Borneo's Orangutans

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Days 2 - 9	Explore Sepilok, Kinabatangan River, Gomantong Caves, the Danum Valley
Day 10	Leave Danum, depart Kota Kinabalu
Day 11	Arrive London

Departs

August/September/October

Focus

Orangutans, other rare primates and wildlife

Grading

A. Largely gentle wildlife walks only (see grading)

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code MYS02) or brochure

Highlights

- Wild Orangutans, Proboscis Monkeys and other rare mammals
- Pristine rainforest habitats at Danum
- Diverse and colourful birdlife, including several Borneo endemics
- Boat excursions along Kinabatangan River
- Experience the Gomantong Caves







Orangutan, Proboscis Monkeys, Sepilok

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Introduction

Borneo is the third largest island in the world and over three times bigger than the UK. At an estimated 130 million years old, Borneo's rainforest is twice as old as the Amazon rainforest in South America and is the third largest rainforest on Earth.

It is hard to think of a place which offers the chance to see such a diverse spectrum of unusual mammals, impressive birds and amplitude of other species. The habitat for Orangutans is so complex and vast that it supports an unbelievable cast of species.

Here, primates alone could include troupes of Proboscis Monkeys, Bornean Slow Loris, Maroon and Silvered Langurs, Sunda Pig-tailed Macaque, East Bornean Grey Gibbon and the enchanting Western Tarsier. Other mammals seen with regular frequency here include Asian Elephant, Binturong, Sunda Flying Lemur and civets. The squirrels here may be Giant, Pygmy or Flying!

Birds we'll see include trogons, pittas, kingfishers, broadbills, woodpeckers and many other representatives of the very extensive avifauna. We'll have a chance of finding the rare Storm's Stork, the endemic Bornean Bristlehead, Jerdon's Baza, and a whole host of other Asian specialities. Hornbills could include Rhinoceros, Helmeted, Wreathed, Oriental Pied, Bushy-crested... and more!

Exotic butterflies, which occur in a diverse range of colour and form, enhance every day in the field, along with beautiful frogs accompanying our night searches. The flora is greatly enjoyed here, from the colossal fruiting *Ficus* trees, which bring a range of species together to gorge, to the wonderful tropical climbers and orchids which can be terrestrial, lithophytic and epiphytic.

In these rainforests of Borneo, we'll have the opportunity to encounter truly wild Orangutans whilst enjoying the astounding diversity sharing the home of this gentle and highly endangered great ape. It is easy to understand why a holiday into Borneo's rainforest is never forgotten.



Bornean Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*)

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1 In Flight

We will depart around midday from London Heathrow on board a scheduled flight to Kuala Lumpur.

Day 2 Sepilok

In the early hours of this morning we will arrive in Kuala Lumpur, the ultra-modern capital of Malaysia. After a transit, we will board an onward flight to Sandakan in Sabah, then drive for around 30 minutes to either the Sepilok Nature Lodge or Sepilok Forest Edge Lodge.

Sepilok was established in 1964 to help once captive or displaced Orangutans learn how to fend for themselves in the wild. This endearing ape has suffered badly over the past decades with deforestation and capture as pets and the staff at Sepilok do invaluable work helping the animals return to their rainforest home, as well as studying wild Orangutans in the surrounding forests. Since the sanctuary is located on the edge of the 43-square-kilometre Kabili Sepilok Forest Reserve, it is also an excellent area in which to look for birds and other wildlife.

We will spend the next two nights located on the edge of Kabili Sepilok Forest Reserve, close to the Orangutan and Sun Bear sanctuaries which we will visit. Just around the grounds of the lodges, we often have Orangutans visiting, so keep a lookout!

The order of activities may vary, but on our arrival day we will plan to visit the nearby Sun Bear rehabilitation centre after time to settle into our rooms and then for those who wish, we will go to the nearby Rainforest Discovery Centre for an exciting night walk.

