

# Wild Borneo: Endemic Birding & Nature

## with Naturalist Journeys



**September 9 – 23, 2023**

866.900.1146

520.558.1146

[travel@naturalistjourneys.com](mailto:travel@naturalistjourneys.com)

[www.naturalistjourneys.com](http://www.naturalistjourneys.com)

or find us on Facebook & Instagram  
at Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Naturalist Journeys, LLC PO Box 16545 Portal, AZ 85632 PH: 520.558.1146 | 866.900.1146

[naturalistjourneys.com](http://naturalistjourneys.com) | [travel@naturalistjourneys.com](mailto:travel@naturalistjourneys.com)

Experience wild Borneo, a world beyond your imagination! We visit the Malaysian state of Sabah at the northern end of the world's third largest island. Sabah harbors the best of Borneo's equatorial rainforest, and all of Borneo's 52 endemic birds can be found here — out of 650 birds on the island. But our trip goes way beyond the birds. We could see up to eight primate species, including three big endemics: the Bornean Orangutan, Bornean Gibbon, and Proboscis Monkey. The island boasts nearly 100 endemic reptiles (out of 288 total); 63 endemic mammals (280 total); 1,700 orchids; 46 rhododendron species; and 39 Nepenthes pitcher plants.

Few areas on Earth can match Borneo's amazing biological diversity, and our adventure takes us through many fascinating landscapes. We start in Kota Kinabalu (KK), the coastal capital of Sabah. From KK, we access the amazing Crocker Range and the dripping cloud-forests of Mount Kinabalu — at over 13,000 feet, the highest peak in southeastern Asia (though we only get halfway up the mountain). After Kinabalu Park, we venture into some of Sabah's most pristine lowland rainforests, in the magnificent Danum Valley. We then explore the Gomantong Caves before reaching the Kinabatangan River. Based at our lodge in Sukau, we enjoy several casual boat rides into secondary lowland rainforest, still finding new birds and mammals every day. After the Kinabatangan, we drive to Sepilok, where we visit rehab centers for Bornean Orangutan and Sun bear. We hike among giant dipterocarp trees at the Rainforest Discovery Center, and we visit the Labuk Bay Proboscis Monkey sanctuary. This is an adventure that can't be missed.

## Tour Highlights

- Explore the world's third largest island, a bastion of biodiversity
- Experience the cloud forest on southeastern Asia's highest mountain, Mt. Kinabalu
- See the world's largest flower, the Rafflesia
- Search for up to 52 endemic bird species, including the Bornean Bristlehead
- Tour canopy walkways through the world's oldest rainforest
- Find endemic mammals like the Bornean Pygmy Elephant and the Bornean Orangutan
- Enjoy eclectic Asian cuisine at luxury jungle lodges

## Tour Summary

15-Day / 14-Night Borneo Birding & Nature Tour

\$8,890 DBL / \$10,140 SGL, from Kota Kinabalu

Airport is Kota Kinabalu International (BKI)

## Day-to-Day Itinerary

### Sat., Sept. 9 Arrivals in Kota Kinabalu

Our tour starts and ends in Kota Kinabalu (KK), the coastal capital city of the Malaysian state of Sabah. Even in the downtown areas, we should see House Swift coursing overhead and Asian Glossy Starling just about everywhere. You may even find a Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker in the trees downtown! A walk to the Jesselton Harbor could produce a couple different tern species at eye level or a Pacific Reef Egret on the docks. Kota Kinabalu is a lovely city with many charms, and you may want to spend more time here before or after the tour.

