

The Top 10 Things To Do in **SARAWAK**



SARAWAK TOURISM BOARD
www.sarawaktourism.com



Sarawak Tourism Board

Level 4, Plaza Aurora, Jalan McDougall,
93000 Kuching, Sarawak

Tel: +6 082 - 423600 Fax: +6 082-416700

Email: stb@sarawaktourism.com

Sarawak
More to Discover



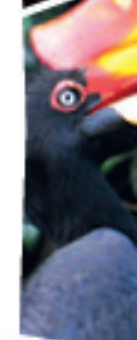
Sarawak

Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia, stretching some 800 km along the northwest coast of Borneo, the world's third largest island. A beautiful land coloured by peace, tradition and unmatched biodiversity, it is a prime destination for discerning travellers seeking vibrant culture, exhilarating adventure and breath-taking nature.

You can share in the lifestyle of an upriver longhouse, follow in the footsteps of a dynasty of White Rajahs, explore gigantic caves in the heart of the Borneo rainforest, or paddle through jungle streams in search of elusive wild orangutans, to mention just a few possibilities. Whatever your choice, you will leave Sarawak with memories to last a lifetime.

Whether you stay in a luxurious resort, an award winning boutique hotel, a heritage homestay or a simple jungle camp, you will be cared for with genuine warmth and sincerity. The people of Sarawak are equally at home in the past and the present, taking the same pride in their traditions of hospitality as they do in their modern infrastructure and seamless connectivity.

Revealing a side of Asia unlike anywhere else, Sarawak is a place for people seeking authentic and engaging experiences rather than tourist-trap clichés. And most importantly, it's a safe, peaceful and friendly place to visit, for large groups and solo travellers alike. Make Sarawak your next destination, as the highlight of your visit to Southeast Asia, or as a journey of discovery all on its own.



Top 10 Things To Do In SARAWAK

Q: Why a Top-10? There must be hundreds of things to do in Sarawak.

A: That's right, there are hundreds or even thousands of different things to do in Sarawak. This brochure is designed to break down the Sarawak Experience into 10 fascinating themes, spread across the State's three regions, so you can easily find all those activities and adventures that appeal to you.

1. Meet The People

With over 30 distinct ethnic groups, each with their own unique culture and traditions, there's a great deal of hospitality to go round. If you want to stay with local people, there are Homestays in every corner of the state. You can take part in all kinds of interesting activities as you get to know your hosts and learn about their fascinating lifestyles. Please check with the Visitor Information Centres in Kuching (Southern Region), Sibiu (Central Region) and Miri (Northern Region) for accommodation, transport and tour operator details.



Southern Region

One Day Or Less (from Kuching)

Spend an evening bar-hopping in Kuching's old city centre. You will find the locals warm, hospitable and keen to make visitors feel welcome.

Visit the well-preserved Bidayuh Longhouses at Kampung Annah Rais, Kampung Benuk, Kampung Mongkos or Kampung Pueh, perfect for photo ops and an insight into Bidayuh (Land Dayak) culture.

Overnight or Longer (from Kuching)

Trek above the clouds to Kampung Semban, a very traditional Bidayuh community where older women still wear brass arm, leg and neck rings.

Visit Iban Longhouses on the Lemanak River or around Batang Ai Hydro Lake. Sample home brewed rice wine (*tuak*), enjoy fresh jungle produce and try your hand at blowpipe shooting. Ornatly tattooed elders will entertain you with tales of their headhunter ancestors and show off their traditional dancing skills.



Central Region

One Day Or Less (from Sibiu)

Drop by at Bawang Assan, a fascinating settlement of Iban longhouses ranging from the traditional to the thoroughly modern.

Overnight or Longer (from Sibiu)

The upriver town of Kapit is an excellent base for visiting local Iban longhouses. Local tour operators also run river safaris to remote longhouses along the Rejang's many tributaries. In the Melanau Heartland around Mukah, you can discover the unique Melanau culture, watch skilled boatbuilders at work and see how sago is produced the traditional way.



Northern Region

Overnight or Longer (from Miri)

Visit the Orang Ulu Longhouses of Sungai Asap and stay in a *Jelatong* floating homestay, exploring the vast Bakun Hydro Lake's shoreline. If you prefer the seaside, head for the Kedayan Village Homestay with its beautiful beach just an hour from Miri.