Day 3 Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre

We will spend today visiting the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre and exploring the surrounding forests. At the Centre we will learn from a video presentation about the plight of the Orangutan and the valuable conservation work they carry out at the Centre rehabilitating these endearing creatures ready for life back in the wild. Sepilok is a fascinating place to begin our tour and learn about Orangutan ecology and an excellent introduction before heading off into the rainforests in search of the wild animals. Semi-rehabilitated animals live in the surrounding forests but make their way back to the Centre twice a day for the free meals on offer, although attendance at mealtimes may be affected by the counter-attraction of ripening fruits in the forest! We will witness the morning and afternoon feeding of the Orangutans, also catching sightings of the species that share this protected habitat. If we have had excellent Orangutan sightings at the 10am feed, we may well go back to the Rainforest Discovery Centre in the afternoon to experience the forest here and canopy walkway in the daytime. A huge variety of animals and birds live in the Bornean rainforests, and the nearby Rainforest Discovery Centre gives access to a tract of excellent

forest, with its canopy walkway allowing us a brilliant view through the treetops. We will look for such species as the spectacular Black-and-red-Broadbill, Scarlet-rumped Trogon, the endemic Bornean Bristlehead and various species of barbet, sunbirds, flycatchers and spiderhunters. Mammals may include Bornean Gibbon and Long-tailed Macaque whilst those interested in insects are sure to be amazed by the staggering diversity of butterflies which will include several species of spectacular bird-wing butterflies.



Bornean Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*)

Late in the afternoon we will return to our lodge for our second and final night here, and there may be the opportunity for a further night walk.

Day 4 - 5 Kinabatangan River

This morning we will travel from Sandakan to the Kinabatangan River. We will leave the lodge at around 11am, giving us a relaxed start today and a final chance to walk around the lodge to look for wildlife and pack our bags. We will drive for around 30 minutes to Sandakan, where we board our boat and depart the jetty at around midday. We first travel across the open sea for a short time before entering the mouth of the Kinabatangan River and the whole boat journey will take around 1-1.5 hours. We will be looking out for wildlife, of course, and it is not uncommon to find a troupe of Proboscis Monkeys or maybe a rare Storm's Stork even before reaching the lodge.

Arriving at our lodge, we will settle in for our two-night stay here. The floodplain of the Kinabatangan River is a low-lying wilderness covered by a patchwork of natural rainforest and ever-encroaching oil-palm plantations. The whole area is dotted with oxbow lakes, sandstone hills and limestone outcrops and is home to a wealth of wildlife, including our first truly wild Orangutans and the remarkable Proboscis Monkey. On our arrival day, we will enjoy an afternoon excursion on the river and also an exciting night safari in search of the many nocturnal creatures which live here. The boat trips will explore the main river channel and also venture into tributaries or oxbow lakes. Here we hope to see wild Orangutans making their way slowly through the canopy of riverside trees or, in late afternoon, watch them making their night-time nests. We can also watch troupes of the bizarre Proboscis Monkey crashing through the branches or swimming across the flooded channels. These comical creatures often sit in the trees and watch us float by, hands resting beside their huge pot bellies and the males with their extraordinary floppy noses.



Proboscis Monkey (*Nasalis larvatus*)

In addition we hope to see Long-tailed Macaques and the odd Silvered Langur, along with a wealth of spectacular birds, including Rhinoceros, Helmeted, Black, Oriental, Pied, Bushy-crested, Wreathed and Wrinkled Hornbills, Blue-eared and Stork-billed Kingfishers, Jerdon's Baza, Blyth's Hawk-Eagle, Black-and-red and Black-and-yellow Broadbills, and if we are very lucky perhaps a pair of the endangered Storm's Storks. Of course there are many smaller birds as well, though watching these from the boats is not too easy. There is also a chance of seeing Crocodile or Asian Elephant from one of these boat trips. Weather permitting, the night cruise could provide sightings of Buffy Fish Owl or one of the strange nocturnal inhabitants, such as the enigmatic Flat-headed Cat, which is a rare sighting indeed but can be found in this riverine habitat.

