

# Sarawak Visitor's Guide

## Sibu

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**SIBU & CENTRAL SARAWAK**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Note:** The area code for all telephone numbers in Sibul and its surroundings, unless otherwise stated, is 084 from outside the area and +6084 from overseas. All addresses are 93500 Sibul unless otherwise stated.

Sibul is the largest port and commercial centre in the Rejang Basin and the gateway to Central Sarawak. Located at the confluence of the Rejang and Igan Rivers, approximately 130 km from the South China Sea, Sibul is a thriving modern town with a vibrant centre and a bustling, crowded waterfront.

To visitors, Sibul feels more down-to-earth than relaxed Kuching. There is still something of the pioneer style about the town, and its people are direct, plain-speaking and assertively friendly. Of course, their smiles may be partly due to the belief that Sibul has more millionaires per capita than any other city in Borneo.

The mighty Rejang, almost a mile (1,600 km) wide, is the dominant feature of the town, and a room with a river view is highly recommended for vibrant impressions of waterfront life. The river is a source of constant activity, with ocean-going vessels manoeuvring delicately between speeding express boats, battered river launches and tiny sampans. Rejang sunsets can be truly spectacular.

Sibul is not only fascinating in its own right; with its excellent road, air and river transport links it is also the ideal jumping-off point for exploring the whole Rejang Basin, from the coastal town of Mukah to the furthest reaches of the Upper Rejang, over 600km upriver.

**People**

The residents of Sibul are predominantly Foochow Chinese, originating from the Fuzhou region of southern China, and the town is often referred to as New Fuzhou. However Sibul's ethnic mix is as varied as anywhere else in Borneo, with smaller proportions of other Chinese dialect groups - as well as Malays, Melanau, Ibans and Orang Ulu - making the town their home.

**History**

Until the beginning 19th century, Sibul was a sleepy trading settlement in the lower Rejang area, named for the rambutan fruits (*buah sibul* in the Iban language)



that grew locally. The only significant population was a Melanau village at nearby Kampung Nangka.

Sibul's transformation began in 1901 with the arrival of Foochow settlers from southern China, led by the Reverend Wong Nai Siong. Rev. Wong, a Methodist missionary sought to find a safe haven for his followers, who were subject to religious persecution in China. He petitioned Charles Brooke, the 2nd Rajah of Sarawak, who offered land in the Lower Rejang to develop Sarawak's agriculture. The first batch of 72 pioneers arrived in 1901, and by 1903 over 1,000 Christian Foochows had made their homes in Sibul. They were later followed by sizeable groups of Henghuas and Cantonese during the 1st World War period.

The early Chinese settlers planned to cultivate rice, but found that the soil was unsuitable for profitable rice farming and turned their attention to pepper, rubber and gambier (a sticky resin formerly used in place of rubber). Despite famine, fever, floods and other hardships, the early settlers eventually made their new home a success. They were capably led by the determined Rev. Wong, ably assisted by the Hoovers, an American missionary couple who played a major role in the development of Methodism in Sarawak.

By the mid-1920s Sibul had the appearance of a fully fledged town. However disaster struck in 1928, when a major fire destroyed almost all of Sibul's predominantly wooden buildings. The hardy settlers simply picked up their tools and built the town all over again, but Sibul was once more devastated, this time by Allied bombing, during the WWII Japanese Occupation. Hundreds of local people were killed, not only by the bombing but also by savage Japanese repression of the local Chinese community, who were firm supporters of Chinese independence.

# CENTRAL SARAWAK

South China Sea



Sibu's recovery began in the early 1950s, with the advent of mechanised logging. The town became the principal centre for the timber industry in Sarawak, and huge fortunes were made. From the 1960s to the late 1980s Sibu boomed along with the timber trade, and downstream industries such as sawmilling, plywood manufacturing and even shipbuilding were established. From the early 1990s onwards, the timber industry in Sibu began a gradual decline as more sustainable logging practices were introduced and timber quotas imposed. However the town continued to grow thanks to its strategic importance as the major port and commercial centre for the entire Rejang Basin.

## ATTRACTIONS

Sibu's **Town Centre** is very compact and easily covered on foot. The narrow crowded streets are crammed with shops selling everything from native handicrafts to designer fashions, and there seems to be an old fashioned coffee shop on almost every corner. The following attractions are all within easy walking distance of the town centre and all major hotels.

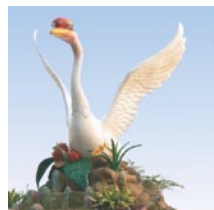
**Sibu Central Market**, on Jln Channel opposite the Express Boat Passenger Terminal, is the largest and most interesting daily market in Sarawak. By combining the former wet market and the native Lembangan market

in clean and hygienic new surroundings, Sibu Municipal Council has created a visual feast for visitors. Highlights are the Iban ladies selling exotic fruits, jungle produce and handicrafts, and the Chinese poultry sellers who offer live chickens and ducks neatly wrapped in tubes fashioned from old newspapers.

**The Rejang Esplanade** is an attractively landscaped promenade stretching from the Express Boat Terminal to the Kingwood Hotel, and includes the **Hii's Association Playground**.

Courting couples, anglers, al-fresco diners and sightseers flock here every evening to enjoy the riverfront scenery and view the **Swan Statue**, the emblem of Sibu.

The vibrant **Night Market** (Jln Market, between Jln Lintang and Jln Bengkel) sets up every afternoon around 5 pm and operates until 10 pm or later. The stalls offer household goods, footwear, fashion items, and of course food. Cakes, steamed buns, satay, pastries, dumplings and many other kinds of local delicacies are on sale here, with shoppers happily snacking as they wander from stall to stall.



**Sibu Town Square**, at 32 acres, is the largest urban square in Malaysia. Attractively landscaped, it is regularly used for concerts and cultural activities, and is also the venue for the annual Borneo Cultural Festival (see Events, page 98).

Still the tallest building in Sarawak (for the time being), the 28-storey **Wisma Sanyan** is located next to the square. It dominates the Sibu skyline and houses the town's largest retail shopping mall.

**Sibu Gateway** is located on Jln Kampung Nyabor and includes illuminated fountains, an open air stage, and **Lin's Garden**, which features the second of Sibu's two **swan statues**, guarded by the 12 signs of the Chinese Zodiac.

The 100-year old **Tua Pek Kong Temple** (Jln Temple) is the oldest and best preserved Chinese temple in Sibu.



The adjacent 7-storey **Goddess of Mercy Pagoda** was added in 1987, and is said to be one of the most perfectly proportioned pagodas outside Mainland China. Visitors are welcome to climb its many steps

to enjoy spectacular views of the Rejang and the Sibu Waterfront, especially at sunset.

The **floating supermarkets** that service the village and longhouse communities along the Rejang and its tributaries berth opposite the Tua Pek Kong Temple on Jln Temple. Their colourful paintwork, with advertising sponsors' logos, provides an attractive and unusual photo opportunity.

Traditional **Malay Kampung** (villages) can be found within easy walking distance at Jln Kampung Datu. They combine an interesting mix of architectural styles, from modern brick and concrete to traditional wood and attap, and the villagers are very welcoming, often inviting visitors into their homes. The *kampungs* also offer attractive photo opportunities, as many of the waterside houses are built on stilts above the river.

Sibu **Heritage Centre** on Jln Central houses a fine collection of antiques, artefacts and photos, cultural exhibits on the various ethnic groups of the Rejang, and displays tracing the history of Chinese migration to the Rejang Basin. Open Tue - Sun 9 am - 5 pm. Admission free.

The **Lau King Howe Hospital Memorial Museum** in Jln Pulau was the principal hospital for the entire Rejang Basin until the opening of Sibu General Hospital in 1994. Named for its main benefactor, a local philanthropist, it

# SIBU TOWN CENTRE MAP



## HOTELS (city centre only)

- 1 Capitol Hotel 98
- 2 Centre Inn
- 3 Century Inn
- 4 City Inn
- 5 Dung Fang Hotel
- 6 Eden Inn
- 7 Garden Hotel
- 8 Gold Star Hotel
- 9 Hoover Lodging House
- 10 Holiday Hotel
- 11 Hotel Bahagia
- 12 Hotel Malaysia
- 13 Hotel Ria
- 14 Kawan Hotel
- 15 Kingwood Hotel
- 16 Ledho Inn
- 17 Li Hua Hotel
- 18 Mandyrin Hotel
- 19 Mansion Inn
- 20 Methodist Guest House
- 21 Miramar Hotel
- 22 New Hai Ping Hotel
- 23 New Hong Kong Hotel
- 24 New World Hotel

## INFO

- 1 Multi Storey Carpark
- 2 Old SMC Building
- 3 Post Office
- 4 Chung Hua Primary School
- 5 Wisma Sanyan
- 6 Sibui Public Library
- 7 Sibui Hospital
- 8 Sibui Mosque
- 9 Sibui Town Square (Phase 1)
- 10 Sibui Town Square (Phase 2)
- 11 Sibui Temple
- 12 Sibui Market
- 13 Sibui Night Market
- 14 Sibui Boat Wharf (to Dalat)
- 15 Sibui Boat Wharf (to Bintangor, Matu, Daro & Ngemah)
- 16 Sibui Boat Wharf (to Kapit, Kanowit, Belaga, Bakuah, Serikei & Tanjung Manis)
- 17 Sibui Boat Wharf (to Kuching, Seremban, Seremban, Seremban, Seremban)
- 18 Sibui Boat Wharf (to Kuching, Seremban, Seremban, Seremban, Seremban)
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## INFO

- 1 Sunway Inn
- 2 Tanahmas Hotel
- 3 Tiong Ying Hotel
- 4 Today Hotel
- 5 Traveller's Hotel
- 6 Victoria Inn
- 7 Villa Inn
- 8 Wen Ya Hotel
- 9 Zunhra Hotel
- 10 RH Hotel
- 11 River Park Hotel
- 12 River View Hotel
- 13 Royal Inn
- 14 Sarawak Hotel
- 15 Sentosa Inn
- 16 Siong Lai Hotel
- 17 Star Hostel
- 18 Orchid Hotel
- 19 Paramount Hotel
- 20 Perdana Inn
- 21 Phoenix Hotel
- 22 Plaza Inn
- 23 Premier Hotel
- 24 Regent Hotel
- 25 Rejang Hotel

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has been converted into a museum tracing the history of medical care in Sarawak. Open Tue - Sun 9 am - 5 pm.