Your guide meets you at Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI) and transfers you to our hotel. Please plan to arrive in time to meet in the hotel lobby at 6:00 PM for a welcome dinner at a local restaurant where we get to know our traveling companions and learn about the plan for the trip. *We encourage you to come in a night or*



*two early to rest up from your travels and perhaps explore the city.  
Accommodations at Grandis Hotel or similar, KK (D)*

### **Sun., Sept. 10 Exploring Crocker Range National Park**

On our first full day, we head into the impressive Crocker Range National Park, which supports both secondary and primary hill forest. Our morning stop takes us to Tambunan Rafflesia Center, with its comprehensive museum focused on the unique biology of the genus *Rafflesia*, the world's largest flowers. Despite the name of the reserve, we will not likely see the blooming *Rafflesia* here. Instead, we search for several mountain specialty birds and a few Borneo endemics such as Kinabalu Serpent Eagle, Mountain Barbet, Bornean Treepie, Whitehead's Spiderhunter, Bornean Black Flowerpecker, Chestnut-crested Yuhin, and Bornean Bulbul. After lunch at a local restaurant we bird farther south in the Crocker Range in search of Orange-backed Woodpecker, Little Cuckoo-Dove, and Ashy Drongo, among many others. We return to KK for dinner.  
*Accommodations at Grandis Hotel or similar, KK (B,L,D)*

### **Mon., Sept. 11 Arrival at Kinabalu National Park**

After breakfast, we start our journey to Kinabalu National Park (KNP), at the foothills of Mount Kinabalu, with numerous stops for mountain scenery and a local market. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its high biological diversity, few places on the planet match the botanical variety of Kinabalu Park. As the park centerpiece, Mount Kinabalu rises to 4,095 m (13,436 ft.) above sea level. It is one of the youngest non-volcanic mountains in the world, and it boasts the highest summit between the Himalayas and New Guinea. The 750-km<sup>2</sup> park is home to over 4,000 plant species, including 26 rhododendrons and 1,200 orchids. Over 300 species of birds have been recorded here, including a majority of Borneo's endemics. From the park entrance at 1,585 m (5,200 ft.) to a zone just above our lodge, a rich montane oak forest includes familiar laurels, myrtles, and rhododendrons, but also tropical palms, ferns, orchids, bromeliads, and bamboos. As we ascend 2,000 feet up the mountain we discover another cooler cloud forest zone dripping with lichens, ferns, and bromeliads. We check into our villas and enjoy some afternoon birding around park headquarters before dinner.  
*Accommodations at Nepenthes Villas or similar, KNP (B,L,D)*

### **Tues., Sept. 12 Exploring Kinabalu National Park Headquarters Region**

We spend today birding between Timpohon Gate and KNP headquarters. Around park HQ, we often bird along the park road, which invites us into a network of excellent trails, allowing easy exploration of the varied forest habitats. At the park's botanical garden, not far from our lodge, we marvel at the diversity of orchids and carnivorous *Nepenthes* pitcher plants. Several endemic bird species occur between park HQ and the Timpohon Gate (the entrance to the summit trail), including Crimson-headed Partridge, Whitehead's Trogon, Golden-naped Barbet, Chestnut-hooded Laughingthrush, Bornean Green Magpie, Mountain Blackeye, Everett's Thrush, Bornean Stubtail, Bornean Whistler, and Bornean Whistling Thrush. We enjoy lunch and dinner between outings and spend the night in the park.  
*Accommodations at Nepenthes Villas or similar, KNP (B,L,D)*

### **Wed., Sept. 13 Kinabalu Park | Poring Hot Springs | KK**

After an early breakfast, we check-out and head to Poring Hot Springs. A short drive around the mountain takes us into sub-montane hill forest where we explore the grounds and trails at Poring. Here we enjoy our first canopy walkway, where we watch forest canopy dwellers at eye level, including trogons, barbets, broadbills, and cuckoos. The route to Poring takes us by a private property that offers the perfect conditions for the world's largest flower, the rare *Rafflesia*, which can attain a diameter of 36 inches! Endemic birds at Poring may include White-crowned Shama and Dusky Munia, and we typically find some other fun species like the Fluffy-backed Tit-

Babbler, Crimson-winged Woodpecker, Diard's Trogon, and Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher. In the afternoon, we return to KK for dinner and another night in the Grandis Hotel.

