

Brunei Darussalam



The last remnants of an empire that once included all of Borneo and the southwest Philippines, Brunei is now one of the smallest countries on earth – two tiny slivers of land lodged in the northern coast of Sarawak. This tiny country is blessed with some of the largest oil fields in southeast Asia, and, perhaps not surprisingly, one of the wealthiest rulers on earth. Thanks to these underground riches, Brunei has been able to spare most of its above-ground resources, and the country boasts some of the most intact primary rainforest in all of Borneo.

Whatever else you can say about Brunei, this much is certain: it won't be what you expect. Those expecting a mini-Dubai on the shores of the South China Sea will be surprised to find that Brunei is remarkably quiet and undeveloped. Those expecting a stern Islamic theocracy will find a relaxed country and an easy-going people. Those expecting another version of Sarawak or Sabah will find that Brunei feels qualitatively different from its nearest neighbours.

For most people Brunei is merely a stopover on the overland journey between Sabah and Sarawak, or between Europe and Oceania on a Royal Brunei Airlines flight, but there is enough here to make Brunei a destination in its own right. First, there is the capital of Bandar Seri Begawan (BSB) with its soaring mosques and picturesque water-villages. Then, there is the rainforest, which is best experienced in the fine Ulu Temburong National Park. Finally, there are the oddities of the country: the Jerudong Park Playground, a surreal semideserted amusement park, and the Empire Country Club and Hotel, a US\$1 billion monument to misguided public spending.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoy the mosques, museums and water villages of Brunei's peaceful capital, **Bandar Seri Begawan** (p221)
- Tear through the marshes between Bandar Seri Begawan and Bangar on one of Brunei's best **boat rides** (p227)
- Climb high above Brunei's intact primary rainforest and swim in a cool jungle river in Brunei's best park, **Ulu Temburong National Park** (p234)
- Trek past the base of giant dipterocarp trees and savour a view that extends all the way to Brunei Bay in **Peradayan Forest Reserve** (p233)
- Marvel at the **Empire Hotel** (p229), a sprawling monument to misguided spending



■ POPULATION: 379,400

■ AREA: 5765 SQ KM

HISTORY

The earliest recorded references to Brunei's presence relate to China's trading connections with 'Puni' in the 6th century, during the Tang dynasty. Prior to the region's embrace of Islam, Brunei was within the boundaries of the Sumatran Srivijaya Empire, then the Majapahit Empire of Java. By the 15th and 16th centuries, the so-called Golden Age of Sultan Bolkiaah, Brunei Darussalam had become a considerable power itself in the region, with its rule extending throughout Borneo and into the Philippines.

The Spanish and Portuguese were the first European visitors, arriving in the 16th century, but they failed to make inroads by force. In the early 19th century, the more subtle approach of the British, in the guise of Sarawak's first raja, James Brooke, spelled the end of Brunei's power. A series of 'treaties' was forced upon the sultan as Brooke consolidated his hold over the town of Kuching. In 1888 Brunei became a British protectorate and was gradually whittled away until, with a final dash of absurdity, Limbang was ceded to Sarawak in 1890, dividing the crippled sultanate into two parts.

In 1929, just as Brunei was about to be swallowed up entirely, oil was discovered, turning the tiny state into an economic power overnight. The present sultan's father, Sultan Omar Saifuddin, kept Brunei out of the Malayan confederacy, preferring that the country remain a British protectorate and the oil money remain on home soil. He's credited with laying the foundations for Brunei's solid development.

In 1962, in the lead up to amalgamation with the new state of Malaysia, the British pressured to hold elections. The opposition Ra'ayat Party, which wanted to keep Brunei independent and make the sultan a constitutional monarch within a democracy, won an overwhelming victory. When the sultan refused to allow the new government into power, an armed rebellion broke out, supported by the Indonesian government. The uprising was quickly crushed with British military backing, and the 'Abode of Peace' has been under emergency laws ever since.

Saifuddin abdicated in 1967, leaving the throne to his popular son and heir, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiaah. Early in 1984 the new ruler reluctantly led his tightly ruled country into complete independence from Britain. As a

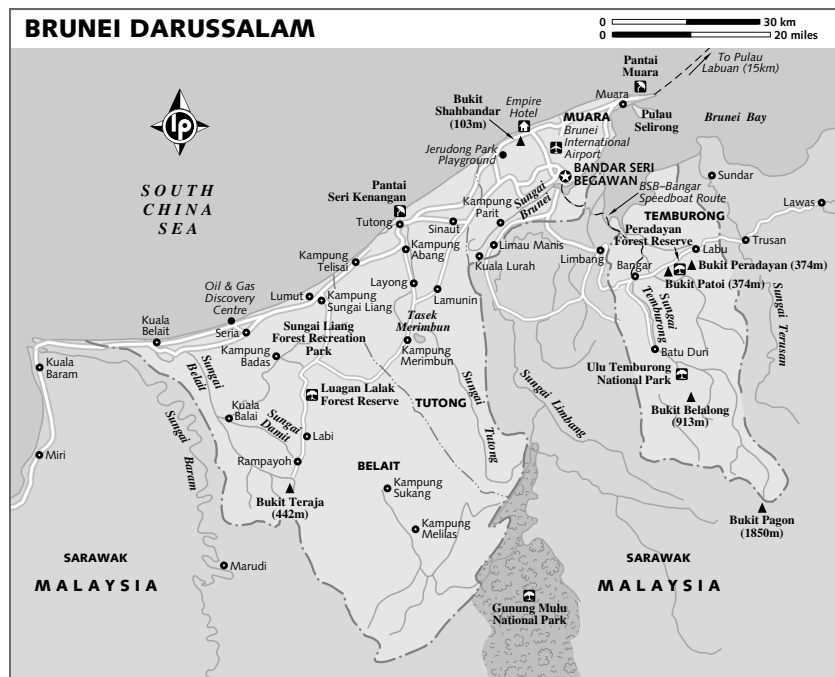
former public-school boy and graduate of Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, the sultan rather enjoyed British patronage and the country still has close ties to Britain.

After independence, Brunei veered towards Islamic fundamentalism, adopting a national ideology known as Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB). This institutionalised dogma stresses Malay culture, Islam and monarchy, and is promulgated through the ministries of education, religious affairs and information. In 1991 the sale of alcohol was banned and stricter dress codes were introduced, and in 1992 the study of MIB became compulsory in schools.

In recent years signs have begun to emerge that Brunei is not the model state it once was. The government has recognised a relatively small but growing unemployment problem, and disaffected youths have been blamed for isolated incidents of crime. The most disaffected youth of them all, the sultan's younger brother Prince Jefri, became a byword for extravagance both in his private life and, rather more seriously, in his role as finance minister. Scandals and rumours of financial corruption forced the sultan to sack Jefri in 1997, but the damage had been done, and Brunei found itself with seriously depleted financial reserves.

Perhaps as a result of these factors, the prevailing climate in Brunei today seems to be one of controlled reform as the sultan struggles to keep pace with the modern world. In 2004, the legislative council was finally restored after 20 years of 'emergency' law. So far the 29 incumbents are all royal relatives or cronies, but the constitution has been amended to allow the council to expand to 45 members in the future, with 15 of them elected by the public. In another significant step, former radical leader Muhammad Yasin Abdul Rahman, who was once jailed for his part in the 1962 rebellion, has been allowed to form a new opposition party, the National Development Party.

The mere mention of the words 'election' and 'opposition' must have brought the sultan out in a sweat, as he promptly hedged his bets by adding another clause to the constitution stating that he 'can do no wrong in either his personal or any official capacity'. Perhaps the sultan was worried that his marriage to a 27-year-old Malaysian journalist (technically his third wife – he's still married to the first,



and divorced his second in 2003) might have undermined his popularity. Either way, don't expect to see Bruneians at a polling booth any time soon.

There was a whiff of reform in November 2004 when the sultan amended the constitution to allow for the first parliamentary elections in 40 years. However, only one-third of parliamentarians will be publicly elected and the rest will still be hand-picked by the sultan, when and if the election ever happens (Bruneians are still waiting).

