

NATIONAL PARKS

Northern Sarawak's national parks feature a wide range of natural habitats and contain some of the region's leading visitor attractions. The national parks listed below are all open to visitor facilities including well marked trekking trails. Four other National Parks – Gunung Buda, Bukit Tiban, Usun Apau and Pulong Tau – are either not yet open to visitors, or do not yet have visitor facilities. However, trekkers using the Headhunters Trail from Gunung Mulu to Limbang town will pass through parts of Pulong Tau. For future developments, check with Sarawak Forestry at www.sarawakforestry.com.

Entry Fees

Visitors to tall national parks in Sarawak must pay an entry fee upon arrival. Entry fees and special passes are listed below. More detailed information on park fees can also be found at www.sarawakforestry.com. A permit is required for professional photography or filming, which should be arranged in advance with the National Parks Booking Office in Miri (see below).

	Single Entry	Multiple Entry (non transferable)		5 Entry Pass Group Entry (5 persons per group)	
Adult	RM 10	1 month RM 50	3 months RM 100	RM 40	RM 40
Student¹ Senior Citizen²/Disabled	RM 5	RM25	RM 50	RM 20	RM 20
Mixed Group³	-	-	-	-	RM 30
Children⁴	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free

¹ A person who is studying at primary or secondary school or university. University students should produce a valid university identity card.

² A person aged 55 and above.

³ At least one person in the group must be a student, senior citizen or disabled person.

⁴ 6 years & below.

Accommodation Bookings

The National Park and Wildlife booking office in the Miri Visitors' Information Centre handles accommodation bookings for national parks in Northern Sarawak (except for Gunung Mulu National Park, see separate listing under Gunung Mulu, below). An online booking service is available at www.sarawakforestry.com or <http://ebooking.com.my>. Day-trippers can obtain entry permits and pay fees upon arrival. Room rates shown below include 5% Government Service tax.

National Parks Booking Office
c/o Visitors Information Centre
Lot 452, Jln Melayu, 98000 Miri,
Sarawak, Malaysia.
Tel: 085-434184 Fax: 085-434179

Opening Hours

National Parks	Monday - Friday	0800hrs-1800hrs
Booking Office (Miri)	Saturday, Sunday & Public Holidays	0900hrs-1500hrs

GUNUNG MULU NATIONAL PARK

Introduction

Gunung Mulu is Sarawak's largest national park (544 sq km), and also Malaysia's first World Heritage Area, a status it was awarded in 2000. It is most famous for its limestone cave systems, including the world's largest natural chamber (the Sarawak Chamber), the world's largest cave passage (Deer Cave) and the longest cave in Southeast Asia (Clearwater Cave). The park's main attractions are the four show caves, all readily accessible by wooden walkways and paths. Other fascinating sights and activities include; a bat observatory; a rainforest canopy skywalk; adventure formed from limestone and therefore have different geographical features. The summit of Gunung Mulu is covered by moss forests and stunted montane vegetation, whilst razor sharp limestone pinnacles, some as high as 50 metres, are found on the upper slopes of Gunung Api. The park's forest ecosystems include peatswamp, heath, mixed dipterocarp, moss forest and montane vegetation – home to thousands of species of ferns, fungi, mosses and flowering plants, including 170 species of orchid and 10 species of pitcher plants, an impressive variety of mammals, birds (including 8 species of hornbill), frogs, fish and insects. Mulu's wildlife is often heard but not seen, but visitors are almost certain to encounter bats, swiftlets, cave dwelling insects, snakes, lizards, tree frogs and an abundance of beautiful butterflies.

Park Headquarters

Upon arrival visitors must register at the park office (Tel: 085-792300/792301) and pay the park entrance fees (RM10 per visitor). Guides and boats can also be booked here. A short walk from the Park Office is the main accommodation building, which also offers a canteen, a small shop selling souvenirs and basic essentials, and an interesting and well designed Information Centre.

Park Guides

Visitors may not enter any of the caves or the Mulu Canopy Skywalk without a Park Guide. For most trails, including the Mulu Summit Climb, the Pinnacles trail and the Headhunter's trail, a Park Guide is also mandatory. Bookings and payment of fees can be made at the park office. If you require a Park Guide you need to book the day before. During peak season, guides for popular activities such as the Pinnacles trail may be fully booked weeks in advance.

