

Sarawak

Places of Interest

KUCHING: Its name means cat in Malay and it's the capital of Sarawak. It has all the modern amenities without losing its old world charm. Multi-storey buildings blend with structures from colonial days and the colourful Malay and Chinese shop houses.

KUCHING WATERFRONT: The Sarawak River has long been the center of Kuching life and the Waterfront, a beautifully landscaped esplanade, is the main gathering place for Kuching's population, especially as the sun sets beyond the scenic Matang Mountains. Across the river is the Astana, once the home of the White Rajah's, now the Governor's residence. Nearby are Fort Margherita, a reminder of more turbulent days, and the colourful Malay Kampung. All are well worth the short sampan ride across the river. A stroll along the Waterfront at any time of day is a good start for a tour on foot around the city. It's a very walkable place with none of the traffic snarls or pollution of other Asian centers.

MAIN BAZAAR: Located opposite the waterfront, is the oldest street in the city and the heart of old Kuching. See superb examples of Chinese shop house architecture with the highest concentration of antique and handicraft shops to be found.

FORT MARGHERITA: Built in 1879 to guard Kuching's river approaches from pirates. It was named after Charles Brook's wife and now houses a Police Museum with fascinating exhibits of Brooke militaria and weapons captured during the communist insurgency, and the famous "laughing skulls".

THE SARAWAK MUSEUM: Has one of the best collections in Southeast Asia. It houses an exceptional ethnographic collection, good natural history displays, the oil industry in Sarawak as well as traditional wood-carving, Chinese ceramics and furniture, an art gallery, Sarawak's history and much more.

THE SARAWAK CULTURAL VILLAGE: You can "see" Sarawak in a day at the Cultural Village. Described as Southeast Asia's finest living museum it offers the culture, arts and crafts of the State's many ethnic groups in one location. Within its seven-hectare site, and just five-minutes walk from the beach hotels in Damai, are replicas of traditional longhouses, roundhouses and huts built around a lake. There are daily performances of native dances and music.

SEMONGGOH ORANG UTAN REHABILITATION CENTRE: Semonggoh Rehabilitation Centre cares for endangered species which have either been found injured in the forest, or have been kept as illegal pets. The centre houses a number of different species including rescued hornbills, honey bears, gibbons and porcupines, but the main attraction is the Orang Utans. The best time to visit Semonggoh is at feeding time (approx. 8.30 to 9am and 2.30 to 3pm) when there is a good chance of seeing the semi-wild Orang Utans who live in the surrounding forest return to the feeding area.

MIRI: Is more than just a booming oil and timber town. It is the gateway to the northeast region, rapidly becoming Sarawak's most popular tourist area. The town is also gaining a reputation for its swinging nightlife as it caters to oil workers and weekend visitors from neighbouring Brunei. It is within easy reach of national parks, huge rivers, heritage and adventure travel destinations and some of the best scuba diving in Borneo.



Waterfront Garden, Kuching



Longboat to Bako National Park



Sarawak Museum



Fort Margherita

Sarawak

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BAKO NATIONAL PARK: Just 37 kilometres by road from Kuching, Bako is easily visited in a day. The park can only be reached by a 20 minute boat ride from Kampung Bako. It has been protected since 1957 so the animals have become used to human visitors and are less shy than their remote jungle cousins. See the proboscis monkey, only found in Borneo, as well as the long tailed macaque monkeys, usually patrolling the park headquarters, silvered leaf monkeys, monitor lizards and squirrels. Although it's one of Southeast Asia's smallest national parks it contains almost every type of vegetation found in Borneo.

BATANG AI NATIONAL PARK: Iban longhouses and wild Orang Utans are among the many attractions of this park on the banks of a 24km lake. See it all in the lap of luxury while staying at the unique and prizewinning Hilton Batang Ai Longhouse Resort, a Hilton hotel in the jungle. You can travel by boat up the rivers that flow into the lake or trek on the jungle trails looking for wildlife. On your travels you can visit or stay at Iban longhouses and sample their traditional way of life.

GUNUNG GADING NATIONAL PARK: Sarawak is the home of the world's largest flower, the Rafflesia, measuring up to a metre across. For more than 10 years Gunung Gading has been a conservation zone to protect these unusual blooms. The park was opened to visitors in 1994 only after measures were taken to allow the public to see the plants without damaging the park's delicate ecosystem. While the huge flowers are the main attraction, this park, covering a series of rugged mountains near Lundu in southwest Sarawak, has plenty of other attractions. Waterfalls and clear jungle streams provide excellent bathing spots. There is also a series of jungle trails at Gunung Gading.

GUNUNG MULU NATIONAL PARK: A tropical wonderland is the only way to describe Sarawak's largest national park. For the visitor seeking adventure it has everything, the world's most extensive cave system, rock climbing, jungle trekking, kayaking, mountain biking, river rapids, and fascinating people, including Sarawak's last nomadic tribe.

