

# THE MAGIC OF KALIMANTAN

Kalimantan is an island offering superb snorkeling and diving, pristine rainforests, a rich array of exotic wildlife and is home to the Dayak people, some of the friendliest people in the world. Come on a journey to three handpicked places and discover what adventures awaits you.

Text by STEPHANIE BROOKES  
Photos DAVID METCALF

## The Delightful Derawan Islands

The coral reefs that surround Derawan Island are bursting with colour and life and over 870 fish species live in these waters, from pygmy seahorses to giant manta rays. Derawan Island is part of a chain known as the Derawan Islands, which consists of six main islands as well as a number of islets and reefs, all set in the aqua blue waters of the Sulawesi Sea.

Derawan Island is a small sandy atoll and a truly magical place. It is the ideal place for a laidback travel experience, such as enjoying a magnificent locally prepared seafood feast on the beach while watching a spectacular sunset. The island is also a wonderful launch pad for day visits to the other islands in the chain, each of which has something individual and special to offer.

Sangkalaki is one of the most interesting nearby islands, lying only about 1.5 hours away by small speed boat. Its waters have been designated as a recreation park and marine protected area. The island is home to a breeding program where turtle eggs are incubated. The hatchlings are then tagged and protected before being released into the surrounding waters.



The waters around Sangalaki also provide a natural habitat for manta rays. These massive sea dwellers have a four-metre wingspan and can frequently be spotted from the surface. However, this area is known amongst local and international divers as “the kingdom of the mantas” and nothing compares with swimming with these creatures when snorkeling or diving.

One of the other fantastic daytrips from Derawan Islands lies an hour from Sangalaki. On reaching Kakaban Island, head inland to visit Jellyfish Lake, a landlocked body of seawater raised above sea level. This rare phenomenon has enabled life forms in the lake to evolve separately from those in the surrounding ocean over millions of years. It has resulted in numerous unique fish species, many of which are yet to be identified. Therefore diving into this peaceful lake, surrounded by lush forests, is an unforgettable experience.

Marine wonders include sponges, tubeworms and sea cucumbers. However, it is the jellyfish that attract most visitor interest. On entering the lake, divers and swimmers invariably find themselves in the midst of a mass of jellyfish. People would not normally seek this kind of experience, and most would normally find this alarming, but the four species of jellyfish which live in the lake have evolved to be stingless. It is the most surreal sensation to swim in a sea of graceful, beautiful and harmless jellyfish. Some of them are translucent, some large, some small and some quite curious. It is common to feel them nibbling at your toes, as if wanting to make friends.

You need three days or more to explore at the idyllic Derawan Island and surrounding islands. It is advisable to visit now, before tourism really takes off. The charms and wonders of this remote chain off East Kalimantan are awaiting you.

### How to Get There:

From Jakarta take a short flight to Tarakan or Berau, East Kalimantan and take a speedboat to transfer to Derawan Island.

### Local Guide:

Ibu Yun Pratiwi can arrange airport pick up and all land/sea connections

<http://www.centralborneoguide.com>

## Setulang Eco Tourism Village

There is a lot of talk lately about eco tourism, but what does this really mean? According to the International Eco Tourism Society the definition of eco tourism is, “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education.”

Setulang Village is a living-breathing example of successful eco tourism. It offers a truly original travel experience for those willing to make the journey to this isolated village with just 800 Dayak Kenyah inhabitants in North Kalimantan.

Interestingly, people only settled in this village forty years ago. Before that the original inhabitants, the Omah Long people, lived much deeper in the Borneo jungle in a place called Long Saan. They were happy living sustainably in the forest, but lacked access to key health and education services. In 1969 after much discussion, they took the month long journey on foot out of the jungle to their new home.

So what will you experience when you visit Setulang village? The village is a neat grid of streets and the houses are mostly painted wooden homes with large wide patios. The front door always seems





## Tauzia Balikpapan ad

to be open, which is an indicator of hospitality. Everyone is welcome. You will be immediately by struck by the friendliness of the locals, as they love to welcome visitors and share their culture and hospitality.

As you walk through the village, children often take your hand and lead you back to meet their parents. They will then invite you in for a coffee or to eat something fresh directly from their small garden plot. There are no supermarkets, so all the food is produced locally.

Most of the Omah Long people still practice farming in a traditional way, which includes sustainable slash and burn practices. They are very happy to take you to their fields and explain their farming methods.

The village has a homestay program, which includes three meals a day. From your homestay, your host can arrange a small outboard canoe on an hour's journey into the nearby pristine forest, Tana Olan and stay in the forest camp for two or three nights.

This forest is estimated to be 130 million years old, the oldest rainforest on the planet. As you walk through among enormous old growth trees, locals also give you a fascinating running commentary on the medicinal plants. Your guide explains the spiritual significance of the forest, where Dayaks believe their ancestors' spirits reside.

In the evening the *sape* inevitably comes out. This is the traditional Dayak guitar, handmade from the local trees. As you sit in the campsite listening to the *sape*, you fall into a rhythm that seems at one with your ancient forest surroundings.