The following full day here we will enjoy morning and afternoon boat outings on the river and then in the evening after dinner, take a night walk around the 1km boardwalk of the lodge. This will usually start at around 8am and we will walk slowly on the flat boardwalk searching for wildlife. Maybe a Slow Loris or bizarre Colugo could be found. This secondary forest just around our lodge holds a great variety of birds and any downtime when not on the cruises can be spent exploring from the boardwalk. Black-headed Pitta can be seen, and other specialities such as Raffle's Malkoha, Buff-necked, Banded and Crimson-winged Woodpeckers, Straw-headed Bulbul, Black-throated and Chestnut-winged Babblers, Black-and-yellow Broadbill, Little Green Pigeon and perhaps even Malaysian Honeyguide. It is also a great place for photographing dragonflies and butterflies. Our time at the Kinabatangan River will be spent with two nights at the Kinabatangan Wetlands Resort and the final night at Borneo Nature Lodge or a similar standard of lodge close to Sukau. Moving lodges like this allows us to explore different



Bornean Pygmy Elephants

areas of the Kinabatangan River to increase our chances of sightings and importantly means we can be in striking distance of the Gomantong Caves, so we can get there for the bat exodus at dusk.

Day 6 River Cruise & Gomantong Caves

This morning we shall leave the lodge and travel 1.5 hours along the Kinabatangan River to our next lodge near the village of Sukau where we shall stay for one night. Searching for wildlife as we travel, we will arrive in time for lunch. In the mid-afternoon, after time to settle into our rooms, we will travel the short distance to the spectacular Gomantong Caves, just a 27km overland journey from the river. By splitting our time between two lodges on the Kinabatangan River, we increase our chances on intercepting wildlife, including Pygmy Elephants in particular, and it allows us to visit the caves in the evening for the mass bat exodus.

At the Gomantong Caves, there are two massive cathedral-like cave systems that penetrate deep inside two huge limestone outcrops concealed amongst an area of lowland rainforest not far from the Kinabatangan River. The caves tower to staggering heights of 100 metres or more and are home to literally millions of bats and swiftlets. It is here that every 3-4 months local tribesmen come, for a week at a time, to gather the nests that are used by the Chinese to make 'birds-nest soup'. The way in which these people reach the heights of these caves on precarious, locally made ropes and bamboo ladders is terrifying and incredible. Standing at the bottom, it is almost impossible to see the tiny specks of these fearless men clinging and climbing along the crevices in the roof of the caves. Inevitably it is a high-risk job, and it is still of such economic value to the tribesmen that each of the cave entrances is guarded day and night throughout the year.

Four species of swiftlet nest inside the caves: Black-nest, Mossy-nest, Edible-nest and Glossy Swiftlet. The Black-nest Swiftlet is by far the most abundant, and its nests (which are black because they are lined both inside and out with body feathers) form the bulk of the harvest. However, it is the Edible-nest Swiftlets' white nests, made entirely of saliva, that fetch the highest prices as the greatest delicacy of all. To ensure minimum disturbance, the nests that are taken are strictly those that are empty, and judging from the numbers of swiftlets, this harvest, which has been going on for centuries, is not doing too much harm! As well as going inside one of the main caves, we will look for wildlife in the adjacent rainforest, perhaps



Gomantong Cave

finding a Blue-headed Pitta, Wreathed or Bushy-crested Hornbills, or even another Orangutan which is quite regularly found in the protected forest here. At dusk we will wait outside the caves to observe the spectacular exodus of millions of bats (10 or more species roost in the caves) and to watch the Bat Hawks and Peregrines that regularly gather to hunt for their supper.

As this spectacular show draws to a close, we will retrace our steps for a final night alongside the Kinabatangan River.

Day 7 Danum Valley Conservation Area

This morning we will leave the lodge at around 7am before taking the short boat ride back to Sukau to start the drive to the Danum Valley. A 2.5-hour road journey takes us to the small town of Lahad Datu, where we will register with the award-winning Borneo Rainforest Lodge office before transferring luggage and ourselves to their minibuses for the 2.5-3-hour journey to the lodge. After 15 kilometres along the main road, it is a further 80 kilometres westwards along the unsealed (but relatively fast) track, passing through an undulating mosaic of selectively logged, clear-felled and replanted forest types, before we turn off for the final 3 kilometres through towering pristine primary forest to the lodge. We will arrive here at around 1pm and have lunch and settle in for our 3-night stay. We will have a relaxed afternoon walk here and some free time, and weather permitting, we will head out for an exciting spotlighting session after dinner in search of the nocturnal species that live here. For the next three nights we stay at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge.

Days 8 - 9 Danum Valley

The Danum Valley Conservation Area covers 438 square kilometres of predominantly lowland dipterocarp rainforest, situated in the upper reaches of the Segama River, of which the Danum River (beside our lodge) is a major tributary. Whilst within much of its area selective logging is allowed, a large part has been set aside to protect one of only two of Sabah's remaining expanses of primary lowland dipterocarp forest.