In 1998 the sultan's son, Crown Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah Bolkhiah, was proclaimed heir to the throne and began preparing for the role as Brunei's next ruler and 30th sultan. That preparation included the 30-year-old prince's wedding in September 2004 to 17-year-old Sarah Salleh, in a ceremony attended by thousands of guests. While Brunei may not be facing the same promise of prosperity that existed when the current sultan took the throne in 1967, it's clear that the sultan sees the crown prince's careful apprenticeship as crucial for the continuing (and absolute) rule of the monarchy.

Whatever its political waverings, Brunei's wealth still allows its citizens to enjoy an unprecedented standard of living. Literacy stands at 94%, average life expectancy is 77 years, and there are pensions for all, free medical care, free schooling, free sport and leisure centres, cheap loans, subsidies for many purchases (including cars), short working weeks, no income tax and the highest minimum wages in the region. The sultan even marked his 60th birthday in 2006 by awarding civil servants their first pay rise in 20 years. Economic diversification and new deep-sea explorations for oil aim to keep the cash rolling in, and as long as it does, the people of Brunei should stay happy with their lot.

CLIMATE

For information on the climate of Brunei, see p13 and p291.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

There are flights between Brunei and the following cities: Auckland, Bangkok, Brisbane, Darwin, Denpasar (Bali), Dubai, Frankfurt,

Hong Kong, Jakarta, Jeddah, Kuala Lumpur, London, Manila, Perth, Sharjah, Shanghai, Singapore, Surabaya and Sydney, to Bandar Seri Begawan. For details, see p227.

Boat

There are boat connections between Muara (BSB's port) and Pulau Labuan (Sabah), where you can get onward boats to Kota Kinabalu, Limbang and Lawa. There are direct speedboats between BSB and Limbang, in Sarawak's Limbang District. For details, see p227.

Road

There are road connections between Kuala Belait and Miri, in Sarawak (see p232); there are also road connections between BSB and Limbang, in Sarawak (see p227). For details on crossing between Brunei and the Limbang Division of Sarawak (and onward to KK in Sabah) see the Across Temburong By Land boxed text (p234).

GETTING AROUND

Coastal Brunei is laced with excellent roads, and these are well served by taxis and buses. As you head inland, roads peter out almost completely, with only a few paved ones and the occasional dirt track. River travel is possible on a few of the country's rivers, most notably up the Sungai Temburong in the Temburong District. There are no commercial flights around this small country. For details on getting around Brunei, see the Getting There & Away sections in this chapter and the Transport chapter (p302).

VISAS AND OVERLAND TRAVEL

If you are coming overland from Miri in Sarawak to BSB and intend to continue overland up to Sabah, or vice versa (that is, if you want to traverse Brunei in either direction), you should get a multiple-entry visa as you arrive since you'll be entering and leaving Brunei twice, due to the country's unique layout.

Also, note that travelling from Miri to BSB is fiddly, with up to five changes of transport. Several travellers guesthouses in Miri can organise direct minibuses, which cost only a little more. Unfortunately, we haven't seen comparable overland deals between BSB and Kota Kinabalu (Sabah), perhaps because the boat is so easy and fairly direct.

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

pop 81,500

Bandar Seri Begawan ('City of the Abdicated Sultan'; BSB) is most notable for the absence of the mayhem that is typical of most south-east Asian cities. In fact, central BSB introduces itself to the traveller as a quiet, pleasant, greenery-dotted city with a low skyline that's decorated with minarets and neat arrangements of buildings. Despite the city's rather sterile atmosphere and almost total lack of nightlife, there is something quite alluring about the city and it is well worth a day or two of lazy exploration.

To start with, you can visit the excellent Royal Regalia Museum and then wander over to the nearby Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque. After this, you can take a bus down to the Brunei Museum and check out the fine Islamic Art Gallery contained therein. Those with more time might head out to see Jame' Asr Hassanah Bolkhiah Mosque or the Istana Nurul Iman, two of the city's better outlying attractions.

However, the real heart and soul of BSB is in its sprawling *kampung ayer* (water villages), and the best time to check them out is in the early evening when another brilliant Borneo sunset starts to set the sky on fire. As you wind your way along Sungai Brunei, you'll be treated to a most pleasing visual composition: otherworldly domed mosques rising out of rickety water villages with the teeming Borneo jungle as a backdrop.

ORIENTATION

Central BSB is a compact grid aligned roughly north-south and bounded on three sides by water: the Brunei and Kedayan Rivers on the south and west respectively, and a tidal canal on the east. Jalan Sultan runs down the middle of the city and forms its main artery. It's also home to the major banks, the post office, airline offices, coffee shops and some good restaurants, as well as the Royal Regalia Museum. The Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque, on the western edge of the city centre, dominates the landscape. Most sights are within walking distance of, or a short bus ride from, the city centre.

Between Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque and the riverfront are two massive buildings forming the Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkhiah Complex. Usually called the Yayasan Complex, this huge shopping mall leads to Jalan MacArthur, across which are waterfront

cafés and the wharf where you can catch boats to nearby destinations.

Stilt villages sprawl along the opposite bank of Sungai Brunei (Brunei River), and along both banks of Sungai Kedayan to the northwest. Long, rickety-looking plankwalks connect them to the shore.

The Brunei Museum is about 6km south-east of the city centre, on Jalan Residency, overlooking the Sungai Brunei and accessible by bus or taxi. With the exception of this museum, most of the sights in the city centre are within easy walking distance of the main hotels.

Maps

Unfortunately, it is impossible to find decent maps of BSB and Brunei. Google Earth has clear and detailed satellite photos of BSB. Otherwise, the *Brunei: Kingdom of Unexpected Treasures* map-brochure is probably your best bet. It's occasionally available at the airport and at businesses around town. There's also a simple map in *Big*, the free what's-on magazine put out by the Brunei Tourism Board. It's available in the same places as the Brunei map.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Paul & Elizabeth Book Services (☎ 222-0958; 2nd fl, Block B, Yayasan Complex, Jln Pretty) Stock a small range of English-language paperbacks but no city or country maps.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 991)

Fire (☎ 995)

Police (☎ 993)

Internet Access

Paul & Elizabeth Cyber Café (☎ 222-0958; 2nd fl, Block B, Yayasan Complex, Jln Pretty; per hr B\$1; ☎ 8am-9.30pm) On the 2nd floor overlooking the central atrium in the northern building of the complex. Decent connections, bad soundtrack.

Medical Services

Ripas Hospital (☎ 224-2424; Jln Tutong; ☎ 24hr)

A fully equipped, modern hospital across the Edinburgh Bridge on the western side of Sungai Kedayan.

Money

HSBC (☎ 225-2222; cnr Jln Sultan & Jln Pemancha; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11am Sat, closed Sun)

Charges B\$15 to change most travellers cheques and has an ATM.

Rupiah Express (ground fl, Britannia House, 1 Jln Cator; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-3pm Sun) Exchanges cash only.

Post

Main post office (cnr Jln Sultan & Jln Elizabeth Dua; ☎ 8.30am to 4.30pm Mon-Thu, Sat, 8.30am-11.30am, 2pm-4pm Fri, closed Sun) Be sure to stop in to the adjoining Stamp Gallery (same hours as post office).

Telephone

Payphones are common in the city centre, and they accept 10c or 20c coins. Phonecards are available from post offices and many retail shops and hotels. SIM cards can only be purchased from the **DST Communications** (☎ 223-2903; ground fl, Yayasan Complex, Jln Pretty; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, Sat, 9am-11am & 2.30pm-4pm Fri, closed Sun). The standard DST SIM card is B\$30 and includes B\$5 worth of calls.

