

ASIAN
Geographic
passport

Go!



BRUNEI

Brunei may be a tiny state, but it's big on things to see and do. Visit the largest water village in Southeast Asia, explore its rich treasure trove of wildlife—and lose yourself in the laid-back charm of this Malay Muslim kingdom.



Brunei: Abode of Peace

A boy dressed in traditional Malay attire stands along a row of gilded columns at the Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, Brunei's grand mosque.



NESTLED on the northern shores of the island of Borneo, and surrounded by East Malaysia and the South China Sea, Brunei is one of the smallest and most prosperous countries in the world.

With a population of only 391,000, Brunei is home to the world's only sovereign Malay Sultanate, and is a living example of a culture strongly linked to centuries of royal Islamic heritage. The country also boasts lush tropical rainforests that teem with a rich diversity of flora and fauna.

In such modern times, where it's rare to observe the preservation and adoration of the monarchy, Brunei, with its stunning mosques, friendly people and forests, is a gem waiting to be discovered. □

	01
	02

01. Clusters of stilt houses are one of the main features of Kampung Ayer, which is made up of 28 water villages.

02. Schoolboys walk home on wooden-plank pathways that link the stilt houses

in Kampung Ayer. The water village is Southeast Asia's most famous and largest water settlement, housing around 30,000 Bruneians, or ten percent of the nation's population.

Bandar Seri Begawan

MOST of Brunei's development is clustered around its capital: Bandar Seri Begawan. Dominating the skyline is the magnificent Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, the heart of both the city and the sultanate's Muslim faith. Built in 1958, the mosque is an example of world-class Islamic architecture amidst a display of Arabian carpets, English chandeliers and Italian marble. It stands in its own artificial lagoon and is one of the most striking buildings in Southeast Asia, especially when framed against the backdrop of Kampung Ayer.

Bandar's water village, or Kampung Ayer, is one of the city's most famous sights. A fascinating sprawl of stilted buildings connected by a vast maze of wooden footbridges in the middle of the Brunei River, the village is home to around 30,000 people. From schools and provision shops to homes and restaurants, it's a living example of the strong community spirit and family values that are intrinsic to Bruneian culture. It's in the morning though, that Kampung Ayer comes alive. You'll be amazed at the symphony of engines and chatter as sleepy-eyed children and their anxious parents rush in water taxis to shore, eager to get to school on time.

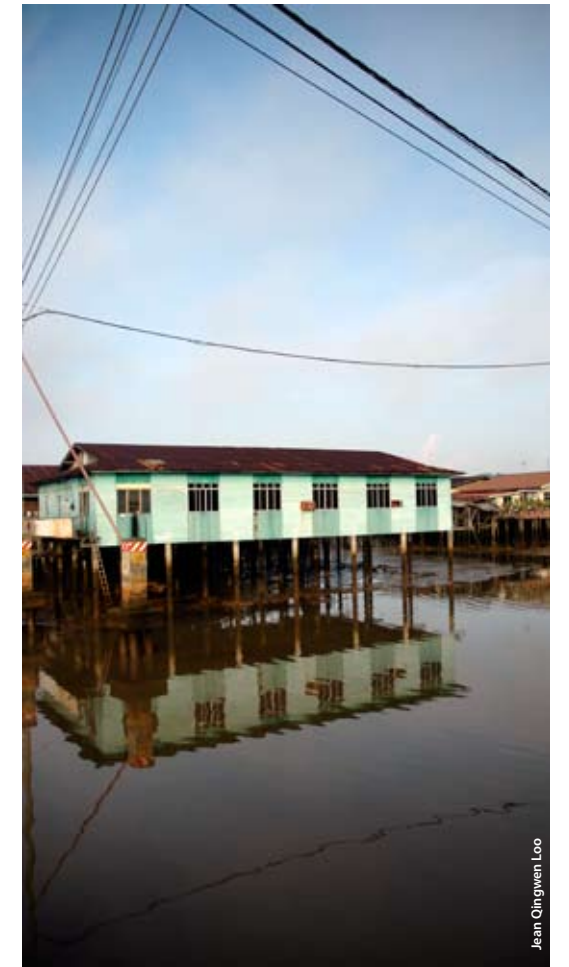
Elsewhere, the Brunei Museum and Malay Technology Museum provide visitors a peek into Brunei's past. From displays of cultural artifacts and a brilliant Islamic gallery, which includes an illuminated Quran, the Brunei Museum complements the Malay Technology. □

