

Lankayan, Borneo

Whale Sharks, turtles and Orang-utans



Freckled or Forster's Hawkfish (Alex Mustard)



Stargazer (Mark Walker)



Elegant Squat Lobster (Mark Walker)

“Not too long ago Lankayan was a deserted tropical island. Now, despite its remote location, there is an opportunity to stay on the island and dive there. One of the main attractions for the diver is the opportunity to see Whale Sharks. These fantastic, truly enormous fish pass by Lankayan from March to May and no diver could fail to be enthralled by these giants of the sea. If you have never seen a Whale Shark, it's time you did! Usually boatmen will alert the divemasters to round up their divers so they can be taken over to enjoy close encounters of the big fishy kind.”

Season: Year-round diving (Whale Shark season: March to May)
Visibility: 15-40 metres
Water temperature: 27-30°C

Just over an hour's boat ride from the town of Sandakan on the Borneo mainland, in Malaysia's Sabah Province, lies remote Lankayan Island. There is only one dive resort on this tiny tropical 'lump' in the ocean: Lankayan Island Resort. The island is never busy or over-crowded and offers a wonderfully serene place to relax as well as some great diving in Borneo's Sulu Sea. You will be amazed by this incredibly beautiful, magical little island, with the only dive centre in the entire Sulu Sea. The island is surrounded by one of the most lovely beaches, with extensive, clean, powdery, vanilla coloured sand: just the type of beach one always imagines on tropical islands!

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But Lankayan has more than peaceful beaches, a relaxed atmosphere and Whale Sharks. The creation of a local marine park has meant the resurgence of the pelagic fish population. In years gone by these fish were either caught by fishermen or they left the area in search of more prolific reefs. Now they are returning to hunt these reefs once again. Though sightings of sharks are still quite rare, spiky-toothed barracudas and schools of jacks have already returned, making great subjects for wide-angle photographers. Depending on the season, you may be able to witness Green or Hawksbill Turtles coming ashore at night to lay their eggs in the soft sand. The resort has a small turtle hatchery and prides itself on its ecological approach, safeguarding the tiny hatchlings until it is time for them to be released into the sea. There should be an opportunity for you to witness the amazing (and rather touching) sight of the hatchlings scabbling down the beach and striving to make it to the sea.

With very healthy corals and reefs, Lankayan offers superb macro diving as well as some very scenic photo opportunities. An easy and reachable dive is **Jetty Wreck**. This wreck of a small fishing boat lies right in front of the jetty and is marked by a guide rope. Any time of the day or night you can make a giant stride into the water, right of the end of the pier and explore the wreck for yourself. The conditions are usually calm so this dive is suitable for most levels of experience. The dive bottoms out at around 20 metres. Just follow the shot line down. As frequently occurs in the water column above healthy reefs, there is a friendly group of photogenic and camera-loving batfish to welcome you. Under the pier, in the shadows, lionfish

dance their fancy dances. The wreck itself is home to Ghost Pipefish and camouflaged frogfish, as well as many nudibranchs.

Another super wreck, **Mosquito Wreck**, lies just a short boat ride from the resort. The ship is believed to have been part of a Japanese fleet and sank during WWII. The wreck still has some bits and pieces of the original cargo and lies at a depth of 25 metres. It is a great place for small creatures and, in contrast, is also an area where Whale Sharks have been seen.

For anyone who is fascinated by the behaviour of fish and marine life, **Jawfish Lair**, will be at the top of their 'hit list'. The divemasters will guide you to the resident Yellow-barred Jawfish that lives hiding in a pebble-lined burrow with (usually) his head sticking out. It is the male which broods a mouthful of eggs for periods of 5 to 7 days. During this time he must blow out the eggs every so often in order to oxygenate them. Naturally there are fallers-by-the-wayside and some eggs do not get collected into dad's mouth again. You have to be sharp-eyed and aware of its behaviour if you want to see the Mimic Octopus, but Jawfish Lair is a dive site where you can watch the amazing 'deceit' of this creature as it metamorphoses into other disguises. Maybe you will see it perform its 'lionfish dance' or its attempt to look like a poisonous Banded Seasnake. Whatever its disguise, we can guarantee you will find it fascinating! Don't overlook the 'usual suspects', for every hard coral will have pretty Christmas Tree Worms, bubble corals where you can find beautiful and elegant purple

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Lankayan Island Resort (Richard Swann & Lankayan Island Resort)

shrimps hiding, and some furling crinoids in yellow and black.

LANKAYAN ISLAND RESORT

It will take you less than half an hour to walk around the powdery white sands of Lankayan Island. There are currently 20 chalets, which are all built from local materials in simple but elegant style. All the rooms are air-conditioned, have private bathrooms with hot water, coffee and tea making facilities, and refrigerators. Toiletries and towels are provided. The rooms have seating areas and bedside lights. Mosquito nets are arranged over the beds for extra comfort. Fresh drinking water is supplied from the mainland. The chalets each have a private veranda overlooking the beautiful pale sandy beach and across the deep turquoise water beyond, or overlooking the jungle interior of the island. The ocean is no further than a few steps away. Step out of your room onto the beach and stroll under the shade of the trees, enjoy relaxing on a sun lounger, walk in the forest or take a dip in the ocean.

