mukah river estuary. The week-long ceremony features a variety of traditional food and traditional games. The highlight of the festival is the *serahang* procession, where a flat round basket made from leaves is raised about seven feet high on a bamboo pole and taken around in a procession by community elders. It is then offered to the spirits. The water poured on the offering is also believed to wash away sickness and misfortune.

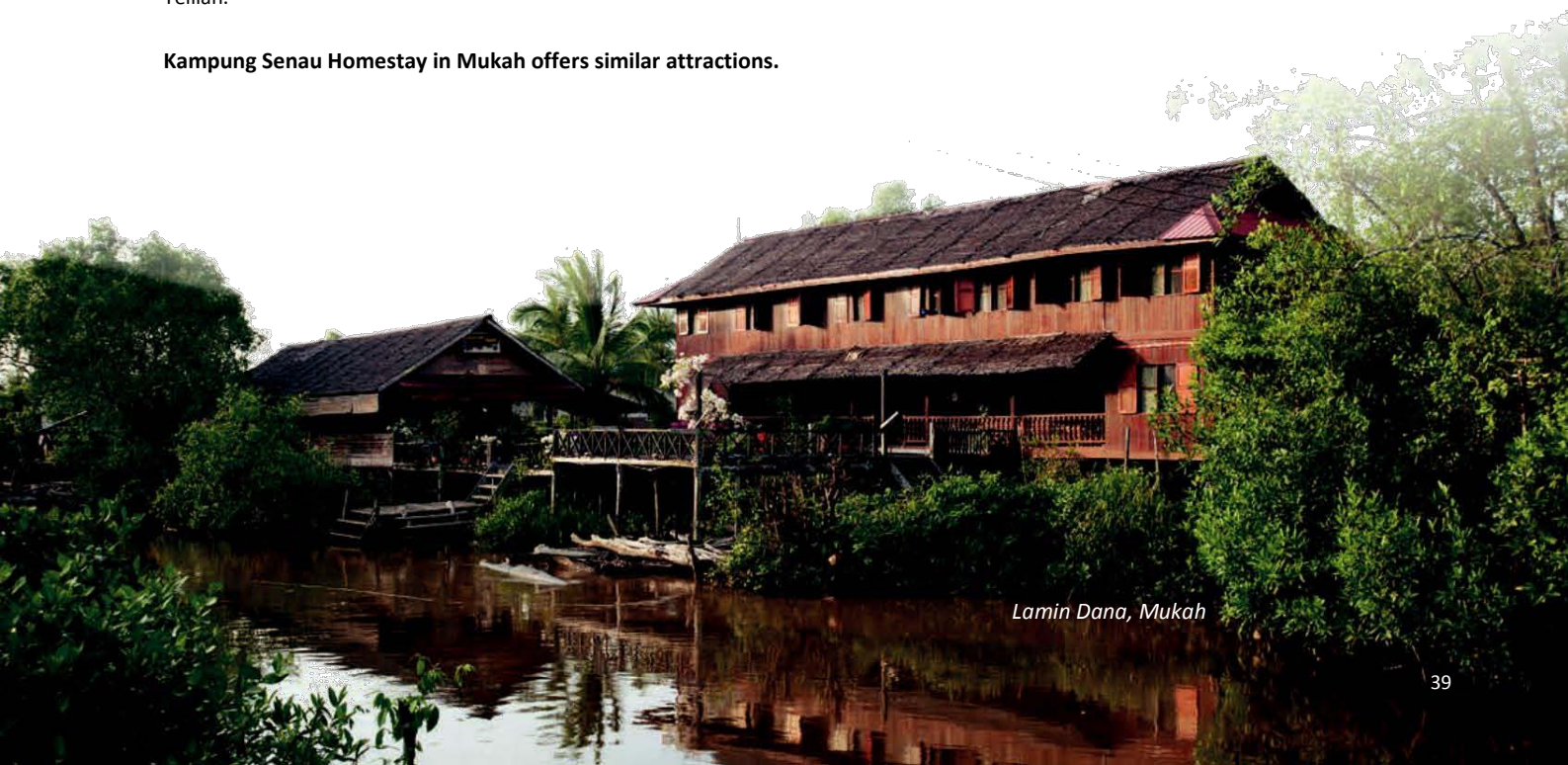
PLACES TO VISIT

Lamin Dana, Mukah

Built to resemble a Melanau Tall House, Lamin Dana is a lodge cum cultural centre. Lamin Dana literally means 'traditional house' in the Melanau dialect. True to its name, this place welcomes visitors as guests and enables them to experience a slice of the Melanau lifestyle. Watch how sago is processed, enjoy cultural performances, learn how the authentic Melanau food is made and savour these delicacies. Visitors can also go on a mangrove cruise or rent a bicycle to explore the scenic surroundings. Lamin Dana is situated at Kampung Tellian.