Travel Agencies & Tours

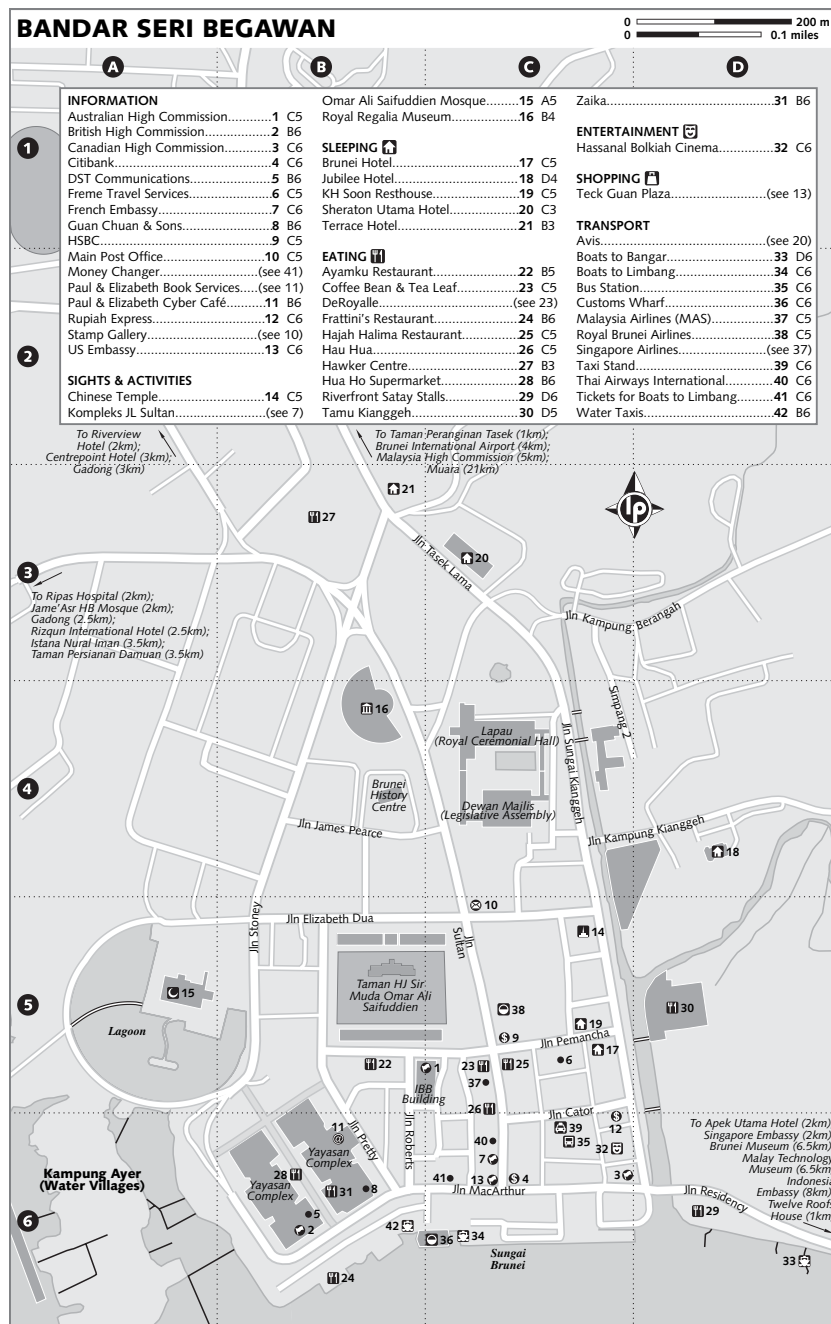
Freme Travel Services (☎ 223-4280; www.freme.com; 403B-407B Wisma Jaya, Jln Pemancha) Offers a variety of tours, including the city and Kampung Ayer, and trips to Ulu Temburong and Pulau Selirong.

SIGHTS

Royal Regalia Museum

A celebration of the sultan and all the trappings of Bruneian royalty, the **Royal Regalia Museum** (☎ 222-8358; Jln Sultan; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-5pm Fri) belongs at the top of any Brunei itinerary. The first floor is dominated by a recreation of the sultan's coronation day parade, including a huge gilded royal cart, on which the newly crowned sultan was pulled through the streets of BSB.

On the mezzanine floor of the museum you'll find a selection of gifts received by the sultan. Of course, when you are called upon to give a gift to the Sultan of Brunei, you must inevitably confront the question: what do you give the man who has everything? Here you'll see how various heads of state and royalty have answered this question (hint: you'll never go wrong with priceless gold and jewels). We particularly like the mother of all beer mugs, given by Queen Elizabeth, the fine abalone-shell chest given by the Philippines, and the Benjarong porcelain from Thailand.



On the same level, at the back, you'll find a hall containing medals that the sultan has received.

Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque

Named after the 28th sultan of Brunei, the **Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque** (☎ 222-2623; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon, 2-3pm, 5-6pm & 8-9pm Sat-Wed) was built in 1958 at a cost of about US\$5 million. The 44m minaret makes it the tallest building in central BSB. Listen for the call to prayer that echoes throughout the city centre, starting before dawn or at dusk.

The interior is simple but tasteful, though it's no match for the stunning exterior. The floor and walls are made from the finest Italian marble, the stained-glass windows were crafted in England and the luxurious carpets were flown in from Saudi Arabia and Belgium. Jigsaw enthusiasts can admire the 3.5 million-piece Venetian mosaic inside the main dome. The ceremonial stone boat sitting in the lagoon is a replica of a 16th-century *mahligai* (royal) barge.

The external compound is open between 8am and 8.30pm, and non-Muslims may enter the mosque itself outside prayer times. Remember to dress appropriately and to remove your shoes before entering. You may also be able to take the elevator to the top of the minaret or walk up the winding staircase (ask permission from staff first). The view over the city and Kampung Ayer is excellent.

Kampung Ayer

Kampung Ayer is a collection of several traditional and modern stilt villages on either side of Sungai Brunei. It's home to a population of around 32,000, some of whom commute to work in the city each morning by taxi boat. Others, of course, pursue a more traditional way of life.

The best way to see the **water villages** is from a water taxi, which can be chartered along the waterfront for B\$20 per hour (don't worry about finding one – any time a foreign tourist goes anywhere near the waterfront in BSB, a small school of taxi boats forms with eager drivers offering their services). Be sure to ask the driver to stop off at Taman Persiaran Damuan for great views of the sultan's palace.

Late afternoon or early evening is best for a tour, not only because the midday heat is unbearable, but so you can also enjoy the sunset

over the city. If there's any wind about, you will see kites rising out of the *kampung* (kite-flying is a popular pastime in Brunei).

If you don't feel like exploring the Kampung Ayer by boat, you can also explore them on foot via the plankwalks that connect the settlements to the city (try the ones west of the Yayasan Complex).

Brunei Museum

The **Brunei Museum** (☎ 222-3235; Jln Kota Batu; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-4.30pm Fri) is 4.5km east of central BSB, sitting on a bluff overlooking Sungai Brunei. The main building contains the excellent **Islamic Art Gallery**, which has some wonderful illuminated (decorated) copies of the Koran, as well as an incredible model of the Dome of the Rock executed in mother of pearl and abalone shell.

In the same building, the **Oil and Gas Gallery** is surprisingly interesting. It answers all your questions about how they get the stuff from under the ground to your nearest gas pump. Finally, don't miss the **Brunei Traditional Culture Gallery**, also in the main building. It's got good exhibits on all aspects of Bruneian culture, including a picture of two young fellows enjoying a spot of grass sledding – a sport we didn't know existed until we visited this museum.

Descend the stairs from the car park behind the museum, then turn right to reach the **Malay Technology Museum** (admission free; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-4.30pm Fri) A pair of rooms here have interesting life-sized re-creations of stilt houses with accompanying information on traditional cultures. Gallery 1 features water villages and includes reconstructions of how *kampung* architecture has evolved over the last 150 years. Gallery 2 has exhibits of handicrafts and fishing techniques practised by the people of the water villages. Gallery 3 shows the tools and techniques used by the indigenous tribes of the interior for food gathering, agriculture and hunting.

To get to the museum, take bus 39 from the bus station in downtown BSB.