*Accommodations at Grandis Hotel or similar, KK (B,L,D)*

## **Thurs., Sept. 14 Fly to Lahad Datu | Danum Valley Conservation Area**

After breakfast, we take a one-hour flight to Lahad Datu, where we meet the staff from Borneo Rainforest Lodge (BRL). We enjoy lunch in town, followed by the approximate 2.5-hr. drive (depending on wildlife sightings) to the Danum Valley Conservation area. Danum's virgin lowland and hill forests exemplify a swath of land through the middle of the island called the "Heart of Borneo," and they offer perhaps the best bird and wildlife watching on the entire island. We settle into our rooms, with plenty of time to relax before our first of BRL's amazing buffet dinners.

*Accommodations at Borneo Rainforest Lodge or similar (B,L,D)*

## **Fri., Sept. 15 & Sat., Sept. 16 Exploring Danum Valley**

The next two full days take us across the network of trails in the Danum Valley. The botanical diversity of Danum's *Dipterocarp* forest rivals that of lowland South America. In fact, twenty-five acres of forest here contain more plant species than the U.S. and Canada combined. These stunning arboreal habitats support a mind-boggling variety of birds, with more than one-third of Borneo's entire bird list recorded here. From the elegant Great Argus to the stunning Asian Fairy-Bluebird, Danum never fails to impress.

Some of the woodpeckers we might encounter at Danum include Maroon, Rufous, Buff-rumped, and Gray-and-Buff Woodpeckers, just four among the Danum Valley list of 14 woodpecker species. All eight Bornean hornbill species live at Danum Valley, with a special stronghold for the massive Helmeted Hornbill. Black-bellied and Chestnut-breasted Malkohas and Red Leaf-Monkeys may accompany us as we traverse Danum's canopy walkway, marveling at spectacular views of the multi-layer primary forest. Whiskered Treeswift elegantly flycatches from its sky-view perches, while up to seven pitta species tease us with their haunting calls from deep within the impenetrable vegetation of forest floor.

Up to 17 different bulbuls and 24 babblers keep us very busy while we enjoy the colorful pigeons, trogons, and barbets. We are especially diligent in searching for our top bird of the trip: the Bornean Bristlehead, representing the Bornean-endemic monotypic family *Pityriaseidae*. While most of the birds at the Danum Valley are sleeping, we enjoy at least one night-drive in the valley, searching for Brown Wood-Owl and Malay Eared-Nightjar. Our night excursion also allows us to observe some of Danum's secretive nocturnal mammals, including Greater Mouse-Deer, Tarsier, and the impossibly cute Slow Loris. With some luck, we may also find a Civet, Leopard Cat, or the magnificent Clouded Leopard.

*Accommodations at Borneo Rainforest Lodge or similar (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Sept. 17 Transfer from Danum Valley to Kinabatangan River**

Today is our longest travel day, with the drive back to Lahad Datu, and then southwest toward the second longest river in Malaysia, the Kinabatangan (kih-nuh-bah-tung-ahn, said quickly with barely noticeable inflections). The World Wildlife Fund calls the Kinabatangan the "Corridor of Life," describing the river as "arguably the last forested alluvial floodplain in Asia and an area of enormous importance for wildlife and the local community."

En route to the river, we make a stop at Gomantong Caves, birding in secondary forest on the entrance road. After a short hike to the cave entrance, we are surrounded by millions of swiftlets—representing four different species. We learn about the fascinating ecology of the caves and the centuries-old practice of harvesting the

edible nests of the White-nest Swiftlet, a practice now managed sustainably throughout the region. The boardwalk through the cave is an otherworldly experience.