Park Guide and Longboat Fees

Show Caves

Clearwater and Wind Caves	RM 5 per person (1/2 day) Longboat return fare RM27 per person
Deer and Lang's Caves	RM 5 per person (1/2 day)
Garden of Eden (from Deer Cave)	RM 200 (1-5 persons) RM40 per additional person (max 12)
Turtle Cave (from Clearwater Cave)	RM 20 per person (max 20)

Adventure Caving

Lagangs Cave	RM 200 (1-5 persons)
Racer Cave	RM 200 (1-5 persons) RM 40 per additional person (Max8) Longboat fare RM 18 per person (min 4)
Clearwater/Wind Cave Connection	RM 300 (1-5 persons) RM 60 per additional person (max 8) Longboat return fare RM 27 per person
Sarawak Chamber	RM 500 (1-5 persons) RM 100 per additional person (max 8)

Treks and Trails

Mulu Canopy Skywalk	RM 30 per person (max 12)
Plants For Life Walk	RM 5 per person
Night Walk	RM 10 per person
Camp 1	RM 100 (1-5 persons)
Long Langsat (longboat fee)	RM 50 per person (min 3)
Pinnacles (3 days/2 nights)	RM 400 (1-5 persons) RM 80 per additional person (Max 8) Longboat return fare RM 370 (1-4 persons) Camp 5 accommodation RM 22 per person/night
Headhunter's Trail	RM 200 (1-5 persons) RM 40 per additional person (max 12) Longboat to Camp 5 RM220 (1-4 persons) Longhouse accommodation RM 15 per person Longhouse accommodation RM 15 per person Longhouse food RM 15 per meal Longboat to Medamit RM 450 (1-4 persons) Van to Limbang (Airport) RM 75 (1-5 persons)
Mulu Summit Trek (4 days/3 nights)	RM 1,000 (1-5 persons) RM 200 per additional person (max 8)
Ad-Hoc Guiding and Side Trips	Porter fee RM 50 (if available) RM 25 per hour (1-5 persons)

Visiting the Show Caves

NOTE: Visitor may only visit the show caves at fixed times, and only when accompanied by a park guide, in order to minimize human impact on the delicate rock formations and cave ecosystems. A flashlight, sturdy non-slip shoes, rainwear and insect repellent are essential, and a hat can be useful to protect from dripping bat guano. Flash photography and the use of tripods and monopods are strictly forbidden, as are smoking (except in designated areas) and littering.

Wind and Clearwater Caves (half-day, mornings)

Meet the Park Guide at the Wind Cave (either 09.45 or 10.30, booking required), traveling by longboat along the Melinau and Clearwater Rivers. If the water is low, you may have to get out and help to push the boat. The boats usually make a short stop at the Batu Bungan Penan Settlement, where Penan women operate a small craft market (closed Sundays) offering a wide selection of superb handicrafts, including rattan mats, baskets, woodcarvings, jewellery and musical instruments. Alternatively there is a 3 km trail from the Park HQ passing by the Moonmilk Cave, so named for the soft white cheese-like sediments found in the cave.

The entrance to the Wind Cave is situated above an ancient Berawan burial site. Inside, cool breezes can be felt at narrow parts of the cave, and there is a spectacular chasm caused by a catastrophic roof collapse to the left of the walkway. Further into the cave is a circular walkway leading through the King's Room; this chamber contains one of the finest collections of calcite stalagmite (upward growing) and stalactite (downward growing) formations known to science. The formations are actually lit to bring out their bizarre and dramatic appearance.

From the Wind Cave, a short walk along the river leads to the Clearwater Cave. Formed by an underground river which emerges near the cave mouth, it is Southeast Asia's longest cave passage at over 108km. From the river, 200 steps lead to the cave mouth, which has some superb dripping stalactities and two species of bizarre one-leaved plants (*Monophyllae pendula* and *M. glauca*). Inside the cave entrance are strange spike-like formations formed by bacterial action, all facing towards the cave entrance. As the bacteria are dependent on sunlight, the formations become smaller and more delicate further into the cave.

At the end of the walkway is a bridge across the subterranean river, where visitors can clearly see how the cave was sculpted by the force of rushing water. A skylight formed by a roof collapse and a great vault formed by a floor collapse (in the adjacent Lady Cave) are amongst the other unusual features of the cave system. There is an excellent swimming area at the cave entrance, with changing and picnic facilities. Most visitors stop here for a lunch and a relaxing swim.

The Turtle Cave is an alternative exit route from the Clearwater Cave. Visitors are led into the subterranean blackness of the underground river, clambering over sharp rocks and swimming with the river current to emerge into a crystal clear pool. A waterproof flashlight and sturdy shoes are essential, and this add-on tour must be booked in advance.

