



**BORNEO: SPECTACULAR BIRDS AND OTHER
WILDLIFE**

26 AUGUST - 9 SEPTEMBER 2018



Crested Fireback is one of our targets on this trip.

Borneo is the third-largest island in the world and is awash with avian riches. With over 50 endemics and pristine Dipterocarp forests, montane cloudforests, riverine habitats, and mangrove swamps you should enjoy an amazing trip filled with stunning birds like pittas, trogons, and broadbills, as well as many mammalian treasures like Bornean orangutan, proboscis monkey, crab-eating and southern pig-tailed macaques, Malay civet, and an array of reptiles and butterflies. Our tour will bring us to most of the important birding venues of the Malaysian province of Sabah, which covers the northernmost part of this vast and amazing island, including five of its IBAs (Important Bird Areas identified by BirdLife International): the Crocker Range, Mount Kinabalu, Kabili-Sepilok, the Kinabatangan floodplain, Tabin Wildlife Reserve, and Danum Valley.

The weather can be a bit cool in the mornings in the highlands, where rain is always a possibility, and very hot and humid in the lowlands. Borneo is tropical; you never know when a rainstorm will brew up anywhere, so be prepared with a lightweight raincoat and something to cover your optics. We also recommend leech socks for Danum Valley, although some bug spray may keep the leeches away. There is one uphill hike at Mount Kinabalu to search for some of the highland endemics along the summit trail. While on the Kinabatangan River we are exposed to the sun for hours at a time, so we recommend a hat and some sunscreen. Most of the hotels are good to very good. The food here can be a bit spicy, but they often tone it down for those with a less sturdy palate.

This tour can be combined with our **The Best of Peninsular Malaysia 2018** tour for a magnificent Malaysian mega tour.

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides, and other factors.

Itinerary (15 days/14 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Kota Kinabalu

After arrival at the Kota Kinabalu International Airport we will transfer to our hotel to check in for an overnight stay.

Overnight: Hotel Dreamtel, Kota Kinabalu

Day 2. Tambunan Rafflesia Centre, transfer to Kinabalu National Park

After breakfast we will transfer to Kinabalu National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. En route we will stop at the Tambunan Rafflesia Centre in the Crocker Range. Here we will be birding for a few hours, hoping to see, among others, a number of Bornean endemics such as **Whitehead's Spiderhunter, Bornean, Mountain, and Golden-naped Barbets, Bornean Treepie, Chestnut-crested Yuhina, Bare-headed Laughingthrush, and Bornean Bulbul**, as well as **Ochraceous, Cinereous, and Flavescent Bulbuls** (the Bornean subspecies of the latter is known as the Pale-faced Bulbul), **Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush, and Blyth's Shrike-Babbler**.

From here we'll make our way up into the mountains to Kinabalu National Park. We will be based for three nights in Kundasang, a small village very close to the entrance to the park.

Overnight: The Cottage Hotel, Kundasang

Day 3. Birding Kinabalu National Park

Today we will explore the network of forested trails around the headquarters of Kinabalu National Park on the forest-draped slopes of Mount Kinabalu. This mountain is the highest peak between the Himalayas and the tall ranges of New Guinea. Its huge granite massif holds a spectacular avifauna, with plenty of endemics for us to enjoy. Among these we hope to find **Whitehead's Trogon**, **Whitehead's Broadbill**, **Fruithunter**, **Golden-naped Barbet**, **Crimson-headed** and **Red-breasted Partridge**, **Bornean Swiftlet**, **Bornean Treepie**, **Bornean Stubtail**, **Bornean Green Magpie**, **Bornean Forktail**, **Eyebrowed Jungle Flycatcher**, **Black-sided Flowerpecker**, **Bare-headed Laughingthrush**, **Mountain Wren-Babbler**, **Bornean Whistler**, and **Chestnut-crested Yuhina**, and a somewhat steep climb may even yield **Friendly Bush Warbler** and **Everett's Thrush**.

But certainly we will also be on the lookout for other enticing species, some perhaps even found in mixed feeding flocks, like **Ochraceous** and **Cinereous Bulbuls**, **Chestnut-capped** and **Sunda Laughingthrushes**, **Blyth's Shrike-Babbler**, **Mountain Leaf Warbler**, **Yellow-breasted Warbler**, **Sunda Bush Warbler**, **White-throated Fantail**, **Temminck's Sunbird**, and **Black-and-crimson Oriole**, to name just a few.