◆ What to do in Bandar Seri Begawan

Hail a water taxi from the Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah mall (YSHHB mall) or canal market to get to Kampung Ayer. Spend the entire day wandering around the stilt villages and making conversation with the friendly Bruneians, whose doors are usually open.

Find a restaurant and have a packet of instant *mee* (noodles) or a sweet drink. Each trip costs around B\$1. Make sure you visit the Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, which is open to non-Muslims outside prayer times, and check out both the Brunei Museum and Malay Technology Museum for a dose of history.

At the end of the day, make sure you have dinner at a local market. Indulge in some delicious hawker food at the Gerai Makan on the riverfront just across the canal. Otherwise, malls like Gadong and the YSHHB have clean, air-conditioned food courts with a wide range of food.



Jean Qingwen Loo



Jean Qingwen Loo



Culture of Brunei

DERIVED mainly from the old Malay civilisation and the fact that two-thirds of its population is Malay, Brunei's culture is deeply rooted in Islam. As the state's ideology and governing philosophy, it has pretty much become the way of life today. The Sultan, who is the head of state, is also respected as the head of the Islamic faith in Brunei, and presides over a religious court system and laws that govern matters of marriage, divorce and the family.

Religious holidays are highlights on any Bruneian's calendar. From Early Ramadhan and Hari Raya Puasa, which mark the beginning and end of the holy fasting month, to Hijrah, which celebrates Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina, these are important events for the family and state. Such festivities are symbolic of the closely-knit nature of the community and way of life.

Another strong focus of Bruneian culture is the proliferation of the arts and crafts from yesteryear. Historically, craftsmen were famous for their excellence in skills such as boat-making and cloth-weaving. Today, the Arts and Handicraft Centre is one of the few living testimonials to relics of Brunei's artistic and cultural heritage. Through historic artifacts such as Malay weaponry and wood carvings, one is able to appreciate the lifestyle of the early Bruneians, and understand what makes Brunei's culture one of the richest in the Malay world. □

◆ Festivals in Brunei

Hari Raya Aidilfitri, which signifies the end of the holy month, is a wonderful time to visit Brunei to get a sense of the local culture and festivities. The country is filled with an air of cheer as Bruneians of all ages gather to make merry with their friends and families against a backdrop of multi-coloured streets and homes lit up in an ethereal setting. Hari Raya celebrations last up to one month, and is also the best opportunity to taste a wide variety of local Malay cuisine such as *satay*, *lontong* and *rendang*.

During the holy month of Ramadhan, which falls on the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims are encouraged to practise good deeds and avoid eating, drinking or material comforts during the day, to show their devotion to Allah. Such practices are believed to cultivate virtues such as self-control.



Brunei Tourism



Jean Qingwen Loo

01
02

- 01. Fireworks light up Bandar's night sky during a celebration.
- 02. Grilled chicken satay is one of the local delights at a food market in Brunei.
- 03. Rising over 60 metres above the treetops, the canopy

- walk is a great way to experience the jungles of Ulu Temburong National Park.
- 04. Most of Temburong remains undeveloped, making it an ideal escape from the buzz of city life.

- 05. Boat trips from Bandar to the Temburong district are mini-adventures through a maze of dense mangroves, and curious children are always ready to hop on board.

Wildlife of Brunei

ALONGSIDE regal mosques and magnificent palaces, Brunei is a sanctuary of unspoiled rainforests guarded by the government, which has conserved some 32,000 hectares as forest reserves and allocated 50,000 hectares for national parks.