That evening take us to the bank of the Kinabatangan at the village of Sukau (SOO-cow), where we take a short boat ride upstream to the Sukau Rainforest Lodge (SRL), named as a “National Geographic Unique Lodge of the World.” The lodge here is certainly unique and luxurious, but the real highlight is the chance to see many birds and mammals on multiple boat rides along the main stem of the river, as well as several productive tributaries. *Accommodations at Sukau Rainforest Lodge or similar (B,L,D)*

## **Mon., Sept. 18 & Tue., Sept. 19 Exploring the Kinabatangan**

The next two full days take us up and down the K River and along several tributaries. Cruising the Kinabatangan makes you feel like you are in a wildlife documentary! The forest along the river’s edge supports 10 primate species, including the endemic Orangutan and many Proboscis Monkeys, and we watch closely for the world’s largest woodpecker, the Great Slaty, which lives in family groups along the river corridor. If we’re lucky, we may encounter a herd of Bornean Pygmy Elephants, a rare subspecies of Asian Elephant. When not watching these fantastic mammals, our attention is focused on the rich birdlife of the area. The endangered Storm’s Stork finds a stronghold here, along with possible Lesser Adjutant and Purple Heron.

Kingfishers are well-represented in the rich aquatic habitats, with the possibilities including Stork-billed, Blue-eared, Black-back Dwarf, and the migratory Common Kingfisher. We could have Oriental Pied Hornbill around the lodge, and river trips might produce the Wreathed, Wrinkled, Rhinoceros, or Asian Black Hornbills. Bornean Gibbons howl from across the river each morning and evening. Green Imperial Pigeon are very common, and the raptor list for this stretch of the river is amazing. We could see Changeable, Rufous-bellied, and Wallace’s Hawk-Eagles; Gray-headed and Lesser Fish-Eagles; Brahminy Kite is common, and we have an excellent chance to see the smallest raptor in the world, the “Bornean” White-fronted Falconet.

*Accommodations at Sukau Rainforest Lodge or similar (B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Sept. 20 Transfer from Kinabatangan River to Sepilok**

After breakfast, we pack up and take a short boat ride to our vehicle, followed by the drive to Sepilok (sep-i-lock). We settle into our villas at MY Nature Resort, followed lunch on the property and a short break. For the afternoon, we visit the Orangutan Rehabilitation Center for the 3:00 PM feeding ritual.

*Accommodations at MY Nature Resort (B,L,D)*

## **Thurs., Sept. 21 & Fri., Sept. 22 Sanctuaries in Sepilok Region**

The birding scene around Sepilok is decidedly laid-back, though still brings us many new species for the trip. Our days around Sepilok have many highlights, but the impressive Rainforest Discovery Centre is the gem of the region. This oasis of primary forest boasts an amazing canopy walkway, giving you a bird’s eye view of the giant dipterocarp trees. On one evening, we stay until dusk to experience the emergence of Giant Flying Squirrels from their cavities high in the *Koompassia* trees.

At Sepilok, we also observe Bornean Orangutans and Bornean Sun Bears at their respective rehabilitation facilities. Sturdy elevated boardwalks at these sites allow for close viewing of these threatened mammals, while we are distracted by many new birds, just a few of which may include Scarlet-rumped Trogon, Black-and-red Broadbill, Bushy-crested Hornbill, and up to six different sunbirds. Just a short drive from Sepilok we visit the Labuk Bay Proboscis Monkey Sanctuary, with close-up views of this bizarre primate, as well as practically tame Silver Langurs. We also enjoy a short hike along the mature mangrove forest in search of woodpeckers like Common and Greater Flamebacks.

*Accommodations at MY Nature Resort or similar (B,L,D)*

## Sat., Sept. 23 Return to KK

After breakfast, we pack up for our departure to Sandakan airport and return flights to KK and your individual departures. If you were not able to spend personal time in KK prior to the tour, we recommend that you stay for a couple of days afterward. The markets—especially the fish market and Philippino market—offer superb local culture. Flight schedules look like we will land in KK around 2:30 PM. Please make international flights out for this evening.