The large mammal fauna is poor on Mount Kinabalu, but there is a delightful host of squirrels and tree shrews to look for,

Overnight: The Cottage Hotel, Kundasang

Day 4. Mesilau Nature Resort, Kinabalu National Park

This morning we will make an excursion to the Mesilau Nature Resort, an area situated at approximately 2000 m above sea level on the East Ridge of Mount Kinabalu in Kinabalu National Park. Mesilau is well-known for its plethora of pitcher plants, and if we are lucky we may encounter a few. Some bird species, such as the endemic **Bornean Forktail** and "**Pale-faced Bulbul**", and the more widespread **White-browed Shortwing**, are more easily seen at Mesilau than around the Kinabalu National Park headquarters. We will also again be on the lookout for **Fruithunter**, **Cinereous Bulbul**, **Bornean Treepie**, **Bornean Stubtail**, **Bornean Whistler**, **Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush**, and **Mountain Wren-Babbler**.

In the afternoon we will once more be birding around the Kinabalu National Park headquarters, looking for anything that we might have missed yesterday.

Overnight: The Cottage Hotel, Kundasang

Day 5. Poring Hot Spring, transfer to Sepilok

Although in the afternoon today we will have a lengthy drive, we will spend a good part of the morning birding at Poring Hot Spring, a small reserve approximately 40 km from Kinabalu National Park. Poring is mainly known for its hot springs, which are a major Bornean tourist attraction, but the reserve also holds a number of exciting birds. In particular we will be looking for the endemic **Hose's Broadbill**. Here we will take the Langganan Waterfall Trail, hiking for about 600 to 700 meters, trying to find **Blue-banded Pitta**, and with exceptional luck we might even stumble upon **Bornean Banded Pitta**, both endemics. During our walk we might also encounter a few less difficult species, like **Moustached Babbler**, **Diard's Trogon**, **Black Hornbill**, **Red-throated Barbet**, **Plain Sunbird**, **Little Spiderhunter**, **Bornean Blue Flycatcher**, **Maroon-breasted Philentoma**, **Black-naped Monarch**, and perhaps also the attractive **Scaly-breasted Bulbul**.

During the afternoon we will drive approximately five to six hours overland, mainly through endless oil palm plantations, to Sepilok via Sandakan. Hidden among a veritable treasure trove of tropical plants and grasses, huge trees, and spectacular orchids in bloom we'll find the stunning Sepilok Nature Resort, our home for the next two nights. In the evening there will be a night walk in search of birds, mammals, and other nocturnal creatures.

Overnight: Sepilok Nature Resort

Day 6. Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve and its Rainforest Discovery Centre

We'll have a full day to explore the area. We will bird the 43 square kilometers of the wonderful Dipterocarp forest of the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve with its magnificent walkway at the Rainforest Discovery Centre in the morning, when the birds are most active. This will give us a chance for **Bornean Bristlehead** among many other species we are going to encounter here, like **Red-naped** and **Scarlet-Rumped Trogons**, **Black-capped Babbler**, **Black-crowned Pitta**, **Red-bearded Bee-eater**, **Oriental Dwarf** and **Rufous-collared Kingfishers**, **Little, Streaky-breasted**, and possibly even **Thick-billed, Spectacled, Yellow-eared**, and **Long-billed Spiderhunters**, the endemic **Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker**, and **Dusky Munia**, as well as barbets, mid-canopy bulbuls, ground-dwelling babblers, cuckoos, minivets, and many more avian riches that can be found in these wonderfully birdy forest.

Here we might also see a number of inquisitive squirrels and possibly some primate species, among which the endearing maroon leaf monkey might be particularly appreciated.

An optional visit to the famous Sepilok Orang Utan Sanctuary for either the morning or the afternoon feeding of these semi-wild primates, along with several other species that take advantage of the free handouts, can be arranged, although it is very likely, but of course not guaranteed, that we will see Bornean orangutan in the wild.

Overnight: Sepilok Nature Resort

Day 7. Birding Sepilok, transfer to the Kinabatangan River

After breakfast we will still have time to do some morning birding in Sepilok for any species we might have missed. Then we will drive to our collection point on the Kinabatangan River and cruise upstream to our lodge. Along the way we have a chance for **Oriental Pied** and **Rhinoceros Hornbills**, **White-bellied Sea Eagle**, **Lesser** and **Grey-headed Fish Eagles**, **Storm's Stork**, **Lesser Adjutant**, and various kingfishers.

After arrival and check-in at the lovely Sukau Rainforest Lodge, where we will stay for three nights, we will embark in the late afternoon on our first birding river cruise. Some of our main targets on the Kinabatangan River are the endemic Bornean subspecies of **Black Magpie**, a slate of glittering **Kingfishers** including **Collared**, **Rufous-collared**, **Ruddy**, **Stork-billed**, **Banded**, **Blue-eared**, and **Blue-banded**, **Red-naped** and **Scarlet-rumped Trogons**, and **Hooded Pitta**. If we are very lucky we will also find our mega target, the enigmatic, rare, and endemic **Bornean Ground Cuckoo**.