The elegant and modern **Masland Methodist Church** in Hoover Square, JlanPulau, is the direct descendant of the church founded by American missionary Rev. James Hoover, the father of Sarawak Methodism, in 1905.

The equally modern and imposing **Sibu Mosque** (Masjid an-Nur) in Jalan Masjid features a gilded dome and freestanding minaret, as well as the **Sarawak Heroes Mausoleum**, where the remains of executed anti-cession freedom-fighters Rosli Dhobi, Morshidi Sidek, Awang Ramli Amit Mohd Deli and Bujang Sunjong are interred.

## AROUND SIBU

**Bawang Assan** is an **Iban settlement of 8 longhouses** dating from the 18th Century, about 40 minutes from Sibu by boat or road. It is particularly appealing to visitors for two reasons; firstly the longhouses range from the very traditional to the quite modern, so visitors can get a good idea of how longhouses have evolved to keep pace with the times; and secondly, many of the resident can speak excellent English and are superb interpreters of their culture.



13 families from the 8 longhouses are delighted to welcome visitors, offering day trips and overnight stays, with visitors accompanying the locals in their daily activities, such as padi planting and fishing. Contact Mr Marcathy Gindau, Tel: 014 5828105, email: bawangassan@gmail.com, Mr Tuah Chad, Tel: 013 8327923, Mr Afred Ngelambung, Tel: 019 8193579 or Ms Susana Panyau, Tel: 013 5611045, for guided tours and overnight stays. For transport call Mr Broken, Tel: 019 8361134 or Mdm Uban, Tel: 019 4389749.

**Bukit Aup Jubilee Park** is a 24-acre cluster of low hills with a lookout tower offering views of the surrounding plantations, longhouses and the Igan River. The tower, located on the park's highest peak (59m), is often visited by local Ibans bringing offerings to a benevolent spirit, the *Naga Bari*, which is believed to help people in need. There are picnic huts, a canteen, a suspension bridge over a small lake which is good for photo opportunities, and jogging and walking trails. Open daily 8 am - 6 pm. Admission free. Take a taxi (15 min) or Teku Bus 2 or 3.

The **Sungai Merah Heritage Walk** visits the site of the earliest Chinese settlements in Sibu, Sungai Merah (Red

River), an old bazaar about 10 minutes by road from the town centre. The pleasant walking trail along the river front (the water really is red, changing occasionally to yellow!) leads through a quaintly landscaped park to the **Wong Nai Siong Memorial Garden**, erected in honour of the town's principal founder and featuring a bronze statue of the missionary leader. The walk concludes with the **James Hoover Memorial Park**, commemorating the renowned Methodist missionary and educator who worked with Sibu's pioneering Fochow immigrants from 1903 to the 1930s. Take a taxi or Sungai Merah Bus 1A.

The **traditional potteries** around Sibu produce excellent quality wares in classic Teochew Chinese style, albeit with strong local influences. Visitors are welcome to watch the potters at work at Toh Brothers Pottery, 8½ Mile Jln Oya, Tel: 344151. Take a taxi or contact a local tour operator.



**Yu Lung San Tien En Si Temple Complex**. Km 26, Jalan Sibu-Bintulu.. Also known as the **Jade Dragon Temple**, this sprawling new temple complex, the largest in Southeast Asia, features four main "dians" or devotional halls. Its mission is to bring together devotees of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism to worship together. Its distinctive and detailed architecture make it a photographer's paradise. Take a taxi. Bintulu-bound buses also stop here.

## ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation ranges from budget hostels to luxury international hotels. The premises listed below are located in the central area and within easy walking distance of tourist attractions. Star ratings are shown where applicable, but many hotels do not apply for rating. Room rates are shown in bands as follows. Many properties have rooms in more than one band.

- Band A : RM Under RM 50
- Band B : RM 50 - 149
- Band C : RM 150 - 299
- Band D : RM 300 plus

All addresses are 96000 Sibu, Sarawak, Malaysia. Telephone dialling code is +6084 from overseas and 084 within Malaysia.

**International/Business Class Hotels**  
**Kingwood Hotel (4\*)**, 12 Lorong Lanang 4, Tel: 335888. kingwood-sibu.blogspot.com. Band C-D  
**Premier Hotel (3\*)**, Sarawak House Complex, Jln Kampung Nyabor, Tel: 323222. www.premierh.com.my. Band C-D

**RH Hotel (4\*)**, Jln Kampung Nyabor, Tel: 365888. www.rhhotels.com.my. Band C-D  
**Tanahmas Hotel (3\*)**, Lot 277, Block 5, Jln Kampung Nyabor, Tel: 333188. www.tanahmas.com.my. Band C-D.

### Medium Class Hotels

**Centre Inn**, Jing Hwa Building, Off Jln Central, Tel: 320222. Band B.  
**Garden Hotel (2\*)**, 1 Jln Hoe Ping, Tel: 317888. www.gardenhotelsibu.com.my. Band B-C.  
**Hotel Bahagia**, 21 Jln Wong Nai Siong, Tel: 331131 hotelbahagia.blogspot.com. Band B.  
**Kawan Hotel (2\*)**, 6 Jln Chengal, Tel: 315888 Fax: 327888. Band B.  
**Ledho Inn**, 21 Jln Tukang Besi, Tel: 331894. www.ledho.com.my. Band B.  
**Li Hua Hotel (2\*)**, 18 Lorong 2, Jln Lanang, Tel: 324000 Email: sibu@lihua.com.my. Excellent river views. Band B.  
**Mansion Inn**, 48 Jln Tuanku Osman, Tel: 338922. Band B.  
**Medan Hotel**, Lrg Pahalwan 7 (next to Bus Terminal). Tel: 216162 Email: hotel@mymedan.com. Band B  
**Orchid Hotel (2\*)**, 9 Jln Persiaran Brooke, Tel: 331999.  
**Paramount Hotel**, 3 Lorong 9A, Jln Kampung Datu, Tel: 331122. www.paramountsibu.com. Band B  
**Perdana Inn**, 24 Jln Mission, Tel: 327007. Band B  
**Regent Hotel**, 2A-2C Lorong Foochow, Tel: 316188. Band B.  
**River Park Hotel**, 51-53 Jln Maju, Tel: 316688. Band B.  
**Victoria Inn**, 80 Jln Market, Tel: 320099. Band B..  
**Zuhra Hotel**, 103 Jln Kampung Nyabor, Tel: 310711. Band B.

### Budget Hotels & Hostels

**Capitol 98 Hotel**, 19 Jln Wong Nai Siong, Tel: 336444. Band A-B.  
**Century Inn**, 11 Jln Central, Tel: 339772. Band A.  
**City Inn**, 23 Jln Wong Nai Siong, Tel: 333311. Band A.  
**Dung Fang Hotel**, 37 Jln Maju, Tel: 340778. Band A.  
**Eden Inn**, Wisma Catholic, 1 Jln Lanang, Tel: 337277 Band A.  
**Gold Star Hotel**, 6 Jln Lintang, Tel: 320400. Band A-B.  
**Hoover Lodging House**, 34 Jln Tan Sri, Tel: 334490. Band A.  
**Holiday Hotel**, 14 Jln Tan Sri, Tel: 317440. Band A.  
**Hotel Malaysia**, 8 Jln Kampung Nyabor, Tel: 332299. Band A.  
**Hotel Ria**, 21 Jln Channel, Tel: 326622. Band A.  
**Mandyrin Hotel**, 181 Jln Kampung Nyabor, Tel: 339177. Band A.  
**Miramar Hotel**, 47 Jln Channel, Tel: 338008. Band A.  
**New Hai Ping Hotel**, 13 Jln Maju, Tel: 334905. Band A.  
**New Hong Kong Hotel**, 23 Jln Channel, Tel: 319488. Band A.  
**New World Hotel**, 1-3 Jln Wong Nai Siong, Tel: 310311 Band A-B.  
**Phoenix Hotel**, 1&3 Jln Kai Peng, Tel: 313877 Band A-B.  
**Plaza Inn**, 16-18 Jln Morshidi Sidek, Tel: 341218. Band A-B.

**Rejang Hotel**, 40 Jln Tukang Besi, Tel: 315590. Band A.  
**River View Hotel**, 65 Jln Mission, Tel: 337766 Band A-B.  
**Royal Inn**, 58-60 Jln Kampung Nyabor, Tel: 336644 Band A-B.  
**Sarawak Hotel**, 34 Jln Lintang, Tel: 333445. Band A.  
**Sentosa Inn**, 12 Jln Pulau, Tel: 349875. Band A.  
**Siong Lai Hotel**, 2 Jln Pulau, Tel: 345384. Band A.  
**Sunway Inn**, 11-13 Jln Bengkel, Tel: 344611. Band A-B.  
**Tiong Yiang Hotel**, 33 Jln Channel, Tel: 320916. Band A.  
**Today Hotel**, 40 Jln Kampung Nyabor, Tel: 336499. Band A-B.  
**Travellers' Hotel**, 9 Jln Bengkel, Tel: 311813, Band A.  
**Villa Hotel**, 2-4 Jln Central, Tel: 337833. Band A.  
**Wen Ya Hotel**, 39 Lebuah Tinggi, Tel: 321288. Band A.

