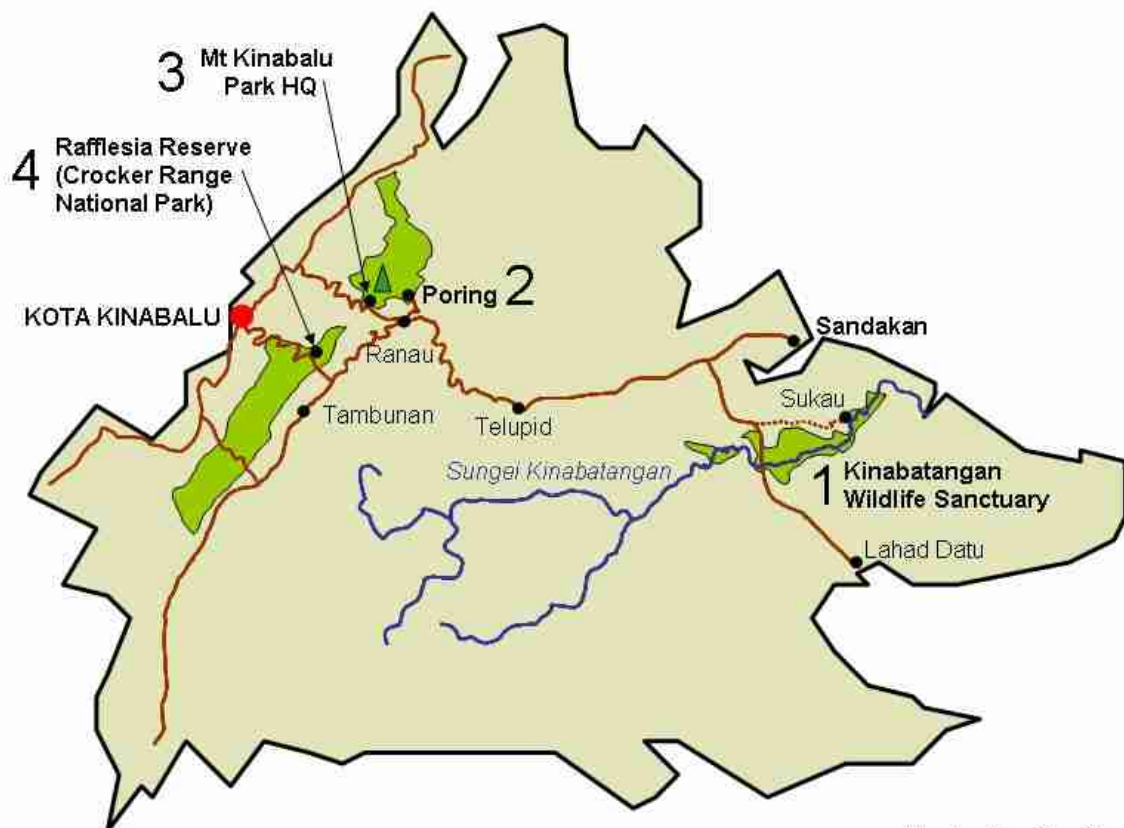


Birding Snippets

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Birding Borneo Part 5 : Practicalities



Map by Tan Gim Cheong

**Map of Sabah, located at the northern part of the island of Borneo.
The places visited are numbered in sequence.**

Getting There The international airport just south of Kota Kinabalu (KK) city is the gateway to Sabah. There are frequent flights from Singapore (SilkAir) and from Kuala Lumpur (MAS - Malaysian Air System and AirAsia) and Johor Bahru (Air Asia).

The smaller airport at Sandakan is the launching pad for explorations on the Kinabatangan. There

are direct flights to Sandakan from Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru (AirAsia). It is also served by internal flights from Kota Kinabalu International Airport.

Getting Around (Generally)



Proboscis Monkey
signature creature of
Borneo

For the Kinabatangan, a vehicle is not necessary as you'll be spending all your time on the river and any rented vehicle will just sit idle. The tour operators can pick you up and drop you off at the Sandakan Airport or bus terminal.

Poring Hot Springs and Mount Kinabalu Park HQ can be reached via buses or taxis.

The birding trails at Poring are accessed on foot, after passing the ticket booth, so a vehicle is not necessary *within* Poring. A vehicle is may useful at Mount Kinabalu as the trails are spread out along a 4.5km tarmac road.

It is cumbersome to get to the Rafflesia Reserve by buses and is more easily reached by taxi. It is useful to have a vehicle here.

Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary.