*Our operator arranges your flights from Sandakan to KK, but the tour officially ends as we leave Sandakan. (B)*

## Your Local Guide

Your expert local guide, R. Mirwan bin Mustapha, aka Mirwan or just “Wan,” is a Sabah-born lad living in the northern part of Borneo. A licensed Tour Guide since year 2000, Mirwan shares his passion for nature and wildlife by leading tours to nature destinations across Sabah & Sarawak. In his free time, Mirwan conducts wildlife surveys off of Borneo’s ‘beaten path.’ His passion for birds began in 2008, and he currently has sighted more than 400 of Borneo’s 688 bird species. For the last eight consecutive years, Mirwan has played an active role as a Borneo Bird Race Marshall during the annual Borneo Bird Festival. As a member of the Borneo Bird Club, Mirwan has also represented this active group of birders at various other bird festivals and bird races (similar to big day competitions) across the region.



## Tour Style & Pace

Our Borneo safari will surprise you for its relatively casual tropical birding experience. Birds can be abundant at times, but you will not typically be overwhelmed by species numbers. In fact, we may ‘only’ tally 200+ species for the entire trip—although more than one-quarter of these will likely represent species and subspecies that are endemic to Borneo!

Many species will be quite common, giving you ample chance for repeated encounters, and we will also see plenty of large birds, such as raptors, hornbills, and waders. Daily outings will include hiking on trails and roadsides, strolling along well-maintained boardwalks, and slow cruising in comfortable boats. Birding time around some of our lodges will include leisurely strolls through manicured gardens and along entry roads.

Bird observation towers and canopy walkways offer wonderful viewing experiences, but they typically require climbing several flights of stairs. We will visit some mountainous and hilly terrain, especially at Mt. Kinabalu, where the trails may have moderately steep grades. Trails can also be quite muddy in places. On all of our outings, your guides will move at a rate suitable for the entire group, and having two guides allows us to easily divide the group for varying ability levels if needed.

In general, our tour operates at a relaxed pace and appeals to birders with a wide range of skill and ability levels. As expected, those guests with more advanced skills will be able to find and identify more of the anticipated species, while less-experienced birders can still be guaranteed jaw-dropping looks at plenty of birds. Each evening, we will review the birds and other wildlife seen during the day, but we are not big ‘listers’, so we will not let the prospect of a larger bird list drive our daily schedule.

We also rarely bird from dawn to dusk, and we spend plenty of time at each location enjoying the behaviors of birds. While the focus of our tours is birding, we always enjoy sharing the broader natural and cultural history of the regions we visit. Nowhere is this truer than in Borneo, where we will regularly stop to admire the wide variety of mammals, reptiles, insects, and flowers, many of which live nowhere else on Earth!

## Tour Details

### Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

### Cost of the Journey

The cost of this 15-day journey is \$8,890 DBL / \$10,140 SGL, from Kota Kinabalu. This cost is based on double occupancy and includes 14 nights' accommodations; all meals as specified in the itinerary, in-country domestic flight, group airport transfers, professional guide services, local park and other area entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost of the journey does not include airfare from your home to Kota Kinabalu, or items of a personal nature, such as drinks from the bar, telephone, and local guide gratuities. Cost also does not include fixed lens camera fees at the following preserves:

The following Professional Camera Fee will be applicable for the usage of fixed lenses:

400mm, 500mm, 600mm, 800mm and above:

Sepilok Orang Utan Centre/BSBCC/Gomantong Cave @ RM1,000 p/ camera unit p/location

Labuk Bay Proboscis Monkey Sanctuary @ RM500 p/ camera unit

Danum Valley @ RM500 p/camera unit

### Travel Details

**Travel Notes:** We recommend that you arrive at least one day early to rest after the long flights from home. You may also want to explore Kota Kinabalu on your own for a day or two to experience the amazing markets, eclectic restaurants, and general hustle and bustle of this small but busy city.

#### Arrival:

**Arrive:** 9/9 by mid-day or we recommend the day prior - see travel notes below.

**Arrival Airport** is BKI / Kota Kinabalu International Airport

#### Departure:

**Departure:** 9/23 after 6:00 PM

**Departure Airport** is BKI / Kota Kinabalu International Airport

Photos by Steve Shunk.

*Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.*