### EATING OUT

Sibu is a paradise for gourmets, particularly cost-conscious ones. It has some of the best value food in all of Malaysia, especially fresh river fish and prawns and top quality seafood. A wide variety of restaurants and coffee shops offer the visitor considerable choice of different Malaysian and international cuisines, so only a small selection can be listed here. But remember it's the local dishes that make eating out in Sibu so memorable and economical.

### Sibu Specialities

**Kam pua mee** is Sibu's signature dish, thin noodles tossed in pork lard and served with slices of roasted pork or minced pork balls, served either with or without a thin broth and accompanied with chilli sauce and soya sauce. **Mee sua** (longevity noodles), another Foochow favourite, is a rich herbal soup containing fine vermicelli noodles and large chunks of boiled chicken. Both can be found in coffee shops all over town.

**Konpia** is Sibu's answer to the bagel. Roasted tandoori style, these fresh bread rolls are served in a variety of ways. One of the most popular konpia outlets, **Mr & Mrs Yeo's Stall**, Lorong Tiong Hua 26 (15 mins walk from town centre or take a taxi) serve them in a rich pork broth with slices of stewed pork - be prepared to wait for a table, mornings only.



**Prawn noodles (mee udang)** is the town's most popular seafood dish. Huge river prawns, sliced down the middle, are served in a steaming bowl of spicy seafood stock with thick Foochow noodles. The most famous is served by **Min Kong Café** (see below), although **Sin Chun Hua Café** (next to Visitor's Information Centre) is also very good. A delicious variation on this theme, tom yam prawn noodles, can be found at **Kheng Hock Café** (see below).

Fresh **dabai**, delicious savoury fruits resembling olives in appearance, and to some extent in taste, are usually sold by Iban ladies at the Central Market. These need to be briefly dunked in hot water to soften them before serving - a hotel room kettle will do nicely. A wide variety of other **tropical fruits** are also available at the market, including exquisite pineapples from Sarikei and unique green oranges from Bintangor.



### Coffee Shops

Coffee-shops are found on just about every street corner, and serve thick Borneo coffee sweetened with condensed milk, as well as a huge range of other drinks. Food offered usually includes local noodle dishes, chicken rice, and mixed rice or *nasi campur*.

### Food Centres

These are the most popular eating places. There is always a wide selection of value-for-money stalls and you can select food from as many as you like.  
**Sibu Central Market**, 1st floor. Over 30 mostly Chinese stalls serving almost every kind of local dish imaginable, mostly from 6 am to lunchtime, but some are open in the evening.  
**Jln Market Food Stalls**, near Premier Hotel. Variety of Chinese stalls, plus Malay stalls offering curries, *mee jawa* (spicy noodles in a thick sauce) and *roti canai*.  
**Kampung Bandung Food Court & Taman Selera MUC**, Jln Jasmin, take a taxi. Offers a variety of Malay seafood including the popular *ikan panggang masak belacan* (fish barbequed with prawn paste), *satay* and many others.  
**Pusat Mara**, Sibu Plaza building, Jln Mission, opp. AmBank. Malay and Melanau food stalls offering popular breakfast dishes, then later freshly cooked *nasi campur* and home made *umai* (see page 61). 7 am - 9 pm.  
**Taman Selera Harmoni**, off Jln Awang Ramli Amit (take a taxi). Open air food court with dozens of Malay stalls offering a selection of local delicacies. One stall serves delicious *sup power* (beef tendon soup) and the *cendol* (a popular Malaysian dessert) is the best in town. Open 5 pm - late.

### Chinese & Seafood

Sibu has plenty of **upmarket Chinese restaurants**, serving a blend of Foochow, Cantonese and Shanghainese cuisine. Notable ones include **Ming Ziang Restaurant** (Kingwood Hotel), **Golden Palace Restaurant** (Tanahmas Hotel), **Gold Hope Restaurant** (Sarawak House), **Blue Splendor Restaurant** (Level 5 Wisma Sanyan), **Golden Happiness Restaurant** (Jln Chengal), **Yi Pin Lou Restaurant** (20-32 Mission Road),



**New Capitol Restaurant** (46 Jln Kampung Nyabor) and **Bei Ji Restaurant** (155-159 Jln Kampung Nyabor).

**David Bak Kut Teh**, 3 Jln Central, serves generous portions of *bak kut teh*,

stewed pork ribs with special herbs cooked in a claypot, morning to early evening.  
**Hai Bing Seafood**, 31 Jln Maju, opp. Rejang Esplanade, has a good selection of reasonably priced local seafood, dishes and friendly, efficient service.  
**Esplanade Seafood**, Rejang Esplanade, has a good selection of local seafood and a varies od simple western dishes.  
**Kheng Hock Café**, 49 Jln Maju, facing Rejang Esplanade. This popular and very friendly café serves local noodle dishes and steamed buns and dumplings in the morning, tasty barbecued pork and duck for lunch and superbly cooked seafood (especially the *saan hock* fish) in the evenings, all at very moderate prices.  
**Min Kong Café**, Jln Bank, is famous for its delicious prawn noodles (RM20), and also serves other local specialities. Open daily, lunchtimes and evenings.  
**New Capital Restaurant**, opp. Premier Hotel. Not to be confused with the more upmarket New Capitol, serves tender Hainanese chicken rice all day long.  
**Restoran Bahagia** (Jln WongNai Siong) serves robust local dishes lunchtimes and evenings (the claypot beef is particularly good) and is open 24-hrs for noodles, fried rice and other light meals  
**Sri Meranti**, 1 Jln Hardin, is a Chinese Muslim seafood outlet. Their steamed *tapah* fish is perfectly cooked and the fish head curry is famous throughout town. Evenings only.

### Japanese

**Akatsuki Animate**, 8 Lrg Sena, off JlnPedada. Japanese fast food and steamboat restaurant, with an Anime theme. Take a taxi.  
**Sushi Tie**, Jln Pedada, behind Rejang Medical Centre. A very reasonably priced Japanese eatery with a good selection of authentic dishes.  
**Zen**, 16 Jln Chew Geok Lin (near pagoda). Stylish Japanese and fusion dining for those with deep pockets.

### Malay

Malay food stalls can be found in many Chinese coffee shops, serving halal food with their own crockery and cutlery. See also **Taman Selera Harmoni**, **Pusat Mara**, **Kampung Bandung Food Court & Taman Selera MUC** and other listings in Food Centres, above.

**Kasturi**, 18 Jln Tunku Osman, is Sibu's leading Malay/Melanau restaurant, serving spicy curries and Malay style seafood, as well Melanau dishes such as *tebaloi* crackers and *umai* (see page 61).

**Payung Cafe**, No.20F Lanang Road (behind Kingwood Hotel), serves a variety of local, Indonesian, Malay and Nyonya dishes.

**Islamic Nyonya Kafe**, 141 Jln Kampung Nyabor, serves a variety of tasty Malay food and is justly famous for the largest *roti canai* in the Rejang Basin.

### Western

**McDonalds, KFC** and local chain **Sugar Bun** are all represented in Sibul, and can be found in the major shopping malls. Sugar Bun also has an outlet on Jln Pedada with an attached **gelateria** (ice cream parlour). Malaysian fusion and cake franchise SecretRecipe is at Lorong Pahlawan 9. For more upmarket western dining, the best bet is to choose from the coffee houses in Sibul's leading hotels or the outlets listed below.

**Ark Café**, Rejang Esplanade, has a fine river front location and serves a variety of western, local and Thai dishes. Evenings only.

**Breadsense**, 20 Jalan Morshidi Sidek. Busy bakery serving baguettes, sandwiches and light meals. Daytime and early evening.

**Café Café**, 10 Jalan Chew Geok Lin (near pagoda), serves an interesting mix of western and Nyonya dishes.

**The Little Roadhouse** (see below).

### ENTERTAINMENT

As this guidebook has been produced with tourists in mind, we have not included places that concentrate on lavish business entertainment or where female visitors would feel uncomfortable. Socialising in Sibul is also done in restaurants and coffee shops.

**Green Lounge**, RH Hotel. Plush musiclounge with quality livebands.

**K-Pop Karaoke**, Tanahmas Hotel. Upmarket cocktail lounge with open karaoke and private karaoke rooms.

**Kaban Lama**, Persiaran Brooke. Friendly Iban karaoke bar with occasional live music.

**Little Roadhouse**, 4 Jln Causeway. Friendly upstairs pub with a pleasant balcony area for observing the street life below. Also serves inexpensive steaks and other local and western dishes.

**MC Karaoke Pub**, 20 Jln Sanyan, is where the local darts fanatics hang out. Prepare to make friends and lose heavily.

**Pelangi**, Jln Wong Nai Siong, above Sarawak Hotel. Scruffy but cheap and friendly Iban karaoke pub, where tone deaf singers and karaoke novices will feel welcome.