Kampung Senau Homestay in Mukah offers similar attractions.

Requiring skill and lots of courage, tibau is a traditional game held in conjunction with Pesta Kaul. It takes participants in a gravity defying leap, soaring nearly 30 feet high from a bamboo scaffolding, to catch a swinging rope. Definitely not for those afraid of heights!



Lamin Dana, Mukah

*Nuba Layar,
a traditional food*



Salt-making



Lun Bawang ladies



The Ba'kelalan community is known for its Bamboo band, where local musicians play the flute and bass made of bamboo.

PLACES TO VISIT

Home in the Highlands: Ba'kelalan Homestay

Situated atop the cool Bario Highlands, Ba'kelalan is a group of nine villages tucked away amidst undulating mist-shrouded hilltops and picturesque rice fields. It is one of the most important settlements of the Lun Bawang ethnic group. At about 3,000 feet above sea level, Ba'kelalan has the ideal climate to cultivate a special type of highland rice. The Ba'kelalan Homestay gives a chance to experience the lifestyle here while watching how the locals make their own mountain salt and rice crackers, harvest paddy and produce flutes out of bamboo. One of the most remote settlements in Sarawak, Ba'kelalan is connected by air to the towns of Miri and Lawas. It is about 170km from the nearest town of Lawas and 4km from the Indonesian border.

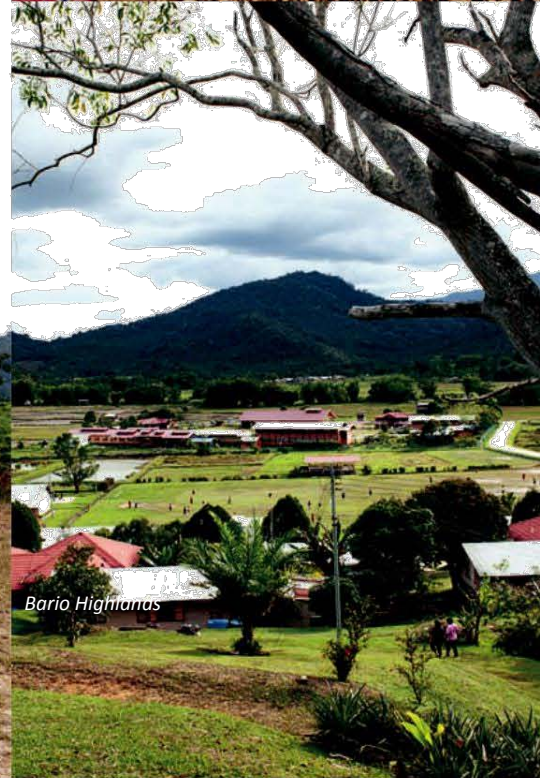
More home-styled experiences await at the Long Semadoh Homestay in Lawas.



Bario Homestay

Amidst the rolling hills of Bario, visitors can experience a slice of the local lifestyle in a totally peaceful environment broken only by the sound of cockerel, bamboo bells and church bells. Enjoy fragrant Bario rice with freshly picked vegetables that grow abundantly, without the use of chemicals or pesticides. Listen to the melody of sape or explore the wilderness by jungle-trekking, river cruising or mountain climbing. Bario Homestay will give you the experience unlike any other, away from the beaten track.

Uma Belor Homestay in Belaga is another homestay village with a rustic charm.





LABUAN

Labuan is a beautiful island in the South China Sea, situated about 8km off the coast of Sabah. Labuan comprises one main island and six smaller islands. It is dubbed as 'The Pearl of Borneo, Where Business and Leisure Meet' for the wide range of facilities that cater to incentive holidays. Boasting mesmerising dive sites, water villages, duty-free shopping and historical attractions. Labuan is a unique destination.

BRUNEI-MALAY

The largest ethnic group here is Brunei-Malay, who make up half of the population. Brunei-Malay people are Muslims and speak Brunei-Malay.