The Danum Valley was only opened as recently as 1986 and is managed jointly by the Sabah Foundation, the Sabah Forest Department, the Sabah campus of the National University and the Royal Society of London. A number of international scientists are based at the Danum Valley Field Centre, conducting a variety of research projects. The Field Centre is an hour's drive from Borneo Rainforest Lodge, and we do not normally plan to visit it, as the forests around our lodge offer such a wealth of wildlife experiences that there is no need to go further afield. Within the Danum Valley Conservation Area, 275 species of birds, 110 mammals, 72 reptiles, 56 amphibians and 37 fish species have been recorded so far. We will do our best to see a good selection of these, particularly the mammals and birds, though it is most important to appreciate that, despite incredible species variety in primary rainforests, the density of each species is often extremely low. Rainforest birding and mammal-viewing therefore demands exceptional stealth and patience (silence and minimal movement when we stop to listen and wait) and a great degree of persistence. Dark, neutral clothing is also a great advantage.



Rhinoceros Hornbills (*Buceros rhinoceros*)

Our programme will vary each day, but essentially we will be in the forest throughout, with breaks for a quick breakfast (early morning is always the best time in the forest), lunch and an afternoon siesta. There is an excellent system of trails around the lodge, mostly fairly level but with one looping up over an adjacent hill. This can be a challenging walk for some on a narrow trail, but we take it slowly and stop a lot and anyone who wishes to turn back to the lodge can do so. Time spent along the entrance track can be very productive too, and just off the track, one kilometre from the lodge, is an excellent canopy walkway from which superb views of a great variety of birds and occasionally even an Orangutan can be obtained. Waterfalls, pools and rivers offer the occasional welcome opportunity to cool off al fresco. After dinner there will usually be the opportunity to go out from the lodge with one of the local guides in search of nocturnal wildlife. This will be by vehicle, sometimes on foot, and as always with wildlife-watching it will be unpredictable, so the more often we go, the greater the chance of seeing something really exciting. The mammal list for the Danum Valley includes all 10 species of primate found in Sabah, along with Asian Elephant, Banteng, Clouded Leopard, Marbled Cat, Flat-headed Cat and Malay Sun Bear. Naturally, many of these are very elusive and rarely seen but it is a particularly good area for Orangutan, which we have a very good chance of finding in the vicinity of our lodge, as well as out in the forest. The movements of these apes are often monitored and tracked by the local wildlife guards, giving us vital information on where to see them before another day of foraging takes the Orangs off into the surrounding forest. Commoner species include a wide variety of both diurnal and nocturnal tree-shrews and squirrels, Leopard Cat and Malay Civet, Bearded Pig, both Greater



Western Tarsier (*Cephalopachus bancanus*)

and Lesser Mouse-deer, the endemic Bornean Yellow Muntjac, the much more widespread Red Muntjac and Sambar, all of which are most often encountered during darkness. Nocturnal sorties often produce other common species such as Red Giant Flying Squirrel, Flying Lemur (Colugo) and Slow Loris, and very occasionally such exquisite denizens of the forest as Western Tarsier or the tiny Temminck's Flying Squirrel. Clouded Leopard, which in Borneo does not have to compete with the larger Leopard, is seen on night drives 2-3 times a year, so you never know!

Amongst the birds, Danum Valley is home to eight species of hornbills, with the huge Helmeted and Rhinoceros seen and heard almost daily. Other specialities include Great Argus, Crested Fireback, Black-crowned, Blue-headed, Giant and Banded Pittas, Bornean Bristlehead, Bornean and Black-throated Wren-babblers, Large-billed Blue and Bornean Blue Flycatchers, Chestnut-naped and White-crowned Forktails, Great-billed Heron, Wallace's and Blythe's Hawk-eagles, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Crested Wood-partridge and Chestnut-necklaced Partridge, Scaly-breasted Bulbul, Great Slaty and Olive-backed Woodpeckers, Whiskered Treeswift, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, and a host of other bulbuls, babblers, flowerpeckers, sunbirds and spiderhunters.

Day 10 In Flight

After an early breakfast this morning, we must drive to Lahad Datu to catch a short flight back to Kota Kinabalu which connects with an onward service to Kuala Lumpur and ultimately home.