Fly, drive or paddle up the Baram River to visit Kayan and Kenyah Longhouses at Long San, Long Makeba and Long Bedian, where you can discover Orang Ulu culture, art and music. A short flight from Miri brings you to Bario, gateway to the Kelabit Highlands, home to the Kelabit people and their large, well preserved longhouses. Miri is also connected by Twin Otter service to Ba Kelalan, a cluster of seven Lun Bawang villages famous for their orchards and organic vegetables.



2. Go For A Walk

Sarawak is best explored by foot, whether it's a short stroll through Kuching's Historic City Centre or a week-long trek through the Heart of Borneo. There are walks and treks available for every level of fitness, through some of the finest scenery in Southeast Asia. Some treks are covered in other sections, where the main features are people or wildlife. Experienced guides will be required for most longer treks.



Southern Region

One Day Or Less (from Kuching)

Discover Kuching's Historic City Centre, by yourself or through a guided walk or bicycle tour. Climb Mount Santubong, for a birds-eye view of the city and the coastline, or take to the trails of Kubah National Park to discover rare and fascinating plant species and idyllic jungle waterfalls. Visit Gunung Gading National Park for a close-up view of the Rafflesia, the world's largest flower, amidst stunning rainforest scenery.



Overnight or Longer (from Kuching)

Visit Tanjung Datu National Park, at the remote southern tip of Sarawak, to trek through rugged, jungle terrain to deserted white sandy beaches. Or explore the beautiful upriver scenery of Batang Ai, staying overnight in Iban Longhouses and jungle camps.



Central Region

One Day Or Less (from Sibiu)

Take a stroll along the Rejang Esplanade to get a close-up view of life along Malaysia's longest river.

Northern Region

One day Or Less (from Miri)

Stroll through Miri Old Town, crammed with shops selling all manner of fascinating goods, taking in the Fish Market and the Tua Pek Kong Temple. Visit Lambir Hills National Park, probably the world's most complex and diverse forest ecosystem, for a selection of jungle trekking trails to suit every ability.

Overnight Or Longer (from Miri)

Gunung Mulu National Park, famous for its extensive cave systems also offers some spectacular trekking trails, including the demanding yet incredibly rewarding Summit Trek and Pinnacles Trail and the historic Headhunters Trail.



The remote Kelabit Highlands has a wide selection of trails, from half-day strolls in and around Bario to week-long expeditions, staying in remote longhouses, passing by ancient megaliths, camping out in the rainforest and ascending the rugged peaks of Pulong Tau National Park.

3. Wildlife Encounters

Sarawak's rainforests are just teeming with wildlife, but not the vast herds you find on the African savannah – here you mostly have to go looking for your animal encounters, which is half the fun.



Southern Region

One Day Or Less (from Kuching)

Visit Matang Wildlife Centre to encounter young orphaned orangutans and sun bears and learn about the wildlife rehabilitation process. Then check out Semenggoh Nature Reserve and its thriving population of semi-wild orangutans, or go frog-spotting in Kubah National Park, home of Asia's smallest frog species. Take a boat to Bako National Park to view the rare proboscis monkey, as well as long-tailed macaque monkeys, Bornean bearded pigs, colugos (flying "lemurs") and many colourful bird and reptile species.

Overnight Or Longer (from Kuching)

Head upriver to Batang Ai National Park to follow the Red Ape Trail. This area has possibly the world's highest population density of wild orangutans and encounters are quite frequent. Take a fishing boat along the waterways of Maludam National Park in search of proboscis monkeys, Irrawaddy dolphins and the world's only viable population of red-bearded langur monkeys. If you have the time (and the energy), you can even join a volunteer programme, helping to conserve Sarawak's marine turtles or rehabilitate orphaned orangutans.



Northern Region

One Day Or Less (from Miri)

Visit Niah National Park to view remarkable cave fauna, watch an amazing bat exodus and find your way back by the light of luminous mushrooms. Head for Kuala Sibuti for an evening of crocodile spotting and firefly watching.

One Day or Less (from Bintulu)

Visit Similajau National Park and its golden sandy beaches to view crocodiles and marine turtles.