The traditional dance of the Brunei-Malay community is known as Adai-Adai. This folk dance describes the story of fisherfolk and farmers by using props such as boat paddles, fishermen's hats, fishing nets and baskets. The dance is accompanied by traditional musical instruments such as *dombak*, gong, *rebana* and violin.

KEDAYAN

Labuan's population is also made up of the Kedayan community. One of the main attractions of this community is the traditional dance called Anding. There are three types of Anding dance – Anding Rimba, Anding Mambang and Anding Biasa. The dance is accompanied by musical instruments such as *rebana* (a giant drum), violin as well as other instruments named *tangkung* and *guritik*. In the past, the dance was performed as part of a healing ritual. These days the dance is performed during weddings and other ceremonies.

KEEPING TRADITIONS ALIVE

The traditional pastimes of the Labuan people include *gasing* (spinning top) and bird-catching. Spinning top was a game that kept the people occupied after the harvesting season and it was usually played in groups. Till this day, this activity still enjoys popularity and has a strong following. There are two types of spinning top – *gasing pusing* and *gasing pangkah*. Out of the two, the latter is usually played in competitions.

Brunei has its fair share of signature culinary delights, such as *pais udang* (spicy prawns in banana leaves) and *pulut panggang* (grilled glutinous rice wrapped in banana leaves). For those with a sweet tooth, try the jelly-like *punjung* or *jelurut*, a mixture of sugar, rice flour and coconut milk.

WATER VILLAGES

Water villages are a common sight in Labuan. There are three water villages; Kampung Patau-Patau I and II, Kampung Ranza-Ranza and Kampung Bebuluh Laut. The houses are built on stilts and connected by a series of boardwalks.

PLACES TO VISIT

Malaysia's Only Water Village Homestay

Labuan has the distinction of having Malaysia's only water village homestay, known as Kampung Patau Patau 2. This is one of the last remaining water village homestays in Malaysia. The villagers are descendants of fisherfolk, sailors and traders from neighbouring Brunei who settled here many generations ago. Other places to visit include Homestay Sungai Labu and Homestay Bukit Kuda.



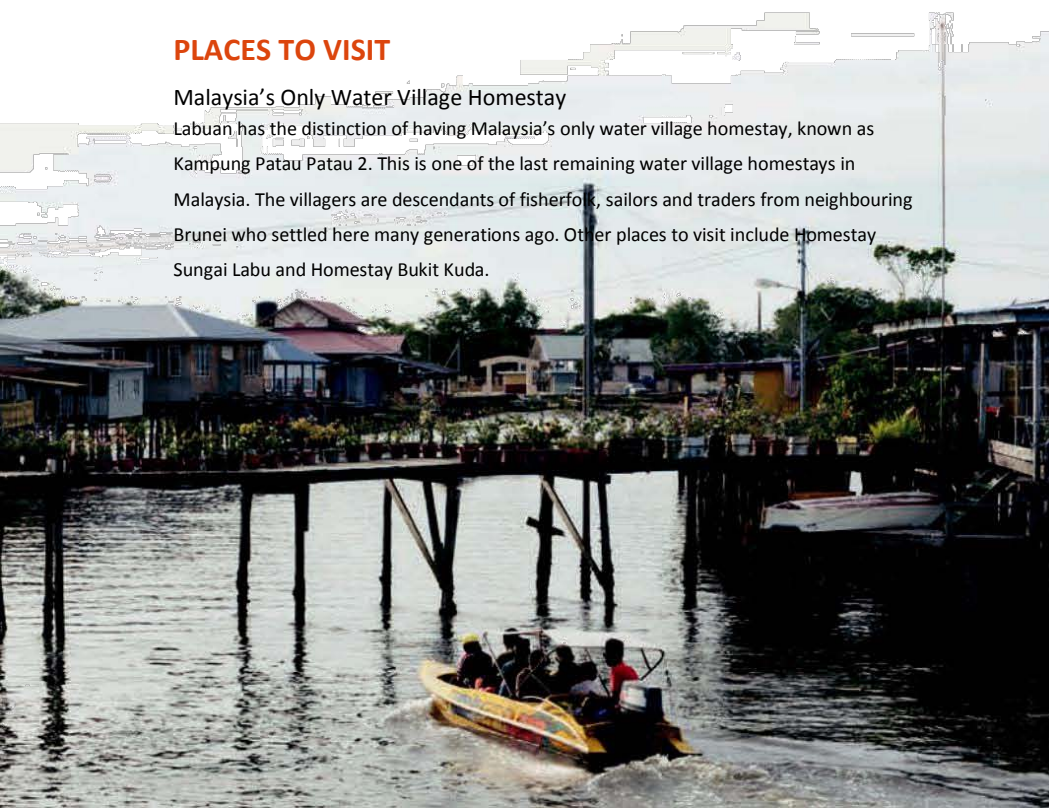
In the years 2000 and 2001, Labuan was crowned as the Champion of the national-level Gasing Pangkah Championship.