Day 11 Arrive London

We will arrive back at London Heathrow in the early morning.

Tour Grading & Focus



Bornean Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*)

The principal focus of our holiday will be Orangutans but, as we visit some of the most magnificent rainforests on Earth, we will also be entering the domain of many wonderful birds, mammals, other fauna groups and flora. Most of this tour is graded A – gentle walks from our lodges. Most of the trails at Sepilok, Danum Valley and those on the Kinabatangan are good, although some become a little more difficult if the season is very wet. Whilst the walks are largely not strenuous, the heat and humidity can be tiring at times. One particular walk in the Danum Valley is higher than a grade A. This walk climbs up to some ancient coffins and gives a superb view over the reserve. The walk is largely under the canopy and

walking on a narrow trail at times, steadily uphill. We are, of course, stopping regularly and are in no rush but it is more demanding than the other walks on the itinerary. It is, of course, not compulsory and if anyone decided not to do it, or only do some of it, it would not mean missing out on Orangutans.

Guiding

This tour is led throughout by an excellent local guide who knows the areas extremely well. They will be with you from meeting you at the airport to dropping you off there again at the end of the holiday. You will also have input from 'in-house' guides and drivers at the lodges on the tour.

As the tour is locally led, we often find it difficult to gather a full tour report. If you would like to create a report, we would be delighted to format it for you and produce a bound copy.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Malaysia has a typical tropical climate. It is hot and humid all year round. The temperature rarely drops below 20°C, and usually climbs to 30°C or more during the day. The wet season in Sabah is generally considered to run from June to December (December generally being the wettest but the climate varies a lot even within Sabah). Being a tropical country, it can rain at any time, frequently and heavily. When not raining, however, it is usually sunny! Recently locals have begun to deny any pattern to the weather, saying that relying on wet and dry seasons is a thing of the past. You can reasonably expect plenty of sun, plenty of rain and hot temperatures. Binoculars are, of course, essential for this holiday into the rainforests.

What's Included

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this tour, except for lunches and dinners on Day 10. You can allow only about £20 for this. The Bornean government has implemented a tourist tax to be paid upon checking in/out of hotels, at the cost of MYR10 per room per night. Please be aware that this cost needs to be covered by yourself personally at each lodge and hotel throughout your holiday. It seems sometimes they ask for this and other times they do not.

At Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre, any camera with a zoom lens from 100 to 400mm, video camera or other video recording equipment for personal use is chargeable at RM10.00 per unit (around £2). Any camera (**fixed lens** - 400mm and above) or any film-making equipment is chargeable at RM1,000.00 per unit (around £200). The mode of payment is cash only. Please note that group members often carry long lenses and no one has ever paid £200. This is really only for film-making equipment and your local guide makes sure no one is paying the high amount. So please do not worry about that.

Accommodation at Borneo Rainforest Lodge

Please be aware that there are different room types available at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge in the Danum Valley. Standard, Deluxe, Premium Deluxe, Premium Villa Single Storey and Premium Villa

Double Storey. To keep the cost of the tour as low as possible, we block standard rooms (which are very nice) but there is the option to upgrade if you wish. Please do let us know on booking if this is of interest and your preference and we will do our best to accommodate you and inform you of the upgrade cost. Borneo Rainforest Lodge is the most luxurious lodge in Sabah. At all the locations the rooms are en suite and very clean and comfortable.

All accommodation on this tour can accept payment via card or cash.

Extending Your Holiday

We can arrange many popular extensions to this holiday, so please speak to operations manager Tom Mabbett if you are considering this. The tour is action packed, with long hours from the start, so an extra night at Sepilok at the beginning may be something to consider. Following the holiday, a visit to Mt Kinabalu National Park will provide a real contrast to the lowland forests of the main tour, or you may wish to visit another lowland rainforest lodge. For relaxation, an extension to Gaya Island Resort just offshore from Kota Kinabalu offers a lovely beach, some snorkelling (and diving for those who wish) with swimming pools and excellent food. There is some nice habitat on the island with a nature interpretation centre and walks available with an in-house naturalist. A visit to Mulu Caves is also excellent and would add three nights to your holiday and a short flight.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements at the time of booking.

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Bornean Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*)