Deer and Langs Caves (half day, afternoons)

Guided tours leave the Park HQ daily at 1.30 and 2.30pm. A 3-km wooden walkway passes through peat swamp, alluvial flat and limestone outcrops before reaching the Deer Cave, which at 120 metres high and 100 metres wide is the world's largest discovered cave passage. The cave is home to the world's largest known bat colony comprising several million bats from 12 different species, and their droppings and remains have created a thriving and complex ecosystem on the cave floor. The billions of invertebrates include a unique species of luminous centipede, and cave racer snakes and pythons can occasionally be seen. The huge cave passage was formed by an ancient river that carved the spectacular scalloped walls and left a number of fascinating rock formations; at one point it is possible to see a remarkably lifelike profile of Abraham Lincoln outlined at the cave entrance.

The nearby Langs Cave is altogether smaller and more intimate, with elegant rock shawls and cave curtains, dramatic stalagmites and stalactites, and unusual rim stone pools on the cave floor. From the cave exit, visitors usually walk over to the Bat Observatory, to view the mass exodus as millions of bats emerge from the vast entrance of the cave to forage in the rainforest between 5.50 and 6.30pm. This is a unique and memorable display, as the huge flocks of bats fly in rapidly shifting spiral formations to confuse predators. Occasionally the bats fail to emerge, and visitors who wish to return the next day without visiting the caves may do so provided they notify the park HQ first. The walk back along the steadily darkening plankwalk is enhanced by the sounds of frogs and cicadas and the sight of hundreds of fireflies amongst the trees.

Visitors may opt for the Garden of Eden tour extension, to the rear entrance of the Deer Cave, climbing down to the underground river and wading and scrambling to the glowing pool of light and water at the far end of the cave. Intrepid visitors will enjoy spectacular scenery and can swim in a secluded mountain pool. Prior booking is essential.

Adventuring Caving

Adventure caving is a great way of getting to know Mulu's caves, and involves wading swimming, climbing, crawling with your face to the floor and getting covered in dirt. The Park HQ provides competent guides, caving helmets and headlamps. The caves are graded in order of ability. The Lagangs Cave trip (3 hrs) is suitable for beginners and family groups as it does not involve climbing. The intermediate Race Cave trip (3 hrs) offers the chance to view remarkable cave dwelling snakes and invertebrates, and requires a reasonable level of fitness and upper body strength. The Clearwater – Wind Cave Connection trip (6-8 hrs) with its exceptionally beautiful river section requires advanced caving skills, as does the Sarawak Chamber trip (10-15 hrs) to view the world's largest cave chamber. Full details are available at www.mulupark.com.

Walks, Treks, Trails and Climbs

The 480 metre Mulu Canopy Skywalk is the longest tree-based walkway in the world. The complex ecosystem of the forest canopy provides a unique opportunity to view a variety of birds, insects and plants that cannot be seen from the ground. Guided tours (approx 2 hrs) leave the Park HQ daily.

The Plants for Life walk (1 hr) is a guided tour of the plants used by the indigenous people to survive in the rainforest, whether as food, medicine, or to make everyday implements. It also includes the opportunity to try some of the edible plants.

The guided Night Walk (1hr) winds its way through 7 different types of vegetation and offers the opportunity to see many different Mulu plant species, including pitcher plants, as well as species only visible at night, such as fire-flies and fluorescent fungi.

The 4-5 hr Paku Waterfall Trail is a self-guided walk that passes through peatswamp forest to a small waterfall on the banks of the Paku River, an ideal spot for a picnic lunch and a refreshing swim.

The all-day Camp 1 Trail (Park Guide mandatory) continues past Paku Waterfall and passes near a spectacular 'strangling fig' before proceeding through pristine rainforest to one of the camps used during the 1977 Royal Geographic Society Expedition. If you wish to stay overnight in the rainforest, a basic forest hut provides shelter.

The Long Langsat tour is a longboat trip down the Sungai Melinau and up the Sungai Tutoh to the small long Langsat stream, where crystal clear waters cascade down a narrow valley between steep slopes. On the way back you can visit the Penan community at Long Iman and learn about their way of life.

The 3-day/2-night Pinnacles Trail leads to the remarkable limestone pinnacles near the peak of Gunung Api (1732m). The first day involves a 3-4 hour boat journey to Long Berar, followed by a pleasant 4 hour jungle trek to reach Camp 5 for the overnight stay. The ascent begins the following day. Although the trail is only 2.5km, Gunung Api's steep slopes make it feel a lot longer. It takes about 4 hours to reach the Pinnacles where the fantastic views make it all worthwhile.

The Summit Trek to the top of Gunung Mulu (2,370m) is for the fit and adventurous. It's usually done as a four day/3 night out and back trek. However the super-fit can opt for 3 day, or even 2 day treks. There are a number of wooden huts along the trail (Camps 1, 2, 3 & 4). The choice of overnight locations depends on the length of your trek, and the schedule you arrange with the park guides. Details can be obtained at the Park HQ.