Panjung baas, a traditional Kedayan delicacy



Visitors can enjoy the novel experience of living in the water village and getting around in a water taxi.





ORANG ASLI

The Aboriginal People of Peninsular Malaysia

Peninsular Malaysia is the site of the country's main entry point, Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). It is also where the capital city of Kuala Lumpur is located. Peninsular Malaysia thrives with attractions such as Johor, the southern gateway, Melaka and Penang, two UNESCO World Heritage Cities and Langkawi, a UNESCO Global Geopark.

Peninsular Malaysia offers a fascinating gamut of aboriginal experiences. The natives who live on the peninsular are known as Orang Asli or the 'first people' of the land. These early dwellers have a strong and deep interaction with the rainforest, rivers, coasts, mountains and hills. They live in perfect harmony with the nature and environment.



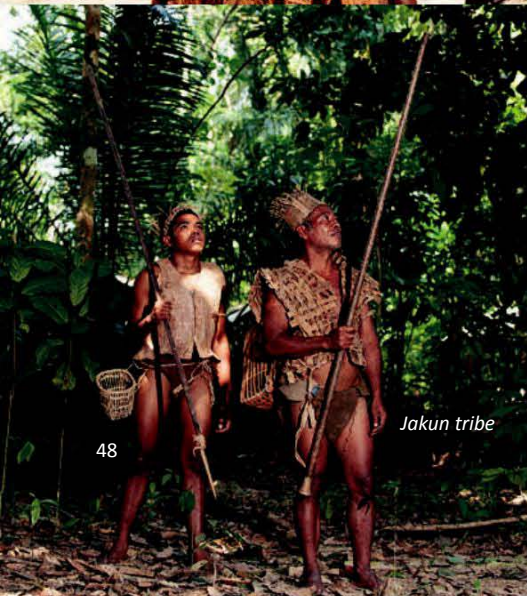
Sewang ruai, a ritualistic dance by the Semai community in Kampung Gabang, Pahang

During the Communist Insurgency in Malaya, the British colonial authorities established a special force known as Senoi Praaq Army. It comprises Orang Asli troopers who operated in the jungles to combat the communists. In the present day, Senoi Praaq Army is still serving and deployed for special missions.

Raft-making



*Jahut
tribe*



Jakun tribe

It is interesting to note that although known by the same name, Orang Asli is not a homogenous group, but a collective term for a heterogeneous community with different languages, dialects, customs and traditions.

Differing from the ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak, the Orang Asli communities in Peninsular Malaysia are not associated with battles or conquests. Gentle, withdrawn and shy, these aboriginal people traditionally depended on cultivation and jungle produce. However, with education and modernisation, the younger generation is now employed in urban areas.

The largest Orang Asli population is found in Perak, Kelantan and Pahang. Although they led a nomadic lifestyle in the past, these days many live in permanent settlements called Kampung Orang Asli or Orang Asli Villages that has been established by JAKOA (Department of Orang Asli Development).

There are three main groups of Orang Asli - Senoi, Negrito and Melayu-Proto – each with six sub-groups. Believe it or not, there are 18 different languages, customs and traditions to be experienced in Peninsular Malaysia alone!

Senoi

Possessing a history dating back to 500 years, The Senoi people are believed to have migrated from Indo China through Thailand. The Senoi sub-groups consist of Semai, Temiar, Jahut, Che Wong, Mah Meri and Semoq Beri.

Negrito

Tracing their origins to 8,000 years ago, the Negrito people are believed to have migrated to the Malay Peninsular through Indo China. Some anthropologists are still debating that they are from South Africa. The Negrito communities are made up of Kensiu, Kintak, Jahai, Lanoh, Mendriq and Bateq sub groups.