**The Queen**, Jln Tukang Besi. This exotic cocktail lounge attracts a friendly and diverse clientele.

**Sangkai Temuai**, Jln Tukang Besi. Upmarket Iban karaoke transforms into bouncing dance club after midnight.

### Cineplexes

**King's Trioplex**, Sarawak House Complex, includes a traditional widescreen large cinema. Tel: 321166.

**Star Cineplex**, 6 Jln Ramin, Tel: 334522.

### SHOPPING



Sibul is an excellent place to buy **Borneo arts, crafts and curios**. Particular items to look out for are Iban *pua kumbu* (hand-woven rugs), wooden hornbill carvings used in rituals, and silver jewellery, Orang Ulu beadwork and woodcarving, and Penan blowpipes and mats. The best places to get a good bargain are the **Sibul Central Market** and **Night Market** stalls, where you are usually buying direct from the producer. Also try **Chop Kian Huat**, 8 Jln Tukang Besi (entrance on Jln Market), which has a good selection of Iban silver jewellery, and **Chai Chiang Store**, 5 Jln Central. Visitors travelling by road should check out the **Durin Handicraft Shop**, a one-stop handicraft centre for the Central Region, 35 km from town a few minutes from the Durin Bridge exit.

For more **general shopping**, the main malls in town are in the lower floors of **Wisma Sanyan**, and the **Sarawak House Complex** on Jln Kampung Nyabor. The best bookstore is probably **Premier Bookstore** in Wiama Sanyan. Budget fashions and household goods can be found at the **Night Market**, and in dozens of small shops around town. More malls can be found outside the old town centre, including **Delta Mall** (Jln Pedada), **Medan Mall** (Jln WongKing Huo) and **Star Megamall** (Jln Tuanku Abdul Rahman).

### SPORTS & RECREATION

All major hotels have **fitness centres**. There are **public swimming pools** at Jln Delta and **Bukit Lima Sports Complex** (take a taxi). Good **jogging trails** can be found at the **Sungai Merah Heritage Walk**, **Bukit Aup Jubilee Park** and **Kutien Garden in Bukit Lima Forest Park** (take a taxi)

Hotels, travel agents and fishing tackle shops can arrange **fishing** trips, either fishing for Borneo masheer (*empurau*) on the Rejang and its tributaries or deep sea game fishing (esp. marlin) off the coast near Mukah.

If your idea of fun is running through humid jungle, getting covered in mud, sweat, bites and scratches (and recovering over a few drinks afterwards), the **Sibul Hash House Harriers** would love to hear from you. An excellent way to make new friends, the Sibul Hash runs every Sunday at 4pm. Contact Mr Ham at Kheng Hock Café (Tel: 324391).

The 18 hole, par 72 **Sibul Golf Club** is open to non-members on weekdays. Visitors must have an affiliation with a recognised club and/or a verifiable handicap. Contact Kelab Golf Sibul, Mile 10½, Oya Road, 96008 Sibul. Tel: 339890.

**Sibul Superbowl** is located at 1 Lorong 2, Jln Perpati, off Jln Wong King Huo, Tel: 333111.

### USEFUL INFORMATION

**Banks & Money Changers:** The following is a list of centrally located banks and money changers. Banks open Mon-Fri 9.30 am-3.30 pm.

**AmBank**, Jln Tunku Osman & next to Tanahmas Hotel.

**CIMB Bank**, 10 Lorong Kampung Datu 5.

**Hong Leong Bank**, 133-137 Jln Kampung Nyabor.

**HSBC Bank**, Bangunan Grand Merdin, 131 Jln Kampung Nyabor.

**Maybank**, 35-39 Jln Kampung Nyabor.

**Public Bank**, 3 Jln Central.

**RHB Bank**, 31 Jln Tuanku Osman.

**Standard Chartered Bank**, 25 Jln Tukang Besi.

**Yewon Money Changer**, 8 Jln Tukang Besi.

**Doctors, Dentists & Hospitals:** There are a number of clinics around the centre of town. Consultation and simple medication is usually around RM 30-50. Hu's Dental Surgery (1B Jln Persiaran Brooke, Tel: 332226) and Ling Wang Hong Dental Surgery (13 Jln Bengkel, Tel: 325482) are conveniently located for visitors. **Sibul Hospital** is at 51/2 Mile, Jln Ulu Oya (take a taxi), Tel: 276666) A cash deposit, insurance card or credit card will be required for in-patient treatment. Sibul's two private hospitals, **Rejang Medical Centre** (29 Jln Pedada, Tel: 330733) and **Sibul Specialist Medical Centre** (52A-52F Jln Persiaran Brooke, Tel:218800) are both modern, well equipped and centrally located.

**Laundry and Dry Cleaning:** **Mr Dobi**, 5 Jln Bindang, Tel: 324820 for collection/delivery. **Sky Laundry**, 4 Jln Kampung Datu 2, Tel: 332099. **Speed Queen Laundry**, 53 Jln Pedada (Pusat Tanahwang), Tel: 345053.

The main **post office** is at the corner of Jln Kampung Nyabor and Jln Wong Nai Siong. Open Mon-Sat, 8 am - 6 pm. Most hotels offer **Internet access**, and many restaurants and pubs have Wifi for customers. Charges may apply.

### Useful Telephone Numbers

**Central Police Station** ( Jln Kampung Nyabor Opp. Sarawak House) 322222

**Immigration**, Federal Complex, Jln Awang Ramli Amit 336991

### UP THE REJANG RIVER

The Rejang, Malaysia's longest river at over 530km, is a unique travel experience. The river and its tributaries are lined by hundreds of villages and wooden longhouses, home to a kaleidoscope of ethnic groups, each with their own distinct culture. A journey up the Rejang introduces the visitor a different side of Sarawak - a glimpse of raw Borneo, of a rugged landscape and a river that is constantly alive with boats and people. For adventurous travellers, this is what Borneo is all about.

Most travellers begin their journey in Sibul, using **express boats** (see page 64) to travel upriver to Kapit or other small towns along the way.

These unique torpedo shaped craft thunder upriver at quire remarkable speeds of 30 knots (55km/h) or more. From the window you can see the wide variety of traffic on river - from small dugout canoes to barges weighing hundreds of tons - as well as dozens of modern and traditional longhouses, surrounded by spectacular jungle scenery.



### PEOPLE OF THE REJANG

**Chinese people** of various dialect groups (mostly Foochow and Hokkien) are found in all the towns and riverine settlements of the Rejang. However once you leave the major towns, the bulk of the Rejang's population are indigenous.

The lower Rejang (Sibul to Kapit) and its tributaries are **Iban territory**. The Iban, formerly known as *Sea Dayaks*, are famous for their head-hunting past, their massive ironwood longhouses, their ornate body tattooing, their wonderful weaving skills, and of course their potent rice wine, *tuak*, which is always offered to visitors.

Above Kapit and the Pelagus Rapids, the people are mostly **Orang Ulu** (literally "upriver people"), the collective name for a number of smaller groups including the **Kayan, Kenyah, Kajang, Lahanan, Ukil** and **Punan**. Also former-head-hunters, they live in even more imposing longhouses than the Iban. However their arts and crafts are very different; they are famous for woodcarving and beadwork, spectacular *keliring* or totem poles, and the music of a haunting, mandolin-like instrument - the *sape*. Tattooing and body ornamentation are prominent; older orang ulu ladies



can be recognised by the brass rings hanging from their extended earlobes, and from the dense black tattoos on their arms and legs, although the practice is sadly disappearing amongst the younger generation.

Further upriver, visitors may occasionally encounter small groups of **nomadic Penan**, hunter-gatherers and occasional farmers who live deep in the heart of the forest, moving their temporary settlements according to the seasonal availability of food and the forest products that they trade with the longhouse dwellers.

The sheer variety of different communities makes the Rejang a real cultural kaleidoscope. Its people take great pride on their arts, traditions and culture, and are very happy to receive visitors; it is never a question of which longhouse to visit, but how many.

## KANOWIT

First stop on the Rejang, only an hour from Sibul, is the small riverside town of Kanowit. This is the furthest point on the Rejang accessible by road (from Durin), and makes



a good alternative jumping-off point for visitors who want to spend an extra hour in bed before catching the express boat upriver. The town centre is formed by three streets of 1930's Chinese shophouses near the waterfront. The main landmark is **Fort Emma**, a 19th Century Brooke Era wooden fort with a Mini-Museum displaying the history of Kanowit and its surroundings. Open Tue - Sat 9am - 4.30 pm.

Kanowit is virtually untouristed, so don't expect any flashy seafood restaurants; the best cooking is done in Chinese coffee shops, so just stick your head into the kitchen and ask what they've got. For adventurous travellers, these coffee shops are also fertile ground for making friends and getting an invitation to one of the longhouses on the nearby Ngemah and Julau rivers.

The town gets its name from the Kanowit people, a sub-group of the Melanau, who have been gradually absorbed by other ethnic groups. The last surviving Kanowit community live at **Kampung Bedil**, 10 minutes by boat from the jetty by the Shell Station. *Bedil* means

cannon, due to a cannon presented by Rajah Sir James Brooke which can still be seen in the village.

## Accommodation

All addresses are 96700 Kanowit, Sarawak, Malaysia. Telephone dialling code is +6084 from overseas and 084 within Malaysia.

**Harbour View Hotel**, 63 Jln Kubu, Tel: 753188. Band A-B.  
**Kanowit Hotel**, 85 Jln Kubu, Tel: 752155. Band A-B.  
 There is a **homestay programme** at the nearby Rumah Benjamin Angki longhouse. Contact the *Tuai Rumah* (headman), Tel: 013-8823076 Email [ben\\_8845@yahoo.com](mailto:ben_8845@yahoo.com) for further details or call Kanowit District Office, Tel: 752939. [www.kanowitdo.sarawak.gov.my](http://www.kanowitdo.sarawak.gov.my).