Three mountains dominate the 544 square-kilometre park – Gunung Mulu, Gunung Api and Gunung Benarat, the latter still unclimbed. They are honeycombed by the world's most extensive cave system. So far 310 kilometres of passages have been surveyed and that is only a third of what is believed to exist.

The system includes the world's largest natural chamber, Sarawak Chamber, capable of holding 47 jumbo jets, the world's largest cave passage, Deer Cave, and the longest cave in Southeast Asia, Clearwater Cave, which runs for 108 kilometres and has never been traversed from end to end.

There are four well-lit show caves that are open daily to visitors. A longboat trip from Park HQ takes you to Clearwater Cave and Wind Cave while a plankwalk leads through forest to Deer Cave and Lang's Cave. Most visitors go to Deer Cave at sunset to watch a black river of three million bats pour out on their nightly forage for insects.

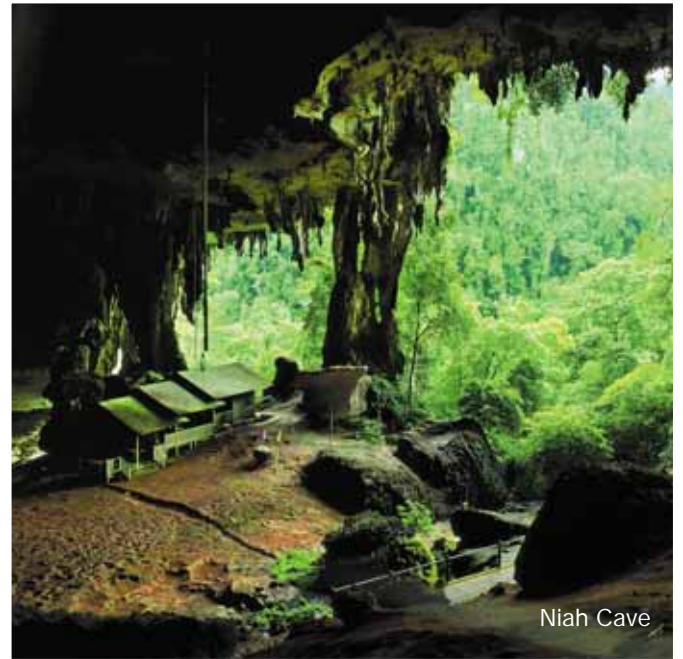
NIAH NATIONAL PARK: Humans inhabited Niah Great Cave 40,000 years ago. Today, local Penan tribesmen venture into the cave to collect edible birds nests and the guano dropped by the myriad swiftlets and bats that live there. You can see evidence of prehistoric inhabitants in the Painted Cave where human figures drawn on the wall watch over grave sites where the dead were laid in boat-shaped coffins. You reach the cave on a plankwalk through the lowland forest alive with birds and butterflies.

PINNACLES SUMMIT TREK: Razor sharp limestone ridges shearing through the jungle to a height of 50 metres – these are the Pinnacles, a distinctive geological feature half way up Mulu's Gunung Api. The Pinnacles can be reached by a three day hike from Mulu National Park HQ in what one visitor described as "a very challenging trek," where coming down is as hard as the ascent. A four hour boat ride along the Melinau River and easy three hours trek takes you to Camp Five where there are huts for an overnight stay.

LONGHOUSES: The longhouse is the very center of communal life in Sarawak. To visit a longhouse is to look deep into the State's soul. As most traditional longhouses are riverside dwellings, the real longhouse experience begins with the journey upriver. As you arrive at the longhouse, it is customary to be greeted by the longhouse maidens and young men performing traditional dances and playing ceremonial gongs. From the moment you step inside the longhouse you will be treated as an honoured guest. Visitors will be offered a glass of tuak – the very palatable local rice wine. This is followed by the beating of the gongs, a cue for the traditional dance.

DAMAI & THE SANTUBONG PENINSULA: Take white sandy beaches lapped by the South China Sea, add rainforest walks and an imposing jungle-covered mountain and you have Damai. This is Sarawak's main beach resort area. Once accessible only by river, Damai, on the Santubong Peninsula, is now just a 40 minutes drive from Kuching.

Damai has very good international-class resort hotels, such as the Holiday Inn Resort Damai Beach. It has its own secluded beach, landscaped, free form swimming pool and great facilities. Nearby is the Arnold Palmer-designed Damai Golf & Country Club, the Sarawak Cultural Village and the sleepy fishing villages of Santubong and Buntal with their excellent seafood restaurants'. For the more adventurous there is the climb through the rainforest to the summit of Mount Santubong. It's a five to six-hour trek and your hotel will provide a guide and a packed lunch.



Niah Cave



Orang Ulu Longhouse