Melayu Proto or Melayu Asli

Believed to have arrived in the Malay Peninsular as early as the 1800s, the Melayu Proto people are said to have hailed from Sumatera and Riau Lingga in Indonesia. The sub-groups are Temuan, Semelai, Jakun, Kanaq, Kuala and Seletar. Melayu Proto is said to have many similarities to the Malays. They mainly inhabit the central region of Peninsular Malaysia, in the states of Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Selangor and some parts of Johor.

Authentic Mah Meri crafts which are purchased at the Cultural Village or National Museum bear the UNESCO Seal of Excellence and come with a certificate.

Mah Meri Community of Selangor The Masked Men of Malaysia

Mah Meri is one of most well-known Orang Asli communities in Malaysia.

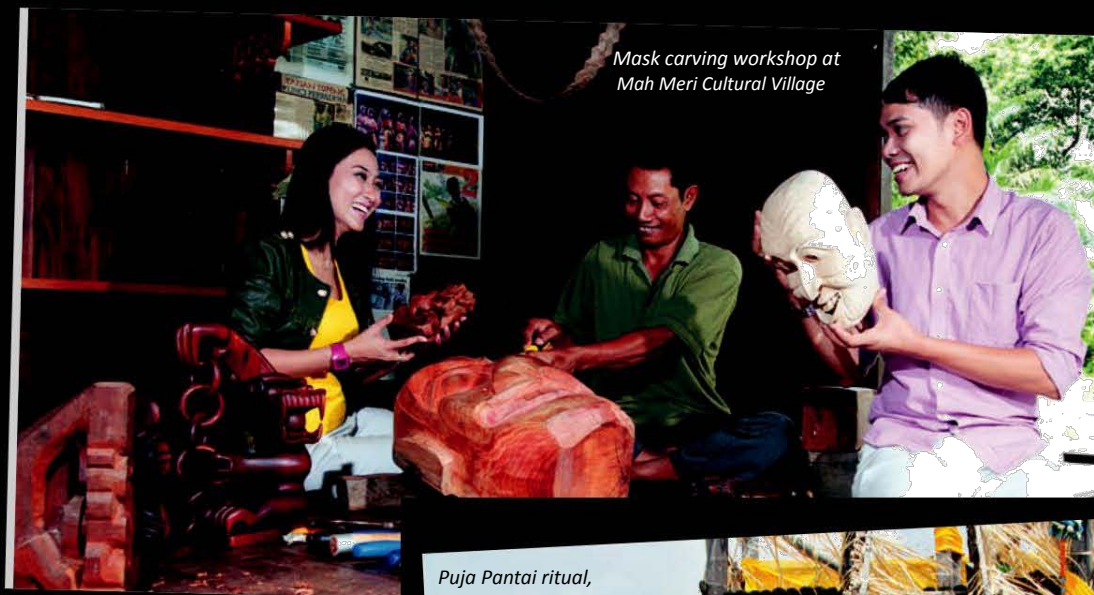
Mah Meri is a sub-group of the Senoi tribe who live in a village called Kampung Bumbun, Pulau Carey in Selangor about 60km from the capital city. They are famed for their carved wooden masks that are fashioned out of a rare red swampwood called Nyireh Batu. Every piece has a story behind it and is related to their ancestral legend.

The Mah Meri community celebrates a number of rituals and festivals throughout the year. One of the most important is the Ancestors Day (Hari Moyang) which is celebrated on a grand scale.





The ritualistic Main Jo-oh Dance



Mask carving workshop at Mah Meri Cultural Village



Puja Pantai ritual, Pulau Carey

PLACES TO VISIT

- Mah Meri Cultural Village, Pulau Carey, Selangor
- Orang Asli Craft Gallery, National Museum, Kuala Lumpur
- JAKOA Craft Centre, Sungai Bumbun, Selangor
- JAKOA Orang Asli Museum, Gombak, Selangor



Sewang ritual



Traditional Orang Asli home

Jahai Community of Royal Belum Sungai Tiang, Gerik, Perak

Embraced by the pristine Royal Belum Park and fringing the sprawling Lake Temengor, lies the Orang Asli Village of Sungai Tiang. Inhabited by the Jahai people, the settlement is an enclave of unspoilt nature and peaceful, scenic surroundings. The quietness of the lake is broken only by the chirping of birds and the occasional sound of motorboats.