Overnight: Sukau Rainforest Lodge

Days 8 – 9. Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary

The Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary is now under the purview of the Sabah Wildlife Department. Despite ever-encroaching oil palm plantations, the original lowland forests and mangrove swamps near the coast have largely survived, providing sanctuary for a population of saltwater crocodiles, and containing some of Borneo's highest concentrations of wildlife. Of special note are Borneo's indigenous proboscis monkey, Bornean orangutan, Asian elephant (possibly a full species in its own right), and the endemic Borneo river shark. The sanctuary is also known for its prolific birdlife. We will explore this riveting area for two days.

In the early mornings and mid-afternoons boat trips will take us along the river and its small tributaries. Here we hope to see wild orangutans feasting on the fruits of riverside fig trees or, in the late afternoon, preparing their night-time nests. Troops of the bizarre proboscis monkey with their huge pot bellies and the males with their extraordinary, floppy noses will watch us curiously. Many groups of crab-eating macaques will be our constant companions, and we might find the occasional silvery lutung (langur) and, with luck, perhaps a Müller's Bornean

gibbon. We might even come across a herd of “Bornean pygmy elephants” in this area, or the secretive and rare flat-headed cat.

The forest along the river and its tributaries is home to a wealth of birds, including such spectacular species as **Rhinoceros, Helmeted, Black, Oriental Pied, Bushy-crested, Wreathed, White-crowned, and Wrinkled Hornbills, Wallace’s Hawk-Eagle, Black-and-Red and Black-and-Yellow Broadbills, Hooded Pitta**, and with luck a pair or two of the endangered **Storm’s Stork** or a **White-fronted Falconet** sitting on a snag.

Watching smaller birds from the boat is not really easy, but the lodge grounds are very birdy, and a boardwalk behind our lodge winds its way through the jungle. Between boat trips we will explore these areas, hoping to find the delightful **Black-crowned Pitta, Asian Red-eyed Bulbul, Violet Cuckoo**, the endemic **White-crowned Shama, Chestnut-winged Babbler, Blue-throated Bee-eater, Dark-necked Tailorbird, Maroon-breasted Philentoma, and Orange-bellied Flowerpecker**. In the evening we might see **Mountain Scops Owl** or a **Buffy Fish Owl** at the jetty.

Overnight: Sukau Rainforest Lodge

Day 10. Gomantong Caves, transfer to Tabin Wildlife Reserve

On our overland transfer to the Tabin Wildlife Reserve today we will make a stop at the famous Gomantong Caves, an intricate cave system inside Gomantong Hill, the largest limestone outcrop in the Lower Kinabatangan area. The caves and the surrounding area are a protected area for wildlife, especially orangutans, which are frequently seen at the entrance to the caves, and are well-known in birding circles for the variety of swiftlets inhabiting them, together with a vast array of other wildlife, including massive populations of cockroaches and bats. Here we have a chance to see four species of swiftlets, which are really only safely told apart by their nests: **Edible-nest, Black-nest, Mossy-nest, and Glossy Swiftlets** all nest in these caves. There is a boardwalk through the caves that will give us access to the inside of the cave system, where we’ll be able to see where these birds make their nests and how the local workers collect them for birds-nest soup on intricate rope-and-ladder systems.

After reaching the town of Lahad Datu we will embark on the 48-km drive on mediocre tarred and gravel roads to the Tabin Wildlife Reserve, the largest reserve in Malaysia, where we will arrive in time for some late-afternoon birding. Here our major target birds are **Barred Eagle-Owl, Brown Wood Owl, and Sunda and Blyth’s Frogmouths**.

Overnight: Tabin Wildlife Resort

Day 11. Birding Tabin Wildlife Reserve

Tabin has been declared a Wildlife Reserve primarily on account of the large number of animals inhabiting its forests, some of which are highly endangered. In addition to harboring a large population of elephants, this is the only reserve in Sabah where we might have a (very slight!) chance to get a lucky glimpse of the vulnerable sun bear or the endangered banteng, or the critically endangered Sumatran rhinoceros, but either one of these would require an extraordinary streak of luck. Other ungulate species include sambar, southern red muntjac, and both greater and lesser oriental chevrotain. In addition, seven of Sabah’s eight primate species are present, and 230 bird species have been recorded here.

We will spend a full day at this wondrous place. Tabin, a large area of magnificent dipterocarp rainforest, is filled with birds, and we’ll spend our time here birding the many rainforest trails, while trying particularly for **Pittas**: six species occur here, namely **Hooded, Blue-winged, Bornean Banded, Blue-headed, Blue-banded**, and even **Giant**, but sadly, as always, they are not easy to find. Similarly difficult is **Great Argus**, but large numbers of trogons, babblers, bulbuls, broadbills, barbets, hornbills, and more will bring much enjoyment. The evening will give us a chance to take to the forest for mammals and night

birds, and with luck we might find any of **Large**, **Blyth's**, or **Sunda Frogmouths**, **Grey or Large-tailed Nightjars**, or **Reddish Scops Owl**.