The Headhunters' Trail follows the route of Kayan headhunting parties who dragged their war boats through the rainforest to raid the inhabitants of the Limbang river system. A boat journey to Camp 5 is followed by an 11.3km trek through a very remote rainforest area, with a good possibility of wildlife encounters. Trekkers then take another boat for an overnight stay at an Iban longhouse, followed by a further 1 ½ hr boat ride to Medamit to catch the van for Limbang. The trek can also be done in reverse, starting at Limbang. Either way, it offers a fascinating route into or out of Mulu National Park.

Accommodation

The Park Headquarters offers wooden Longhouse Rooms (air con, attached bath) from RM80 twin share and a Dormitory (21 beds, fan shared bath) at RM20 per person. For reservations and enquiries contact Borsarmulu Park Management Sdn Bhd, CDT62, 98007 Miri, Sarawak. Tel: 085-792300/792301 Fax: 085-792305 E-mail: enquiries@mulupark.com Website: www.mulupark.com.

Royal Mulu Resort, CDT62, 98007 Miri, Sarawak. Tel: 085-790100 Fax: 085-790101 Website: www.royalmuluresort.com. 40 large air-con rooms in wooden longhouse style, Room Rate (from) RM240(++). International class resort on the banks of the Melinau River adjacent to the National Park. Conference facilities available. Features Wildflower

Restaurant, Splash Bar, Riverside Lounge, swimming pool, sun deck, satellite TV. Activities include rock climbing wall, quad bike safaris, kayaking, rafting, mountain biking, archery.

Eating Out

Café Mulu at the Park HQ is open daily from 7.30am to 9.00pm and provides a variety of reasonably priced meals and snacks.

The Wildflower Restaurant at Mulu Rainforest Resort offers Asian, Western and local cuisine with live dance performances every evening.

The locally owned Melinau Canteen across river from the Park HQ offers simple rice and noodle dishes and can prepare multi-course traditional dinners to order. A similar choice is available at the Mulu Canteen opposite the Mulu Rainforest Resort.

Travel Connections

By Air: MASWings currently operates Fokker 50 Turboprops to Mulu from Miri and Kota Kinabalu. – see Miri Travel Connections for full details.

By Boat: The introduction of regular flights to Mulu has drastically reduced the number of people traveling to the park by boat. Consequently the boat service has become somewhat irregular. However, it is still possible to go by boat but hits may involve waiting around for enough passengers and could end up costing a lot more than planned. The first stage is from Miri to Kuala Baram (RM3.00 by bus, RM20 by taxi). There is a regular express boat service from Kuala Baram to Marudi (RM20). The first boat departs at 7.40am and the trip takes 2-3 hours. The next stage is from Marudi to Long Terawan (RM20). Boats leave when there are enough passengers. If the water level is high boats go all the way to Long Terawan. If not, there is a boat change at Long Apoh. From Long Terawan to Mulu you will need to charter a boat (best arranged in Marudi) – count on Rm250 or RM55 per person for larger groups.

On Foot: It is possible to trek to Mulu by taking the Headhunters Trail (see above) in reverse, starting from Limbang town. See Limbang chapter for details.

NIAH NATIONAL PARK

Introduction

Niah National Park provides some interesting and impressive sights. The area was a major centre of human settlement as early as 40,000 years ago, and features one of the world's largest cave entrances, Paleolithic and Neolithic burial sites, and iron-age cave paintings. The surrounding area is covered in dense primary rain forest and is home to many species of plants and wildlife. Even today, the caves remain important for local communities, with birds nest and guano collection providing valuable employment and income. Niah Caves is a very pleasant place to spend a few days, although most of the major attractions are accessible to the day visitor.

Historical Background

In 1958 a team led by Sarawak Museum curator Tom Harrisson unearthed a human skull estimated to be 40,000 years old. The scientific community remained skeptical of Harrisson's claims, but, as dating techniques improved, Harrisson was eventually proved right. Further excavations have shown a continued human presence over tens of thousand of years, from Paleolithic times until as recently as 1400 AD. The nearby Painted Cave houses wall-paintings depicting the boat journey of the dead into the afterlife, along with remnants of "Death-ships" on the cave floor – boat-shaped coffins

containing the remains of the deceased, and grave-goods for use in the afterlife, such as ceramics, ornaments and glass beads. The death-ships have been dated from 1AD to 780AD, although local Penan folklore tells of the use of death-ship burials as late as the 19th century.

Visiting the Park

Niah National Park is located on the Sungai Niah, about 3km from the small town of Batu Niah, 110km south-west of Miri. The park has a visitor centre and good accommodation, and is very easy to get around, thanks to an extensive network of plankwalks. A flashlight and good walking shoes are absolutely essential – the caves are unlit, and the plankwalk can become slippery from the constant dripping of water and bat guano from the ceiling of the cave. A wide-brimmed hat is desirable, for obvious reasons.