Bolkiah Mosque

The largest mosque in the country, **Jame'Asr Hassanal Bolkiah Mosque** (☎ 223-8741; Jln Hassan Bolkiah, Gadong; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon, 2-3pm, 5-6pm & 8-9pm Sat-Wed), is a fine example of Islamic religious architecture. The four main mina-

rets and two golden domes of the structure are a fantastic sight when illuminated in the evening. The mosque was built in 1992 to celebrate the 25th year of the Sultan's reign. Non-Muslims are forbidden entry on Thursday and Friday. It's located en route to Gadong, about 2.5km northwest of the city centre.

To get to the mosque, take bus 22 or 1 (Circle Line) from the bus station in downtown BSB.

Istana Nurul Iman

The largest palace in the world, according to some calculations, **Istana Nurul Iman** (Jln Tutong), is the official residence of the sultan of Brunei. It's a good thing that the sultan has a large staff, because the upkeep must be daunting – it contains 1788 rooms, 257 bathrooms, and the floor area is around 200,000 sq metres.

Designed by Filipino architect Leandro Locsin, the aesthetics of the palace draw heavily on airport terminal and stadium designs. Nonetheless, it's relatively attractive from a distance or when illuminated in the evening. Those who want to get inside the palace will have to time their visit carefully: the Istana is open to the public only at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan (September).

The best vantage points are from the river and **Taman Persiaran Damuan**, a landscaped park nearby. The Istana is 2.5km out of town. From BSB, take a water taxi there in the early evening and get off at the park.

To get to the museum, take any westbound bus from the bus station in downtown BSB.

Other Attractions

One of BSB's most overlooked sights is the charming **Twelve Roofs House** (Bumbungan Dua Belas; admission free; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-11.30 & 2.30-4.30 Fri), which is the former residence of the British High Commissioners, and now displays photos illustrating British involvement in Brunei and the 'special relationship' between the two countries.

Further out on the north side of town, **Taman Peranginan Tasek** is a more extensive green zone with picnic areas, and peaceful walks to a small waterfall and reservoir. If you're lucky, you may get a glimpse of proboscis monkeys in the early morning or late afternoon. The falls are nicest in the wet season, when the water is deeper. You can swim here but women should remember that the usual rules of modesty apply; T-shirts and shorts are OK. Another

road by the gate leads to a 15-minute uphill walk to a view over the reservoir.

To get here, walk north along Jalan Tasek Lama past the Terrace Hotel and turn right after two sets of traffic lights. It's about 1km to the falls from the entrance gates by the car park – continue past the flowerbeds and picnic tables, then follow the stream. The Sheraton Utama Hotel can provide a map showing the park walks.

SLEEPING

Most of BSB's accommodation options are located in the city centre, with a few outlying options in the Gadong suburb a few kilometres to the northwest. Unlike the rest of Borneo, you'll find few budget options in the city.

Budget

KH Soon Rest House (☎ 222-2052; khsoon_resthouse_brunei@hotmail.com; 2nd fl, 140 Jln Pemancha; s B\$30-35, d B\$35-39; ☎) This simple guesthouse is a decent budget choice for those seeking a central location. Rooms are spartan but huge and an extra B\$5 snags you an attached bathroom. If all you need is a clean place to lay your head in BSB, this should suit.

Apek Utama Hotel (☎ 222-0808; Simpang 229, Jln Kota Batu, Kampung Pintu Malim; r from B\$30; ☎) This basic hotel has acceptable rooms with fan or air-con. The management is friendly and a good source of information on travelling around Brunei. The downside is the somewhat inconvenient location: it's 3km east of town, accessed by bus 39 or by water taxi. Note that buses stop running at 6pm, so plan accordingly.

Midrange

Terrace Hotel (☎ 224-3554; www.terracebrunei.com; Jln Tasek Lama; r from B\$60; ☎) Even if you're on a tight budget, consider spending a little more to enjoy the comforts of this excellent mid-range hotel. Rooms are clean and well taken care of, and there's a great little swimming pool and wireless internet access. There's also a decent restaurant on the ground floor. Deluxe rooms cost about B\$10 more than standard rooms, but are well worth the price. Highly recommended.

Jubilee Hotel (☎ 222-8070; www.jubileehotelbrunei.com; Jln Kg Kianggeh; r from B\$70; ☎) Not quite as appealing as the Terrace, the Jubilee offers simple and clean standard rooms (the deluxe rooms aren't worth the extra price). On-site facilities include a Thai restaurant

and billiards. Rates include airport pick-up and breakfast.

Brunei Hotel (☎ 224-2374; www.bruneihotel.com.bn; Jln Pemancha; standard s/d from B\$88, deluxe from B\$130/150; 🍴) This hotel is like a formerly prosperous oldster going gracefully to seed. The standard rooms are strangely more appealing than the deluxe rooms, the only difference we could see was the size. The place is pervaded by a somewhat musty fug and the industrial air conditioners in the halls don't do much to help this. It's got a great downtown location, but we'll take the Terrace.

Riverview Hotel (☎ 223-8238; riverview_htl@brunet.bn; Jln Gadong; standard s B\$60, deluxe s/d from B\$88/99; 🍴) Inconveniently located between the city centre and Gadong, the Riverview is a large hotel popular with local and Malaysian guests. The rooms are fairly spacious and well kept. Book well in advance if you want to claim one of the four standard singles.

Top End

Sheraton Utama Hotel (☎ 224-4272; www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/utama; Jln Tasek; r from B\$158; 🍴 🚗) Located within walking distance of the downtown area, the Sheraton Utama is easily the nicest hotel in town, with no real competition from the two top-end entries in the Gadong area. The standard rooms are fairly spacious and light with adequate but not luxurious bathrooms. The deluxe rooms are a little more spacious and have semiseparate sitting areas. There's also a nice pool, two restaurants (one poolside), a small gym and a spa.

Centrepont (☎ 243-0430; Abdul Razak Complex, Gadong; r from B\$240; 🍴 🚗 🚗) A little long in the tooth, with chaotic and irregular service and a lobby that feels like a shopping mall. Unless you really insist on being in Gadong, you'll do better in a deluxe room at the Terrace or a standard room at the Sheraton. Rooms are spacious and have the typical amenities. However, they can be noisy and if the person in the next room is watching TV, you'll know it.

Rizqun International Hotel (☎ 243-3000; reservation@rizquninternational.com; Abdul Razak Complex, Gadong; r from B\$320; 🍴) Under the same ownership as the Centrepont, this newer spot is more appealing and is worth considering if you can get a great online or travel agency rate, but we'd still rather be in the Sheraton in the city centre. The rooms are new, large and well appointed, but the service appears somewhat inconsistent.

EATING City Centre

Hajah Halima Restaurant (☎ 223-4803; 54 Jln Sultan; meals from B\$2; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This popular and friendly Indian Muslim place has just about everything the traveller wants: good coffee, tea, fresh juice and rotis in the morning; and great *nasi biryani* (spiced rice) and set meals for lunch and dinner, not to mention great *mee goreng* (fried noodles) and *martabaks* (roti stuffed with meat or vegetables). It's the best of the three similar joints on this part of Jalan Sultan. There is no sign – look for the blue paint around the entrance. It's almost directly opposite the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf.

Riverfront Satay Stalls (Jln Residency; satay from B\$2.50; 🍴 midday-early evening) This collection of *satay* and drink vendors right on the riverfront offer one of life's great combinations: *satay* and fresh coconut juice. You can get 10 sticks of chicken or beef *satay* here for about B\$2.50. A fresh coconut will add another B\$1.50. This is a great place to watch the sunset – when the colours really start working, why not jump into a waiting water taxi and enjoy the view from sea level?

Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf (nr Jln Sultan & Jln Pemancha; coffee drinks from B\$3; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Travellers and expats alike are drawn like moths to the invisible waves of wi-fi and the aroma of good coffee emanating from this downtown caffeine emporium. Drop by in the afternoon and you'll run into about half of the Western tourists in BSB at any one time.

DeRoyale Café (Jln Sultan; coffee drinks from B\$3; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Like its direct neighbour, the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, this cosy little coffee shop is a good place to kick back and relax with a magazine. If you're in a hurry, however, we suggest its more famous next-door neighbour, as the staff here is well meaning but service is slow. There's also wi-fi.