For a relaxing stay, guests can check-in at Kem Pelancongan Sungai Tiang, a modest, jungle lodge that is situated overlooking the village. Life goes on in an unhurried pace here, immersed in the quiet calmness of the lake and the beauty of the rainforest. Through packaged tours, guests will be able to watch how the aboriginal people make bamboo rafts, cook rice and chicken in hollowed bamboo tubes and perform the ritualistic *sewang* dance.

Houseboats are another popular option for those who wish to take in the idyllic beauty of the majestic Royal Belum rainforest and Lake Temengor at a leisurely pace.





Chicken and rice in bamboo tubes, cooked over wooden fire



Kem Pelancongan Sungai Tiang is tucked away in the Upper Belum area which is also an Important Bird Area (IBA). The resort is about 30 minutes by boat from the Pengkalan Aman Jetty. The gateway to the jetty is the small town of Gerik, situated about 45km away. All visits to Upper Belum require permits from the park authorities.

Other settlements of the aboriginal people are situated in Sungai Kejar and Batang Padang.

PLACES TO VISIT

- Kem Pelancongan Sungai Tiang, Gerik, Perak
- Orang Asli Village, Sungai Kejar, Gerik, Perak
- Orang Asli Village, Batang Padang, Perak

Royal Belum Park is situated in the northernmost corner of Perak, covering an area of 175,500 hectares. This forest has remained untouched for the last 130 million years.





Bateq Community of Taman Negara Kampung Jeram Dedari, Pahang

Taman Negara is Malaysia's premier national park. The 434,350 hectare park is mainly located in the state of Pahang but extends into Kelantan in the north and Terengganu to the east.

The forest is 130 million years old, making it one of the oldest in the world. It was already flourishing when the earth's tectonic plates were still shifting to form the continents that we know now. Taman Negara contains almost all types of forest habitats found in Malaysia. Virtually all of Peninsular Malaysia's large mammal species are found within the vast wilderness. And within this magnificent forest, are the Bateq people of Pahang.

The Jeram Dedari Orang Asli Settlement is only 30 minutes away from the Taman Negara Jetty. Access to the isolated village is only by boats via Jeram Dedari or the Dedari Rapids. Traditionally a nomadic tribe, the Bateq people now reside permanently in the settlement.

Although a small village, the Jeram Dedari settlement is not short on attractions. The Bateq women sell crafts (combs, bracelets and other accessories) made from bamboo while the shy aboriginal children giggle and watch the visitors with curious glances. The men share their survival skills – such as using the blowpipe and creating fire the traditional way using rattan and dried leaves.

Tour packages to the Bateq settlement is available for visitors to Taman Negara. Travellers can walk along the world's longest canopy walkway that spans 400 metres, go jungle-trekking, or even go mountain climbing at the nearby Gunung Tahan.

Other Orang Asli settlements in the state are in Kampung Sungai Ruil in Cameron Highlands and Gabang.

PLACES TO VISIT

- Orang Asli Village, Kampung Sungai Ruil, Cameron Highlands, Pahang
- Kampung Jeram Dedari, Kuala Tahan, Pahang
- Kampung Sungai Kiol, Jerantut, Pahang

Sewang nitsoi, a healing ritual by the Jahut tribe at the nearby Kampung Sungai Kiol, Jerantut





Semai Community of Kampung Kabang Baru Kuala Lipis, Pahang

The Semai people typically occupy the central areas of Pahang and Perak, along Malaysia's Main Range. They are one of the larger communities and make up almost a quarter of Peninsular Malaysia's Orang Asli population.

The Semai community is described as a very peaceful community that shuns violence. In the village of Kabang Baru in Kuala Lipis, the Semai community is known for its crafts, traditional dance and nose flutes. Kampung Kabang Baru has about 169 residents. Like other Orang Asli communities, the main economic activities of the Semai people are farming and hunting. Some grow mountain rice, tapioca and maize.

The main festival celebrated by this community is known as Hari Genggulang.

PLACES TO VISIT

Orang Asli Museum, Jeli, Kelantan
Kelantan, the neighbouring state, is famed as the Cradle of Malay Culture. Among the state's attractions are the Orang Asli Museum, a great place to learn about the Orang Asli communities. The museum is situated in Jeli, the site of the famous Stong Waterfall and Jeli Hot Springs.

Nose flute



Sewang nyak nyik ritual



According to local legend, the name Kampung Peta was derived during the World War 2. As the British and the aboriginal people were trekking through the forest, they found a map that was believed to mark the location of a hidden treasure placed by the Japanese. The village was henceforth named Kampung Peta which translates to 'Map Village' in English.