## SONG

The small town of Song, just over 2 hours from Sibul by express boat, is the jumping off point for visiting Iban longhouses on the **Katibas** and **Bangkit** rivers. The *Capitol Hotel* can usually arrange transport and a guide. Please note that many of the traditional wooden longhouses in the area are being replaced by modern concrete structures, so check with the Song District Office for the latest situation, Tel: 777221.

## Accommodation

All addresses are 96850 Song, Sarawak, Malaysia. Telephone dialling code is +6084 from overseas and 084 within Malaysia.

**Capital Hotel**, 8 Song Bazaar, Tel: 777264. Band A.  
**Katibas Inn**, 7 Song Bazaar, Tel: 777323. Band A-B  
**Mesra Inn**, 31 Song Shoplot, Tel: 7777777. Band A.  
**Sukaramai Inn**, 44-45 Song New Town, Tel: 777686  
 Email: [teo\\_su\\_ing@hotmail.com](mailto:teo_su_ing@hotmail.com). Band B.

## KAPIT

The bustling upriver town of Kapit (pop. 15,000) is the jumping-off point for the Middle and Upper Rejang and Baleh Rivers and the best place to organise a visit to one of the Iban longhouses of the Lower Rejang. Despite its small size, Kapit is the commercial and administrative centre of the Kapit Division (a vast hinterland comprising the Kapit, Song and Belaga Districts of almost 39,000 sq km with a population of around 150,000), so there is always plenty to see and do.



## Attractions

**Fort Sylvia** is a 19th Century fort whose whitewashed walls and ironwood shingled roof are home to a mini-

museum and handicrafts centre managed by the by Tun Jugah Foundation. It houses a fine collection of ethnic arts and handicrafts, heirloom jars, brass cannons and historical documents, and a collection devoted to the life of the late Tun Jugah ak Barieng, Paramount Chief of the Rejang Iban and one of Sarawak's foremost independence leaders. Open Tue - Sun 10 am - 12 noon and 2 pm - 4 pm.

The **Civic Centre Museum** next to the Lake Garden has an interesting set of exhibits on the ethnic groups of the Rejang Basin, as well as some fine watercolours of riverside towns and villages, and a relief map showing all the longhouses in the area. Open Tue - Sun 8 am - 5 pm.

## Accommodation

**Medium Class Hotels**  
**Greenland Inn**, Lot 463-464 Jln Teo Chow Beng, Tel: 796388. Band B-C.  
**Hotel Meligai**, Lot 334 Jln Airport, Tel: 796611. [www.meligaihotel.com](http://www.meligaihotel.com). Band B-C. Restaurant, music lounge, conference facilities.  
**New Rejang Inn**, Lot 104 Jln Teo Chow Beng, Tel: 796600. Band B.

## Budget Hotels

**Ark Hill Inn**, Jln Penghulu Gerinang, Tel: 796168. Band A-B.  
**Dragon Inn**, 467 Jln Teo Chow Beng, Tel: 797435. Band B.  
**Dung Fang Hotel**, Lot 510, Jln Temenggong Jugah, Tel: 797799. Band A-B.  
**Fully Inn**, 105 Jln Temenggong Jugah, Tel: 797366. Band A-B.  
**Hiap Chiong Hotel**, 33, Jln Temenggong Jugah, Tel: 796314. Band A-B.  
**Kapit River View Inn**, 10 Jln Tan Sit Leong, Tel: 796405. Band B.  
**Orchard Inn**, 64 Jln Airport, Tel: 796325. Band B  
**Well Inn**, 40 Jln Court, Tel: 706009. Band B

## Eating Out

For a small town, Kapit has a great selection of eating places. Local river fish are a popular delicacy, especially the hugely expensive *empurau* (Borneo masheer), although more economical fish such as *tapah* and *soon hock* are almost as tasty, as are the huge Rejang river prawns.

Good air conditioned restaurants include **Orchard Restaurant** (64 Jln Tlong Ung Hong, 9 am - 11 pm, excellent local pork dishes), **Chong Seng Restaurant** (Jln Airport opp. Meligai Hotel, halal cuisine) and **Tekam Cafe** (adjacent to Meligai Hotel, halal cuisine). **Local seafood** can be found at **Ah Kau Restaurant** (Jln Berjaya), and **Hock Bing Seafood** (off Jln Temenggong Jugah past Chinese temple). The **Ung Tong Bakery** on Jln Airport is good for sandwiches, buns and continental breakfast.

**Coffee shops** are located all over town, serving local variations on standard Sibul and Kuching noodle dishes, as well as economy rice (at lunchtimes).

**Muslim food** can be found at Malay stalls in many coffee shops, as well as **Malindo Café** in Harmony Mall, **Binggas Café** in Jln Temenggong Jiggut, and the wide variety of food stalls at **Taman Selera Empurau** food court (5 pm - late). One dish unique to Kapit is deep-fried *roti canai*, which can be found at the Malay stall on the 1st floor of the **Gelanggang Kenyalang** building.

## Entertainment

Nightlife in Kapit is focused around coffee shops and dozens of karaoke pubs. Many of these outlets are dedicated to entertaining an all-male clientele, but locals will know which are more family oriented and welcome female guests.

## Shopping & Essentials

The main shopping centre is **Kapit Square**, where visitors can find the post office, essential supplies, pharmacies and medical clinics. There are also a number of banks with ATMs located around town. The lively **Teresang Market** (wet market) on Jln Temenggong Jugah has a colourful selection of stalls selling all kinds of exotic jungle produce. For **handicrafts**, try the market stalls, as well as Sula Perengka and Lai Lai Handicraft on the 1st floor of the nearby **Gelanggang Kenyalang** market and Rozy Stationery (2<sup>nd</sup> floor, MARA building). The Kapit Resident's Office has a comprehensive **database of local craftspeople** - email for a copy. If you would like a traditional **Iban tattoo**, check out Robert's Tattoo Art, 1st floor Gelanggang Kenyalang (disposable needles are used). There are several cybercafés in town - cellular phone connections are either slow or voice only.

## Longhouses Near Kapit Town

For day visitors, the most conveniently located longhouses are **Rumah Bundong** and **Rumah Jandok**, traditional wooden longhouses 10 km and 15 km from town respectively. Visitors are also welcome to stay overnight with local families. Vans leave regularly from Jln Airport, no introduction is required.

Further afield, there are longhouses on the main Rejang River, as well as the Baleh and the Mujong and their tributaries. A homestay programme at **Rumah Lutul** on the Sungai Tisa involves both traditional and modern longhouses. **Rumah Garie** on the Sungai Kain is famous for its *pua kumbu*, traditional Iban woven textiles, and has even been accredited with the Japanese 'G-mark' for good design. **Rumah George** involves a boat ride through the notorious Pelagus Rapids. **Rumah Penghulu Jampi** on the Baleh is the birthplace of the legendary Iban warrior turned statesman Temenggong Koh. **Rumah Bangkong** on the Mujong is a very traditional longhouse that is just starting to attract visitors.

All of the above require an overnight stay, usually with a host family. Alice Chua Travel, Jln Airport, can make the necessary arrangements. Tel: 789788 Email [atta\\_kpt@yahoo.com](mailto:atta_kpt@yahoo.com). Longer trips requiring a lot of planning include **Long Singut**, a very remote Kenyah (Orang Ulu) longhouse on the Baleh, and expeditions to the remote peak of **Batu Tiban**, described in Redmond O'Hanlon's book *Into The Heart of Borneo*. The Kapit Resident's office keeps a register of licensed nature guides and an up-to-date list of longhouses that accept visitors - email for details.

**The Pelagus Rapids:** Until the introduction of powerful modern engines, and generous amounts of dynamite used by British Army engineers in the 1960s, only the most courageous or foolhardy boatmen would brave the mighty Pelagus Rapids. The rapids divide the Rejang into lower and upper sections, and previously passengers would disembark, proceed on foot through the forest, and join another boat at the other side. Nowadays express boats and speedboats with reinforced hulls glide through the rapids with ease, but it is still a heart-stopping experience for the first-time visitor.

The **Kapit Resident's Office** is on Level 9 & 8 of the State Government Complex on Jalan Bletteh. Tel: 796230. [www.kapitro.sarawak.gov.my](http://www.kapitro.sarawak.gov.my). Open 8am - 5 pm Mon - Fri, closed Friday lunchtimes from 11.30 am to 2.15 pm. Take a van from Teresang Market. The helpful staff can provide detailed visitor information.

**Permits for Onward Travel:** Foreign visitors require a permit from the Resident's Office for all destinations upriver from Kapit (Rejang or Baleh rivers). The permit is issued immediately, is free of charge and is valid from one to two weeks. Visitors to the Baleh area should be accompanied by guides.

## BELAGA



The Upper Rejang, beyond Pelagus, is home to the Orang Ulu or "Upriver People". The riverine settlement of Belaga is the last major trading post on the Rejang, and a good base for arranging visits to the **Kayan** and **Kenyah** longhouses situated further upriver. Due to the

remote and rugged terrain, visitors travelling beyond Belaga are advised to inform the **Belaga District Office**, Tel: 461315, [www.belagado.sarawak.gov.my](http://www.belagado.sarawak.gov.my), about their travel plans. For **licensed nature guides**, call Hamdani, Tel: 019-8865770, Daniel Levoh, Tel: 013-8486351 or enquire at Belaga District Office.

**Bakun Hydro Dam and Reservoir:** This huge hydropower project has created a hydro reservoir as large as Singapore. The lake has not yet been developed for tourism but some local families are operating homestays on their floating houses - see below. The imposing dam and hydropower plant are a restricted area and may only be visited by prior appointment. Contact Sarawak Hidro Sdn Bhd, Tel: 03-7932 2310 Email: [admin@sarawak-hidro.com](mailto:admin@sarawak-hidro.com).