Overnight or Longer (from Miri)

The Bat Observatory at Gunung Mulu National Park provides a grandstand view of one of nature's natural wonders, while the world's longest canopy walkway showcases the birds and plants of the rainforest canopy. Spend a night at Loagan Bunut National Park, with its incredible shrinking lake ecosystem and a resident population of Bornean gibbons, as well as hundreds of bird, reptile and small mammal species.

Birding



Sarawak is a birder's paradise! A great portion of Borneo's 650 bird species have been recorded in Sarawak, including most of the island's endemics such as the bizarre Bornean Bristlehead. With the highest number of national parks and nature reserves in the country (over 600,000 ha of totally protected areas) and an amazing 22 Important Bird Areas, Sarawak offers unrivalled birding opportunities.

4. Take To The Water

With over 1,000 km of coastline, more than 40 major rivers and three vast hydro lakes, one of the best ways to see Sarawak is from the water.

Southern Region

Take a Sarawak River cruise to discover Kuching from the water, and watch the sunset reflected in the water as the sun sinks over Mount Serapi. Or hire one of the local *tambang* ferries to explore the riverside at your own pace.



Go Irrawaddy dolphin spotting and crocodile watching in Kuching Wetlands National Park, or visit Satang Island to see the marine turtle hatchery and enjoy snorkelling with green turtles. If you prefer to paddle your own canoe, try rainforest kayaking or rafting along the Upper Sarawak River, or sea kayaking around the Santubong River and the Bako-Buntal Bay. Most of the Iban longhouse visits described in Chapter 1 (Meet The People) also include a longboat ride along narrow, fast flowing jungle rivers. Be prepared to climb out and push!

Central Region

Explore the mighty Rejang River by Express Boat. These powerful craft are the “buses” of Central Sarawak. You can take a day-trip from Sibul to Kapit, Kuala Rajang or Sarikei to sample the local cuisine, or use the express boat network and local speedboat and longboat services to explore the entire river system and discover remote, seldom-visited longhouses that are home to some of the most hospitable people on Earth.



Northern Region

Charter an express boat from Kuala Baram (near Miri) brings you to the upriver town of Marudi, gateway to Ulu Baram (Upper Baram River). If you

have the time, and weather conditions permitting, you can travel from Marudi by express boat and longboat to some of the remotest villages and longhouses in Sarawak, home to various Orang Ulu communities including Kayans, Kenyahs and even nomadic Penans.



From northerly Limbang, take a day trip to explore Bandar Seri Begawan, capital of Brunei, on the local ferry service, or simply explore the Malay water village across river from Limbang Town. In the evening, take a boat through the mangroves in search of proboscis monkeys, crocodiles and fireflies.

5. Underground Sarawak

With a high annual rainfall and abundant porous rocks, Sarawak is literally riddled with caves, including some of the largest, most unusual and most scientifically important in the world. There's no better place than Sarawak to discover a remarkable underground world.



Southern Region

One Day Or Less (from Kuching)

Take part in a caving adventure in the limestone hills around Bau or Serian. Beginner, intermediate and advanced level activities are offered and equipment is supplied. Less adventurous visitors will enjoy

the easily accessible caves near Bau, a short drive from Kuching. The Wind Cave, is long and narrow with beautiful rock formations and a cooling breeze, while the Fairy Cave is more imposing, with extensive cave vegetation and a Chinese shrine at the cave mouth.



Overnight Or Longer (from Kuching)

If you have time, local operators run longer expeditions that combine caving, climbing, 4x4 treks, jungle walks and visits to Bidayuh villages for an unforgettable adventure experience.

Northern Region

One Day or Less (from Miri or Bintulu)

Visit the caves of Niah National Park, settled by modern humans for over 40,000 years and one of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia. The Great Cave has one of the world's largest cave mouths, a fascinating cave ecosystem and you can watch the birds nest collectors at work. The Padang, where a shaft of light pierces the rear of the cave, is perfect for photo ops. The adjacent Painted Cave is the site of Niah's famous cave paintings. Leave the Great Cave around sunset, to see the nightly "changing of the guard". Two great living clouds intermingle in the sky as hundreds of thousands of swiftlets return to their nests, whilst a similar number of bats fly out to forage in the forest.