Rattan products
as souvenirs



Jakun Community of Endau Rompin Kampung Peta, Endau Rompin, Johor

Straddling the border between southern Pahang and northern Johor, Endau-Rompin National Park is one of the most undisturbed lowland forests in the country. The park derives its name from the Endau River and its tributaries, which are the central feature of the park, as well as Rompin in the state of Pahang. It is the second designated national park in Peninsular Malaysia.

The park's remote wilderness is a refuge for a plethora of plants and animals including endemic species.

Endau-Rompin is home to the Orang Asli of the Jakun tribe. Their settlement, Kampung Peta, is situated near the park's entry point. However, it is only accessible via a four-wheel drive. The Jakun people have a unique culture and some interesting rituals. Watch the traditional game of *kercang* or purchase authentic handmade craft items such as mats, baskets and bags fashioned out of pandanus leaves.

The Jakun tribe celebrate a day called Hari Orang Asal or Aborigines Day. The occasion calls for a ritualistic bath at a sacred waterfall situated nearby, followed by merrymaking, dancing and feasting. The gateway to Kampung Peta is the small town of Kahang.

PLACES TO VISIT

Orang Asli Museum, Ayer Keroh, Melaka

Situated to the north of Johor, Melaka is known for its historical attractions. Melaka is also the site of the Orang Asli Museum, a treasure trove of all things aboriginal. Housed in a building that is a typical example of an aboriginal house, the museum showcases a wealth of artefacts relating to the Orang Asli. Its five galleries display an interesting range of information from the aboriginal dwellings, agricultural tools, weapons to ritualistic items. The museum is just 2km away from the Ayer Keroh toll and situated beside the Crocodile Farm.









A Practical Guide

- Contrary to common notion, the indigenous and aboriginal people of Malaysia are not dangerous. Many are urbanised and lead a modern lifestyle. However, they still uphold their cultural identity and preserve their tribal customs.
- Centuries ago, the Iban were known as sea-marauders. Today, the Iban people have shed that image and would greet visitors with gentle smiles and genuine hospitality.
- The indigenous and aboriginal people are like any other Malaysian, but have a deeper bonding with nature and the environment. Visitors are advised to be attentive and respect the local customs.
- Some places (such as mountains, waterfalls and jungles) are considered sacred by the indigenous people. Always adhere to the local etiquette at these places.
- Malaysia prohibits nudity in public places. Visitors who enjoy bathing in the rivers or waterfalls are encouraged to wear a *sarong*, pareo or a non-revealing costume.
- In villages, the community Headman is a respected figure. Visitors are advised to address the headman with respect too.
- The indigenous and aboriginal people live in traditional dwellings that vary in shape and design. The dwellings range from Iban longhouses, to water villages and Orang Asli settlements. Most dwellings today are equipped with modern facilities.
- Shoes must be removed before entering a house.
- Visitors who wish to decline food or drinks that are offered may do so politely by touching the glass or plate gently with their right hand.
- Many members of the indigenous and aboriginal community wear practical clothes such as jeans or t-shirts. They don their traditional costumes and headgears during special occasions and ceremonies.
- Traditionally, the indigenous and aboriginal people used to hunt or gather jungle produce for their living. Today, many are employed.
- In Peninsular Malaysia, the dwellings of the aboriginal people are not too far from the main towns and are easily accessible. In Sabah and Sarawak, the villages are tucked away at more remote locations. Logistics can be arranged through tour operators.
- To make the most of a visit and to respect the privacy of the natives, visitors are advised to make prior arrangements with tour operators or authorised agents. Walk-ins to the dwellings and settlements are not encouraged for practical reasons.
- For FIT travellers, there are numerous cultural villages, museums and living museums around the country. Call the Tourist Information Centres for details or check the websites for further information.
- Muslim visitors are advised to find out from tour operators on the availability of *halal* food.
- Visitors are discouraged from giving out money to the aboriginal people or sea gypsy children. Visitors who wish to bring gifts can consider other options such as packets of uncooked rice. Gifts should be given to the headman who will distribute the items to his community.
- Last but not least, those who are in an organised tour are advised to always follow the guide's instruct

MALAYSIA AT A GLANCE

COUNTRY

The federation of Malaysia comprises Peninsular Malaysia, which is made up of 11 states, three Federal Territories as well as the states of Sabah and Sarawak situated in Borneo.