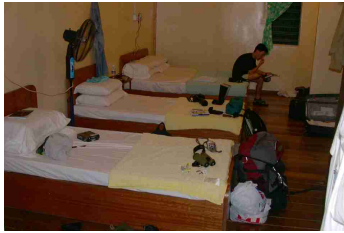
General notes

There are numerous eco-tour operators along the Kinabatangan river, and a number are concentrated around Sukau, near the Menanggal tributary. Most of them offer packages with full board, lodging, boat tours and airport pickup. You just need to get yourself to Sandakan, it is as easy as that! Just do an internet search and it should be easy to find some of them. It is possible to drive all the way to the lodges located at Sukau. Travelling time from Sandakan to the Kinabatangan is around 2.5 to 3 hours.

How we did it



We stayed at the Kinabatangan Jungle Camp (KJC) operated by Robert Chong and arranged for airport pickup at Sandakan. The KJC can only be reached via a 10 minute boat ride. If you rented a car, it'll have to be left at an isolated jetty – you've been warned! Their web site is www.kinabatangan-jungle-camp.com, e-mail labukbb@yahoo.com, contact numbers are +60-19-8435017, +60-19-8047756 and +60-89-533190.



**A triple share room
at the KJC**

Accommodation is in the form of lodges, there is no need to camp out. The windows are protected by mosquito netting and a fan is provided. It is cool enough in the jungle at night, no need for air-conditioning. Electrical outlets are available in the rooms to charge your batteries. There are rooms for 2, 3 or 4 persons, with hot showers. Meals are mostly 'buffet style' at the communal dining area. Tea, coffee and water are free-flow while soft drinks cost extra. The KJC is located in the jungle, there are no shops nor restaurants. Do your shopping for essentials near Sandakan – just tell the driver to drop by a grocery shop along the way.

Protection from the elements

Birding on the river is easy, just sit on the boat and watch the birds! The boats are not covered, and you'll be exposed to the sun and rain. Long sleeves and long pants are recommended as protection against the sun. A cap worn backwards to protect the back of the neck is a good idea. I did not use sun block but they may be useful for those who do not mind using them. Bring a rain-coat in case you encounter rain while on the river.

Hazards

Leeches and mosquitoes will be encountered on the trails around the KJC or whenever you get off the boat and go into the forest, thankfully most of the birds can be seen from the boat.

Poring Hot Springs

How we got there from the Kinabatangan

We took the long-distance bus plying the Sandakan-Kota Kinabalu trunk road to get to Poring. The bus can be flagged down anywhere along the road and we did not need to go all the way to Sandakan so we asked Robert to drop us off at the T-junction as we approached the Sandakan-KK trunk road (see map above).



Sandakan-KK bus

The bus had a ticket conductor (TC) on board. Before boarding the bus, he opened the luggage compartment for us to load our bags. The TC did not speak English but that wasn't really a problem and we just told him we wanted to go to Poring – this turned out to be a mistake (more on this later). We were charged based on the distance



Lunch stop at Telupid



Trying to hitchhike at the isolated junction to Poring

travelled and did not have to pay for the full ticket price for Sandakan to KK. The seats in front were all occupied and we sat right at the back of the bus. We were to find out why everyone was seated in the front when the bus went over some bumpiness on the road and we were actually bumped 20cm up into the air, off our seats! The tallest member in our group 'flew' high enough to have his head hit against the top of the bus! The bus made a 20 minute stop at Telupid and we discovered that our bus ticket entitled us to a free lunch! However we already had lunch, so we opted for some free bottled water (1.5 litre ones) instead. After a total of 3 hours on the bus, the TC gestured for us to disembark and we found ourselves at an isolated junction where the turn-off to Poring was. We decided to try our luck flagging down a passing motorist and he kindly made the 10 minute detour to Poring for us. We realized that we should have told the TC that we wanted to alight at the town of Ranau where it would be easy to get a taxi to Poring!

Accommodation at Poring

The accommodation at Poring is managed by Sutera Sanctuary Lodges www.suterasanctuarylodges.com.my/ (which also manages Mt. Kinabalu's accommodation). To book the accommodation, make a 'reservation' on the website, then the company will get back to you via e-mail and thereafter you'll have to fax your credit card details to make payment. Or you can call the booking office to book the accommodation and make payment over the phone.



Our cramped compartment at the Serindit Hostel, Poring

We stayed at the hostel. Our group of 5 was given a cramped compartment with 3 double decker bunk beds that can sleep 6 people. The last bed was not occupied so we were given the key to our compartment and we were able to lock up the room when we went birding. There is an electrical outlet and a fan, bring multi-plug adapters to charge your batteries. Hot water showers are available. There is a kettle in the common area and I enjoyed a hot cup of instant noodles in the early morning to warm my stomach before going birding.

