

UP THE BARAM RIVER

The Batang Baram, Malaysia's (and Sarawak's) second longest river, drains much of the northern region, and is home to many of the Orang Ulu tribes, including the Kayan, the Kenyah, the Berawan and the shy and semi-nomadic Penan. Much of the Baram region is highly inaccessible, but there are some fascinating sights in the region, including the famous Gunung Mulu National Park and the lesser-known Loagan Bunut National Park (see National Parks chapter). Other attractions accessible to visitors include the small riverside town of Marudi, the bustling Kenyah community of Long San, and the delightful Kayan longhouse community of Long Bedian.

MARUDI

Marudi is situated on the northern bank of the Baram roughly 80km from Miri. It is a busy bazaar town whose traders supply most of Sarawak's northern interior, so you are likely to bump into members of dozens of different ethnic groups here. The town's main attraction is Fort Hose, a Brooke-era wooden fort named for Marudi's most famous administrator, the naturalist, ethnographer and pioneer photographer Charles Hose. The fort is nowadays a museum. Featuring some of Hose's remarkable ethnographic photographs, as well as local textiles, handicrafts and ceremonial items. To get there, walk uphill along Jln Fort from the Main Bazaar (10 min). The nearby Taman Tasik (lake park) offers excellent river views from the hilltop.

Accommodation

All addresses are 98058 Marudi, Sarawak, Malaysia. Telephone dialing code is +6085 from overseas and 085 within Malaysia.

Business Class Hotel

Grand Hotel, No. 92, Lorong Lima, Tel: 085-755711, 755712, 755143 Fax: 755293.
Room rate: RM105-126.

Budget Hotels (room rates approx RM40-60)

Alisan Hotel, No. 63-65, Queen Square. Tel: 755911.

Baram Hotel, No. 7, Queen Square. Tel: 756008/755773.

Ka Lee Inn, Queen Square. Tel: 755897/755098.

Marudi Hotel, No. 3 Queen Square. Tel: 755141/756603.

Mayland Hotel, Lot 347, Marudi Town District. Tel: 755106/755089 Fax: 755333.

Mount Mulu Hotel, Lot 89&90, Marudi Town District. Tel: 756671 Fax: 756670

Queen Inn, No. 34, Jalan Lim Chin Kiat. Tel 755330.

Victoria Hotel, Lot 961, Main Bazaar. Tel: 756071 Fax: 756864

Eating Out

Marudi has a fair selection of Chinese coffee shops serving noodles and rice dishes, while the Boon Kee restaurant (Jln Newshop) is popular for sumptuous dinner. Malay food is available from the stalls at the Pasar Rakyat food centre. Restoran Kopaselera on Jln Cinema serves economical Indian Muslim dishes.

Travel Connections

Air: MASWings currently operates regular Twin Otter turboprop flights to and from Miri and Bario. Less frequent flights (1-2x weekly) serve the remote communities of Long Akah, Long Banga, Long Lellang and Long Seridan.

Boat: Downriver express boats leave approximately hourly for Kuala Baram (near Miri) from 7.30am (RM20). There is a daily service to Long Terawan (RM20, 4hrs) with on onward connection to Mulu National Park (connection must be booked in advance, see National Parks chapter).

Road: Marudi is also accessible from Miri by 4WD along an old logging road. Vehicles depart from the central bus station. Check with the Visitor's Information Centre in Miri for details.

Permits: A permit is necessary to travel upriver beyond Marudi. This is available free of charge from the Resident's Office in Miri.

LONG SAN

The sprawling Kenyah community of Long San is the last major settlement on the Baram River. Long San is something of a surprise to those who expect a sleepy riverside village rather than a mini-boom-town. However it's still the principal home of traditional Kenyah arts, crafts, music and dance, and visitors are sure to have a fascinating time.

The region around Long San is a complex ethnic mix and visitors can take in the Kayan longhouse of Long Mekaba, famous for its traditional musicians who are expert in playing the lute-like sape, as well as the abandoned Brooke-era fort at Long Akah, and even visit nomadic Panan groups when they are in the area. These activities generally cost about RM150 per person per day for 4 persons, due to the vehicles, boats and fuel costs involved, and can be arranged at the Long San Guesthouse (see below).

