

Kalimantan



Deep, dark and exotic, the very notion of Borneo rouses something in the subconscious. Summoning visions of mythical people and ancient forests, it tugs at the adventurer within. It's a romantic notion, but the world's third-largest island has managed to keep some of her secrets and most of them lie in the impenetrable interior of Kalimantan.

Occupying two-thirds of Borneo's primeval land mass, Kalimantan is one of Indonesia's least-visited provinces. A void on the tourist radar, it's a red flag to those hungry for the unknown. Mountains, forests and mighty rivers stretch across the interior, influencing the culture, history and livelihoods of villages throughout. Although the logging and mining industries have had a 30-year feeding frenzy, the fury of the chainsaw and the tide of wasteland is beginning to slow. But you need to be quick – Kalimantan's hidden world continues to diminish.

The once mysterious Sungai Mahakam is now a highway of river traffic, yet treacherous rapids still protect the customs of traditional Dayak villages. Even the urban jungle begs exploration. Dawn canoe rides to Banjarmasin's floating markets and dusk journeys through its enigmatic canals imbue travellers with a taste of modern culture.

You can trek in Kayan Mentarang National Park, the Apokayan Highlands, and around the eastern reaches of the vast Sungai Kapuas. And with little effort you can come face to face with orang-utans, macaques, proboscis monkeys, bird life and maybe even the odd sun bear.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Coursing Sungai Kumai in a *klotok* (motorised river canoe) and glimpsing the rust-red figure of an orang-utan in **Tanjung Puting National Park** (p631)
- Testing longboat limits; investigating Dayak villages beyond the rapids of **Sungai Mahakam** (p654)
- Discovering **Banjarmasin** (p635) at dusk and dawn from the canals of this animated city
- Trekking, rafting and exploring South Kalimantan's enigmatic **Pegunungan Meratus** (p644) around Loksado
- Going coastal in the tropical islands around **Pulau Derawan** (p663) and the isolated beaches north of **Pontianak** (p618)



■ POPULATION: 11.2 MILLION ■ LAND AREA: 539,460 SQ KM ■ HIGHEST PEAK: BUKIT RAYA (2278M)

HISTORY

Kalimantan's position on the India-China trade axis ensured strong influence from these two countries long before Europeans set foot on Borneo. By about AD 400, Hinduism arrived and Chinese settlements were established. As Islam spread east around the 15th or 16th century, coastal ports were converted and sultanates, such as Kutai and Banjarmasin, became major trading centres.

But it was ultimately the Europeans who colonised and shaped the province's modern history. In the early 17th century, Kalimantan became a scene of conflict between the British and the Dutch, ostensibly over the Brit's flourishing pepper trade. The conflict culminated in rebellion by 1701, and the British were evicted six years later. By the late 1820s the colonising Dutch had concluded treaties with various small west-coast states, including parts of the Banjarmasin sultanate.

In 1839 the establishment of a private colony in Kuching, Sarawak, by Englishman James Brooke, fuelled Dutch concerns to cement their commercial interests in Kalimantan. New coal mines in South and East Kalimantan were quickly developed and gradually the island gained commercial importance. The 1840s and 1850s brought several internal disputes, culminating in war between the Dutch and the Banjarmasin sultanate in 1859. The Dutch regained control after four years, but resistance continued until 1905.

By the end of the 19th century, Dutch commercial exploitation of the archipelago was at its peak. Rubber and oil markets were flourishing, and pepper, copra, tin and coffee plantations were developed. By the end of the century, oil was being drilled in East Kalimantan. In 1907, the British company Shell Transport & Trading merged with the Royal Dutch Company for the Exploitation of Petroleum Sources in the Netherlands Indies to form Royal Dutch Shell. By 1930 Shell was producing 85% of Indonesia's oil, and Kalimantan's fate as a stronghold was sealed.

The current division of Borneo between Indonesia and Malaysia originates from the British-Dutch rivalry. After WWII the Brooke family handed Sarawak over to the British government, at the same time that Sabah came under British administration,

putting Britain in the curious position of acquiring a new colony at the time it was shedding others. Both remained under British control until 1963, when they joined with the Malay Peninsula – and, temporarily, Singapore – to form the nation of Malaysia.

