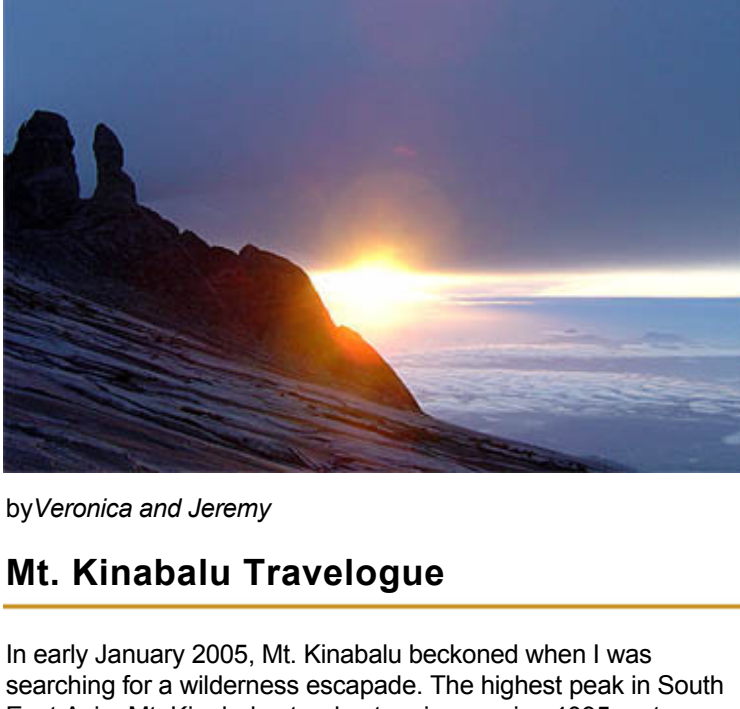


Green World

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by [Veronica and Jeremy](#)

Mt. Kinabalu Travelogue

In early January 2005, Mt. Kinabalu beckoned when I was searching for a wilderness escapade. The highest peak in South East Asia, Mt. Kinabalu stands at an impressive 4095 meter high in the [Sabah](#) state of Malaysia. After a bit of research and the unwillingness to pay extra for a tour package, we booked flights from Air Asia's website and secured lodgings at the Mt. Kinabalu Park through [Sutera Sanctuary Lodges](#). It's necessary to ensure that you've a confirmed booking at the Laban Rata rest house before proceeding with other arrangements since the park regulation requires that you stay at Laban Rata overnight before ascending the peak the following morning. And, there are limited beds available!

On the departure date, we arrived at KLIA airport about an hour before departure time. The lines were rather long and we were wondering how they would manage to check in everyone in 45 minutes. The departure time was delayed an hour! Welcome to no-frill airline! For RM169 roundtrip, we couldn't really complain though. To save cost, they practice cutting and combining multiple flights.

My first sight of KK was the tiny little terminal 2. The taxi counter offers ticket for RM13.60 to the city. We checked in at the relatively new backpacker hostel, Borneo Backpacker Inn on Gaya Street for RM60/night. The room, with four beds (two bunk beds) was clean and simple. My only complaint was the lack of air conditioning! Doubt if I'll ever stay in one again, unless it's totally unavoidable!

The friendly staff at the reception gave some advice on how to get to Mt. Kinabalu Park and where to go for dinner. He even volunteered to make the arrangement for us if we wanted to. So far, everyone that we met seemed so lay back and polite. Definitely not the same breed as the impatient KL folks.

Since the taxis don't use the meter, it's advisable to check with the locals on the going rate before setting out. Armed with the KK map, we set off on foot and walked to the pier area. None of the restaurants looked remotely interesting. So, we back tracked to somewhere near the hostel again and ended up in a taxi, still in search of the elusive good and cheap seafood. RM5 got us to the "halah" restaurant next to the Promenade hotel. Food was fantastic and fresh, but definitely wasn't that cheap.

The gentle sea breeze and the light traffic (compared to KL) prompted us to take a leisurely walk along the beach front, back to the hostel. By the time we reached the hostel and studied the map of KK, we realized we almost walked from one end of KK to the other. Not bad for one night out!

Next morning, we packed up after breakfast at a coffee shop downstairs and walked to the long distance bus stop. There were plenty of taxis with going rate of RM60 to Mt. Kinabalu. Alex, our Dusun driver proudly showed us to his new taxi and we began the 2 hours journey to the park.

About half way through, we stopped for lunch at the Kiau Nabalu restaurant at Kota Belud district and had my first Sapau tauhu noodle. Situated at a cliff side, surrounded by greeneries, the temperature was already pleasantly cooler.

