

CAPTAIN'S LOG

SABAH / BORNEO

The Land below the Wind

Captain Raymond Heer



From a luxury base in Borneo you can dive the Coral Triangle, journey up steamy jungle rivers to spot orangutan and pigmy elephants, climb mountains in the clouds, and enjoy outstandingly hospitality from friendly locals. Blessed with pristine beaches and landscapes straight out of a National Geographic photo shoot, Borneo is adventure in a natural paradise.

I'm writing this from the Chart Room, a quiet place here at Sutera Harbour Marina, in Kota Kinabalu, capital of the Malaysian state Sabah, on the island of Borneo. From here I have a great view of the yachts in the marina and the beauty of Tunku Abdul Marine Park spread out in the background – a perfect backdrop for my thoughts.

Kota Kinabalu is right in the middle of South-East Asia, so it makes complete sense to choose it as a base when cruising the region. The marina was my base on board M/Y *Andiamo* for three and a half years. Not only is

it the gateway to the spectacular cultural and natural attractions of the region, but it would be challenging to find a marina that is more comfortable, anywhere in the world. And yes, I really mean that. Anywhere in the world.

Sutera Harbour Marina & Country Club

This is a very luxurious marina to return to after remote cruising adventures, and a superb place to base your yacht – both from the owner and crew perspectives. In the marina grounds, there's 27 holes of golf, undercover tennis, squash, table tennis, badminton, tenpin

bowling, a movie theatre, four swimming pools (one Olympic-size), good restaurants, and two resort-style hotels.

Operationally, Kota Kinabalu is also a great city, featuring:

- A major airport that serves as a regional hub, with short flights to Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Seoul, Tokyo, Jakarta, Taipei and more
- No duty for ship's stores in transit
- Efficient, honest, friendly officials
- Cheap, good quality fuel
- Great options for provisioning
- For yachts cruising Indonesia, a very helpful Indonesian Embassy

Diving Adventures

First and foremost, Sabah is a nature destination. Sitting squarely within the Coral Triangle, the magnificent scuba



diving is one of the obvious drawcards for visiting yachts.

Sipadan

Any diver worth their salt would have Sipadan on their bucket list. The schools of fish on Barracuda Point never disappoint, and the sheer number of turtles in the area is staggering.

Mabul

Mabul offers some incredible critter diving, with huge colourful frog fish and the longest blue ribbon eels I've ever seen.

Layang-Layang

Less well-known but even more impressive is Layang-Layang. The naval base perched right on top of this atoll has guaranteed that this reef remains untouched. Best known for hammerhead sharks, the reef is actually equally good when they are not around. Great coral, good fish life, excellent diversity and crystal clear water.

Jungle Adventures

When you want some time on land, it is time to head for the Bornean jungle. The World Wide Fund for Nature lists 44 endemic mammals and 37 endemic birds in Borneo; you will not see these animals anywhere else.

Kinabatangan River and Sepilok

People are attracted here by the charismatic megafauna. A boat safari on the Kinabatangan River is the best way to see orangutan, pigmy elephants and proboscis monkeys.



Complemented by a night's stay in one of the river resorts, this is a fun side trip. A private excursion to Sepilok Wildlife Sanctuary can also be arranged. The orangutan rehabilitation centre there is very successful and really worth seeing; the baby orangutans will melt even the coldest heart.

Danum Valley

If ancient, pristine rainforests are your thing, head for Danum Valley. Take a helicopter or tough it out in a 4WD, returning from your adventures to be pampered at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge. Forest walks led by extremely knowledgeable guides are the main activity here, while watching the sun peek over the horizon from the forest canopy walkway is a surreal experience.

Mount Kinabalu

For those who want to challenge themselves, climbing Mount Kinabalu is a fantastic way to spend a couple of days. At over 4,000 metres,

it is the highest peak in Malaysia. This is definitely not for sissies. Alternatively, choose the easy option and do some relaxing hikes in the cool montane forests of Mount Kinabalu National Park at a slightly lower altitude.