This pristine rainforest is home to over 10,000 proboscis monkeys, a bulbous-nosed creature with an bulging belly. It is the largest primate on the island of Borneo, and can be found among the forest canopy, feeding on seeds, mangrove shoots and unripe fruits. The males are usually much larger than the females, and are distinguished by a bigger protruding nose to attract the opposite sex.

Proboscis monkeys live in small groups of 10 to 32 and are mostly active from late afternoon till dark. They can often be found near rivers, so you might get a great view of the monkeys if you're travelling along the muddy delta of the Limbang River to Ulu Temburong.

Native to the island of Borneo, the number of these monkeys in the wild has dropped drastically in recent years, due to widespread poaching and habitat destruction activities such as logging and land clearing.

It is fortunate that here, in the Sultanate of Brunei, the clearing of forests is strictly forbidden. Although laws have been established to protect the monkeys from poachers, more immediate conservation efforts are needed to restore their national habitats and safeguard their survival. □

◆ Zoos and national parks in Brunei

With more than 70 percent of Brunei's land area covered by rainforests, its national parks such as the Peradayan Forest Recreation Park and Ulu Temburong National Park are well worth a visit.

The Ulu Temburong National Park is the jewel in Brunei's crown of forest reserves. Blessed with a rich ecosystem, the 550-square-kilometre national park is accessible only by speedboat, and is separated by the rest of Brunei by Malaysia. The park is host to an exciting array of ecotourism activities, as well as the Kuala Belalong Rainforest Field Studies Centre and an Outward Bound centre.

Here it's hard not to be awed by the mangroves and abundant animals unique to Borneo. Strict conservation policies limit the number of people allowed in the park, so visitors should apply in advance to the Forestry Department. This measure helps to restrict the number of tourists, so nature lovers would be thrilled to have all this paradise all to themselves, while they explore the park at their own pace.



Brunei Tourism



Brunei Tourism



Brunei Tourism



Business in Brunei

TO PROMOTE Brunei as a travel destination, the National Tourism Organisation of Brunei Darussalam has launched a promotion called “Treasures of Brunei” to attract short-haul markets such as Singapore.

The “Treasures of Brunei” promotion involves a consortium of hotels, championship golf courses and tour operators to entice visitors to visit Brunei for a holiday and experience its many offerings ranging from nature discovery, Malay heritage immersion, and luxurious golf getaway for the avid golfer.

Golfers are targeted to visit Brunei’s world-class golf courses, which are only minutes away from the capita. These courses are conceptualised by world-famous designers like Max Wexler, Ronald Freme and Jack Nicklaus. For example, the famous Empire Hotel and Country Club, which has been the venue for the Asian Tour-sanctioned Brunei Open since 2005, is offering a holiday package that includes three rounds of golf in three cham-

pionship courses, accommodation, a city tour and a return ticket.

Nature lovers can enjoy Brunei’s pristine and abundant rainforest environment, through tour packages that include excursions to the famous Ulu Temburong National Park, where they can spot the proboscis monkey in its habitat. For those interested in learning about Brunei’s Malay heritage, there are also tours that can arrange informative trips to Bandar’s museums, as well as visits to the Water Village.

Accommodation options range from the homely tourist hotels to Asia’s most opulent integrated resort. It’s also easy to visit this wealthy kingdom, as Bandar Seri Begawan is well-served by frequent flights from major Asian cities such as Bangkok, Jakarta, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Manila. □

Hotels in Brunei

EMPIRE HOTEL AND COUNTRY CLUB

The hotel is about world-class luxury at its grandest. A US\$800 million project spearheaded by the Sultan’s brother, Prince Jefri Bolkiah, it boasts beautiful opulent architecture and furnishings. From an 18-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course to a lagoon beach and spa, it offers an escape into the life of the royals—even if only for a day.

www.theempirehotel.com

ROYAL BRUNEI AIRLINES GOLF CLUB

The golf club is Brunei’s first 18-hole public course, and it’s less than a 20-minute drive from the capital. It is marked by a slightly hilly layout with huge artificial lakes spread out over the course, and spreads to the west of the airport runway. Designed by Max Wexler, a famed golf course designer, the result is a marriage of the original flora, and a highly challenging golf course.