Day One at Kinabalu Park:

Reached the park at 2:30 p.m. and checked in at the park HQ. Arrangement for the following morning trek up the mountain was made next door. Right outside the HQ, there was a splendid view of the top of the Mt. Kinabalu. Unfortunately, it was quite covered by cloud. According to the ranger, cloud starts rolling in around 11 a.m. and that was why all climbers must descend the peak by 10 plus.

We stayed overnight at the lovely and cozy two bedroom cabin that costs RM230/nite. It even has a kitchen and a real fire place, and of course the fantastic view of Mt. Kinabalu from the floor length glass window.

While waiting for the evening's pre ascent briefing, we wondered around the base of the park. The ranger gave a preparatory talk on what to expect and what to bring. Two European ladies joined our group to share the cost of the mandatory trekking guide.

Menu at the two park restaurants weren't very interesting and of course on the pricey side. So we trudged out of the park and across the road for dinner at another roadside restaurant that was conveniently situated to serve the park visitors. The restaurant also has a little convenience store that carries gloves, beanies and miscellaneous food stuff for those who needs any last minute shopping

Day Two:

Met up with the two ladies at 8 a.m. and checked in our big backpacks at the HQ. Only needed to carry enough for the over night trip and the ascend to the peak in the wee hour of the morning. After introducing the assigned guide for the trip, we had breakfast again at the roadside restaurant before meeting up for the van ride to the Mesilau trailhead.

As we got closer to the railhead, at last, reaching the top of the Mt. Kinabalu didn't look too impossible. At the trailhead, we purchased a RM5 walking stick since we decided not to bring any onto the flight. Nothing fancy, but there were no splinters and they worked.

The cool temperature made the hike quite pleasant. Most parts of the trail were gradual but some steps were spaced quite far apart, making it rather tiring to climb. There were rest huts and flushing toilets throughout the trails and some even provided drinkable rain water. We passed a small water fall, ascended and later descended again before reaching the ridge top, my favorite part of the entire hike. The place looked magical, with the soft mist and colorful stunted plants. Almost felt like I was walking in the cloud!

Sound of hammering and sawing reached us before we reached the junction where the Mesilau trail met up with the main Timpohon trail. Construction of another half way rest house was on the way. Thank god, only another two km to the Laban Rata resthouse. But soon, we found out that the last two km wasn't that gradual at all as claimed! Some parts were in fact darn steep! Luckily there were birds and pitcher plants to keep us occupied and a guide from another group was bored enough to be our curator.

The last two hundred meters to Laban Rata seemed to take forever! When we finally made it there, the trail was blocked by a group of Koreans busily posing for pictures. A bunch of people were playing volleyball at the helipad. Wonder who will go look for the ball if it flies over the cliff???

Laban Rata, sitting at 3,873 meters above sea level, was an almost v-shaped wooden hostel. At that high, we were already above the tropical cloud level. Visitors have the choice of heated or unheated beds. Thank God I'm a creature of comfort and choose the heated room. Otherwise we'd be spending the freezing cold night in one of the container looking building.

Since there were only three of us, we had to share the room with an Aussie guy and one of the European lady (no choice was given). Dinner was served very early and we were off to bed at 8p.m. And.....ahhhhhh, there was no hot water! They claimed the heater broken and that they were actually on water rationing since there was no rain for over a month even though January is supposed to be the wet season.

Day Three:

Sleep was quite elusive even though we were real tired. And before we knew it, someone was banging on the door at 2 am. With so many people walking back and forth the restroom, there was no way anyone will be able to sleep. Had a quick breakfast and met up with our guide at 3 am to begin the peak ascend.

The full moon was still clearly seen at that hour so we didn't really need the torch light. We had to move in a single file and in a snail pace. Some of the inconsiderate hikers will just rest in the middle of trail even though there were people waiting right behind! Someone should have lectured them on trail etiquettes.

From the back of the line, I could see a thread of flash lights slowly going up the mountain. Once we passed the vegetation level, it was mostly granite terrains. Cable rope was chained onto the granite surface for handholds. The terrain wasn't that steep though and I didn't have to rely on the rope since my "Vibram" sole provided great traction.

The wind was howling when we reached the Sayat Sayat hut area. The rangers registered everyone that passed through before we could go up the peak. It was freezing cold at the top! People were looking for places to hide from the wind while waiting for the sunrise that wasn't due out for another 45 minutes! There were just way too many people at the peak and I decided to descend after 10 minutes. Managed to catch some quite decent shots of sunrise on the way down. At Sayat Sayat, the ranger checked my name again, to ensure the correct headcount going back down.