The **Belanum Floating House-Stay**, Tel: 017-8535394 Email: [liashra@yahoo.com](mailto:liashra@yahoo.com), offers four 4-bed rooms on a *jelutong* (floating house) on the lake. The river nearby has a swimming hole with a natural massage effect. Boat trips can be arranged to various parts of the lake as well as angling trips for highly prized fish like such as *empurau* and *semah*. Access is via Sungai Asap (see below).

**Sungai Asap** is the main resettlement area for the various Orang Ulu communities displaced by the Bakun hydropower project. One of the 15 modern longhouses here, Uma Belor, offers homestay accommodation. Visitors can experience farming activities, learn to cook local food, see how the local '*burak*' rice wine is made, and of course sample it. Other attractions include exquisite Kayan handicrafts - their colourful beads, woodcarvings, paintings and fascinating burial houses - as well as the chance to hear a *sape* recital by a master musician. Contact Mr Luhut Tugau, Tel: 017-8535394, Email [liashra@yahoo.com](mailto:liashra@yahoo.com), or the Sungai Asap Sub-District Office, Tel: 013-8303383. The hosts can arrange transport from Belaga or Bintulu.

## Accommodation

All addresses are 96900 Belaga, Sarawak, Malaysia. Belaga's telephone dialling code is +6086 from overseas and 086 within Malaysia.

**Belaga Hotel**, 14 Belaga Bazaar, Tel: 461244. Band A.  
**Sing Soon Hing Hotel**, 15 Belaga Bazaar, Tel: 461257. Band A.  
**Sing Soon Huat Hotel**, 26-27 New Belaga Bazaar, Tel 461307. Band A-B

**Note:** During the dry season (July - September), express boats may not be able to reach Belaga and access is only by road (from Bintulu).

## THE MELANAU HEARTLAND

The Melanau number around 140,000, and make up roughly 6% of Sarawak's total population. They inhabit the coastal region from the Rejang Estuary to the town of Bintulu and are traditionally fishermen and sago growers. They formerly lived in massive "tall houses" as protection against pirates (a fine replica can be seen at Sarawak Cultural Village near Kuching), but nowadays live in *kampungs* (villages) of individual wooden houses similar to those of the Malays.



The majority of Melanau are Muslim, with a significant number of Christians, and a small minority still practise the traditional religion of *Liko*, meaning "people of the river". An interesting *Liko* practice is the use of wooden effigies, called *berbayah* and *berayun*, for healing rituals. Although the Melanau have been influenced by the Malays, they are very proud of their distinct culture, and are noted for their religious tolerance, with Muslims, Christians and *Liko* adherents living happily side-by-side.

## MUKAH

The bustling town of Mukah is the administrative centre for the whole Mukah Division, a coastal region covering almost 7,000 sq km with a population of over 120,000. The population is primarily Melanau (55%) and Iban (35%) with small numbers of Chinese, Malays, Bidayus and others. Mukah and its surrounding *kampungs* (villages) are the historic centre of Melanau culture and the location of the exuberant **Kaul Festival** (see page 98). The town played an important role in Sarawak's history, as the Brooke Rajahs and the Brunei Sultans competed with one another to control the valuable sago trade in the 19th Century. An **old smokestack** in the centre of town is one of the few surviving relics of this period.

Sights to see in Mukah include the bustling **fishing harbour** in the old town; the ancient water village at **Kampung Tellian** (3km from town - bus or taxi), where visitors can see **traditional boat builders** at work and trains of sago logs being towed along the narrow rivers; the vibrant cultural centre at **Lamin Dana** (see below); and the colourful **Tua Pek Kong Temple**. On a more modern note, the **Divisional Mosque** and the **Civic**



**Centre** in Mukah's new town centre both feature multi-coloured conical roofs which are modelled on the *terendak*, a sun hat made of sago palm leaves which is the principal icon of Melanau culture. Mukah is accessible by road or air. See **Travel Connections** for full details.



**Lamin Dana** is a delightful combination of visitor's lodge and cultural centre, built in the style of a traditional Melanau tall house and hidden amongst the wooden houses of Kampung Tellian beside a small river. It also provides authentic Melanau meals, and offers activities such as boat trips, mangrove tours and bicycle rental. Band B. For accommodation and tours, contact GreatTownTravel (see page 65).

## Food and Drink

Mukah's signature dish is **umai**, a spicy salad of raw marinated fish with shallots, lime juice and chillies. It was invented by Melanau fishermen who were reluctant to cook aboard their fishing boats because of the risk of fire. Other local favourites - not for the squeamish - include **sago worms** (actually sago-trunk-dwelling beetle larvae), and **lameh**, caterpillars that have recently spun their chrysalis. The last two dishes are hard to find in restaurants, but can be obtained at the town market and are often served in Melanau homes.

Both the Old Town and the New Town are crammed with **Chinese coffee shops** and **Malay restaurants** serving a variety of popular Malaysian dishes, and a number also offer freshly grilled fish wrapped in banana leaves and coated with *sambal belacan* (shrimp paste relish). More up-market outlets include the air-conditioned **JS Seafood** and the **Riverside Seafood Restaurant**, both located near to the Tua Pek Kong Temple. For authentic Melanau food, including superb *umai*, visitors should head for **Nibong House**, on Jalan Orang Kaya Setia Raja opposite the Civic Centre.

## DALAT

The small riverside town of **Dalat** makes an interesting half-day outing from Mukah, or a stopover if you are travelling by speedboat to or from Sibul. **Taman Poket Dalat**, the small landscaped park beside the Oya river, has as its centrepiece the finest Melanau *kelidieng* (sacrificial burial pole)





still in existence. The *kelidieng* or *jerunei*, a hollow *belian* (Borneo ironwood) tree trunk decorated with ornate carvings, was used in ancient rituals to ward off disasters. Should the community be threatened, a young maiden was placed inside the pole and given only drinking water until she finally passed away. This sacrifice would appease malicious or angry spirits and thus avoid disaster. Interestingly, the cross in the altar of nearby **St Bernard's RC Church** is also made in the form of a *kelidieng*, to give Christ's sacrifice a Melanau cultural context.

Just across from the church is one of the Melanau Heatland's rare treats. **Relax Corner** is a multi-cultural open-air café and watering hole where local Christians and Muslims sip their beer or coffee (according to faith) and exchange friendly banter with occasional visitors in a delightful riverside setting until surprisingly late. Amongst the new shophouses across the road from the riverfront are a number of **Chinese coffee shops**, as well as **Taku Café**, a Melanau restaurant serving traditional dishes.

Between the few blocks of shophouses is a small clump of *nunok* trees, which are believed to be the homes of animist spirits. Upon closer inspection you can see a number of traditional animist, Buddhist and Taoist altars next to the trees.

The **Dalat speedboat service** is easily the most interesting way to reach the Melanau Heartland from Sibü. After about an hour on the wide and stately Batang Igan, the speedboat slows its engines and cruises through the narrow, tree-lined Sungai Kut, stopping at picturesque water villages along the way before emerging at Dalat. See page 64. Onward connections to Mukah are by bus (RM3.20, bus station behind Hiap Leong Mini Market) or the waiting taxis (RM 35) and vans (RM8).

## OYA

15km downriver from Dalat is the tiny township of Oya, comprising a row of old wooden shophouses, a market, a picturesque fishing harbour, a decent beach and two Melanau villages. Take a van from Mukah (RM 8) or Dalat (RM 6). One of these villages, **Kampung Senau**, has a very well run **Homestay Programme**, where visitors can enjoy traditional Melanau life and take part in traditional activities such as fishing and sago gathering, as well as boat trips and treks into the peat swamp forest. Contact the Fishermen's Association Mukah, Tel: 871416.

## Melanau Longhouse

The last remaining **Melanau longhouse**, which still retains its traditional structure, is located at Kampung Sok in the isolated Matu area. Visits can be arranged by the Mukah Resident's Office, Tel: 872596.

## Accommodation

All addresses are 96400 Mukah, Sarawak, Malaysia. Telephone dialling code is +6084 from overseas and 084 within Malaysia.

**Dalat Inn**, Lot 502 Dalat New Township, 96300 Dalat (30km from Mukah). Tel: 864482. Band B.

**Hotel Sarina**, Lot 46 Jln Orang Kaya Setia Raja, Tel: 872655. Band B.

**Hotel Sri Umpang**, 29 Jln Lintang, Tel: 872416. Band B.

**King Ing Hotel**, 1-2 Jln Boyan, Tel: 871400. Band B.

**Kingwood Hotel Mukah (3\*)**, Medan Setia Raja, 15 mins walk from old town. Tel: 874996. Band C-D.

**Kingwood Resort Mukah (3\*)**, Lot 96 Block 17, Mukah Land District, Tel: 873888. Band C-D. Located on beachfront 15 mins drive from Mukah.

**Mandarin Inn**, 30-32 Jln Lintang, Tel: 872688. Band B.

**Mukah Kaul Beach Resort**, Km 4, Jln Mukah-Oya, Tel: 871700. Band B (chalets).

**Pantai Harmoni Beach Resort**, Km 4, Jln Mukah-Oya, Tel: 871010. Band B (chalets).

**Qintai Inn**, 50 Jln Oya, Tel: 872872. Band B.

**Sago Inn**, Lot 485, Dalat New Township, 96300 Dalat (30 km from Mukah), Tel 863779. Band B.

**Sea View Hotel**, 1 Main Bazaar, Tel: 871226. Band B

**Weiming Hotel**, 19 Main Bazaar, Tel: 872276. Band B.

## DOWNRIVER FROM SIBU

## SARIKEI

Sarikei, 122km by road from Sibü, is a bustling riverside town and a major transit point on the Pan-Borneo highway. However Sarikei's real claim to fame is its importance as an agricultural centre; more than 80% of **Sarawak's pepper production** comes from Sarikei Division, and the area is justly famous for its **sweet, succulent pineapples**, which thrive in the slightly acidic soil here.