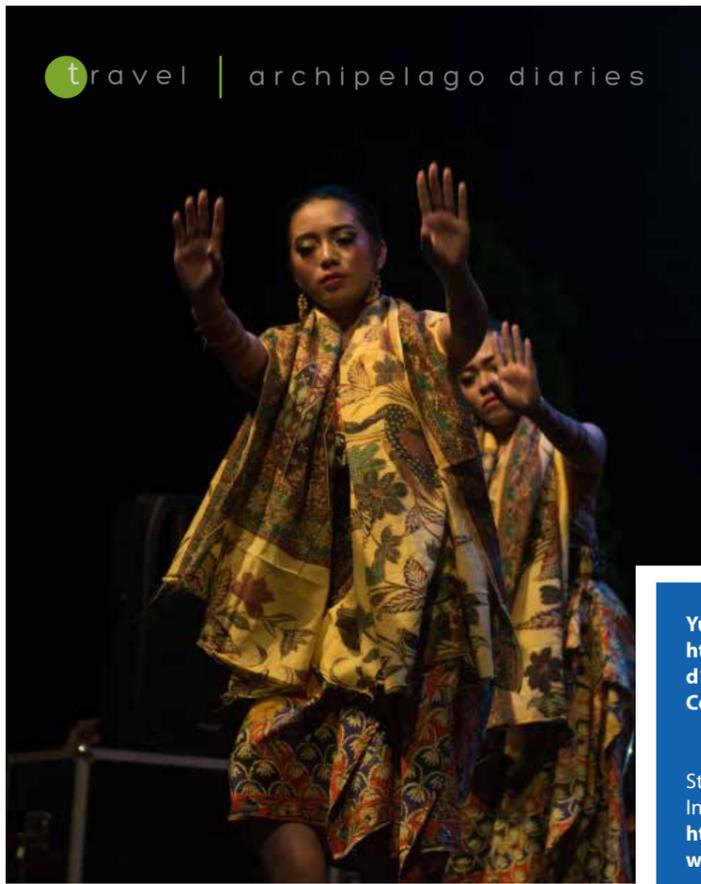
Setulang eco tourism project funds go directly to the local community and help support educational programs and forest preservation. If people keep visiting Setulang and Tana Olan, there will be an added economic incentive to preserve the forests and the cultures sustained by them for the future, rather than destroy them for short-term commercial gain.

### How To Get There:

Direct flights from Jakarta to Tarakan (or via Balikpapan), followed by a three-hour boat journey up the vast Sesayap River to Malinau, and a one-hour private car journey to the village to Setulang.

### Local Guide:

arranged by David Metcalf <http://www.davidmetcalfphotography.com/package/borneo-eco-jungle-camp/>



**Yun's Reviews**

[https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g303951-d10376399-Reviews-Central\\_Borneo\\_Guide-Palangkaraya\\_Central\\_Kalimantan\\_Kalimantan.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g303951-d10376399-Reviews-Central_Borneo_Guide-Palangkaraya_Central_Kalimantan_Kalimantan.html)

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**Palangkaraya Waterways and Orangutans**

The small city of Palangkaraya in Central Kalimantan has been in the news a lot lately. It has been reported in the media that it will be chosen as Indonesia's new capital, with an announcement due later in the year. So it might be the right time to visit one of Indonesia's best-kept secrets.

There is plenty to do and see in Palangkaraya, and it must be one of the friendliest towns in all of Indonesia. The city is a melting pot of cultures, including the indigenous Dayak majority and the Banjarese, who established a presence there as traders several centuries ago. During the seventies, President Suharto was keen to move people from overpopulated areas of the archipelago to less populated areas like Palangkaraya. As a result, many Javanese, Balinese and others moved there.

This fascinating cultural mix is very much on display during Palangkaraya's annual Isen Mulang, held in May each year. A key focus of this festival is dance. There are 50 dance academies in the city, and dancers from other areas also perform, so the competition is very fierce. At other times of the year, you can visit some of local dance academies, such as The Spirit of the Hornbills, and they will arrange a traditional dance and music performance.

Palangkaraya is also a key base for seeing Indonesia's beautiful endangered orangutans, which can be found in the forest not too far from the city itself. You can hire a comfortable private boat and explore the nearby waterways early in the morning. You are almost guaranteed to see some of these primates on one of two Islands where they are being prepared to return to the wild. Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOS) also has a very effective program, which you can visit.

Nearby Sebangau National Park is larger than the Island of Bali. It is a wonderful ecological reserve and, you can explore by boat and cruise out to the black water lakes, stay overnight in a Dayak village and even set camera traps with the rangers to track the clouded leopards. There is a large wild orangutan population in Sebangau as well and guided treks with rangers can be arranged.

An unforgettable experience is to take a boat cruise on the Rungan River. The beautiful, ancient waterways of this area are a true highlight, and cruising along the Wow Borneo boat combines nature with a bit of luxury. Wow Borneo is Australian/English owned and operated very professional organisation that has operated for 8 years in the area. The boat crew including the very knowledgeable guides make the experience very educational as well as engaging and a lot of fun. Most of the boats have cabins, so you can venture deep into the river system and sleep on board.

For me, though, the most interesting thing about visiting Palangkaraya is the opportunity is to meet and learn from the original inhabitants, the Dayak people. With a good local Dayak tour operator and guide it is easy to arrange a trip into one of the Dayak villages, where you will be welcomed like family, as they still have very few visitors. You mainly stay in three and four star hotels or homestays, and there is a large variety of good restaurants serving Chinese food as well as traditional Dayak food, which is delicious.

I highly recommend Yun, who is a young Dayak female tour guide. She can take you to all these places, and more, and is a mine of information about the local area, the waterways and the Dayak culture.

An amazing Borneo adventure awaits you.

**How to Get There:**

Direct flights from Jakarta – Palangkaraya 1 hour 10 mins on Garuda or Lion Air

**Local Guide:**

Miss Yun Pratiwi  
<http://centralborneoguide.com>

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