

Kalimantan



Kalimantan is one of the world's last, vast wilderness areas, a symphony of natural beauty and indigenous cultures.

Covering two-thirds of Borneo in four provinces, Kalimantan showcases countless natural wonders. It's the last refuge for most of the world's wild orangutans, and home to ancient civilisations, including Dayak tribes that selectively embrace the 21st century, struggling to balance modernity with tradition.

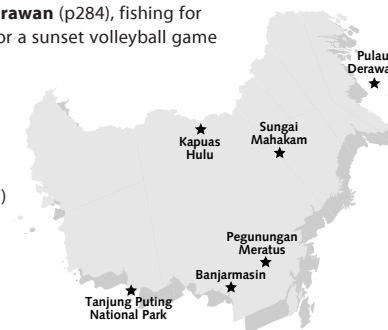
While roads are improving, the best attractions remain tied to Kalimantan's waterways. River boats up the mighty, mysterious Sungai Mahakam lead to rainforests and longhouse villages. Simpler craft with put-put engines reminiscent of cinema's *the African Queen* reveal the great apes and vibrant jungle of Tanjung Puting National Park. Narrow canoes call on Banjarmasin's water villages and floating markets. Off the east coast, amid some of the world's best diving, Pulau Derawan preserves bygone times, where easy smiles remain the openly exchanged currency.

There is a dark side to Kalimantan, too. Ongoing destruction, from logging and intentional forest fires, plus energy extraction, continues to reduce the areas where these natural attractions thrive. This cloud merely underscores that there will never be a better time to visit Kalimantan than right now.

Time is running out: don't miss the boat.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Chugging up Sungai Sekonyer by *klotok* (canoe with water-pump motor) to see orangutans in **Tanjung Puting National Park** (p253), sleeping on deck with cicadas singing lullabies and gibbons' whoops as a morning alarm
- Flying underwater with mantas off **Pulau Derawan** (p284), fishing for dinner on the return trip, returning in time for a sunset volleyball game
- Nailing breakfast at a floating market and trading high-fives at wash time in the waterways of **Banjarmasin** (p260)
- Seeking Dayak longhouse traditions of intricate tattoos and drive-through earlobes above the rapids of **Sungai Mahakam** (p277) or in **Kapuas Hulu** (p244)
- Swinging across bamboo bridges over river valleys in breathtaking **Pegunungan Meratus** (p267), wrapping up with a river raft to hot springs



■ POPULATION: 12,223,300

■ AREA: 558,266 SQ KM

HISTORY & CULTURE

Kalimantan's riches drew Chinese and Indian traders as far back as AD 400. Hinduism, Chinese settlers, and, a millennium later, Islam all arrived ahead of Europeans. Dutch and English imperialists began sparring over Kalimantan in the early 17th century. Holland won here, while England took Sarawak and Sabah (see p23).

The lurking British, as well as Kalimantan's bounty, spurred Dutch industriousness, particularly during the 1800s. Envoys signed treaties with local sultans, though Banjarmasin fought the imperialists in 1859 and resisted until 1905. Global industrialisation and expanding wealth spurred demand for traditional commodities and new ones: coal and oil.

Petroleum drew Japan's attention during WW II, and the war's end brought independence to Indonesia. But over the past six decades, Kalimantan has struggled to find its place in Indonesia.

Kalimantan is less homogenous than much of Indonesia. It has three major ethnic groups: Malay Indonesians from other islands who tend to follow Islam and live along the coasts and rivers; Chinese, traders in Kalimantan for centuries; and Dayaks, Kalimantan's indigenous inhabitants. Each group holds a majority in parts of Kalimantan.

Population has grown through *transmigrasi* (transmigration), a government policy begun by the Dutch and expanded under Suharto. Clashes between Dayaks and Maduranese,

frequent transmigrants, erupt periodically. In many towns, Jln Madura has been renamed.

Beyond *transmigrasi*, economic opportunity and expanding government increasingly bring outsiders to Kalimantan. With a cast now comprising crusading missionaries and imams, loggers, planters and conservationists, government administrators and traditional leaders, the struggle for Kalimantan's soul continues. Joseph Conrad would be busy indeed.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Balikpapan's Seppingan Airport is Kalimantan's only entry point offering visa on arrival (VOA, see p299). All other entry from outside Indonesia – by land, sea or air – requires a visa in advance. Indonesian consulates in Sabah – Tawau (see p151) and Kota Kinabalu (p91) – issue visas to foreigners.

Air

Silk Air (www.silkair.net) flies between Balikpapan and Singapore. **Batavia Air** (www.batavia-air.co.id) flies between Pontianak and Kuching in Sarawak, plus Batam near Singapore. **Garuda** (www.garuda-indonesia.com) and **Batavia** fly the most routes to the rest of Indonesia.

Air schedules and carriers constantly change due to rapid growth and, following major accidents in 2007, heightened safety concerns. Now more than ever, rely on travel agents for the best information, service, and prices.

Boat

Boats depart daily (except Sunday) from Taranak and more frequently from Nunukan in East Kalimantan to Tawau in Sabah.

Pelni (www.pelni.co.id) and other carriers connect to Jakarta, Semarang and Surabaya on Java and Makassar, Pare Pare, Mamuju and Toli Toli on Sulawesi.

Bus

Air-con buses link Pontianak and Kuching (140,000Rp to 200,000Rp, 10 hours).

GETTING AROUND

Roads now connect most major towns, and construction continues. Quality varies dramatically by location and season. Bus routes follow roads but trips often include stops to get out and push or await repairs. Air-con, smoke-free buses remain the exception. Kijangs, a local SUV brand, runs scheduled routes between some cities and

can be chartered everywhere, often through hotels and travel agencies. Where necessary and available, 4WD versions are far more expensive.

For long distances, flights via **Kal-Star** (www.kalstaronline.com), Dirgantara Air Service (DAS) and others may save time and wear, often at surprisingly low fares.

Kapal biasa (river ferries) or *long boats* (narrow wooden boats with covered passenger cabins) are a pleasant alternative to buses and best for exploring the jungle. Scheduled and chartered speedboats and motorised *ces* (canoes) reach many small towns and tributaries.

WEST KALIMANTAN

Blessed with Indonesian Borneo's widest variety of attractions, West Kalimantan (Kalimantan Barat or KalBar) is also blessed – or cursed – with its least-developed tourist infrastructure. A sizable Chinese minority spices the mix. Visitors can find the most traditional villages, wild orangutans, virgin forests and idyllic beaches, but gird for struggle, with success by no means guaranteed.

PONTIANAK

☎ 0561 / pop 520,000

Stoutly astride the equator, Pontianak is Kalimantan's city with big shoulders, processing rubber and timber from the interior and marketing the region's abundant produce. At the confluence of Sungai Landak and Sungai Kapuas, Kalimantan's longest river at 1243km, KalBar's biggest city doubles as gateway to the Dayak settlements and forests of Kapuas Hulu (upper Kapuas). Pontianak's coffee stalls and brisk roadside commerce create an urban buzz rare in Kalimantan.

Orientation

Pontianak's centre of gravity has expanded south across Jln Diponegoro to Jln Gajah Mada. Streets there pulsate far into the night.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Centrine Online (per hr 4000Rp; ☎ 7.30am-10pm)

Signposted in a short alley off Jln Nusa Indah III.

Mitra Tour & Travel (☎ 733-544; Jln Teuku Umar Komplek; per hr 4000Rp; ☎ 9.30am-midnight) Music, snacks and flight bookings, too.