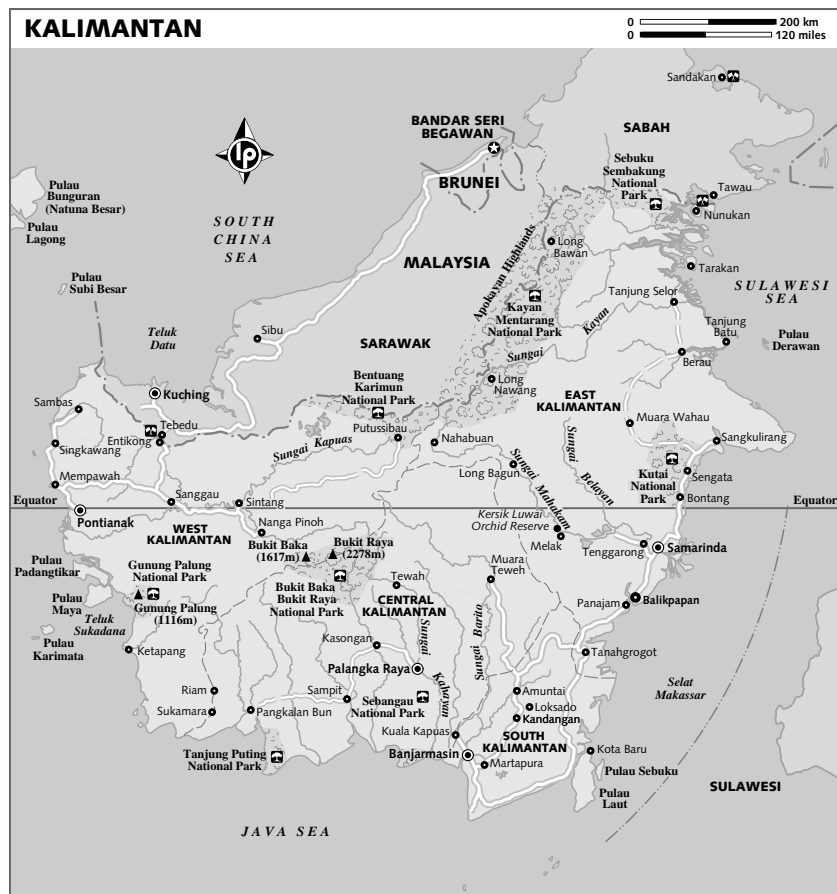
East Kalimantan has been one of Indonesia's prime *transmigrasi* (transmigration) targets, a campaign which has had disastrous effects on the province. The transmigrants have settled on marginal lands, replacing diverse tracts of jungle with extensive monocultures of rubber and pulpwood trees. This practice is in direct discord with Dayak groups, whose indigenous land-use regimens and land rights are rarely recognised. Transmigrants have also provided mining and logging industries with a ready supply of cheap and young labour.

By the late '90s almost a fifth of the population were transmigrants, and brewing ethnic tension, particularly between Madurese migrants and the Dayaks and Malays, reached a bloody peak. During the 1997–98 upheaval hundreds died in violent clashes, most were Madurese. Dayaks returned to their traditional practice of head-hunting and the island seemed in a state of chaos. Calm was restored relatively quickly but the conflict flared again briefly in 2001. Again hundreds of people lost their lives and thousands of Madurese fled the island. Today tension between the Madurese and other ethnic groups is a mere simmer and most travellers will be oblivious to it. The pursuit of peace and progress have become common denominators for all groups.

CULTURE

The population of Kalimantan is more than 11 million. The three biggest ethnic groups are the recently arrived Malay Indonesians, who tend to follow Islam and live in settlements along the coasts and the main rivers; the Chinese, who have controlled trade in Kalimantan for centuries; and the Dayaks, the collective name for the indigenous inhabitants of the island. Individual Dayak tribes use their separate tribal names, such as Kenyah, Kayan, Iban and Punan.

The most striking feature of many of the older Dayak women is their pierced ear lobes, stretched with the weight of heavy gold or brass rings. This custom is increasingly rare among the young. Older Dayaks,



influenced by missionaries, often trim their ear lobes as a sign of conversion.

It was once the custom for all women to tattoo their forearms and calves with bird and spirit designs. Tattooing of young women has almost disappeared, except in tribes deep in the interior. It's still seen among men, although traditionally men in many Dayak cultures were expected to earn their tattoos by taking heads.

In the past, many Dayak tribes lived in large communal buildings, known as longhouses, which sit on tall posts above the ground, mainly for defence. But Dayak traditions and belief systems have taken a beating in the 20th century and this tradition has largely gone by the wayside in the

last 50 years. Pressure from the Indonesian government, increasing development and Protestant missionaries also continue to weaken the backbone of Dayak tribal cultures.

WILDLIFE

Kalimantan's most celebrated inhabitant is the unbearably human-esque orang-utan. These rich amber-coloured primates with their soulful disposition are an undisputed highlight of the islands' fauna and an obvious magnet for tourists. Today, the few remaining orang-utan refuges are found in the national parks and reserves of Kalimantan. Camps in Tanjung Puting National Park in Central Kalimantan were

the first such facilities, mainly dedicated to studying ex-captive orang-utans in order to reintroduce them into the wild. In East Kalimantan, the Wanariset Orang-utan Reintroduction Centre, which is closed to visitors, was established in the early 1990s with similar goals. Due to the lack of success with reintroducing orang-utans into the wild, in recent years the focus at these and other centres has shifted to behavioural studies, with an aim to promote a greater understanding of the need to protect orang-utans and the forest in which they live.

The easiest place to see orang-utans is Tanjung Puting National Park, where ex-captive and orphan feeding stations virtually guarantee close encounters, but spotting wild orang-utans is also possible. But the best place for wild orang-utans is Kutai National Park in East Kalimantan.

The deep waters of Sungai Mahakam in East Kalimantan are home to freshwater dolphins; there are proboscis monkeys, crab-eating macaques and crocodiles in the mangrove swamps; while the forest is

the haunt of gibbons, clouded leopards, giant butterflies and hornbills, including the legendary black hornbill.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Balikpapan's Seppangan is the only entry point in Kalimantan where Visas on Arrival (see p862) can be issued. For all other entry, whether by sea or air, you must have obtained a visa in advance.

Air

Malaysian Airlines flies between Pontianak and Kuching in Sarawak.

Balikpapan, Pontianak and Banjarmasin are the busiest airports, with connections throughout Kalimantan as well as Java and Bali. Due to turmoil in recent years, in addition to changes in government at the national and local levels, flights are in constant flux. The arrival of new airlines, coupled with fluctuating oil prices, has made competition stiff in recent years. As a rule, double check all flight times and prices with a local travel agency. See p607 for flight routes and fares in Kalimantan.

KALIMANTAN AIRFARES

One-way airfares in '000Rp, unless otherwise indicated. Quoted fares were correct at the time of writing.