Accommodation

The Long San Guesthouse, a community-run project, is the only accommodation option. It offers comfortable fan-cooled rooms in an attractive wooden building close to the river. Room rate is RM60 per person including all meals. A small shop nearby sells basic essentials, including cold beer and the powerful local rice wine, borak.

Travel Connections

The only practical way to get to Long San without chartering boats and incurring excessive costs is the 4WD service from Miri, passing along old logging roads (RM80, 4 ½ hrs). Check with the Visitor's Information Centre in Miri for the latest schedules. From Long San it is possible to charter a 4WD vehicle (RM300, 4hrs) to the remote Kenyah longhouse at Lio Match, from where it is possible to trek to Bario in the Kelabit Highlands (see Kelabit Highlands chapter)

LONG BEDIAN

Long Bedian is one of those rare longhouses that is not gradually losing members through migration to the cities. Instead, it is thriving to such an extent that it has even been visited by the King and Queen of Malaysia. Keen to showcase their success to others, the Kayan people of Long Bedian have set up a community tourism programme with riverbank chalets and a lodge attached to the longhouse. They offer an authentic upriver experience, setting up an extensive network of jungle trails and providing treks and boat trips to picturesque waterfalls and other idyllic locations.

Accommodation

The Tenyok Rimba Resort offers one and two room chalets with electricity, running water and cooking facilities at RM80 and RM160 respectively. When full, visitors can also be accommodated in the longhouse lodge or with individual families. Village shops sell all basic necessities for self caterers, or meals can be arranged. E-mail lbedian@longbedian.com for reservations. Further information is available at www.longbedian.com.

Travel Connections

Boat: From Miri, take one of the frequent express boats from Kuala Baram to Long Lama (via Marudi, RM25, 2hrs), then the local 4WD service from Long Lama to Long Bedian (RM20, 1hr).

Road: The Long Bedian community offers a direct 4WD service from Miri via old logging roads (RM80, 4hrs). Book at lbedian@longbedian.com.

THE KELABIT HIGHLANDS

The Kelabit Highlands is a series of beautiful mountain valleys lying slightly over 1000m above sea level and flanked by jungle-covered peaks rising to more than 2,400m. The climate is probably the most pleasant in Borneo, although it can become quite chilly in the evenings. The Kelabit, after whom the area is named, and the neighbouring and closely related Lun Bawang, are Borneo's only wet rice farmers, and their well tended padi fields bring order to the rugged landscape, and produce the fragrant and much sought-after barrio rice. Both groups are branches of the Orang Ulu, and live in large longhouses widely dispersed throughout the area. They are friendly, hospitable people and enjoy receiving visitors.

BARIO

Bario is the gateway to the Kelabit highlands, thanks to its airport and a small network of paved roads leading to some of the nearby villages. The main attraction at Bario is the old longhouse, Bario Asal, whose ancient timbers are darkened by the constant smoke of generations of cooking fires. Most of the area's accommodation is found in and around Bario, and it is the main starting point for treks through the area.

BAKELALAN

Bakelalan (formerly Ba'Kelalan) is the most important of the Lun Bawang settlement in the northern highlands. The village is famous for its apples and organic vegetables, and for the local musicians and their 'bamboo bands'. The village is connected to Lawas and Miri by air, and it is also possible to travel to Lawas via an old logging road.

Trek and Trails

One of the great attractions of the Kelabit Highlands is trekking from longhouse to longhouse through dense rainforest and past sparkling green padi fields. These treks last from a few hours to a few weeks in duration, and vary from a gentle stroll to a tough jungle hike, using log bridges to cross fast-flowing rivers. Some of the treks involve a short excursion into Kalimantan, Indonesia. Mountaineers can tackle Gunung Murud (2,424m, reasonable going) or the famous Batu Lawi (2,043m, very though).

The Bario Loop is one of the most popular trails. This 5-day trek covers some of the most beautiful countryside in all of Borneo, and involves overnight stops in the longhouse communities of Long Dano, Pa Dilih, Ramudu and Pa Berang, trekking through dense jungle, crossing streams on bamboo bridges, and viewing ancient and not-so-ancient Kelabit megaliths and rock carvings along the way.