Descending to Laban Rata was a breeze since most of the hikers were still at the top. Reached the hostel at 7:50 a.m., took a nap and had lunch at 10 a.m. before descending to Timpohon trail. We were so thankful that we descended to the Mesilau trail on our way up as it was far more scenic and wasn't as steep. Definitely worth the extra 2km.

When we finally reached the trailhead, a bus was waiting to transport us back to the park hq. As we weren't in a hurry and there were no taxi around, we decided to try the public bus service outside the park. The bus that was supposed to arrive in less than an hour never showed up! We ended up getting the ranger to arrange a hired van for RM140. Two other European ladies who were heading the same way joined us and shared the cost. What a complete waste of time. Should have arranged for the round trip transport with the taxi driver!

Our lodging for the last night at Sabah, Berjaya Hotel, was ok but definitely wasn't as good. Actually, it was a bit old. From there, we walked (painfully) great. Our whole body started to ache) to the recommended area of Sedco Square, searching for more good food.

The following morning, after a not so memorable breakfast at the hotel, we browsed around the Baramunsing mall before taking a cab ride to the Tanjung Aru beachfront. There were lots of restaurants/stalls and even bars and outdoor stage for live performance in the evening. It was such a pleasant place that we wished we knew about it earlier! From there, we took a stroll to the airport and was almost late for the flight! The airport wasn't as close as we were led to believe. Luckily some nice souls gave us a ride in their little Kancil.

And as usual, the Air Asia flight was late again and we didn't reach home till midnight. And hence, the guys came up with a new tag line for Air Asia, "Now everyone can fly, late".

If you would like to share some experiences and photos, please feel free to send them to us at [adventure-x-change](mailto:xcew@adventure-x-change.com). Mail us at xcew@adventure-x-change.com

Photo View



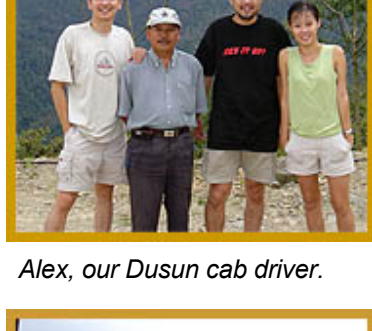
Kota Kinabalu Terminal 2.



Yummy food at Ocean Seafood Village.



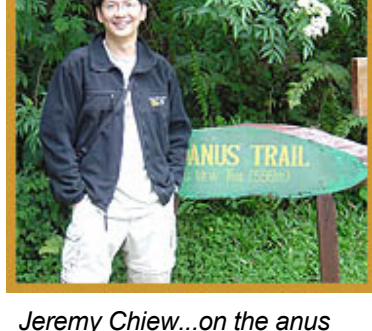
The drive to Kinabalu Park.



Alex, our Dusun cab driver.



The view from our cabin



Jeremy Chiew...on the anus trail?



The restaurant at the Kinabalu Park Center.



The morning view of Mt. Kinabalu from Park HQ.



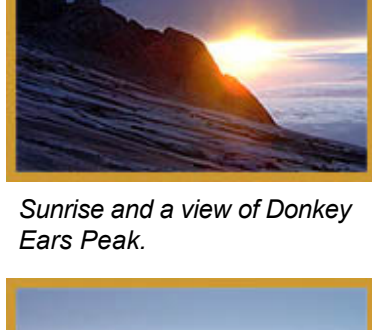
Koreans, limbering up before the hike up the mountain.



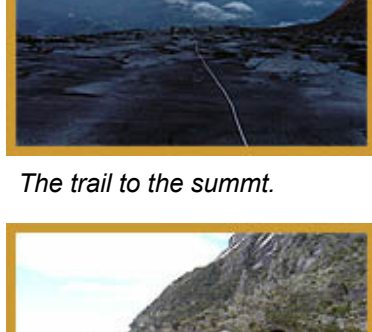
On the Mersilau Trail.



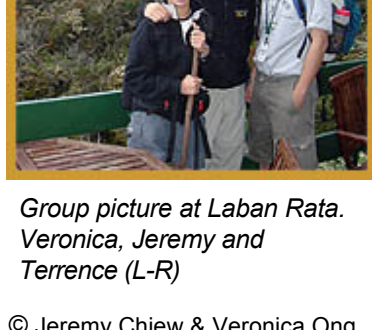
The way to the Laban Rata Resthouse, 3272.7m.



Sunrise and a view of Donkey Ears Peak.



The trail to the summit.



Group picture at Laban Rata. Veronica, Jeremy and Terrence (L-R)

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Photo Album

For more photos from this trip at the photo album, [Click this link here.](#)

Resources

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PDF trail map by Sabah Tourism Board
Kinabalu05_map.pdf (1470 KB)

Trail map by SabahTravelGuide
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