Overnight or Longer (from Miri)

Gunung Mulu National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is most famous for its limestone cave systems, including the world's largest natural chamber (the Sarawak Chamber), the world's largest cave passage (Deer Cave) and the longest cave in Southeast Asia (Clearwater Cave). Here you can visit the four astounding show caves in a single day, finishing at the Bat Observatory to watch literally millions of bats fly out to feed in the rainforest, moving in huge sweeping formations. The fit and energetic can try their hand at adventure caving, which involves wading, swimming, climbing and crawling through the less accessible caves and getting covered in dirt. Cave guides and equipment are provided and there are routes for every ability level.

6. Underwater Sarawak

Sarawak has some great diving sites, which are less well known (and far less frequently visited) than other locations in the region. Beginners can also learn to dive and experienced divers can pursue courses up to IDC Staff Instructor level.



Southern Region

The Southern Region is virtually undeveloped for dive tourism, mostly due to its short dive season, but is well worth a visit for some interesting dives that are easily

to reach with just a short boat ride. The best wreck dives (including a WWII Japanese Destroyer) require at least an Advanced Open Water, but there are great muck dive and snorkelling sites around the turtle sanctuary islands offshore from Kuching. You can even dive in search of marine turtles in the morning and learn about their conservation in the afternoon.



Northern Region

Miri is fast becoming a popular dive destination, due to the 22 pristine patch reefs that make up the Miri-Sibuti Reef Marine Park, lying at depths from 7 to 30 metres. The best time to dive is March to September, with average visibility around 30 metres, but you can expect at least 10 metres visibility all year round. Hard and soft corals cover the entire reefs, with abundant gorgonians, sea-whips, anemones, sponges and crinoids. Angel fish, butterfly fish, fusiliers, groupers, stingrays, trigger fish, parrot fish and wrasses are among the numerous reef species that can be seen and over 40 species of nudibranch have been recorded. There are also some interesting wreck dives in quite shallow water, perfect for a first wreck diving experience.



Most of the best dive sites are at depths between 18 and 30 metres, so EANx Nitrox Diver and PADI Advanced Open Water ratings are highly recommended (and can be studied in Miri). Bonus activities include whale shark spotting and diving (in season).

7. Food And Drink

When Sarawakians meet, they don't ask "how are you?". They ask "have you eaten already?". This shows how important food is in Sarawak, and no matter how much you eat there's always something new and delicious to try.



Southern Region

Kuching is famous for its celebrated noodle dishes, spicy Sarawak Laksa and savoury Kolo Mee, as well as a wide selection of Chinese, Malay and Indian cuisine, exotic rainforest fruits, crispy jungle ferns and wonderful fresh seafood. Dining options range from humble hawker stalls, through waterside seafood restaurants at Kampung Buntal and traditional Chinese delicacies at Siniawan Night Market to opulent fine dining outlets in 5-star hotels, and you can even learn to cook Sarawak-style. Kuching's most famous drink is teh-si-peng, a multi layered tea and palm sugar concoction worth of a brochure by itself. In the villages and longhouses you can try native cuisine such as *manok pansoh* (chicken steamed in bamboo tubes) and fresh jungle produce, accompanied by a glass of *tuak*, the local rice wine.

Central Region

Sibu is renowned for Foochow Chinese cooking, plus fresh fish and huge prawns from the Rejang River Delta. Dishes to look out for include prawn noodles, mee sua (longevity noodles), *kampua*

noodles, *kompia* (minced pork bagels) and the rare and very expensive *empurau* fish. Local shops and markets abound with fresh jungle fruits, including durian, *dabai* (jungle olives), the bright pink *engkalak* fruit (or Borneo avocado) and many more according to season. The Melanau people around Mukah, Oya and Dalat prepare a delicious spicy raw fish or prawn dish known as *Umei*, served with sago pearls instead of rice. They are also known for their delicious *tebaloi* sago crackers. The whole Central Region is pineapple country and the quality is excellent – the town of Sarikei even celebrates a Pineapple Festival.



Northern Region

Miri has a similar culinary selection to Kuching, although with its seafront location the seafood is possibly even fresher. Bintulu is reckoned to produce the best *belacan* (shrimp paste) in all of Malaysia. Inland, be tempted by the fresh jungle produce and organically grown fruits and vegetables prepared by the Kelabit and Lun Bawang people of the northern highlands, served with the unique fine-grained Bario rice. In the upriver Orang Ulu longhouses, enjoy tasty wild boar, free range chicken and exotic river fish served with a glass of borak (orang Ulu rice wine).



