

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Bandar Seri Begawan

Vibrant, yet peaceful. Both modern and timeless. A fusion of majestic opulence and traditional respect.

Bandar Seri Begawan is the centre of Brunei's commerce, finance and government. In many ways, it is also the heart of Brunei's cultural landscape, housing some of the nation's most revered landmarks. The city's breathtaking Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque is a stunning tribute to the nation's deep-rooted faith, while the truly Bruneian Kampong Ayer water village offers a glimpse of the nation's quaint Asian charm.

Beneath Bandar Seri Begawan's lavish adornments, gold towers, sparkling fountains and colourful mosaic tiles, lies a city steeped in quiet respect, grounded in Islamic tradition, and exuding a sense of peace that makes it one of Asia's most distinctive capital cities.

Location

Located on the northern shore of the Island of Borneo, between longitudes 114'04" and 114'23" East and latitudes 4'00" and 5'05" North. Brunei, although occupying less than 1% of Borneo's land area, is the only sovereign country on the island, which it shares with the Indonesian provinces of West, East, South and Central Kalimantan and the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak.

Land Area: 5,765 sq. km.

Population: 372,360 (2005 est.)

Density: 65 persons/sq. km.

Capital City: Bandar Seri Begawan

Population: 236,200 (district)

Ethnic Groups: Malay: 67%; Chinese: 15%, indigenous tribes: 6%; other: 12%

Language: Bahasa Melayu (Malay) is the official language, but English is widely spoken. Mandarin, Chinese dialects and native languages of Borneo are also spoken by segments of the population.

Religions: Islam (official): 67%; Buddhism: 13%; Christianity: 10%; indigenous beliefs and other: 10%

National Philosophy: Since gaining independence from the British in 1984, Brunei has adopted the national philosophy of the Malay Islamic Monarchy (Melayu Islam Beraja), a system that encompasses strong Malay cultural influences, stressing the importance of Islam in daily life and governance, and respect for the monarchy as represented by His Majesty The Sultan. It is a philosophy of tolerance, which allows other cultures to follow individual traditions and to practice other religions.

Climate: Temperate equatorial climate year round, characterized by temperatures ranging between 23 to 32 degrees Celsius, and an average annual rainfall of 320 cm. There is no distinct rainy season, though the period from November to March tends to bring heavier rains.

Borders: Bounded on all sides by the Malaysian state of Sarawak, except for a 161 km long stretch of coastline along the South China Sea to the north.

Administrative Divisions: 4 Districts: Brunei-Muara (housing the capital city), Tutong, Belait, and Temburong

Head of State

His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam. His Majesty is the 29th ruler of his line, which began with Sultan Muhammad in 1405.

System of Government

Independent sovereign constitutional Sultanate, with His Majesty The Sultan as the supreme executive authority. His Majesty is advised by an appointed Council of Cabinet Ministers, Religious Council, Privy Council, a Council of Succession and a Legislative Council.

ECONOMY:

With a total GDP of around US\$6.5 billion and a per capita GDP of around US\$18.3 thousand (2002), Brunei's resource-rich (oil & natural gas) economy affords its population high living standards, resulting in positive social indicators such as high literacy rates, longer life expectancy, and low unemployment and crime rates. The government provides for all medical services and subsidizes rice and housing.

Government, construction, services, retail and some light manufacturing are the other major sectors in Brunei's economy. The government is currently working towards economic diversification — in which tourism plays an important role — as well as encouraging foreign investment and developing education and human resources. These measures are designed to prepare the nation for the challenges of the future when the oil and gas reserves will have been depleted and new sources of income will be needed to maintain the current high standards of living enjoyed by Bruneians.

TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE:

With over 2,500 rooms spread among 30 establishments ranging from guesthouses to the super luxurious "7-star" Empire Hotel and Country Club, and with a dozen or so active inbound tour operators, Brunei has a well-established, yet underutilized tourism infrastructure attracting an increasing number of regional and international visitors.

TOURISM ARRIVALS:

Brunei recorded approximately 1 million foreign visitors in 2003, the vast majority arriving from Malaysia through land entry points. Based on estimates derived from hotel occupancy rates and on market intelligence gathered from inbound operators, Brunei Tourism estimates the number of *bona fide* leisure and business tourists to be around 100,000 in 2003, with a 3-day average length of stay. Most of these tourists originated from the short- and medium-haul markets, though a significant portion originated from long-haul markets, mainly UK and Germany. Brunei Tourism's objective is to increase international tourist arrivals by a minimum average rate of 7% yearly, as well as to increase average length of stay and expenditure.

INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT LINKAGES:

Brunei enjoys a convenient location at the heart of Southeast Asia and is well-connected to destinations worldwide.

Air:

Royal Brunei Airlines, the nation's flagship carrier, flies non-stop or direct to most major Asia-Pacific destinations and the Middle East, as well as to Europe via London and Frankfurt. Meanwhile, Malaysia Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways, Dragonair and Philippines Airlines serve Bandar Seri Begawan and offer one-stop connections to the rest of the world through their hubs in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong and Manila.

Sea:

Ferries link Brunei with the Malaysian island of Labuan off the coast of Sabah, and to the Malaysian towns of Limbang and Lawas in Sarawak.

Road:

An extensive overland road network also connects Brunei to Sarawak and Sabah, while the Indonesian province of Kalimantan can be reached by road, air or boat via Sarawak or Sabah.

HEALTH, SAFETY AND SECURITY:

Brunei is free from malaria and other tropical diseases, is outside the typhoon belt, has no volcanoes, and is not prone to earthquakes or other major natural disasters. The country also enjoys government stability and economic prosperity, resulting in a very low crime rate.