The Great Cave

The Great Cave is situated at the end of a 3.5km plankwalk which cuts through dense primary rainforest, passing close to giant tapang trees, padanus plants, exquisite orchids and tree fungi. Colourful birds, squirrel, lizards, butterflies and unusual insects and invertebrates are commonly seen, as well as occasional monkeys, flying lizards and hornbills.

The cave complex starts at the Trader's Cave, an extended rock overhang where birds nest and guano traders used to conduct their business. A little further along is the West Mouth of the Great Cave; over 60m high and 250m wide, it is one of the world's most spectacular cave entrances. To the left of the cave mouth, archaeological excavations are clearly visible. The view from the cave mouth out over the surrounding jungle is quite unique; the jagged stalactites, overhangs and dangling creepers of the cave mouth provide a dramatic photo opportunity.

Inside the cave chamber, guano (bat and bird manure) collectors work by the dim light of paraffin lamps, collecting the guano from the cave floor for sale as fertilizer. Bamboo poles, and ladders made from ironwood (belian), are evidence of the birds nest collectors, local people who have practiced this dangerous occupation for generations. The half million swiftlets living in the cave make their nests purely from their own salivary secretions, and these valuable nests (over US\$1,000 per kg for the best quality) are used to produce birds nest soup, highly regarded in Chinese cuisine. Note: visitors cannot be sure of seeing birds nest collectors in action, as harvesting is a seasonal activity, and is subject to temporary bans to protect swiftlet populations.

At the back of the Great Cave is a large chamber – the Padang – where shafts of sunlight stream down from large holes in the cave roof to illuminate the bizarre rock formations in the Burnt Cave (Lubang H Angus) – another excellent spot for taking photos. After the Padang comes a totally dark passage – Gan Kira (Moon Cave) – where a flashlight is essential, both to find your way and to admire the remarkable rock shapes and weathering effects.

The Painted Cave

From Gan Kira (Moon Cave), the plankwalk emerges into daylight and a short trail leads through the forest to the Painted Cave, site of the famous Niah cave paintings and 'death-ships'. The contents of the death-ship have been transferred to the Sarawak Museum, but the cave paintings and some of the empty death-ships can still be viewed on the wall behind the fenced-off burial site.

The paintings are difficult to see until your eyes become accustomed to the light. Executed in red hematite, they cover a long narrow strip (approx. 30m) at the back of the cave wall. The spread-eagled human figures probably represent warriors and hunters, the animals of the surrounding forest, and – most importantly – longboats carrying the souls of the deceased on the dangerous journey to the land of the dead. Thus the cave offers a clear insight into the development of the traditional religions of Borneo.

Bats, Swiftlets and Luminous Fungi

Visitors leaving the Great Cave around sunset will see two great black clouds intermingling – the nightly ‘changing of the guard’ as hundreds of thousands of swiftlets return to their nests, whilst an approximately equal number of bats fly out to forage in the forest. A variety of luminous fungi can be clearly seen from the plankwalk at night.

Treks and Trails

The Bukit Kasut Trail (green and white markings, 45 min.) leads to the summit of Bukit Kasut and passes through beautiful primary rainforest before moving into Kerangas forest at the foot of the hill. The trail is steep but the view at the top is worth it, offering a sweeping panorama of the rainforest canopy. The Madu Trail (red and white markings, 1hr) follows the banks of the Sungai Subis, passing through alluvial and peat swamp forest to the foot of Bukit Kasut. There are plenty of wild orchids, bizarre mushrooms and giant pandanus plants along the way.

The Park Headquarters

Upon arrival visitors are required to register at the Park HQ (Tel: 085-737454). There is an information centre where video films about Niah are shown nightly (upon request), as well as an excellent Archeology Museum (just across the river) and a cafeteria serving a range of local and western food and drinks.

Accommodation

Accommodation consists of a luxurious VIP chalet (3 rooms, RM250 per room or RM525 per chalet), Class 2 chalets (2 rooms, 4 beds, air-con, RM157.50 per room or RM236.25 per chalet) Class 3 chalets (2 rooms, 4 beds, fan, RM105 per room or RM157.50 per chalet) and a Hostel (4 rooms with 4 beds each, RM42 per room or RM168 for the whole hostel, all with electricity and hot showers. There are no cooking facilities. Please contact the National Parks Booking Office in Miri to make reservations. If you need to stay in Batu Niah (to catch an early bus, for example), there are a range of lodging houses and small hotels. Batu Niah is a bustling little township and is well provided with coffee shops and restaurants.