The Sultan of Brunei

THE 29TH Sultan of Brunei, Hassanal Bolkiah Mu’izzaddin Waddaulah, became the crown prince in 1961 and rose to the throne at the age of 22 to succeed his father, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III. Born in Bandar Seri Begawan, the current Sultan attended the Victoria Institution in Kuala Lumpur and graduated from the Sandhurst military academy in 1967. In 2005, the National University of Singapore conferred him an Honorary Doctor of Laws title. The Sultan also holds an honorary commission in the British Royal Air Force as an Air Chief Marshal, and is an Honorary Admiral of the Fleet of the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom.

Under Brunei’s constitution, the Sultan is the head of state with full executive authority. He is also the prime minister, as well as the defence and finance minister.

Because of his total control over the national economy’s finances and Brunei’s sizeable oil revenues, the Sultan enjoys an extravagant lifestyle and has an extensive private fortune. In 1997, he was declared the richest man in the world, with an estimated net

worth of US\$55.63 billion. Today, his official residence, the Istana Nurul Iman, is without doubt the world’s largest palace with 1,788 rooms, 257 bathrooms and a floor area of about two million square feet. His legendary automobile fleet reportedly hovers around 6,000 cars, which include uniquely modified Ferraris and Rolls-Royces.

Despite his personal lavish way of living, the Sultan has helped to share the country’s oil wealth with its people. Brunei citizens receive free education and medical care, and are exempt from personal and corporate taxes.

In the face of rapid modernisation, Brunei’s monarchy has the distinction of being the oldest continuous reigning dynasty in the world. The country was admitted to the United Nations in 1984, and is administered based on a conservative Malay Islamic ideology introduced by the Sultan, which presents the monarchy as a defender of the Islamic faith.

The Sultan currently has five sons and seven daughters with his three wives. His designated successor is Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah, his eldest son. □



01. A lagoon beach is one of the lavish offerings at the Empire Hotel and Country Club, one of the grandest hotels in Brunei.

02. Well-loved by the people, the 29th Sultan of Brunei, Hassanal Bolkiah Mu’izzaddin Waddaulah, is the head of state as well the prime minister, defence and finance minister.



How to get there

It's a breeze to get to this Malay kingdom. Brunei's capital is well-connected by air to major Asian cities. Airlines with direct flights to Bandar Seri Begawan include the national carrier Royal Brunei Airlines; Singapore Airlines and Malaysia Airlines.

When to visit

Brunei is hot and wet throughout the year, with only a slightly higher rainfall from September to January, so there's really no "best" time to visit where the weather is concerned. However, you might want to soak in the atmosphere during Hari Raya Aidilfitri from September 20–22, 2009. Or revel in the fireworks and displays when the nation celebrates the Sultan's birthday on July 15.

What to wear

Light cotton clothes are best in the tropical heat, but be sure to dress appropriately. Remember to cover your arms and legs as a sign of respect to the Muslim community.

Accommodation

There are plenty of lodging options in the capital. Budget accommodation is available in Temburong.

Attractions

Experience the vibrant water village of Kampung Ayer, visit the grand Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, dig into hawker fare at Gerai Makan, and explore the untouched paradise of the Ulu Temburong National Park.

Food

It's a must to try the Malay food here. There's *satay*, sticks of chicken, mutton or beef grilled on a charcoal flame; *lontong*, rice packed into a banana leaf and dipped into a sauce; and *rendang*, meat cooked with plenty of spices and served with rice.

Information

Visit Brunei Tourism at www.tourismbrunei.com.

Currency

The currency used is the Bruneian dollar (B\$), but the Singapore dollar, which is pegged to the Bruneian dollar at 1:1 parity, is also widely used. Credit cards are widely accepted, and you should have no problem finding an ATM in Brunei. As of December 2008, B\$1 = US\$0.66 or €0.52.

►► BRUNEI AT A GLANCE

Your quick guide to the abode of peace!

