

SANDAKAN



Sandakan, your next destination

Sandakan is a getaway to some of Borneo's wild adventures. Dense rainforests, winding rivers, and untouched beaches define the landscape. It is home to some of the most iconic wildlife on the planet. Here, it is all about nature - feeling the thrill as the orangutans swing in the treetops just above you, catching sights of rare birds in the canopy, snorkelling with swirling school of jacks, or witnessing turtles laying eggs on deserted shores. These experiences plunge you into the wild beauty of Sandakan, making you crave for more.

Sandakan was once the capital of British North Borneo (now Sabah) before the capital was moved to Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu). It played a significant role during the British colonial period and World War II.

Arriving in Sandakan is like flipping a switch. The energy is electric, and the raw beauty demands your attention. Get ready to dive into an adventure where wildlife surprises and breathtaking landscapes compelling you to uncover the secrets of this wild corner of the world.

Lankayan Island

Just over an hour boat ride from Sandakan, Lankayan feels like the kind of place you stumble upon and instantly wonder how it has stayed under the tourists radar. The water is that perfect shade of turquoise that blends seamlessly into the horizon on a clear day, making it hard to figure out where the ocean ends and the sky begins. It is untouched, it is remote and it is real. Colourful and unspoiled coral reefs put the crown on it all.

The island, a jewel of the Sulu Sea, is part of a Marine Protected Area, and you will understand why the moment you arrive. Vibrant





coral reefs, turtles and schools of fish are visible from the shore, while harmless reef sharks patrol in slow-motion as if to remind you that this is their sanctuary. Blanketed with tropical greenery, the island features a wild dense jungle ringed by endless pure white sandy beaches. It is the kind of island that makes you feel you have stumbled into a postcard that comes to life.

Lankayan is a diver's dream. The underwater scenes here are alive with colourful corals and fascinating macros. Large schools of fish and pelagic species also make their appearances, adding the thrill of diving in these pristine waters, and from March to May, regular sightings of gigantic whale sharks makes it a bucket list destination for divers around the world.

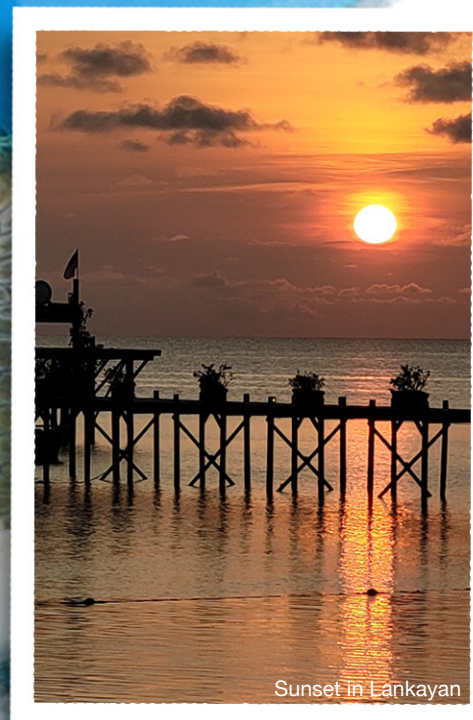
For those who prefer to stay above the water, this island does not disappoint. The coral gardens are so rich that kayaking or snorkelling just off the shore brings its own magic.

Lankayan also offers one a beautiful gift - sunsets so spectacular they will leave you speechless.

Lankayan is the kind of raw, untouched beauty that is becoming harder to find. It is a piece of paradise that you want to keep secret, but it is too good not to share.

Lelingan Turtle Island

Approximately forty kilometres north of Sandakan's coast lies Selingan Turtle Island, a safe haven for the green and hawksbill turtles. It is Malaysia's first turtle hatchery, and despite its minuscule size of eight hectares, the island



Sunset in Lankayan

holds a profound legacy of turtle landings. Selingan Turtle Island is a key destination for visitors eager to witness these ancient creatures as they come ashore to lay eggs. Here, tens of thousands of baby turtles are released into the ocean annually.