Travel Connections

Niah is within easy reach of both Miri (109km) and Bintulu (131km). There is no public bus from either Miri or Bintulu directly to Batu Niah or the park HQ. From Miri, take local bus 33 (from the station near the visitor Information Centre) to the Pujut Bus Terminal. Then take an express bus to the Niah Rest Stop which is on the main Miri-Bintulu road. From Bintulu (Long-Distance Bus Terminal) take an express bus to the Niah Rest Stop. Private cars and mini buses take passengers from the rest stop junction to the park for RM15-20 per person. If you plan to return to Miri the same day arrange a time for the driver to pick you up, otherwise, you might have to wait around at the park HQ for a lift back to the Niah Rest Stop. Share taxis and regular taxis are also available from both

Miri (1hr 20min, RM80 one way) and Bintulu (1hr 40min, RM100 one way), although the cost may be prohibitive if you travel alone.

Note: if you are heading to Niah by public transport you have no choice but to go via the Miri-Bintulu Road (see transport section). However, if you have your own transport or hire car it is quicker to use the coastal highway (via Bekenu & Sibuti) rather than the main Miri-Bintulu Road. The coastal highway begins near Luak Bay (near the Everly and Marriot hotels).

LAMBIR HILLS NATIONAL PARK

Introduction

Lambir Hills National Park is probably the world's most complex and diverse forest ecosystem. Its 6,952 hectares of lowland dipterocarp and heat forests rise to a height of 450m and produce the greatest known level of plant biodiversity on the planet. This provides a home for 237 different species of birds, flying squirrels, wild pigs, gibbons, many different types of monkey, various species of deer, and untold insects and other invertebrates, as well as dozens of international research scientists who are permanently stationed in the park. Lambir also offers fascinating trekking trails leading to sparkling waterfalls and bathing pools scattered about the rainforest, all within 40 minutes drive of downtown Miri.

Treks and Trails

Most of Lambir's trails are interconnected, so it is easy to do quite a few in a day. The Latak Waterfall Trail is the shortest, easiest and most popular – if you are looking for peace and solitude, come on a weekday. The trail (red/white markings, 20 min) follows the course of a clear, fast-flowing stream past two very pretty small waterfalls to a large forest pool surrounded on three sides by steep rock walls and fed by the 25-metre Latak waterfall. Changing rooms, toilets and picnic areas are provided and the pool is safe for swimming, but non-swimmers and small children should take care, as it is deep in parts.

The Pantu, Bukit Pantu and Pantu Waterfall Trails are all branches of the same trail system. Shortly before the Latak Waterfall, the Pantu Trail (white markings, 1hr.) branches off to the left up a series of steep steps past an abandoned tree tower, then downwards through dense forest to the Nibong waterfall, an idea place to cool off. A few hundred metres further along are the Bukit Pantu Trail on the right (yellow/white markings, 1 ½ hours) offering superb views, and the Pantu Waterfall Trail on the left (red/yellow markings, 1 hr).

Beyond the Pantu Waterfall Trail the terrain gradually rises, passing through rugged, dense forest filled with the sounds of Lambir's wildlife. After 4km, the trail forks, the right fork leading to the summit of Bukit Lambir. The Summit Trail (red/blue markings, 3 ½ hours) is hard work for the not-so-fit, but the abundant wild orchids and the superb view from the summit (456m) make it worthwhile, and trekkers can cool off in the pool below the Dinding waterfall on the way down. Lambir also offers a variety of tougher trails for serious trekkers; for further information, please consult the park wardens.

Accommodation

Accommodation at the Park Headquarters (Tel: 085-491030) consists of Type 5 Forest Lodges (2 rooms, bed configuration varies, air-con, RM105 per room or RM52.50 per room or RM78.75 per chalet) and Type 6 Forest Lodges (2 rooms, 2 single beds per

room, fan, RM105 per room or RM157.50 per chalet), all with electricity and hot water), and a camp site Rm5.25 per person. Please contact the National Parks Booking Office in Miri to make reservations.

An interesting alternative is the new Borneo Tropical Rainforest Resort, Km 38 Miri-Bintulu Road, Lot 15, Block 2, Sibuti Land District, 98000 Miri. Tel: 019-8858593, 019-8852193 Fax: 019-8340113 E-mail: info@borneorainforestresort.com Website: www.borneorainforestresort.com. Miri sales office Tel: 613888 Fax: 613808. This agro and nature resort is situated adjacent to the park. 30 rooms and 18 chalets with a range of facilities for most budgets, includes self-catering chalets. Room rates not yet available as the resort is in its opening phase and currently only offering packages with accommodation and activities. Enquire for full details.