Ayamku Restaurant (Jln Pemancha; meals from B\$3.50; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Brunei's answer to KFC, this is one of the cheapest places in town to get a meal. You can get a big piece of fried chicken, some rice and a drink for about B\$3. And, the chicken is surprisingly good. One note: this may be purely coincidental, but many of the diners here seemed remarkably plump for Southeast Asians.

Hau Hua (☎ 222-5396; 48 Jln Sultan; meals around B\$10; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This surprisingly good Chinese restaurant does all the standard Chinese dishes and a few lesser-known ones,

like broccoli with crab meat. There is an excellent drink menu that includes daily changing specials and good fresh juices.

Zaika (☎ 223-1155; block C, Yayasan Complex; meals from B\$15; 🍴 lunch & dinner) This dimly lit northern Indian restaurant is the place to go for a proper sit-down meal in BSB. The kitchen does well with favourites like shish kebab, naan and standard curries, but its attempts at more creative dishes are less successful.

Fratinni's Restaurant (☎ 224-2372; Jln MacArthur; meals from B\$30; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🍴) Fratinni's is one of the few restaurants in BSB to take advantage of the fine riverfront view. It is, without a doubt, the only Italian-Thai restaurant that we've ever come across (yes, we are suspicious of that combination, too). Despite the strange pedigree, it's a good place for a romantic dinner or for when you just can't stand another plate of chicken rice or *mee goreng*. Stick with Italian standards like pasta and salad and you won't go too far wrong.

Self-caterers can walk across the canal to the local produce market, **Tamu Kianggeh** (Jln Sungai Kianggeh; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner), where food stalls are sometimes set up. Supplies can also be bought in the basement of the Yayasan Complex at **Hua Ho Supermarket** (☎ 223-1120; basement, Yayasan Complex, Jln Pretty; 🍴 10am-10pm). Look for shrink-wrapped durian here (just don't try sneaking it into your hotel room).

Finally, there's a small hawker centre in the park opposite the Terrace Hotel. It's something of a hit-or-miss affair, but it's worth a try for a cheap lunch or dinner if you're staying nearby.

Gadong

BSB locals often head to Gadong for a night out (which in Brunei usually amounts to nothing more than dinner and a movie). Based on what you hear from locals, you might start to believe that the place is a seething nightlife zone or at least a fine collection of smart restaurants. Unfortunately, it's neither.

The Mall at Gadong has a good food court on the 3rd floor, with all the usual stalls, including local, Chinese and Thai. The Gadong Centrepont shopping centre has a branch of Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf (with wi-fi), a branch of Fratinni's Restaurant (see above) and a Jaya Hypermarket (really, it's merely a supermarket) for self-catering.

Finally, there is a nightly hawker market in Gadong with stalls selling a great variety of

Malay and Bruneian dishes for rock-bottom prices. Unfortunately, it's geared to car-driving locals who take the food away, and there are no places to sit, so it's of limited interest to travellers.

ENTERTAINMENT

Hassanal Bolkiha Cinema (Jln Sungai Kianggeh; tickets B\$4-8) This small cinema screens a variety of Hollywood action films and Hong Kong kung fu movies. It's about the only game in town as far as 'nightlife' goes in BSB.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

There are flights between BSB and the following cities: Auckland, Bangkok, Brisbane, Darwin, Denpasar (Bali), Dubai, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Jeddah, Kuala Lumpur, London, Manila, Perth, Sharjah, Shanghai, Singapore, Surabaya and Sydney. Airline offices in Brunei are as follows:

Malaysia Airlines (MAS; ☎ 222-4141; www.malaysiaairlines.com; 144 Jln Pemancha)

Royal Brunei Airlines (RB; ☎ 221-2222; www.bruneiair.com; RBA Plaza, Jln Sultan)

Singapore Airlines (SI; ☎ 224-4901; www.singaporeair.com; 1st fl, Wisma Raya Bldg, 49-50 Jln Sultan)

Thai Airways International (THAI; ☎ 224-2991; www.thaiair.com; 4th fl, 401-403 Kompleks Jln Sultan, 51-55 Jln Sultan)

Boat

Most boats to/from BSB operate from the Muara Ferry Terminal, in Muara, about 25km northeast of the city (B\$2 bus ride and a B\$40 taxi ride to/from BSB).

There are regular ferries between Muara and Pulau Labuan in Sabah, Malaysia (B\$15, 1½ hours, six departures between 7.30am and 4.40pm). From Pulau Labuan, there are two ferries a day onward to Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Passengers are charged B\$1 departure tax at the ferry terminal.

Boats to Limbang in Sarawak, Malaysia (B\$10, 30 minutes), make irregular morning departures from the riverfront along Jalan MacArthur. However the service is highly unreliable and departures are often delayed until more passengers turn up so be prepared to wait. Buy your ticket from the moneychanger along the waterfront (Map p223). Another way to get to Limbang or Lawas in Sarawak is to go via Pulau Labuan (see p124).

Boats to/from Bangar (B\$6, 45 minutes, about one departure per hour from BSB from 7am to 1pm) operate from the jetty just east of the riverfront satay stalls, along Jalan Residency. Bangar is the starting point for attractions in Brunei's Temburong district. Boats generally don't depart until they've got enough passengers to warrant the trip, so you might have to wait around a while. Even if you do nothing more than grab a quick cup of tea in Bangar and then return to BSB, we highly recommend this journey. In fact, we rank it among the highlights of Brunei. The speedboats tear through nipa-lined waterways at incredible speeds and you wonder how they manage not to get lost in this watery maze.

Bus

If you're heading to Limbang (Sarwak), Bangar (Brunei), Lawas (Sarawak) or Kota Kinabalu (Sabah), you can go overland, but be warned: the overland journey to/from any of these places is more expensive, time-consuming and just plain troublesome than going by boat.

If this doesn't put you off, here's how to do it (starting from BSB). First, catch bus 42, 44 or 48 south to Kuala Lurah (B\$1, 30 minutes, last departure 5pm) on the Brunei-Sarawak border (or take a taxi for around B\$20). After crossing the border, you can take another bus (RM5.50) or taxi (RM20) to Limbang. From Limbang, it's very difficult and expensive to continue by road to Kota Kinabalu and there is no regular public transport. You'll have to hire a taxi or private car willing to take you across the Temburong district of Brunei and onward to Lawas (around B\$200), from where you can catch regularly scheduled buses onward to Kota Kinabalu. For more details see *Across Temburong By Land* (p234).

To get to Miri in Sarawak, take a bus from BSB to Seria (B\$6, two hours), then take another bus onward to Kuala Belait (B\$1, one hour). At Kuala Belait, switch to the express bus to Miri (B\$15, two hours). Immigration and customs formalities are taken care of on both sides of the Brunei-Sarawak border.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

BSB's modern airport is 10km northwest of the city. Buses 23, 24 and 38 will get you to

and from the airport for B\$1. As you leave the terminal, walk diagonally south for 300m to reach the bus stop. Taxis will charge around B\$20 for trips between the airport and city centre (the price goes up by at least B\$5 after 6pm); taxis are unmetered so agree on the price before getting in. For a cheaper alternative, many hotels offer free or inexpensive pick-up service from the airport, so enquire when you book.

If you travel into BSB by bus, you'll end up at the bus station right in the centre of town, from which you can easily walk to most of the accommodation listed in this book.

Bus

The government bus network covers most sights in and around the city, and the international ferry terminal at Muara. Routes for local buses are displayed at the bus station, beneath the multistorey car park on Jalan Cator, and numbers are displayed on each bus. Apart from the Muara express service (B\$2), all fares are B\$1. Most buses run every 15 to 20 minutes, and the system operates daily between 6.30am and 6pm.

Some useful routes:

Airport Buses 23, 24, 36 and 38.

Apek Utama Hotel, Brunei Museum and Malay Technology Museum Bus 39.

Gadong Buses 1, 22 and 55.