## Attractions

While the **Pineapple Statue** next to the express boat wharf pays tribute to the town's most famous export, visitors can see, taste and buy the real thing at the nearby **fruit and vegetable market**. This is located next to a small but colourful **fish market**, where chefs and restaurateurs from Sibü make early morning pilgrimages to take their pick of the fresh catch. The small **esplanade**



fronting the Nyelong River is a pleasant place to watch the local boat traffic. On the way out of town towards Sibü, the attractive **Residency Building** can be seen to the right of the road.

Sarikei is the best place in Sarawak to buy the herbal ingredients for **pak cheng (8 treasures) soup**, said to be excellent for blood circulation and restoring energy. Most Chinese herbalists and sundry shops stock it at around RM 5 per packet.

About 30 minutes drive from Sarikei, the **Sebangkoi Deer Farm** produces not only venison, but also deer horn for the Chinese medicine trade, which can be worth as much as RM1,000 per kg. Visitors are welcome by appointment; call Mr Ting Sing Fee, Tel: 654573.

The nearby **Sebangkoi Forest Park** has some nice forest trails leading to a small waterfall. The adjacent **Sebangkoi Country Resort** has picnic spots and a resthouse with accommodation.

**Rumah Nyuka** is an imposing and well-preserved 45-door Iban longhouse constructed entirely from Belaina wood, located about an hour's drive south of Sarikei. The 300-plus inhabitants run a homestay programme which includes farm visits, as well as optional treks to nearby jungle waterfalls. Contact Mr Ikau Aji, Tel: 019 4687518, or Greatown Travel (see below).

**Kampung Sungai Buloh** in Pakan, about an hour from Sarikei on the Julau road, is the starting point for the 45-minute trek up **Bukit Sibau** to visit the **tomb of Rentap**, the greatest of the Iban independence leaders, who opposed White Rajah rule from 1853 until his death in 1870.

Further along the Julau road, **Julau** itself offers the historic wooden **Fort Brooke** at Nanga Meluan and a number of fascinating **Iban longhouses**, including the ornately decorated Rumah Juna Sawing, Rumah Ngumbang (famous for its handicrafts) and Rumah Seli with its nearby waterfall. Contact Greatown Travel (see below) or Great Holiday Travel (see page 65).

**Greatown Travel** (see page 65) run tours to Sarikei and its agricultural attractions, including Sebangkoi Deer Farm, Sebangkoi Country Park, dragon fruit orchards, pineapple farms, pepper gardens and orange orchards. Greatown can also arrange trips to the **Rejang Songket Factory** at **Kampung Rejang**, to see *songket* weavers in action, as well as the smoked prawn (*sesar unjur*) processing industry at **Kampung Belawai**.

## Accommodation

All addresses are 96100 Sarikei, Sarawak, Malaysia. Telephone dialling code is +6084 from overseas and 084 within Malaysia.

**Dragon Inn (2\*)**, 60 Jln Masjid Lama, Tel: 651799. Band B.

**Furama Hotel**, 41-42 Jln Haji Karim, Tel: 655999. Band B. Leh Hua Hotel, 10 Jln Tun AbdulRazak, Tel: 655000. Band B.

**Oriental Hotel**, 48 Jln Repok, Tel: 655559. Band B.

**Payang Puri Hotel**, 1-2 Jln Merdeka, Tel: 651216. Band A-B.

**Rejang Hotel**, 1 Jln Berjaya, Tel: 652693. Band A-B.

**Sarikei Hotel**, 11 Jln Wharf, Tel: 651122. Band B.

SebangkoiCountry Resort, 23km, Sarikei-Kuching Road, Tel: 019 8772928. Band A-C.

**Southern Hotel**, 54 Jln Repok, Tel: 651167. Band A.

**Tanjung Manis Hotel**, 24 Jln Repok, Tel: 651188. Band B.

**Wawasan Inn**, 69-72 Jln Masjid Lama, Tel: 653199. Band B.

## Eating Out

Sarikei's Chinese coffee shops and Malay restaurants serve simple noodle dishes and tasty snacks. More demanding diners can try the excellent seafood and venison offered by **Hung Kiew Kee Restaurant**, **Golden Happiness Restaurant** (both on Jln Masjid Lama) and **Oriental Restaurant** (Oriental Hotel, halal). Fast food fans will find **KFC** and **Sugar Bun** on Jln Masjid Lama.

## BINTANGOR

This small market town, 105km by road from Sibü, is famous for its unusual green oranges - although the peel is deep green, the sweet flesh inside is orange coloured and fully ripe. The town can be covered on foot in about an hour, taking in the colourful **fruit and vegetable market** and the **Bintangor orange statue**. The coffee shops in town are renowned for their excellent **rojak**, a spicy Malaysian salad of fruits and vegetables.

## Accommodation

All addresses are 96500 Bintangor, Sarawak, Malaysia. The telephone dialling code is +6084 from overseas and 084 within Malaysia

**Hotel Ming Kiong**, Wisma Cheong Siew, Lot 20 Jln Kelupu, Tel: 692888. Band B.

**Orleans Inn**, 25-26 Jln Wharf, Tel: 692235. Band B.

## TRAVEL & TOUR CONNECTIONS

Unless otherwise indicated, all addresses are 96000 Sibul, Sarawak, Malaysia. The telephone dialling code is +6084 from overseas and 084 within Malaysia.

**AIR - Malaysia: MAS** connects Sibul with Kuala Lumpur (1x daily) and Kuching (2x daily). Advance booking fares are available. **Air Asia** operates regular flights between Sibul and Kuching (2x daily), Kuala Lumpur (LCCT, 5x daily) and Johor Bharu (1x daily). **MASwings** operates ATR72 turboprop services connecting Sibul to Kuching (5x daily), Miri (4x daily), Bintulu (2x daily) and Kota Kinabalu (2x daily), as well as 19-seat DHC-6 Twin Otter turboprops from Mukah to Kuching (3x daily) and Miri (1x daily). **Malindo Air** will commence flights from Sibul to Kuala Lumpur in January 2014 (1x daily). Connections to other destinations are via Kuching, Kuala Lumpur, Miri, Johor Bharu or Kota Kinabalu.

**Sibu Airport Information.** Tel: 307770.

**Air Asia.** Ground Floor, Airport Terminal Building, contact via call centre: 03-87754000, www.airasia.com.

**Malaysian Airlines (MAS) & MASwings.** Ground Floor, Airport Terminal Building, contact via call centre, Tel: 1-300 883000 or 326861, www.malaysiaairlines.com.

**Malindo Air.** No Sibul office. Contact via call centre, Tel: 03-7841 5388, www.malindoair.com.

**ROAD:** The Trans-Borneo highway connects Sibul to all major cities in Sarawak. Sibul to Kuching takes about 5 hours by car, Bintulu about 2 hours, Miri about 4 hours and Mukah about 3 hours. Roads in and around Sibul are generally good.

**BUS SERVICES:** Local bus services operate from the bus station opposite the Express Wharf and serve destinations throughout the town and its surroundings. Long distance buses depart from the **Sibu New Bus Terminal** on Jln Pahlawan. Please phone the bus companies for latest schedules, e-mail the Visitors' Information Centre in Sibul for up-to-date bus schedules and prices, or drop by for a printout of the same.

**Baramas Express** (Bintulu, Kuching, Sarikei, Miri, Pontianak) Tel: 313139, 311323, latest bus schedules at www.busasia.com.

**Borneo Amalgamated Transport** (Bintulu, Kuching, Sarikei, Sri Aman, Kanowit, Miri) Tel: 334521.

**Lanang Road Bus Co** and **Rejang Transport** (Kuching, Bintulu, Miri, Kanowit, Sarikei, Bintangor, Mukah, Balingian plus local services) Tel: 314527, 335917.

**Miri Transportation** (Bintulu, Miri, Kuching) Tel: 324818.

**Sungei Merah Bus Co** (Sibul town local services) Tel: 330759, 335564.

**Suria Bus Express** (From Mukah to Bintulu & Miri) Tel: 872682.

**Syarikat Bas Baram** (Bintulu, Baram, Miri, Kuching) Tel: 313100.

**Tai Hua Bus** (From Mukah to Oya & Dalat) Tel: 871230/872682.

**Trans Borneo Resources** (Kuching, Mukah, Oya, Dalat, Sarikei, Bintulu, Miri. Also from Mukah & Dalat direct to Bintulu & Miri) Tel: 082-452271.

**Vital Focus Transportation** operates **PB Bus Express, Suria Bus Express, Borneo Highway Express** (Bintulu, Miri, Sarikei, Kuching) Tel: 322450, 313254,

**Airport.** No direct bus service. If you are travelling light, take a Lanang Road bus to Kanowit or Sibul Jaya and ask for the airport junction (10 mins walk). Roughly every hour from 5.15 am to 5 pm. RM 3.