Travel Connections

Lambir is only 32km from Miri. Syarikat Bas Suria and Syarikat Bas Baram have frequent bus services to Batu Niah, Bakong and Bekenu, all of which stop directly opposite the park HQ. The journey time is 30-40 mins. If you take a taxi (approx. RM40 each way), arrange a pick-up time for the return journey. The last bus back to Miri leaves at 1730hrs. Self-drive cars are also available – ask at your hotel counter or check in the yellow pages. Note: The bus marked ‘Lambir’ does not go to the National Park.

LOAGAN BUNUT NATIONAL PARK

Introduction

Loagan Bunut features a unique ecosystem based on Sarawak’s largest natural lake (65ha). The shallow lake usually drains completely when the water in the nearby Tinjar river is low (normally February and late May or early June/July). As the water level subsides, huge flocks of wading birds gorge themselves on fish and other aquatic creatures trapped in the mud. When the lake is dry, plants sprout from the mud and are eaten by insect larvae. When the rains come and the lake fill up, returning fish feed on the larvae, breed in the lake, and the whole cycle starts again.

Fishermen from the local Berawan tribe have developed a unique method only found at Loagan Bunut, known as Selambau. They use huge scoop nets mounted on large rafts to catch migrating fish, which are kept alive in submerged bamboo cages until they can be transported to market.

The surrounding terrain features a variety of forest types, ranging from mixed peat swamp forest with huge stilt-rooted trees at the water’s edge, to towering Alam forest with a canopy height of over 60m, and helps to make Loagan Bunut a birdwatcher’s paradise. Permanent residents include eagles, swallows, malkohas, stork-billed kingfishers, magpies, robins, doves, bulbuls, racket-tailed drongos, pied hornbills and kites, while darters, egrets, herons, bitterns, storks and broadbill arrive during dry spells to feed on the trapped fish. Other animals found in the park include barking deer, bearded pigs, sambar deer, long-tail macaques, black banded langurs, lesser mouse deer, small-tooth palm civets, giant squirrels, provost squirrels, Bornean gibbons, many species of frogs and small lizards, dog-headed water snakes and a variety of tree snakes. Estuarine crocodiles are occasionally sighted.

Activities

During dry spells it is possible to stroll across the dried-up lake bed, but visitors must be accompanied by a local guide for safety reasons. More permanent trails include the Hydrology Trail (2km) which provides a close-up view of the peat swamp ecosystem. The 260m Tapang Trail showcases the towering tapang tree (*Koompassia excelsia*), the world's third tallest tree, whose heavy, dense wood is claimed to be the best for making blowpipes. The Belian Trail (720m) features the belian tree (*Eusideroxylon zwageri*, also known as Borneo ironwood) which produces one of the world's hardest and most valuable timbers.

Boat trips can be arranged at the Park Headquarters. Early morning is the best time to appreciate the mist-shrouded scenery, midday is best for viewing wading birds feeding on trapped fish, and later afternoon offer superb sunsets and more bird watching possibilities. The boatmen usually drive the narrow boats right into the forest, amongst huge stilted tree roots where monkeys and squirrels can often be seen. A boat trip will usually include a visit to the fascinating Selambau scoop nets, and during fish migrations visitors can watch the fishermen at work and buy freshly caught fish. The boatmen will also point out an ancient Berawan burial platform, or Klirieng, supported above the lake by sturdy belian pillars.

The boats are operated by local Berawan fishermen who have a great deal of local knowledge and usually speak acceptable English. The charter rate is RM60.00 per boat per hour for up to 4 passengers, with an additional RM15.00 per hour for every extra passenger.

Accommodation

The Forest Hostel at the Park HQ (Tel: 085-779410) has 4 rooms with 7 double-decker bunk beds each (RM15.75 per person). There is a small canteen serving simple cooked meals, snacks and drinks. A generator supplies electricity during the evenings. Please contact the National Parks Booking office in Miri for reservations and the latest room rates.

The Mutiara Hostel, operated by a local Berawan family, offer 9 twin-bed rooms plus a 15-persons dormitory with sleeping mats. Visitors may cook their own food in a simple kitchen-ingredients are sold by the floating grocery shop nearby. The owners will cook meals if notified in advance. Contact Mr. Meran Surang at the hostel, Tel: (+6) 011-292-292164, or Mr. Rolland Ayu in Miri, Tel: (+6) 085-612014. Reservations can also be made at the National Parks Booking office in Miri.