Hassanal Bolkiah National Stadium and Immigration Department Buses 1 and 34.

Jame'Asr Hassanal Bolkiah Mosque Buses 1 and 22.

Jerudong Park Playground Buses 55 and 57.

Muara Buses 37, 38 and 39.

An express bus (B\$2, 40 minutes) departs the bus station about once an hour between 7am and 2pm for the Muara Ferry Terminal.

Car

Hiring a car is a good way to explore the hinterland of Brunei, though you could comfortably see most sights in two days. Prices range from B\$80 to B\$120 for a sedan; rates for luxury cars such as Mercedes, Volvos and 4WDs are much higher. Mileage and insurance are included, though surcharges may apply if the car is taken into Sarawak. Most rental agencies will bring the car to your hotel and pick it up when you've finished, and drivers can also be arranged, though this could cost B\$100 on top of the rental cost. Petrol is cheap and the main roads are in

good condition, but some back roads require a 4WD. An international driver's permit is required for driving in Brunei.

Avis (☎ 242-6345; Hj Daud Complex, Jln Gadong; nscsb@brunet.bn; compact cars per day from B\$75) will send cars to the airport for those with reservations. There's also a branch office in the Sheraton Utama Hotel, next door to the Terrace Hotel in BSB.

Taxi

Taxis are hard to find in Brunei and you should never count on being able to flag one down on the street. The only place where you can reliably find taxis is outside the bus station on Jalan Caor. Otherwise, arrange a taxi through your hotel.

Taxis in BSB are all unmetered and you need to negotiate the fare with the driver. A trip across town will usually cost B\$10, but rates can climb by as much as 30% after 6pm. Other trips include the airport (B\$20), Muara (B\$30), Sarawak Border near Limbang (B\$25), and Miri (Sarawak) (B\$160).

Water Taxi

Water taxis are a good way of getting around if your destination is anywhere near the river. You can find them anywhere on the waterfront at the southern end of town (or, more likely, they'll find you). Fares for short trips shouldn't cost more than B\$2 – don't accept higher rates (the locals certainly don't). Hourly rates should be no more than B\$20 and you might be able to negotiate a rate as low as B\$15 per hour.

AROUND BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

The area around BSB has some interesting attractions for those who fancy a quick half-day trip outside the city. Less than an hour's drive northwest of the city, Jerudong is home to one of Brunei's most famous attractions: the Jerudong Park Playground, Brunei's famous and now mostly defunct amusement park. Also in Jerudong, the vast Empire Hotel & Country Club is the world's most expensive hotel and an interesting diversion for those with an interest in the grand and the gaudy. Or, if you merely fancy a bit of sunbathing and wading, you

might consider taking a bus out to Pantai Muara (Muara Beach), which is the best beach in the BSB area.

JERUDONG

The two white elephants of Jerudong – the Empire Hotel & Country Club and the Jerudong Park Playground – make a fascinating half-day excursion from the city.

Empire Hotel & Country Club

The **Empire Hotel & Country Club** (☎ 241-8999; www.empire.com.bn; Muara-Tutong Rd) is a prominent reminder of Prince Jefri's scandalous spending habits. The palatial Empire cost US\$1.1 billion to build, and it shows – from the soaring height of the monumentally lavish atrium to the Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course. While it's true that the hotel has all the subtlety of a Las Vegas casino, it's definitely a spectacle worth seeing. And, as you wander the grounds, you can't help but wonder how they ever expected this place to pay for itself.

Jerudong Park Playground

The **Jerudong Park Playground** (☎ 261-1894; Jerudong; admission & unlimited rides B\$15, or admission B\$1 & individual rides B\$3; ☎ 5pm-midnight Wed-Fri & Sun, 5pm-2am Sat) is a sprawling amusement park that the sultan built as a gift to his people. Divided into two sections, one for older kids and adults, and one for smaller children, it's now in a semidormant state – over half of the rides are 'closed for maintenance' (read: closed forever, or at least until Michael Jackson comes back to stage another concert). This gives the park a rather surreal air, and you may feel like you're living out a child's fantasy of having an amusement park all to yourself (albeit with most of the rides closed). If you go on a weekend, you'll be less lonely and find a few more rides in operation.

Wandering around the park, especially on a weekday evening, is a truly surreal experience unlike anything else you'll encounter in Southeast Asia – scattered groups of locals and tourists meander around slightly aimlessly, looking at the defunct attractions with a mixture of awe and bewilderment, like inhabitants of the *Planet of the Apes* discovering a postapocalyptic Manhattan.

When the big rides aren't working, admission is discounted to B\$5. Sleeveless blouses or shirts are not allowed and proper footwear is required. On Saturdays the park is open

until 2am and there are food and drink stalls in the parking lot.

Getting There & Away

It's easy to get to the playground with buses 55 or 57 from the bus station, but the last bus leaves at 5.30pm and getting back to town can be a problem. Major hotels have shuttle services for about B\$20 per person. A taxi back to BSB will cost about B\$35. You may also meet locals who will offer to drive you to the park, the Empire Hotel, the mosque and the palace; the asking price is around B\$48 per car.

Some accommodation in town can arrange group tours to Jerudong, including stops at the Empire Hotel and the Jerudong Park Playground.

PANTAI MUARA

Pantai Muara (Muara Beach) is a popular weekend retreat located 2km from Muara town, which is 25km northeast of BSB. The white sand is clean but like many Bornean beaches it's fairly shallow and littered with flotsam and jetsam. If you want solitude, don't go on the weekend.

To get to Muara, take an express bus (B\$2) from the bus station in downtown BSB. Once at Muara, bus 33 will take you from Muara town to either Pantai Muara or Pantai Serasa for B\$1.

TUTONG & BELAIT DISTRICTS

The Tutong and Belait district form the bulk of the big western section of Brunei. Most travellers merely pass through this region en route between Miri (Sarawak) and BSB, but there are a few mildly diverting attractions for those who have several days to spend in the country. Buses ply the coastal highway, but if you want to see the sights the best way is to take a tour or rent a car.

TUTONG

About halfway between Seria and BSB, Tutong is the main town in central Brunei. The town itself is unremarkable, but it does have a good beach a couple of kilometres away at Pantai Seri Kenangan, often simply referred to as Pantai Tutong. Set on a spit

of land, with the ocean on one side and the Sungai Tutong on the other, the white-sand, casuarina-lined beach is arguably the best in Brunei. The royal family clearly agrees, as it has a surprisingly modest palace here for discreet getaways. Commoners, sadly, have to make do with picnic tables, a simple restaurant and food hawkers at weekends. The turn-off to the beach is near the Tamu Tutong, where a **market** is held every morning.

After Pantai Seri Kenangan, the beach road continues for another 5km to Kuala Tutong; the beach at the end is quiet and ideal for camping.

TASEK MERIMBUN

About 27km inland from Tutong, Tasek Merimbun is Brunei's largest lake. The marshy blackwater lake is fairly scenic and supports a variety of wildlife. However, like other sites in Brunei, the facilities here haven't been kept up. There used to be a plank walk out to an island in the lake, but it's being reclaimed by nature. Don't even think about swimming or wading here as the lake is inhabited by crocodiles. And a permit is required for boating, so your options are pretty much limited to taking a gander for a few minutes or a quick stroll around the lakeshore. All told, it's not worth a special trip out from BSB.

The only way to get there on your own is by car or as part of a tour from BSB (see p222). If you drive, note that the road gets pretty rough between Lammuni and the lake; drive through the *kampung* and stick to the main road.

THE LABI ROAD

As you enter the Belait district, east of Seria, a road branches inland to Labi, taking you past some prime forest areas. This road is the easiest way into the interior of Brunei and it offers the chance to see some Iban longhouses (most of which come complete with parking lots and mod-cons). Nothing on this road is a must see, but if you've got a few days in Brunei and a rental car, it's a good day out of BSB.