**Bintangor.** Most buses to Sarikei stop in Bintangor, RM 5.

**Bintulu.** Frequent services with first bus departing 7 am, last bus 12.30 am. RM 28.

**Dalat.** Trans Borneo Resources, phone for schedule. RM 22.

**Kanowit.** Lanang Rd Bus No. 3 Roughly every hour from 5.15 am to 5 pm. RM 5

**Miri.** See operators above. Frequent services with first bus departing 7 am, last bus 12.30 am. RM 40.

**Mukah.** Trans Borneo Resources, Lanang Road Bus Co, phone for schedule. RM 20.

**Pontianak** (Indonesia). Baramas Express, 10 am, 01.45 pm, 9.30 pm, 11.30 pm 12.00 am. RM 95.

**Sarikei.** See operators above. Frequent services with first bus departing 5.15 am, last bus 12.30 am. RM 10.

**Sibu New Bus Terminal.** From the Express Wharf Bus Station, Lanang Rd Bus No. 21 or Sungai Merah Bus Nos. 12 & 17. Every 45 mins from 6.30 am to 5.30 pm. RM 1.

**Sungai Merah Bazaar** (for heritage walk) and **Wong Nai Siong Memorial Park.** Sungai Merah Bus 1A. RM1

**EXPRESS BOATS:** Tickets are sold in the Passenger Terminal at the Sibul Express Wharf. It's advisable to get there 30 mins before departure, except at peak holiday periods when you may have to book a day in advance.

**Belaga.** Daily at 6.15 am (9.30 am from Kapit). Services may not operate during the dry season (July-Sept). 8 hrs. RM 50 (Kapit RM 35). Foreign visitors require a permit from the Kapit Resident's Office to travel beyond Kapit, so will need to stay overnight in Kapit.

**Dalat.** Smaller speedboats depart from the jetty at the junction of Jln Khoo Peng Loong and Jln Temple. Roughly every 1½ hrs from 7.00 am to 2.30 pm. 1<sup>st</sup> boat back from Dalat 6.30 am, last boat 12.30 pm. Boats depart as soon as they are full so get there at least 30 mins early. 2 hrs. RM25.

**Daro.** 2-hourly from 7.30 am - 9.30 pm. 2 ½ hrs. RM25

**Kapit.** A variety of operators run frequent services from 5.30 am to 3.30 pm, most of which stop at Kanowit, Song and the occasional longhouse along the way. Contact the Sarawak Rivers Board for up-to date schedules, Tel: 339936 (24 hrs). About 3 hrs. RM28 (1st class RM33).

**Kanowit.** See Kapit. 40 mins. RM8.

**Kuching.** Express Bahagia, departs daily at 11.30 am, stopping at Sarikei and Tanjung Manis. RM 45, 5 hrs. Tel: 319228 Fax: 336199. RM45 (1st class RM50).

**Sarikei.** See Kuching. 1 hr. RM10.

**Song.** See Kapit. 2½ hrs. RM 22 (1st Class RM28).

**TAXIS:** Airport to town is RM 28. Town to airport is RM26. Taxis do not use meters but most trips within town are between RM6 and RM12. Taxis can always be found outside the big hotels and at the taxi stands opposite the Express Wharf and on Jalan Lintang. Alternatively, call the taxi station, Tel: 320773, 335787 or 313384. Official 1-way long distance fares are: Mukah (RM250), Bawang Assan (RM70), Sarikei (RM150), Kanowit (RM70) and Bintangor (RM120).

**CAR HIRE:** The following operators are fully licensed - contact the Visitors' Information Centre, Sibul, for other licensed operators.

**Kong Teck Car Rental,** Sibul Airport Arrival hall, Tel: 310620, www.kongteck.com.my.

**Team Leisure Travel,** G41, Medan Mall, 6 Jln Wong King Huo, Tel: 344577, www.teamleisure.com.my.

**TOUR OPERATORS:**

**Greatown Travel Sdn Bhd,** No. 6, 1st Floor, Lrg Chew Siik Hiong 1A, Tel: 219 243, Fax: 213243, Email: gotoborneo@gmail.com, www.greatowntravel.com. Greatown specialize in unusual attractions and less-touristed locations. Proprietor H.K. Ling has made discovering Central Sarawak's off-the-beaten-track destinations his mission in life and offers a variety of unique tours and experiences.

**Equatorial Tours & Travel,** Ground Floor, Wisma Equatorial, 11 Raminway, Tel: 331599, Email: equatorial@asia.com.

**Golden Horse Travel & Tours Sdn Bhd,** 62 Jln Kampung Nyabor, Tel: 323288 Email: gohorse@pd.jaring.my

**Great Holiday Travel,** 23, 1st Floor, Pusat Pedada, Jalan Pedada, Tel: 348196, www.ghborneo.com.

**Metropolitan Travel Services,** 72-74 Jln Market, Tel: 313155, Email: mtssbw8@streamyx.com.

**Sazhong Trading & Travel Service,** 4 Jln Central, Tel: 336017, sazhong.yolasite.com. Specialist in upriver trips to traditional longhouses.

**Sentiasa Travel Services,** 2A, Jln Persiaran Brooke, Tel: 329293, Email: sentiasa@hotmail.com.

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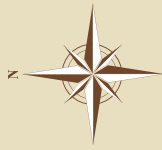
South China Sea

LABUAN

SABAH

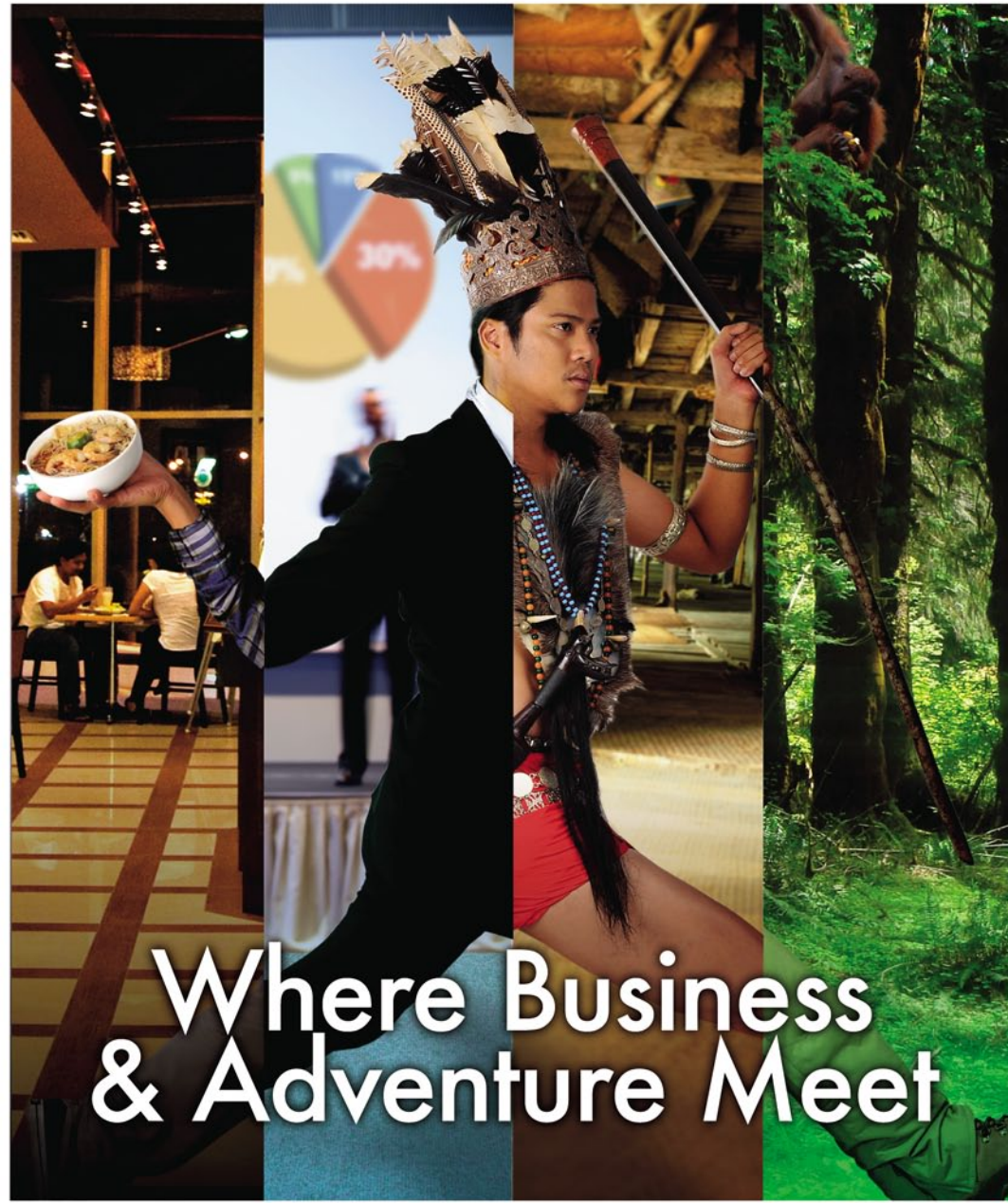
KALIMANTAN

BRUNEI



**LEGEND**

- Capital City
- Major Town/City
- Divisional Town
- National Park
- Main Airport
- STOL Airport
- River
- International Boundaries
- Road
- Diving

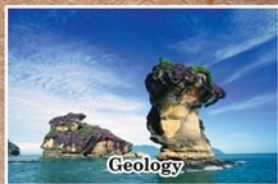
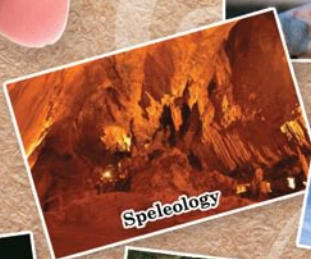
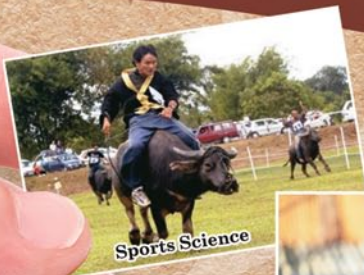


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