Travel Connections

Loagan Bunut is approximately 120km or 3 hours by road from Miri. Travel agents in Miri operate tours to the park. Independent travelers can take public transport (bus or 4WD) to Long Lapok, about 15km from the Park headquarters. The coffee shops near the bus stop can arrange onward transport to the park. Mutiara Hostel meet and transport their guests from Lapok Bridge. Check with the National Parks Booking Office in Miri for the latest timetables and fares.

SIMILAJAU NATIONAL PARK

Introduction

Similajau National Park showcases the unique geographical features of the Sarawak coastline north of Bintulu – a chain of golden sandy beaches, punctuated by small rocky headlands and jungle streams, and bordered by dense green forest. The 8,996 hectare park is at its best during the dry season (approximately February to October) when the emerald green waters are crystal clear and ideal for swimming. The park is very popular with locals at weekends. If you want to avoid crowds, visit during the week when you are likely to have the park all to yourself.

Natural Attractions

Similajau's littoral fringe, kerangas (or heath forest) and mixed dipterocarp forest provide a variety of diverse habitats for a wide range of fascinating species. In amongst its pitcher plants, mangrove and giant dipterocarp trees, Similajau is home to 24 species of mammals, including long-tailed macaques, gibbons, banded langurs, shrews, mouse deer, barking deer, squirrels, wild boar, porcupine, and civet cats. It is also a birdwatcher's paradise, with 185 species of birds having been recorded within the park's boundaries.

Similajau is also home to two crocodile species. The estuarine or saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) lives near the river mouths of the large rivers in the park and feeds on small mammals, lizards, turtles, fish and water birds. It has also been known to attack humans at other locations in Sarawak and in Australia. There are no known cases of crocodiles attacking visitors at Similajau, but to be on the safe side visitors are advised to take note of the crocodile warning signs. Please do not attempt to wade across the larger streams in the park, but use the bridges instead. Similajau's other crocodile species is the harmless false gharial (*Tomistoma schlegelii*), which feeds exclusively on fish. Crocodiles are more easily spotted at night, and the Park HQ can arrange crocodile spotting boat trips for visitors.

Prehistoric-looking horseshoe crabs can often be found on the beaches or in the shallows, and green turtles frequently come ashore to lay their eggs at Golden Beach and the two Turtle Beaches closer to the park HQ. There are also occasional landings by hawksbill and leatherback turtles. All marine turtles are Totally Protected Animals in Sarawak and anyone found tampering with a nest is liable to a heavy fine and/or a jail sentence. Other marine visitors include five species of dolphin that are occasionally seen, usually between March and September – the Irrawaddy dolphin, the bottlenose dolphin, the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, the finless porpoise dolphin and the pantropical spotted dolphin.

Treks & Trails

The main trekking trail (red markings) follows the coastline of the park; from the park HQ you first cross the Sungei Likau suspension bridge to reach the plankwalk over the mangroves, from where you have two choices – to follow the plankwalk to the start of the trail proper, or take a short cut on the left at the very beginning of the plankwalk; a wooden ladder leads down to a secondary trail which joins the main trail near the junction for the Viewpoint Trail. This leads to a shelter with picnic tables looking back to the beach and park HQ. From shortly after the viewpoint turn-off, the main trail hugs the coastline and passes numerous small bays and beaches, eventually (1 ½ - 2 hrs) reaching three idyllic beaches – two turtle beaches each set in beautiful bays, and the aptly named Golden Beach with its long unbroken stretch of sand.

A good way to get the most out of Similajau is to hire a boat and be dropped off at Golden Beach and then trek back to the HQ (or vice versa). Boats can be hired for half day and full day coastal and river tours, or for crocodile, spotting tours at night. Enquire at the park HQ for details.

The Park Headquarters

Upon arrival visitors are required to register at the Park HQ (Tel: 086-391284). Next to the registration counter there is a good information center. The Park HQ also has a canteen which serves drinks, snacks, lunch and evening meals.

Accommodation

Accommodation consists of a VIP Rest House (2 rooms with 4 single beds) at RM157.50 per unit or RM105 per room; 'Drive In' chalets (2 rooms with 2 single beds) at RM78-75 per unit or RM52.50 per room; and hostel accommodation (4 beds per room) at RM15.75 per person or RM42 per room. All rooms have fans. Prices exclude 5% government service tax. For accommodation bookings contact the National Parks booking office in Miri. Early booking is advised if you are visiting at weekends, public holidays or school holidays. There is also a camp site RM5.25 per person), and barbeque pits are provided for visitors wishing to prepare their own meals.

Travel Connections

Similajau is approximately 30km northeast of Bintulu town. There is no public bus service to the park. The taxi fare from Bintulu town is RM40 – arrange a time with the driver to pick you up. Alternatively you may charter a fast boat from Bintulu Wharf (rates negotiable), a somewhat more expensive but enjoyable option.