The first of these attraction on the road, about 800m from the main highway, is the **Sungai Liang Forest Recreation Park** (Taman Rekreasi Hutan Sungai Liang), a simple little park that makes a good leg stretch on the way to Kuala Belait or into the interior further down the Labi Road. There are paved walking trails, a river, swimming hole and hiking trails. There is also a canopy walkway, but it

was closed at the time of writing and looks to remain so indefinitely.

About halfway between the Sungai Liang Forest Recreation Park and Labi is the **Luagan Lalak Forest Reserve** (Taman Rekreasi Hutan Luagan Lalak). This marshy lake is picturesque but like many tourist sites in Brunei it seems that those who started the project have lost interest. There used to be boardwalks around much of the lake but now, almost all that remains open is a rotting stretch leading north from the bottom of the steps down to the lake. It's a nice spot and a good variety of birds call the lake home but due to the state of the facilities, and difficulty and danger of exploring off the plankwalks, it's not worth a specific trip to come here. It's about 24km from the turn-off from the main road.

Another 15km south of Luagan Lake Forest Reserve (or about 40km south of the coastal road), the *kampung* of **Labi** is a small Iban settlement with a few fruit arbours. Note that there is a fork in the road just before Labi (as you head south, away from the main coastal road). Take the left fork to reach Labi and Teraja; don't take the right fork, which is marked Jln Labi Lama (Old Labi Rd).

About 7km south of Labi, you reach **Rumah Panjang Mendaram Besar**, a 'drive-up' longhouse. If you linger outside for a few minutes with a hopeful look on your face, you will probably be invited in and shown some handicrafts.

Another 8km south from Rumah Panjang brings you to the end of the Labi Road, at which you'll find **Rumah Panjang Teraja**, another 'drive-up' Iban longhouse. A guide from the longhouse can take you to a nearby waterfall in around 30 minutes. A trip to the falls should cost about B\$15.

SERIA

Seria, a company town spread out along the coast between Tutong and Kuala Belait, is a transit stop on the road to Sarawak. This is where Shell Brunei has its major installations, and the low bungalows accommodate company staff and the Gurkha troops brought in to protect their work.

The coastal plain between here and Kuala Belait is the main centre for oil production in Brunei, and at a beach just outside of town the curvy **Billionth Barrel Monument** commemorates (you guessed it) the billionth barrel of oil produced at the Seria field. From the beach, oil rigs are visible jutting up on the horizon.

If that's just not enough hydrocarbons for you, the flashy new **Oil & Gas Discovery Centre** (☎ 337-7200; www.shell.com.bn/ogdc; off Jln Tengah; adult/child/teenager B\$5/1/2; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Thu, 10am-noon & 2-6pm Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) aims to put an 'edutainment' spin on the industry, appealing particularly to young science buffs. The complex includes an exhibition hall, a gallery, a theatre, an education centre and even a playground with skate park to keep any disaffected youths happy. The Discovery Centre is opposite the town centre, on the foreshore. You could walk it from the bus station, but it will be a hot 500m indeed. It's clearly signposted.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Koperasi (☎ 322-7589; Jln Sharif Ali Seria; s/d B\$55/65; 🍽️) The only place to stay in Seria is the Hotel Koperasi Seria. It's got acceptable rooms and is not a bad place to spend the night (although you'll find Kuala Belait to be more interesting and attractive). From the bus station, walk northwest 150m past the barbershop.

Muwaffaq Café & Restaurant (ground floor Koperasi Hotel; Jln Sharif Ali Seria; meals from B\$5; 🍽️) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This café is the best spot to eat in town, with a full English picture-menu. A lot of oil workers eat here, so they're used to foreign guests. If this doesn't suit, there are food stalls inside the Kompleks Sri Selera Seria, which is opposite the hotel and near the bus station.

Getting There & Away

About 10 buses a day run between Seria and BSB (B\$6, two hours). There are regular local buses between Seria and KB (B\$1, every 30 minutes between 6.30am and 7.30pm), where you can catch buses onward to Miri and Kuching.

KUALA BELAIT

The last town before Sarawak, Kuala Belait is the main town in Belait District and the place to get buses to Miri. 'KB' has colonial shop-houses in the town centre, the **Silver Jubilee Park** (Jln Maulana) and a reasonable beach, though most travellers just hustle through on their way to or from Sarawak. The **HSBC** bank has an ATM, diagonally opposite the bus station on Jalan McKerron.

You can hire a boat by the market for the 45-minute trip up the river to **Kuala Balai**, a small river village that was once the largest settlement in the district. It's now almost

deserted because the residents have left to find work in the oil industry on the coast. The owner of Sentosa Hotel can help arrange transport (about RM100 per boat round-trip), but the trip is not much more than a simple cruise through the *nipah* (mangroves) and there isn't much to see (you're basically just paying for the river trip).

Sleeping

Government Rest House (Rumah Persinggahan Kerajan; ☎ 333-4288; Jln Carey; s/d B\$40/60; 🚻) As near as you'll get to a budget option in KB, this municipal guesthouse is right on the beach, a 10-minute walk along Jln McKerron from the bus station, then 300m to the right on Jln Carey. It's simple, clean and a good value. We recommend that you phone in advance.

Sentosa Hotel (☎ 333-4341; www.bruneisentosa.com; 92 Jln McKerron; s/d from B\$70/88; 🚻) The Sentosa is easily the best choice in KB. Every room has LAN internet access (if you don't have a cable, they will lend you one). It's clean, well-run and central with competent and helpful management. To get there from the bus station, take a right up the street between the bus station and the taxi station (that is, walk inland or east) and you will see the Sentosa on your left after less than 100m.

Seaview Hotel (☎ 333-2651; Jln Maulana; s/d B\$88/104; 🚻) About 4km out of town along the beach road towards Seria (about a B\$10 taxi ride from the bus station), the Seaview is a nice spot to stay if you don't mind the somewhat inconvenient location. It's right on the beach, although the beach here is better for strolling and wading than actual swimming. Some of the rooms offer eponymous sea views. Breakfast is included and there's a well-stocked supermarket frequented by expats. The hotel can also arrange car rental.

Eating

There are several simple restaurants in the shopping area along Jalan Pretty. To get there from the bus station, walk through the adjoining taxi station (keeping the HSBC bank on your left) and you will see it on your right. It's not more than two minutes' walk.

Morning market (🕒 5.30am-11am) Diagonally opposite and slightly up the street from the Sentosa Hotel, this interesting little market is a good place to eat breakfast. It's divided into halal and nonhalal (ie Chinese) sections.

Hing Nam Foong (54 Jln Pretty; meals from B\$5; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner, closed Tue afternoon) A good little Chinese *kopi tiam* (coffee shop) with an English menu (remember that *mee* means noodles and it will all make sense). We really liked the *char shui po* (steamed buns with pork) here – they're stuffed with more *char sui* (BBQ pork) than usual and they go very well with a steaming cup of tea.

Getting There & Away

The bus and taxi stations are located opposite each other dead in the centre of town, a short walk from the main shopping streets and market.

BUS

There are regular local buses between KB and Seria (B\$1, every 30 minutes between 6.30am and 7.30pm).

There are regular buses between KB and Miri in Sarawak (B\$10.20 from KB at 7.30am 10.30am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm). If you only want to go as far as the Sarawak border, the fare is B\$5.50. Morning departures cross via the new bridge, while afternoon departures use the ferry.

There are also regular buses between KB and Kuching in Sarawak (from KB B\$45, departs KB at 10.30am, arrives in Kuching the next day at 5am). This journey involves at least two bus changes: one at the border and one in Miri. For real gluttons for punishment, you can also buy bus tickets all the way to Pontianak here in KB.

TAXI

The taxi fare between KB and BSB is B\$80. The taxi fare between KB and Miri in Sarawak is B\$80.

TEMBURONG DISTRICT

Separated from the main section of Brunei by a maze of *nipah*-lined waterways, the Temburong District is home to Brunei's best natural attractions. Temburong is wedged like a green dagger in the heart of Sarawak's Limbang Division – a 70km swath of mostly virgin rainforest lining the banks of Sungai Temburong. Once you've seen the mosques, palaces and water villages around BSB, Temburong is the next logical stop in Brunei. And the ride out to Bangar, the dis-

trict capital, is without a doubt the most fun you can possibly have for B\$6.