A variety of other treks include week long trails to Long Lellang or Lio Matoh longhouses on the upper baram (with overnight stops in the rainforest), for boat or air connections downriver, trails leading north to Indonesia, and a pelasant 2-3 day trek to Bakelalan from Bario (or vice versa). It is also possible to climb Gunung Murud or Batu Lawi, but these are both serious expeditions and guides and porters will need to be hired (RM80 per day) in Bario or Bakelalan. For Batu Lawi, mountaineering equipment and experience is also necessary.

Guides

Experienced guides are essential for all of these treks. Expect to pay Rm80-1000 per day, plus an additional Rm80 per day for porters if you don't want to carry everything yourself. The most experienced guides are usually attached to one of the guesthouses. Jungle survival expert Wilson Bala and dedicated naturalist Lian Terawe operate from Tarawe's lodge (itarawe@barion.et, wilsonbala@hotmail.com), while Peter matu, a keen local historian, operates from Bario Asal Homestay (kelabit@kelabit.net). James from Gem's Lodge (gems_lodge@yahoo.com). Douglas Munney operates from De Plateau Lodge (deplateau@hotmail.com) and specializes in birdwatching trips. Over the last few years, these experts have been training up a new generation of trekking guides, so whoever you get you are sure of a memorable experience, and all speak excellent English and Bahasa Malaysia.

For treks starting from Bakelalan, the best people to contact are Borneo Jungle Safari, who run the Apple Lodge and its counterpart in Miri. Tel: 475736 Fax: 417984 Website: www.borneojunglesafari.com.

Accommodation – Bario and Around

Bariew Guesthouse, Jln Bario, E-mail: reddish@hotmail.com, 20 rooms, shared bath, room rate RM15-20 (full board RM45-50). Near the shops past the old airstrip – ask for Reddish's place.

Bario Asal Homestay, barrio Asal, E-mail: kelabit@kelabit.net. Family-run homestay in the old longhouse at Bario Asal, room rate RM60 per person (incl. meals).

De Plateau Lodge, Jln Pa Umur, Bario, E-mail: deplatueau@hotmail.com. 7 rooms, room rate RM20 per person, meals RM10. 3km east of Bario on the 'road' to Pa Umur.

Gem's Lodge, Pa Umur, Bario, E-mail: gems_lodge@yahoo.com. 8 rooms, room rate RM20 per person, meals RM10. Delightful riverside setting 6km southeast of Bario (transport provided from airport).

Labang's Longhouse, Bario, E-mail: ncbario@yahoo.com. 17 rooms longhouse style, room rate RM40 per person (incl. meals). 1km east of Bario village.

Tarawae's, Jln barrio, E-mail: itarawe@bario.net. 4 rooms plus a neaby annex, room rate Rm25 per person, meals RM10. Bario's original lodge, just a short walk from the airport. Owner John Tarawe is a renowned authority on pitcher plants.

Bario Hill View Lodge, (bariohillviewlodge@yahoo.com.my)

Junglebluedream Art Gallery & Homestay, Ulung Palang Longhouse, Bario. (junglebluedream@gmail.com)

Accommodation – Bakelalan

Apple Lodge, Kampung Buduk Nur, Bakelalan, Tel: 013-2865656 website: www.borneojunglesafari.com. 10 rooms, room rate RM20-30, meals by arrangement.

Travel Connections – Bario

Unless you are trekking from Bakelalan, Long Lellang or Lio Match, Bario is only accessible by air. MASWings currently operates regular Twin Otter turboprop flights to and from Miri, Marudi and Bakelalan. – see Miri Travel Connections for full details.

Travel Connections – Ba Kelalan

Air: MASWings currently operates regular Twin Otter turboprop flights to and from Lawas and Bario. – see Miri Travel Connections for full details. See also the Lawas and Bario sections for connecting flights.

Road: A daily 4WD service operates between Lawas Bus Station and Bakelalan along old logging roads (6hrs, RM60). Check with the Visitor's Information Centre in Miri for the latest schedule.