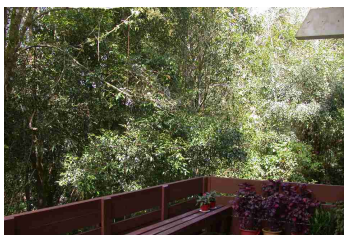
Trails You can get a trail map at the reception counter. The main trail leads to the Langanan Waterfalls, passing by Kipungit Waterfalls along the way. Some sections of the trail entails a steep climb, be mentally prepared.

Food Poring is a small village and right outside the gates to Poring Hot Springs there are a few simple restaurants serving inexpensive meals. Sundry shops and internet is also available here.

Mount Kinabalu National Park HQ

Getting there from Poring We booked a taxi from the Poring Hot Springs park counter to get to Mt. Kinabalu Park HQ. The taxi would come from Mt. Kinabalu itself and take 45 minutes to reach Poring, just nice for us to have lunch. The taxi (a 7-seater) cost RM90. You can flag down minibuses that bring day trippers to the hot springs, one of them asked for RM80 but I was told they are 'not licensed'. There are also cheaper scheduled buses going to Mt. Kinabalu Park HQ, but the timings were later in the afternoon and we wanted to get to the mountain quickly.

Accommodation The hostels are located around 500 to 600 metres from the park entrance. They were almost full and we were split between 2 hostels located about 100 metres apart. (See Poring section above on how to make bookings). Each compartment had 2 double decker bunk beds for 4 persons but the compartment was almost twice the size of the one we had at Poring! Unfortunately, there are no electrical outlets in the compartments, so I had to spend an afternoon sitting in the common room to charge my batteries. Hot water showers are available here. We had to share the compartment with other travellers and thus were not given the key.



View from veranda of the hostel



Morning dew on cobwebs

A map of the trails can be obtained from the park reception counter. The park has drivers who take climbers to the Timpohon Gate (4.5km up) in the morning to start their climb. We managed to get the one of them to make a pre-dawn trip up for us (RM25) to the Timpohon Gate where we can walk down the trails instead of walking up.

Food There are 2 restaurants in the park, but we preferred to eat (dinner) at the restaurant located just outside the park entrance as it was more economical. Breakfast for me was my usual cup of instant noodles – water kettle available in the pantry of the hostel. Sundry items and snacks are available within the park at the restaurant next to the mountain garden and at the restaurant outside the park.



Dinner on Mt. Kinabalu

Reference book The Globetrotter's *Visitor Guide - Kinabalu Park - Sabah, Malaysian Borneo* (Anthea Phillipps with Francis Liew, 2000) has good maps of the trails and has nice introductions to the flora and fauna of the park. Trail maps for Poring are also included.

Rafflesia Information Centre (RIC)

Getting there from Mt. Kinabalu



Roadside Forest

The RIC is the official name and it is commonly referred to as the Rafflesia Reserve. It is a 3 hour drive from Mt. Kinabalu. We arranged for a taxi from Mt. Kinabalu Park HQ and the cost was RM300 one way. We had lunch at Ranau which was along the way.

It is cumbersome to travel by bus – 1 bus from Mt. Kinabalu to Ranau, another from Ranau to Tambunan and then the Tambunan-KK bus.

Accommodation

There are no accommodation facilities at the RIC itself. The nearest one is Gunung Alab Resort 5 km away, followed by Gunung Emas Highlands Resort another 1-2 km farther.



Gunung Alab Resort

We chose the Gunung Alab Resort and went there without reservations as we did not manage to contact the resort by e-mail or phone. It turned out the resort had just changed ownership (in July 2007), thus the change in contact details. Don't expect creature comforts at this isolated location; we were happy to be able to have hot boiled water to mix with the cold tap water in a big pail in order to have a warm 'shower'. Food and snacks are available at the hotel.

Getting around The owner drove us to the RIC in the morning and picked us up in the evening for a small fee. The alternative is to walk the 5km to the RIC. You can bird along the way and see Wreathed Hornbills and maybe raptors along the way. If you're lucky, you may also come across birds visiting a fruiting tree along the way.

Getting to the Airport From Gunung Alab Resort (GAR), we took the Tambunan-KK bus that comes along at about 0900H. The helpful owner of GAR knows what time the bus comes and he helped us by telling the ticket conductor to let us get off somewhere just outside of KK where we can easily get a taxi to the airport.



View of forest and rolling mountains from my room at Gunung Alab Resort !