

MEDIA INFO

EXPLORING THE WILDS OF SABAH, BORNEO



After a hard trek into the jungle, reward yourself with a dip in the cool waters of Lipad Waterfall

A narrow laterite road carved through the Lahad Datu oil palm plantations serves as the only access route into its interiors. The two-hour journey, a bumpy ride that could displace the contents of a weaker stomach, seemed to go on forever and after passing the fifth oil palm plantation, one begins to seriously doubt the existence of a wildlife reserve promised by the glossy brochures.

Perhaps it is true that one must go through hell and high water before reaching paradise. Perseverance in getting through this rough passage is rewarded with a lush, green landscape of the tropical paradise known as Tabin Wildlife Reserve.

Tabin used to be a heavily-logged area in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, however, a core area of about 8,600 hectares of forest was left intact.

After the logging activities were halted, and the area was declared a wildlife reserve in 1984, it was left to naturally regenerate itself.

Today, Tabin, located in east Sabah, Malaysia, has grown to become a green pocket of primary and secondary lowland dipterocarp rainforest, its huge canopy sheltering some of the world's endangered animals. With an area of 120,500 hectares, it is a veritable oasis for man and beast alike.

Here, one can escape the noises of the concrete jungle for the natural din of the tropical variety. Yes, contrary to popular belief, the jungle isn't at all a quiet place. Day and night, Tabin rings out with a million sounds of its local residents. It echoes with a chaotic opera accompanied by the haunting calls of gibbons, the buzz of unseen insects, the chorus of singing birds, and more. In the early mornings, late afternoons, and especially after a particularly torrential shower, a musical performance is staged by the colourful winged residents of the reserve. There are some 220 species of birds here, including at least seven of Sabah's eight Hornbill species, blue-headed pittas, wren-babblers, Bornean Blue Flycatchers, Scarlet Sunbirds, and Everett's White-eyes.

Tabin's "Big Three" – Sabah's largest land mammals – are the Borneo Pygmy elephants, the Sumatran Rhinoceros and the *tembadau* (wild cattle). Orangutans, honey bears, the rare clouded leopard, sambar deer, wild boar, red leaf monkeys and macaques also call Tabin their home.

Besides the wildlife, Tabin is also unique for its mud volcanoes. The seven mud volcanoes found in Tabin (some as large as a football field) are important watering holes for the wildlife in the area due to its high mineral content. Wild animals often visit the mud volcanoes in the early mornings, leaving evidence of their stopovers in the form of paw prints on the soft grey mud.

Visitors come to Tabin primarily to catch a glimpse of its wildlife. The ultimate experience would be to see the Big Three in the wild, however, nothing is guaranteed. To increase your chances of seeing the wild animals of Tabin, it's best to be outdoors as much as possible, or engage in any of these activities:

Birdwatching:

With its wide variety of bird species, Tabin makes an excellent birdwatching spot due to its regenerated forest. Rarely-seen species such as the speckled piculet, chestnut-capped thrush, thick-bellied flowerpecker are found here. A one-hour guided tour around the grounds of Tabin Wildlife Resort early in the morning or late in the evening can be arranged with the tour desk. Just listening to the distinctive calls of the birds is already quite amazing. It's also possible to join a group of avid birdwatchers who would be more than happy to have you tag along with them. They're easily recognizable by the binoculars around their necks, a high-powered telescope in one hand and a bird guide book in the other.

Trekking to the Lipad waterfalls:

About 3km away from the base camp, through secondary regenerative forest and sections of ankle-deep mud, is the Lipad Waterfalls also known as Twin Waterfalls. During the rainy season, the high volume of water creates a second stream of water that plunges into the pool below. A swim in the pool is well worth the effort to get there. The trek to the waterfalls is fairly easy and takes about an



Fascinating mud swirls and patterns at the Lipad mud volcano

hour and a half. On this particular trek, the writer was fortunate enough to spot orangutan nests in the high branches of trees along the way.