Gunung Mulu Caves

Take a short flight into the mountains to Gunung Mulu Caves, a cave network of staggering proportions surrounded by lush Sarawak jungle. Deer Cave, the world's largest cave passage, is home to approximately 3 million bats. Watching these bats leave the cave at sunset for their evening feed is to witness one of nature's great migrations.

Rasa Ria Orangutans

Another good option, not very far from Kota Kinabalu city, is the Shangri-La Rasa Ria Resort. You can enjoy lunch here and then head over to the



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Orangutan Sanctuary to watch the primates having their own lunch.

City Life in Kota Kinabalu

Head back to Kota Kinabalu to experience the city life. Have your jungle aches massaged away, explore the markets, and enjoy a delicious meal. The city has just the right balance between first world comfort and old world charm. Genuine smiles and friendly people are everywhere; Sabahans take great pride in being the friendliest and most welcoming people in Malaysia.

Onwards from Kota Kinabalu

When you are ready to leave, you might sail north for a new adventure, enjoying the yacht's water toys and the amazing sunsets at Borneo North Tip or Balambangan Island.

TIPS FOR CAPTAINS

Anchorage

There is a reason why they call Sabah the 'land below the wind'. More often than not, the days are completely calm, so it is not hard to find a place to anchor. Even when the wind does blow, a lee-shore is never far away.

Formalities

The authorities are always very friendly and helpful. You can clear into the country in Lahad Datu, Tawau, Sandakan and Kota Kinabalu. The easiest route is to use your agent, as if you try to do it yourself there is a lot of legwork to be done.

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Agent

Agent Alvin Teh can arrange the formalities at all of the ports of entry and can arrange the required permits. He's also the most knowledgeable person in town for engineering and maintenance issues.

Local Charities

Many specific needs fall between the cracks. One of Malaysia's cracks is definitely environmental awareness. For this reason, I am always supportive of any work done in this field. Sabah is very much on the right path but sometimes lacks federal support. Shark-finning is one issue that I am personally particularly interested in. Yachts that wish to help with this cause can do so through Shark Savers Malaysia or a local children's charity called Dr Ocean.

Day Workers

There are good day-workers available in Kota Kinabalu.

Events

Chinese New Year causes business to slow down for about two weeks and Hari Raya is a slow month, so obtaining services during these periods is sometimes a little frustrating.

Provisions

Kota Kinabalu has good supermarkets with many international products. Provisions can also be flown in with little hassle.

Fuel

Clean low-sulphur diesel is available, typically at much better rates than other ports in the region.

Marinas

Sutera in Kota Kinabalu is the best marina in South-East Asia. Larger yachts can be accommodated at the commercial port. All of the other towns have jetties suitable for tenders.

Shipyard

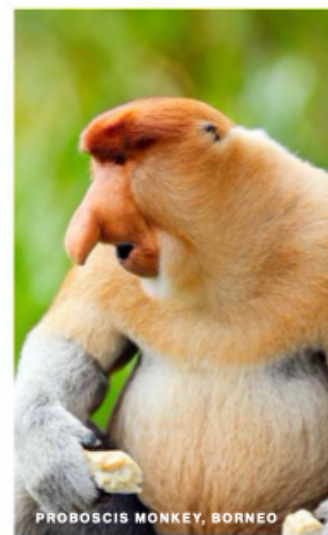
LSE is a large shipyard in Labuan which caters mostly to the oil and gas industry. They have a 7,000-tonne lift and a large shed. Besides some heavy engineering, there are no services to speak of. Nevertheless we had two very successful refits here, using skills from Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu.

Safety and Security

Lloyd's JWC has removed the region from its list. This means that underwriters consider it safe to insure within the region again. The East Coast of Sabah was a little 'hot' at one point but the Malaysian Navy has done a great job bringing security to the region.

Weather

Sabah's weather is good all year round. The wet season is from November to February. Some yachts prefer to head to Thailand during this period, to make the most of their dry season.



PROBOSCIS MONKEY, BORNEO