There is a lounge area that overlooks the jetty. Try a cool drink, or check out the day's video in the TV room. A small shop sells souvenirs and toiletries. The restaurant serves most meals buffet-style. Local seafood is often served, usually in a spicy sauce or perhaps barbecued, but there is usually a choice of western or Asian dishes. There is a spacious wooden terrace where you can relax. When the tide is in, a population of juvenile Black-tipped Reef Sharks often cruises below.

Those who are lucky enough (and old enough?) to remember when one could stay on Sipadan Island itself, will be reminded of the simple but comfortable accommodation that once was there. A bucket of water by the bungalow steps allows guests to rinse the sand from their feet before going 'home'. There is a fabulous wooden jetty that stretches out a long way over the water and across the shallow reef area. Check out the end of the pier as the sun sets. There can be fewer more romantic settings than this! Why not try a dusk snorkel under the pier and watch as the reef changes scenery and the creatures of the night start to emerge?

The staff and divemasters offer efficient but discreet service to their guests. Three boat dives are offered each day. Unlimited shore diving tanks are available for dives in front of the resort.

All divers must complete a check-out dive, which is usually a shallow, local dive. The dive sites are all within a short boat ride from the resort. The diving management and service is excellent, with dive staff carrying tanks and BCDs to and from the boat. Simply take your mask, fins and snorkel. The rest will be waiting for you! On return from the dive, your gear will be safely stowed away leaving you free to take a shower, eat a snack and relax. Nothing is too much trouble.

Lankayan is a great destination for snorkelers too! Snorkeling from the shore is superb. Try out the pier, or take one of the boats. The staff are happy to arrange snorkelling trips.

Stays can be of any length. Prices given below relate to a stay of 7 nights.

Price: from about £951 for 7 nights. Includes: Road/boat transfers between Sandakan airport or hotels and Lankayan Island Resort; 7 nights full board accommodation (breakfast, lunch and dinner), including tea, coffee and some soft drinks, on a twin/share basis at Lankayan Island Resort; 6 days of diving (3 boat dives daily and unlimited shore diving tanks), dive guide on boat dives. Reduction for non-divers.

Single Occupancy Supplement: 50% of the applicable diver package price.

BORNEO WILDLIFE ADVENTURES

Northeast Sabah is a tropical rainforest paradise. Proboscis Monkeys and Orang Utans are just two of the primates found in the forests. Colourful and fascinating tropical birds call from their jungle perches, exotic orchids and other flowers can be found amongst the luxuriant growth. The jungle simply throbs with life. With its source in the hills, the Kinabatangan River snakes its way down towards the Sulu Sea, leaving oxbow lakes puncturing the land. It is in the lower reaches of the river that one finds the most amazing wildlife. With the richness of the reefs below the waves and the richness of the jungle above, it is little wonder that Sabah has been referred to as 'the gateway to Borneo's wildlife'. Why not sample some of what is on offer by adding a few days at a rainforest lodge and a visit to the Sepilok Orang Utan Sanctuary to your diving trip, or visit Mount Kinabalu, the highest mountain in Southeast Asia?

SANDAKAN & SUKAU SAFARI TRAIL: SEPILOK ORANG-UTAN SANCTUARY & BUKIT MELAPAI LODGE

Visiting Borneo offers a great opportunity to enjoy some really sensational wildlife encounters above the water as well as below. That increasingly rare and fascinating primate, the Orang-utan (or Man of the Forest), can be visited at the famous Orang-utan sanctuary at Sepilok. The sanctuary was established in 1964 to help once-captive or displaced Orang-utans re-adapt to life in the forest, but the Sepilok forest is an entirely natural area of rainforest and the re-introduced animals there are not captive. Visits to the centre (which is about 25 kms outside the city, usually include the morning (10 o'clock) feeding time which generally lures a number of Orang-utans out of the forest interior.

The spectacular Gomantong Caves are home to 2 million bats and swiftlets (the latter's nests are used to make 'bird's nest' soup, which is much relished by the Chinese).

Bukit Melapai Lodge has a series of simple, but clean and spacious air-conditioned wooden bungalows all with en-suite bathrooms. From the lodge one can walk in the nearby rainforest. Although it is possible to see wild Asian Elephants and Orang-utans in the area, these sightings are a rare and special treat. As you walk the trails the sounds of the rainforest will be ringing in your ears. Apart from smaller forest species of birds such as sunbirds, flowerpeckers, bulbuls

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Bukit Melapai Lodge (Bukit Melapai Lodge)



Young Orang-utan (Sabah Tourism)

and babblers, you can expect to see hornbills, kingfishers and birds of prey including eagles. Visits to Bukit Melapai Lodge include river cruises on the Kinabatangan and Menanggul Rivers in search of the strange, long-nosed Proboscis Monkey and other wildlife.