Trekking to the Lipad mud volcano:

The Lipad mud volcano, situated in a clearing fringed by the forest about

2km away, is the nearest mud volcano to Tabin base camp. The ground here is grey, soft and free of vegetation. The volcano spews out fresh mud every day. Visitors can either trek along the laterite road all the way or jump on a pick-up truck to the forest entrance, from which the mud volcano is a mere 700m away. A visit in the early morning is advised as that is the time animals come to drink from the mud volcano. Visitors can wait at the nearby viewing tower to watch their comings and goings. It is believed that the mud has regenerative properties that are good for human skin. Some visitors take the opportunity to slather themselves with the mud for an instant facial before trekking back to camp.

Night safari:

Hop onto the back of a pick-up truck after dinner for a night safari tour. Guides use powerful torch lights to sweep the pitch-black night landscape in search of nocturnal animals such as civets, leopard cats, and owls. With their keen eyesight, the guides often spot these animals much faster than we do. The slow drive along the road is an opportunity to see the wild animals and also to enjoy the beautiful night sky studded with stars you hardly see in the city skyline. Bring



Rooms at Tabin are cosy and offer great views of the surrounding forest

a light sweater or jacket as it gets chilly in the evenings. In the unlikely event that you don't spot even one animal, the drive itself is a pleasant experience to enjoy the cool surroundings and the occasional calls of the wild.

Rhino Survey Expedition

Guests can help save the last population of rhinos by joining the in-situ project in Tabin to evaluate the Sumatran rhino in their natural habitat. Join the Rhino Protection Unit to collect survey data and take part in the conservation programme to save this highly endangered species. Tabin has a 7 days-6 nights programme that combines

adventurous rhino survey activities deep in the jungle with a relaxing retreat at Tabin Wildlife Resort.

Accommodation and dining:

Though the jungle is wild, the accommodation is nothing but. There are simple campsites, improved at Tabin by being elevated onto platforms three feet above the forest floor, called eco-tented platforms, with common bathrooms. For something more comfortable, Tabin Wildlife Resort offers timber chalets or lodges. The cabin lodges are located along the Lipad river and have private balconies from which you can appreciate the sights and sounds of the jungle. The timber chalets are built along the forested hill and offer beautiful views of the jungle as well as much privacy. All rooms are spacious, air-conditioned and come with hot shower facilities.

The Lipad Café can easily accommodate about 60 people at one time and serves both local and western cuisine. The resident chef is a shy young man who can whip up a delicious meal even with the simplest of ingredients!

What to pack:

Due to the occasional showers in the rainforest, the ground can get a bit muddy. To ensure a pleasant experience in the jungle, do take along suitable shoes for trekking along muddy routes (waterproof shoes such as the cheap rubber ones known locally as Jungle Adidas are highly recommended), leech socks (Tabin's own brand of leech socks not only protects but also makes a great memento), and a light poncho in case it rains.

General advice:

Tabin Wildlife Reserve is not a zoo and neither is it a game park. Sightings of animals are not guaranteed as they depend upon several factors such as moonlight, weather, temperature and a good dose of luck! However, according to

the resort operator, there has been a higher frequency of elephant sightings during the months of September, October and November.

How to get there:

Sabah is a Malaysian state in the northern part of the island of Borneo. Its state capital is Kota Kinabalu, where the Kota Kinabalu International Airport is located. As the main gateway into Sabah and the island of Borneo, the Kota Kinabalu International Airport has become the second busiest airport after Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Tabin Wildlife Reserve is located near Lahad Datu, Sabah, about seven hours' drive from Kota Kinabalu. There are four daily flights from Kota Kinabalu to Lahad Datu served by MASWings. Guests are recommended to take the MH3010 flight from Kota Kinabalu departing at 7 am and arriving Lahad Datu at 7:55 am. From Lahad Datu, guests are advised to take flight MH3023 at 5:25 pm, arriving Kota Kinabalu at 6:20 pm. Transfers to and from the Lahad Datu airport, which is a 1 hour and 15 minute drive, can be arranged by Tabin Wildlife Resort.

For more information, log on to www.tabinwildlife.com.my or email enquiry@tabinwildlife.com.my. For telephone enquiries, contact the head office at 60 88 267 266.

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