The island's park headquarters and hatchery offer insights into ongoing conservation efforts, emphasising the importance of protecting these magnificent creatures. Their efforts flourish across the island, inviting visitors to participate in the nurturing process, from witnessing the turtles making its way to the beach to lay eggs, to egg collection and the thrilling release of new hatchlings back into the ocean. The experience is profound.

The peak season for turtle landing is from July to September, offering the best chance to witness this extraordinary event. Selingan Turtle Island is a destination that is a heartfelt reminder of our duty to protect and cherish the ancient creatures.



Fly with Batik Air to Sandakan
14 times a week



Local Guide on Kinabatangan River –

Kinabatangan River

Stretching an impressive 560km (kilometres), the Kinabatangan River is Malaysia's second largest river. This remarkable ecosystem is home to the big five of Malaysia's wildlife - pygmy elephants, proboscis monkeys, orangutans, saltwater crocodiles and Asian hornbills.

Cruising the Kinabatangan River transports visitors into the heart of nature. The tranquillity of the river sharply contrasts with the lively wildlife, keeping onlookers on the edge of their seat, making this trip unforgettable. Spotting of proboscis monkeys is almost guaranteed, while the long snout of saltwater crocodiles occasionally peek above the water, or bask on the sun-drenched riverbanks. Pygmy elephants have been sighted, adding the spectacle. Get those cameras ready as seagulls dive for fish, blending with the vibrant calls of hornbills, amplifying the excitement of this wild adventure.

The local guides are always eager to share their knowledge about the river's ecological significance, deepening the appreciation for this unique environment.

Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre

No visit to Sandakan is complete without a trip to the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre. Renowned as the world's leading rehabilitation centre for orangutans, Sepilok boasts a vast forest reserve dedicated to protecting and preserving these incredible creatures. This sanctuary has worked tirelessly for the last sixty years, playing a crucial role in rehabilitating orphaned and rescued orangutans within its extensive grounds.

The nursery, where the adorable baby orangutans receive training and care, is the icing on the cake, giving visitors a heartwarming glimpse into their early lives. Additionally, the thrilling feeding sessions highlight these intelligent mammals as they exhibit playful antics and remarkable agility. Observing them in their natural habitat while learning about vital conservation efforts creates an unforgettable experience, ensuring these magnificent creatures continue to thrive for generations to come.



Orangutan

Photo courtesy of Sabah Tourism Board



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Borneo Sun Bear Conservation Centre

At Borneo Sun Bear Conservation Centre, visitors have the rare opportunity to meet the world's smallest bear species, the Malayan sun bear. With a few left in the wild and their incredibly shy nature, spotting these gentle creatures in their natural habitat is a true challenge. The centre plays a vital role in rescuing and rehabilitating sun bears impacted by habitat loss and poaching, allowing visitors to witness their remarkable journeys towards recovery.

Originally part of lush forests, the centre's enclosures are designed to mimic their natural environment. Towering dipterocarp trees provide the bears with the perfect playground, encouraging their distinctive behaviour. These little bears are exceptional climbers, effortlessly scaling the trees to find a cosy spot for a nap!

Visiting this sanctuary not only offers a glimpse into the lives of these beautiful



animals, but also reinforces the importance of conservation efforts. Every ticket sold contributes to the ongoing protection of sun bears and their habitats, ensuring that future generations can also marvel at these incredible creatures.

Get ready to dive in

Sandakan is a place that challenges the ordinary and delivers the unexpected.

This place is about diving deep - literally and figuratively. You will be surrounded by stunning natural beauty and wildlife, inviting you to explore its wonders up close.

As you plan your trip to Sandakan, prepare for a genuine adventure that leaves a lasting impression. This destination will reshape your perspective on nature and community, inspiring you to carry its beauty home with you.

Photo courtesy of Sabah Tourism Board



CONTRIBUTOR

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Shannim Mohd Sa'ad is an adventurous traveller with a deep appreciation for diverse cultures and off-the-beaten-path destinations. Along her journeys, she enjoys riding motocross, Muay Thai training, and snowboarding. Writing is her passion, compelling to share her unique experiences. Follow her on Instagram @epicadventuress and her blog epicadventuress.com



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