8. Culture & Heritage

Sarawak has a rich and complex history, its many ethnic groups have vibrant traditional cultures and there is a thriving contemporary art scene. If you love visiting museums, galleries, temples and historic buildings, Sarawak is the place to be.

Southern Region

One Day Or Less (from Kuching)

Follow in the footsteps of the White Rajahs around Kuching's old city centre and the waterfront, taking in the Sarawak Museum, Islamic Museum, Tua Pek Kong Temple, Chinese History Museum, Old Courthouse, India Street Mosque, Textile Museum and many other unique heritage sites. Then cross the Sarawak River (by bridge or boat) to visit Fort Margherita, the Brooke Gallery and the exquisite Orchid Garden. The surrounding Malay Kampung have some fine examples of traditional and modern Malay architecture.



Learn about Sarawak's traditional cultures at the award-winning Sarawak Cultural Village in nearby Damai, stopping by en route to visit the world's first Cat Museum, a prehistoric human figure and the tomb of Sarawak's first and only Sultan. If you are heading north to visit the Iban Heartland, drop by at Sri Aman to visit historic Fort Alice and a 19th Century Chinese Temple.

Central Region

One Day or Less (from Sibul)

Learn about the remarkable history of Sibul on the Sungai Merah Heritage Walk, and check out the Tua Pek Kong Temple with its 7-storey Goddess of Mercy Pagoda and the Sibul Heritage Centre. Half an hour away is the Yu Lung San Tien En Si Temple

Complex, the biggest modern temple complex in Southeast Asia. The distinctive architectural mix makes it a photographer's paradise. Drop by nearby Kanowit to visit a 19th century wooden fort and see early 20th century shophouse architecture.



Overnight or Longer (from Sibul)

Head upriver to Kapit for Fort Sylvia, a splendid Brooke-era fort with a fine display of ethnic arts and handicrafts, then take a boat to Rumah Garie longhouse to watch the world-famous weavers hard at work on their traditional *pua kumbu* textiles. Go downriver to visit the *songket* weavers at Kampung Rejang. Over in Mukah, make for the village of Kampung Tellian to visit Lamin Dana, a reconstructed Melanau Tall House showcasing Melanau's art and culture.



Northern Region

One Day Or Less (from Miri)

Canada Hill not only offers excellent views of Miri and the surrounding area, it is also home to Oil Well No. 1, known as the "grand old lady," the first well to strike oil in Sarawak in 1910. The adjacent Petroleum Museum traces the history and development of the oil and gas industries in Malaysia. Back in town, visit the impressive and atmospheric San Ching Tian Temple, the largest Taoist temple in Southeast Asia. If you are heading for Niah National Park (see Chapter 5), Underground Sarawak) make sure to visit the fascinating Niah Archaeological Museum, tracing 40,000 years of human settlement at Niah.



Overnight or Longer (from Miri)

Upriver at Marudi, Fort Hose, a wooden Brooke-era fort, has been transformed into a fine regional museum, showcasing local Orang Ulu culture and the wonderful ethnographic photographs of Charles Hose.



9. Shopping

Sarawak's towns and cities are teeming with modern shopping malls just packed with luxury branded goods. But so is your home town, so we'll focus on what makes Sarawak different – handicraft shops, artisan workshops and traditional markets.

Southern Region

Main Bazaar and Carpenter Street, the two oldest streets in Kuching, are packed with handicraft shops, art dealers and families practising their traditional crafts, ranging from tinsmithing to coffin-making! Nearby India Street is a pedestrian precinct with a fine selection of traditional clothing and textile outlets, and the adjacent Gambier Street is the place to buy spices and utensils if you want to cook Sarawak-style. In the Malay Kampung across river, small family bakeries sell *kek lapis* (Sarawak layer cake), probably the state's most popular souvenir. Also across river, the colourful Satok Weekend Market is renowned for the Bidayuh ladies selling fruit and vegetables. Goods on offer include handicrafts, forest produce, orchids and a whole range of local snacks and delicacies. The potteries on Jalan Penrissen produce fine ceramics in a unique Teochew-Sarawak fusion style, and the potters are happy to be photographed at work.