Itinerary: Day 1: On arrival at Sandakan you will be met and transferred to the Sepilok Orang-utan Sanctuary, where you can enjoy morning feeding time for the Orang-utans. After lunch at an hotel you will take a fascinating boat journey to Bukit Melapai Lodge, hidden in the jungle by the Kinabatangan River. After checking in to the lodge enjoy a wildlife river cruise on the Menanggul River, one of the tributaries of the Kinabatangan River. Return to the lodge for dinner and overnight. Day 2: The day starts with an early morning trip by boat to one of the Oxbow Lakes. At this time of the day the animals of the forest are at their most active. Listen and watch as the forest stirs and the sounds of life abound. Shrieks and calls are everywhere but your knowledgeable local guide will be there to help you identify the sights and sounds of the rainforest. Return to the lodge in time for breakfast and enjoy free time exploring the forest surroundings (or take a nap!) until the late afternoon, when you can take another wildlife cruise. Return to the lodge for dinner and overnight. Day3: Depart from the lodge after breakfast bound for the Gomantong Caves. After exploring the caves, set off for lunch in Sandakan. After lunch visit the Pavilion for a panoramic view of the city and the Puu Gih Jih Temple before

heading for the airport. (Note: Longer stays at Bukit Melapai can be arranged if you prefer).

Price: from about £304. Includes: all land and boat transfers; visits to Sepilok Orang-utan Sanctuary and Gomantong Caves; 2 nights accommodation on a twin/share basis at Bukit Melapai Lodge; 3 river cruises while at the lodge; all meals from lunch on Day 1 to lunch on Day 3. Price based on minimum 2 people.

Single Occupancy Supplement: from about £80.

KINABALU NATIONAL PARK & PORING HOT SPRINGS

The mountains and higher altitude jungle areas of Borneo are very different from the hot and humid lowlands. Explore magnificent Kinabalu National Park, an area of outstanding natural beauty and diversity, and venture into the rainforest (at canopy height!) at Poring Hot Springs.

Itinerary: Day 1: After breakfast you will take a drive into the mountains. As you leave the city behind you will see traditional wooden houses on stilts and rice fields. Gradually the road will start to climb the Cocker Range and the views across the tops of the forest-covered hills and mountains, and out to the sea beyond, are magnificent. There will be opportunities for photo stops en route and also a visit to a local market can be accommodated if desired. The Kinabalu Park Headquarters are

situated at 1524 metres above sea level and the park covers a vast area of 754 square kms. Mount Kinabalu is the highest mountain in Southeast Asia at 4101 metres above sea level. In clear weather its jagged summit can be seen from as far away as Kota Kinabalu. Local Kadazan people, who lived in the area long ago, named the mountain 'Akin Nabalul' or 'home of departed spirits'. On arrival at the park there is time to visit the Information Centre where you can learn about the flora and fauna of the park. There are over 1,000 species of orchids and 300 species of birds. Fascinating pitcher plants, huge ferns, verdant mosses and brilliant rhododendrons are everywhere. There is a Mountain Garden at the park headquarters that offers a wonderful example of the flora of the region. Your guided walk through the jungle will end in the Mountain Garden. Lunch will be taken in the park restaurant, after which there is some time to explore the jungle paths and trails. From the park headquarters you will be taken on a short trip round the fruit and vegetable growing area of Kundasang before returning to the Kota Kinabalu Park Headquarters Guesthouse for dinner and overnight. Day 2: After breakfast you will depart for Poring Hot Springs. To reach the spring there is an exciting walk across a short rope and hanging bridge over a river to landscaped gardens. The hot sulphur spring water has been channelled into open, tiled baths (which you are free to enjoy). Maybe take a swim in a refreshing rock pool after your bath. There are numerous paths and jungle walkways to enjoy, including the amazing and justly famous Canopy

Walkway, which stands 40 metres above the jungle floor. You will be guided along a steep path for about 20 minutes to the start of the walkway. If you are not nervous of heights, this is a rare adventure! A packed lunch is provided and you are free to enjoy exploring the area until your departure later in the afternoon, when you will be driven back to your hotel in Kota Kinabalu. (Note: Longer stays at Mount Kinabalu can be arranged if you prefer, and you can even climb to the summit if energetic enough!)

Price: from about £234. Includes: transfers by road as described above; entrance fees and guided walks as described; 1 night full-board accommodation (lunch, dinner and breakfast) on a twin/share basis at Mount Kinabalu Headquarters Guesthouse; packed lunch on the second day. Price based on minimum 2 people.

Single Occupancy Supplement: from about £62.

FLIGHTS: Prices from about £774 to Sandakan. There are daily flight connections to Sandakan via Kuala Lumpur.

STOP-OVERS: These are available in Singapore or Kuala Lumpur, depending on flight routing.

COMBINATIONS: It is very easy to extend your holiday in Borneo and visit famous Layang Layang island with its superb 'open-ocean' diving or world-famous Sipadan, Mabul and Kapalai. Talk to us about the possibilities.