CAPITAL CITY

Kuala Lumpur

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Lying 2° to 7° north of the Equator, Peninsular Malaysia is separated from Sabah and Sarawak by the South China Sea. The Peninsular shares a common border with Thailand in the north, while its southern neighbour is Singapore. Sabah and Sarawak share a common border with Indonesia while Sarawak also shares a border with Brunei Darussalam.

AREA

329,758 sq km

POPULATION

28 million

PEOPLE

Malays make up about 57% of the population, with Chinese, Indians and other ethnic groups making up the rest.

LANGUAGE

Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) is the national language but English is widely spoken. Malaysians also speak various languages and dialects.

RELIGION

Islam is the official religion but all other religions are practised freely.

GOVERNMENT

Malaysia practices parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. The Head of State is the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and the Head of Government is the Prime Minister. The country has a bicameral legislative system.

CLIMATE

Malaysia has a tropical climate and the weather is warm all year round. Temperatures range from 21°C to 32°C and the annual rainfall varies from 2,000 mm to 2,500 mm.

ECONOMIC PROFILE

Manufacturing constitutes the largest component of Malaysia's economy while tourism and primary commodities such as petroleum, palm oil, natural rubber and timber are major contributors to its economy.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Visitors must be in possession of a valid passport or travel document with a minimum validity of six months beyond the intended visiting period. Citizens of most countries do not require visas for social or business visits. For further information, please visit or call the nearest Malaysian diplomatic mission or Tourism Malaysia office.

CURRENCY

The unit of currency is the Malaysian Ringgit, which is denoted as RM. Foreign currencies can be converted at banks and money changers.

WORKING DAYS

Most states observe Monday to Friday as working days while Saturday and Sunday are rest days. In the states of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu, working days are from Sunday to Thursday. Friday and Saturday are observed as rest days. This applies to government offices and many private establishments.

BANKING HOURS

In most states, banks are open from Monday to Friday from 9.15 am to 4.30 pm. In Kelantan and Terengganu, banks are closed on Friday and Saturday. Check the websites of the relevant banks for details on operating hours and rest days. Online banking services are available.

POST OFFICES

Post offices are open from 8.30 am to 5.00 pm daily except on Sunday and public holidays. They are open for half-a-day on Saturday (until 1.00 pm). Post offices that are located in shopping malls have extended operating hours. In the states of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu, post offices are closed on Friday and Saturday.

TIME

The standard Malaysian time is eight hours ahead of GMT and 16 hours ahead of the U.S. Pacific Standard Time.

ELECTRICITY

The voltage used throughout Malaysia is 220 - 240 volts AC, at 50 cycles per second. Standard 3-pin square plugs and sockets are used.

MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

Malaysia uses the metric system.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Malaysia is linked nationally and internationally by telephone, facsimile and via the Internet. Most hotels provide International Direct Dial (IDD) telephone services and Wi-Fi Internet connection.

GETTING TO MALAYSIA

The main gateway to Malaysia is through the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang. It is located about 50 km south of Kuala Lumpur. Over 40 international airlines fly into the country while the national carrier, Malaysia Airlines, has a global network that spans six continents. The airline is a full-fledged member of oneworld, one of the world's top three airline alliances. The national carrier is complemented by its subsidiary, Firefly and the budget airline, AirAsia. Rayani Air is Malaysia's first Syariah-compliant airline. It is based in Langkawi and serves various destinations; KLIA2, Langkawi, Kota Bharu, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching. The new KLIA 2, situated about 1.5 km away from the main terminal of KLIA, is the world's largest purpose-built terminal dedicated to low-cost carriers. Airlines that operate from KLIA2 include AirAsia, AirAsia X and Malindo Air. Other major international airports that serve as entry points are situated in Penang, Johor Bahru, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and the island of Langkawi. The main entry point to Malaysia by sea is Port Klang, about 50 km away from Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia is also accessible by rail and road from Singapore and Thailand.

GETTING AROUND

Malaysia has excellent domestic air links serviced by Malaysia Airlines as well as carriers such as AirAsia and Firefly. The country has a well-developed and efficient public transportation system served by buses, taxis as well as trains.

ACCOMMODATION

Malaysia has a wide range of accommodation with competitive rates. International star-rated hotels, boutique hotels, beach resorts, chalets, youth hostels and timeshare apartments are among the types of accommodation available.



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