

## Borneo

### Mount Kinabalu & Sabah's Fabulous Rainforests

#### A Greentours Itinerary

##### Day 1

##### Depart UK

##### Day 2 – 7(am)

##### Mount Kinabalu National Park including Mesilau & Poring Hot Springs

After our arrival at Kota Kinabalu, Sabah's modern capital, we'll make the two hour drive to the Nepenthes Villas 5000 feet up in Mount Kinabalu National Park. Above us loom the huge buttresses of Kinabalu's summit, the granite worn smooth by ice sheets a hundred thousand years ago. The bare summit rocks belie the richness of the montane heaths and forests below. Quite simply, Kinabalu is one of the world's greatest evolutionary hotspots with a degree of endemism found virtually nowhere else. The figures are quite staggering – over 4000 higher plant species are recorded from this mountain – including some 700 species of orchid. A whole suite of animal and bird species are known only from Kinabalu and the Crocker Range! No less than ninety per cent of the park contains primary habitat that we can explore at leisure along well maintained tracks and trails. Around our villas feed Temminck's Sunbird and Chestnut-crested Yuhina as well as rare Bornean endemics such as Black-sided Flowerpecker and Whitehead's Spiderhunter. Along the trails we can see some of the island's most stunning birds – the endemic Whitehead's Broadbill in its iridescent green livery and brilliant lime-coloured Short-tailed Green Magpies. Black and Crimson Orioles, Spangled Drongos, Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush and an assortment of babblers, bulbuls and flycatchers make up diverse feeding parties which will cross our path every now and then. By rushing torrents we can see White-crowned Forktails and Sunda Whistling Thrushes. Squirrels include over a dozen species and range from the large Kinabalu and Giant Forest Squirrels to the lovely ear-tufted miniature Whitehead's Pigmy Squirrel. Amongst thick moss in this fairyland of epiphyte-laden trees, rhododendrons and tree-ferns, live Kinabalu's famous insectivorous pitcher plants. *Nepenthes tentaculata*'s pitchers are only ten centimetres or so in height but come in all shades of green and red as they nestle in little clusters on the moss. At nearby Mesilau are elfin forests adorned with the striking pitchers of *Nepenthes burbidgia* and the 'daddy-of-them-all', giant *Nepenthes rajah* whose pitchers can hold up to an unbelievable 3.5 litres! Many orchids will be in flower, among them glorious *Paphiopedilums* and attractive cream, chocolate and butterscotch *Coelogyne radioferrens*. There is a wonderful selection of Rhododendrons in flower on the mountain and at Tambunan we can see one of the largest flowers in the world, *Rafflesia pricei*, perhaps the most beautiful of the genus. The bright pinky-red white-spotted flowers are about eighteen inches across but these pale into insignificance

when compared to *Rafflesia keithii* whose immense blooms reach three foot or more across - but the latter are shy flowers and we have only a fifty-fifty chance of seeing one in bloom!

After a couple of days in the cool climes of Kinabalu to the more tropical atmosphere of Poring where a series of hot springs are set on the lowland edge of Kinabalu National Park. Poring is a wonderful spot for butterflies as well as bathing – birdwings drift around the sulphurous springs while Great Egg-flies and Clippers are numerous. The Leaf Butterfly, its upperside a dazzling blue and orange and its underside the most wonderful leaf-pattern camouflage, inhabits shady forest near waterfalls. Other winged delights are Banded Swallowtail, Tawny Rajah, Map Butterfly, the Malayan Owl Butterfly, the Malay Harlequin and the giant *Amathuxidia amythaon*, its huge wings adorned by electric blue panels, showing to stunning effect as it takes off from a rotting Durian fruit. Asian Fairy Bluebirds and Banded Broadbills forage above the café whilst in the forest are Rufous-collared Kingfishers and Rackettailed Drongos. A rich array of canopy birds such as various malkohas, Spectacled and Yellow-eared Spiderhunters, Orange-backed Woodpecker, Black-and-yellow Broadbill and Red-throated Barbet can be seen from a superb canopy walkway. Flying Lizards signal with their yellow throat flaps and with a flash of brilliant green they glide from tree to tree – sometimes landing right beside us. A nightwalk may reveal some surprising rainforest animals such as Slow Loris and Thomas's Flying Squirrel whilst the lights around the café attract many weird and wonderful insects such as Threehorned Rhinoceros Beetles, Lantern Bugs and many stunning moths.

### **Days 7(pm)-10(am) Imbak Canyon**

The Imbak Canyon is fast generating a reputation for rare mammal-sightings. Around the hotel complex at night we'll see Malay Civet and also likely the beautiful Banded Civet. But on night drives along the roads we can see so much more! Red Giant Flying Squirrels and Black Giant Flying Squirrels are both common and we'll see Bornean Striped Palm Civets and the wonderful Binturong, which is as common here as it is anywhere. Also very likely are Greater Mouse Deer and Masked Palm Civet, and hopefully Bornean Slow Loris. On our last trip a highlight was an Otter-Civet

Walking through Imbak's forests we'll hear a fantastic chorus of Gibbons soon after dawn, these with occasional backing provided by Helmeted and Rhinoceros Hornbills. Birdlife is rich with Changeable Hawk Eagle, Wreathed Hornbill, Raffle's and Chestnut-breasted Malkohas, Fairy Bluebird and Orange-bellied Flowerpecker. Amongst many butterflies are Rajah Brooke's Birdwing, some nice Jezebel species, and Malayan Assyrian, a butterfly with rich velvety blue uppers, and a third of the hindwing, orange. There's also Buff-rumped Woodpeckers, Crimson Sunbird, Sooty-capped Babbler, Red-bearded Bee-eater, White-bellied Woodpecker, Large Green Pigeons and hyper-active Spiderhunters!