Overnight: Tabin Wildlife Resort

Day 12. Transfer to the Danum Valley Conservation Area

Our time in the lowland rainforests is not over, some of the best is yet to come! Today we will return to Lahad Datu and from there will be transferred, on an adventurous prior logging road, to the Danum Valley Conservation Area and the Borneo Rainforest Lodge. This wonderful, upscale lodge is situated in a large tract of mind-blowing primary rainforest, one of only very few remaining on Borneo after rampant logging and clearing for oil palm plantations. While within much of the conservation area selective logging was allowed, a large part had been set aside for the protection of one of only two remaining expanses of primary lowland dipterocarp forest in Sabah.

The Danum Valley Conservation Area boasts 268 avian species, and 110 mammals, 72 reptiles, 56 amphibians and 37 fish species have been recorded here so far. We will search for a good selection of especially the birds and mammals during our time in this great habitat.

The entire slate of eight Bornean pittas occurs in Danum Valley. In addition to those listed for Tabin here we could, with luck, also see **Garnet** and **Black-crowned Pittas**, but we particularly hope to find **Blue-banded**, **Bornean Banded**, and **Blue-headed**, and of course also other special target birds like **Bornean Blue Flycatcher**, **White-crowned Shama**, and **Streaked** and **Black-throated Wren-Babblers**.

Overnight: Borneo Rainforest Lodge

Days 13 – 14. Danum Valley

During our two days in Danum Valley we will explore the excellent system of trails around the lodge as well as the canopy walkway, and after dinner there will be opportunities to go out from the lodge with one of the local guides in search of nocturnal wildlife, either by truck or on foot. Results on night outings are always unpredictable, of course, but with luck we might find something really exciting, like red giant or Thomas's flying squirrels, colugo, the occasional Bornean slow loris or Horsfield's tarsier, the tiny Temminck's flying squirrel, or the giant tree-dwelling Malaysian tarantula.

Danum Valley is a particularly good area for orangutan, which sometimes is even seen within the lodge grounds. Commoner mammal species include crab-eating and southern pig-tailed macaques, a wide variety of both diurnal and nocturnal tree shrews and squirrels, bearded pig, Malay and masked palm civets, both greater and lesser oriental chevrotain, the endemic Bornean yellow muntjac, the much more widespread southern red muntjac, and sambar. The biggest predator here is the Sunda clouded leopard, which is seen on night drives a couple of times a year – so one can always hope.

Among the multitude of birds we hope to encounter here are eight species of hornbills, with the huge **Rhinoceros Hornbill** seen and heard almost daily. We'll also be looking for many other specialties, like **Great Argus**, **Crested Fireback**, **Black-crowned** and **Blue-headed Pittas**, **Bornean Bristlehead**, **Bornean** and **Black-throated Wren-Babblers**, **Sunda Blue** and **Bornean Blue Flycatchers**, **Chestnut-naped** and **White-crowned Forktails**, **Great-billed Heron**, **Wallace's**, **Rufous-bellied**, and **Blyth's Hawk-Eagles**, **Great Slaty** and **Olive-backed Woodpeckers**, **Ashy Tailorbird**, **Whiskered Treeswift**, **Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher**, and a host of bulbuls, babblers, flowerpeckers, flycatchers, woodpeckers, drongos, raptors, sunbirds, and spiderhunters.

The heat of the afternoon after lunch allows some relaxed meanderings around the resort, and you can find flowerpeckers and Spiderhunters in the flowering bushes, along with some stunning butterflies.

Overnight: Borneo Rainforest Lodge

Day 15. Departure

Sadly, our exciting tour to wild Sabah will end today. We will transfer from Danum Valley back to the Lahad Datu airport, where the tour ends. From here you will catch your afternoon flight to Kota Kinabalu to continue from there on your international flights home.

Duration: 15 days
Limit (Group Size): 6 – 8
Date: 26 August – 9 September 2018
Tour Start: Kota Kinabalu, Borneo
Tour End: Lahad Datu, Borneo

Price: MYR26,158 per person sharing
Single Supplement: MYR4,739

Price includes:

Accommodation

All meals (except for dinner on the first night, i.e. breakfast on Day 2 through lunch on Day 15)

All transport while on tour

English-speaking birding guide

Entrance fees

Price excludes:

International flights

Domestic flight (Lahad Datu – Kota Kinabalu)

Drinks

Camera and video fees (Poring Hot Spring)

Insurance

Tips

Any personal expenses, e.g. laundry, gifts, etc.