Two parks make up the main attractions of Temburong: the Peradayan Forest Reserve, which is good for a quick stroll in the jungle, and the brilliant Ulu Temburong National Park. The former requires no prior arrangements and minimal expenditure, while the latter requires a bit of planning and a fair bit of cash. Of course, as far as we're concerned, if you do nothing more than take the speedboat out to Bangar, quaff a quick cup of tea and then return to BSB, you'd probably think the time well spent.

Note that if you intend to do any hiking at either park, you'll probably want to bring a change of clothes in your day pack, as you'll be pretty rank by the time you rock up at the wharf for the boat trip back to BSB. And for Ulu Temburong National Park, you'll want to bring a swimsuit, as you'll almost certainly be swimming in the river there.

For information on getting to/from Temburong, see the Bangar Getting There & Away section (right).

BANGAR

Bangar is a small town on the banks of Sungai Temburong that seems perpetually half-asleep, even though it's the administrative centre of (and gateway to) the Temburong district. The **Temburong tourist information centre** (☎ 522-1439; 13 Kedai Rakyat Jati; 🕒 8am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) provides information and books tours. Exiting the boat wharf in Bangar, turn left and you'll find the information centre in the cinnamon-coloured block of offices just before the road-bridge. Behind the information centre is the Youth Hostel, and across the street from the Youth Hostel is the Bangar Resthouse.

Sleeping & Eating

Bangar Resthouse (Rumah Persinggahan Keragaan Daerah Temburong; ☎ 522-1239; Jln Batang Duri; dm B\$15-30; 🚻) This is a government-run complex with hospitable staff and lots of six-bed rooms, each with attached bathroom, a small fridge and TV. Families or small groups might also consider renting one of the four-person chalets (B\$80 per night). From the boat wharf, walk to the bridge, turn right and head 200m to the Jalan Batang Duri turn-off; the resthouse is on the corner, signed 'Rumah Persinggahan'.

Youth Hostel (☎ 522-1694, 522-1718; dm B\$10) This basic hostel is part of a youth centre and sits in a fenced compound almost directly behind

the information centre. It offers bunk beds in clean fan-cooled rooms.

R.R. Max Cafe (1 Kedai Pekan Bangar; meals B\$2-6; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The first restaurant in the row of shops on your right as you walk from the boat jetty to the information centre, this simple *kedai kopi* (coffee shop) serves a surprisingly good plate of fried noodles – ask for *mee goreng basah* (fried noodles in sauce with prawns) – and good hot or iced tea to wash it down with.

Getting There & Away

Boats to Bangar (B\$6, 45 minutes, about once per hour from 7am to 1pm) operate from the jetty just east of the riverfront *satay* stalls, along Jln Residency. The last boat back to BSB leaves Bangar at 3.30pm.

PERADAYAN FOREST RESERVE

Fifteen kilometres southeast of Bangar and protected within the **Peradayan Forest Reserve** (admission free) are the peaks of **Bukit Patoi** and **Bukit Peradayan**, which can be reached along walking tracks (bring your own water and trail food). For those who can't be bothered with the trouble or the expense of Ulu Temburong National Park, this is a fine and easy alternative.

The 5km trail up to Bukit Patoi is a steep and sweaty one-hour climb that starts at the entrance to the park. The trail takes you through intact rainforest. At the 1150m point (distance, not altitude – thank God), you reach an interesting cliff, the base of which you skirt as you continue upward. At 1200m you reach a covered shelter. Then it's roughly 15 minutes or 300m to reach a viewpoint, which affords excellent views west over fairly intact forest. Keep an eye out for hornbills; even if you can't spot one, you will likely hear their distinctive calls. There is no water en route, so bring your own.

Most walkers descend back along the same trail, but it's possible to continue over the other side of the summit and around to Bukit Peradayan. The trail eventually rejoins the road some 12km from Bangar near the Labu Km 5 marker. Allow at least three hours for the walk from Bukit Patoi to Bukit Peradayan and back to the road. This trail is harder and indistinct in parts, some of which are impassable.

A park brochure with map is available from the tourist office in Bangar. There are picnic tables and a toilet block at the start of the trail.

ACROSS TEMBURONG BY LAND

Travelling overland from Bandar Seri Begawan (BSB) in Brunei to Kota Kinabalu or the reverse is extremely time-consuming and fiddly. The main problem with this route is that there is no public transport across the Temburong District of Brunei, and no official taxis here either, only private cars. Thus, we strongly recommend going by boat via Pulau Labuan (see p124). However, if you insist on the overland route, here's how you do it from BSB.

First, catch bus 42, 44 or 48 south from BSB to Kuala Lurah (B\$1, 30 minutes, last departure 5pm) on the Brunei-Sarawak border, or take a taxi for around B\$25. After crossing the border, you can take another bus (RM5.50) or taxi (RM20) to Limbang.

From Limbang, it's very difficult and expensive to continue by road to Bangar (Brunei). A taxi will take you to the border for RM15, but you'll have to find a private car on the other side to continue to Bangar. If you decide to bail on the route at this point, you can take a speedboat from Limbang to Pulau Labuan and continue by boat to Kota Kinabalu (p217).

Once at Bangar, there is no public transport to the eastern border with Sarawak. A private car from Bangar to the eastern Sarawak border costs around B\$30, if you can find one, and you'll have to find another private car or taxi on the other side of the border to continue to Lawas. You may be able to persuade the driver to take you all the way to Lawas, but this will cost around B\$80.

From Lawas, buses head to Kota Kinabalu in Sabah (RM20) at 7am and 1pm daily.

The Temburong tourist information centre in Bangar can arrange transport to the reserve. A private car (the only means of getting there), will cost about B\$10 each way. Hitchhiking is also an option. The road to the Peradayan Forest Reserve – and Lawas (Sarawak) – is across the bridge from Bangar wharf, on the east side of the river.

ULU TEMBURONG NATIONAL PARK

The 500-sq-km **Ulu Temburong National Park** (admission B\$5) is surrounded by the Batu Apoi Forest Reserve, which covers most of southern Temburong. One of the many pleasures of visiting this stronghold of primary rainforest is that the only access is by longboat. The park contains an excellent canopy walkway and has simple accommodation in the form of cabins within the park.

Unfortunately, it's difficult and expensive to visit the park on your own. Access to the park is limited by the availability of the longboats that make the journey to the park from the jetty at Batu Duri. These are usually being used by BSB-based tour operators (see p222). If you are on your own and haven't arranged a tour, the best thing to do is to arrive at the information office in Bangar before 9am and ask to join one of the day's tours.

The main attraction at the park is the 60m canopy walkway, which is reached by a 20-minute climb up 1226 steps. The view from the walkway is almost as breathtaking as the climb up and it's one of Brunei's highlights. After

climbing down, the standard route involves a short jungle trek and most visitors take a swim in the cool waters of the Sungai Temburong.

While most people visit the park as a day trip from BSB, it's possible to stay in the simple wooden cabins inside the park. To do so, contact the Bangar tourist information centre (p233) at least three days prior to your visit.

Getting There & Away

The park is accessed by a combination road-river trip from Bangar. First, it is necessary to drive about 20km south from Bangar to the hamlet of Batu Duri where you switch to a river boat for the wonderful river trip to park headquarters. En route to Batu Duri, about 13km south of Bangar, you pass a collection of relatively modern Iban longhouses in the village of Amo.

Unfortunately, there is no public transport down to Batu Duri. Even if you could make it down to Batu Duri under your own steam (say, by rental car or hitching), you'd find it impossible to hire a boat onward to the park: the few longboats that make the trip to park headquarters are controlled by BSB-based tour operators. Thus, for all intents and purposes, it is impossible to visit the park independently – you'll have to sign up for a tour in BSB (see p222). Your only alternative is to catch the first boat out to Bangar from BSB and inquire at the Bangar tourist information centre (p233) if you can join one of the tours scheduled to visit the park that day.

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