In primary forest across the river we'll find Ear-spot Squirrel and the diminutive Plain Pygmy Squirrel, and along the river by the hotel there's some fine *Odonata*. The damselfly in particular are both diverse and beautiful. *Euphaea tricolor* has patches of shimmering blue or green on the wings, *Vestalis beryllae* is emerald-green with a long body, there's tiny red *Ceragrion bellona*, and most stunning of all is the red, blue and yellow *Rhinagrion elopurae*. Dragonflies include the bright red *Orthetrum testaceum*, an equally red *Crocothemis* species, and the pink and grey-blue *Orthetrum pruinosum*.

### **Days 10(pm)- 13(am)** **The Kinabatangan River and Gomantong Caves**

After an early lunch we depart for the four hour overland journey to the banks of the Kinabatangan River. A short boat ride takes us to the excellent Sukau Rainforest Lodge, winner of numerous environmental awards for its eco-sensitive approach to tourism. We think you will find this both a pleasant and a rewarding base from which to explore the island's largest river. Electric-powered boats quietly propel us along channels and well-laid out trails allow on-foot exploration. Many groups of Proboscis Monkeys feed and sleep within a short boat-ride of the lodge. The white breeches and the huge distended belly, necessary to digest their leafy meals, give a rather comical air to these large monkeys, only added to by the males' extraordinary noses. Beautiful Maroon Langurs, their burnished fur shining in the evening sun, both Pig-tailed and Crab-eating Macaques, and the now rare Hose's Langur, can all be seen here. In the 'hope to see' category are Asian Elephant, Flatheaded Cat and Hairy-nosed Otter. Birdlife along the river and around the lodge is rich and varied. Black-and-red Broadbills feed in the grounds and Oriental Pygmy Kingfishers in the nearby forest. Long-tailed Parakeets fly overhead, the tiny endemic White-fronted Falconet watches from high vantage points and shimmering Blue-eared Kingfishers hunt along the riverbank. The globally endangered Storm's Stork has one of its last strongholds here. Lesser and Greyheaded Fish Eagles soar over the river on the lookout for the next big catch while in the evenings we can see Buffy Fish Owls. Sukau is a fantastic place to see hornbills. The huge comical bills and the expressive eyebrows, coupled with their striking plumages make these sought after birds a 'must-see' and at Sukau there are plenty of them. Perhaps the most stunning is the magnificent Rhinoceros Hornbill, pairs of which often let the boats drift close to them. Inside the atmospheric limestone Gomantong Caves roost vast numbers of bats and swiftlets. The latter include the famous Edible-nest Swiftlet – the nest of this species is worth more than its weight in gold! As dusk approaches, bats fly out in hugely impressive swirling formations from holes in the cave roof and waiting for them are Bat Hawks, Peregrines and Rufous-bellied Hawk Eagles – it is quite a show!

## **Days 13(pm) – 17(am)**

### **Danum Valley Conservation Area**

After breakfast we depart for the forests of central Sabah. The Danum Valley Conservation Area contains some of the oldest and most magnificent rainforest in the world – indeed the largest rainforest trees on Earth are here. We stay at the gorgeous Borneo Rainforest Lodge, beautifully set deep in primary rainforest above a sweeping bend on the Danum River. A wonderful canopy walkway and numerous superb tracks and trails offer great insight into the life of the forest. Wild Orang-utans will be encountered during our wanderings, they often build their nests near the walkway. On average we see eleven wild Orang-utans on each of our holidays to Borneo. We wake to the evocative whooping cries of Bornean Gibbons, and later we may see them swinging across the trails, their extraordinarily long arms being put to good use. A strange odour may reveal the presence of that most unusual of primates, the diminutive Western Tarsier, which quite literally, stinks! Most likely we will see this animal on one of the nightwalks or night drives on offer. These can be very productive. Bearded Pigs, Greater Mouse-Deer and Red Giant Squirrels are seen on most evenings. Other species we hope to see are Malay Civet, the beautiful Banded Palm Civet, the cryptically-marked Flying Lemur and Leopard Cat. Diard's and Red-naped are amongst four species of Trogon one can see from the canopy walkway, a spot often frequented by the bizarre Bornean Bristlehead, a strange scarlet and black member of the crow family with a disproportionately thick bill. The loud calls of the Great Argus Pheasants reveal the locations of their leks – these are truly magnificent birds. On a walk to the jacuzzi pool Great Slaty and the perky little Grey and Buff Woodpecker, leafbirds, malkohas, yuhinas and an assortment of babblers and bulbuls pass by in richly diverse feeding parties while fragile 'paper handkerchief' butterflies, or Tree Nymphs, drift through the mid-canopy layer. This lodge is perfect for those that love 'balcony wildlife-watching'. The garden is superb for butterflies. Magnificent black and green Raja Brooke's Birdwing, several other birdwings, the stunning green Banded Peacock, Black and White Helens and Great Orange-tips all frequent the exotic flowers. Bright blue flashes erupt from under our feet as Archdukes and various *Amathusiid* butterflies head for a quieter spot. The forest floor and understory is home to many weird and wonderful creatures. Praying Mantids of all shapes and hues, giant pill bugs and beautifully-marked leafbugs. Perhaps the most sought-after and brilliantly-coloured birds in all Borneo make this shadowy deep green world their home. There are seven species of dazzling pittas at Danum, the commonest being Borneo's stunning endemic Blue-headed Pitta, all metallic reds, blues and purples.

## **Day 17(pm)**

### **Depart from Lahad Datu**

## **Day 18**

### **Arrive UK/Europe**

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