The busy weekend market at the border village of Serikin, where Indonesian traders come to sell their wares, is a great place to buy cheap textiles, clothing, fresh fruits, jungle produce and handicrafts. Heading north, the bustling and colourful Serian Market is a must-visit for fruit, vegetables, forest produce and amazing photo opportunities.

Central Region

Sibu is blessed with two superb markets. Sibu Central Market is the largest and most interesting daily market in Sarawak. Highlights include Iban ladies selling exotic fruits, jungle produce and handicrafts, and the Chinese poultry sellers who offer live chickens and ducks neatly wrapped in tubes fashioned from old newspapers. Sibu Night Market operates until late every evening. The

highlight is the food, all kinds of local delicacies, with shoppers happily snacking as they wander from stall to stall.



Upriver Kapit also has two fascinating markets, the Teresang Market and the Gelenggang Kenyalang Market, both packed with Iban and Orang Ulu handicrafts, exotic jungle fruits and abundant photo opportunities. Mukah's Town Market is the place to buy Melanau handicrafts, including ornate *terendak* sun hats, *tebaloi* sago crackers, and exotic local delicacies including sago worms.



Northern Region

Miri Handicraft Centre showcases the ethnic arts and crafts of northern Sarawak. Stalls are run by the producers, and craftspeople can often be viewed at work here. Items on sale include Penan mats and basketry, Orang Ulu beadwork and woodcarvings. Miri's Tamu Muhibbah is a colourful native market selling exotic fruits and vegetables, handicrafts and produce from upriver areas, including fragrant Bario rice, and great photo opportunities. The northern town of Limbang has, in addition to a fine waterfront wet market, a unique *Pasar Bawah Payung*, an "under the umbrella" market which sets up at weekends selling all manner of cheap goods.



10. Festivals & Celebrations

Sarawak has festivals, religious and cultural celebrations and artistic and cultural events all year long. They range from small community celebrations to world-class events showcasing the best of local and global culture. Here are just a few examples.

Southern Region

Rainforest World Music Festival: Every July, Sarawak Cultural Village. The most exciting musical event in the region, and ranked among the top-25 world music festivals globally.



Kuching Festival: July and early August. A month-long festival of music, drama, arts, exhibitions and food, glorious food.

Sarawak Regatta: Every November, Kuching Waterfront. Dating from 1872, this is the biggest and best river regatta in Southeast Asia. There's even a category for visitors to join in.



Multi-Cultural Mooncake Festival: Mid-September Carpenter St, Kuching. Kuching's Chinese community share the mid-autumn festival with everyone at a 4-day street party.



Pesta Benak (Tidal Bore Festival): November, Sri Aman. Celebrates the Lupar River's famous tidal bore. Surfing and wave-riding competitions, water sports and nightly entertainment.



Central Region

Mukah Kaul Festival: April, Mukah. The annual spiritual cleansing ceremony of the Melanau people, with plenty of cultural performances and traditional games, including the giant swing or *tibau*.



Borneo Cultural Festival: July, Sibuan Town Square. Enjoy Borneo culture ancient and modern at this extravagant 10-day festival which also includes a popular food fair.

Sibu Base Jump: September, Sibu Town Square. Borneo's most challenging extreme sport event. An international line-up of base jumpers attempt soft landings from Sarawak's tallest building.

Baleh Kapit Raft Safari: October, Kapit. Sarawak's original adventure race, as competing teams raft down the mighty Baleh River to Kapit. New participants always welcome.

Sibu International Dance Festival: August, Sibu. A showcase of traditional and modern dance performance and education from around the world.



Northern Region

Borneo International Kite Festival: October, Bintulu. Watch and learn how the professionals build and fly their kites at this major international kite festival.

Borneo Jazz: May, Marina Bay, Miri. One of the top jazz festivals in the region, attracting top jazz and blues performers from around the world.



Pesta Babulang (Bisaya Festival): June, Limbang Division. A 3-day festival held by the Bisaya Community, including buffalo racing, cooking competitions and a traditional costume beauty pageant.



Baram Regatta: October, Baram River, Marudi. First held in 1899 as an alternative to headhunting, this is one of Sarawak's oldest and most historic regattas.



Pesta Nukenen Bario (Bario Food Festival): August, Bario. The world's most exclusive food festival celebrates the unique food, farming, forest and cultural heritage of the Kelabit Highlands.

