

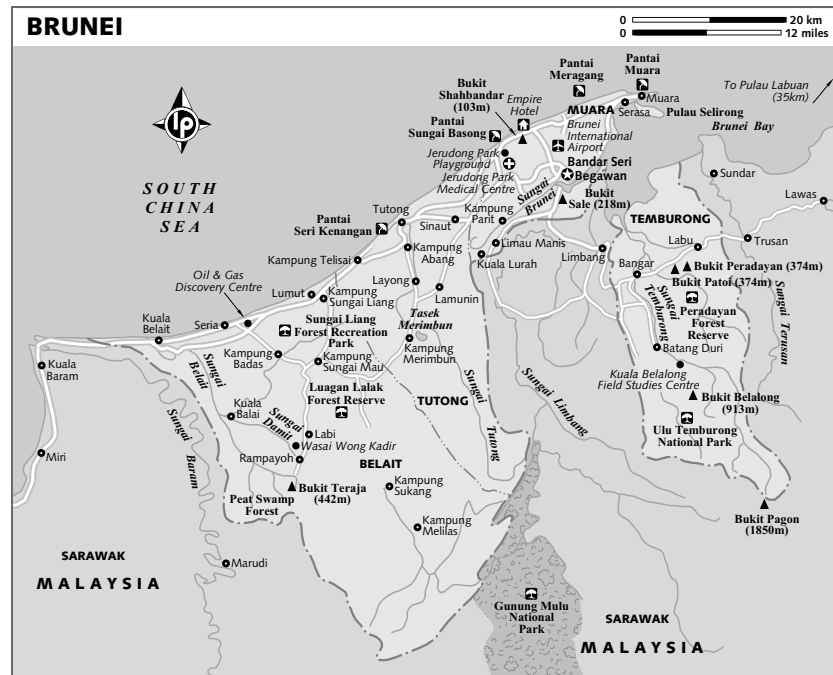
# Brunei



Two things make Brunei famous: money and oil. If it wasn't for the vast riches pumped out in hydrocarbons every year, it's doubtful whether this tiny nation would still be independent; as it is, it remains an engaging anachronism, an absolute monarchy under Islamic law, maintaining its mild-mannered conservatism in the face of a changing world. Watching an entire country slowly come to terms with itself is a fascinating experience, and the ongoing saga of one sultan and his people is like a soap opera in itself.

For many visitors Brunei is just a convenient stop and an extra stamp in the passport, but for centuries this was the hub of the entire region, controlling the whole of Borneo and territory as far away as the Philippines. The country's culture and heritage are still deeply bound up in those proud times, and exploring its history is the best way to understand the unique national character.

None of Brunei's sights are more than a couple of hours from the capital, but a car is essential to reach most of them. There are some beaches and forest reserves that make pleasant day trips, and with a little effort you can take river trips, climb some scenic hills, dip under secluded waterfalls, visit a traditional longhouse or immerse yourself in the pristine rainforest of Temburong. Money and oil may not buy you happiness but, as Brunei proves, if used wisely they may just produce something special.



## 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 Bolkiah, 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 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

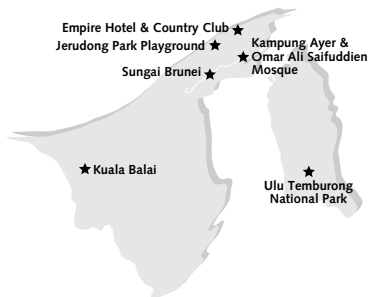
ceded to Sarawak in 1890, dividing the crippled sultanate into two parts.

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.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Speeding down the Sungai Brunei on a water taxi to explore the stilt villages of **Kampung Ayer** (p595)
- Trekking through Brunei's pristine tropical rainforest in **Ulu Temburong National Park** (p608)
- Taking tea at the impossibly lavish **Empire Hotel & Country Club** (p603)
- Admiring the sunset flaring over the golden dome of the **Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque** (p595)
- Wandering agawp round the deserted fantasy land of the **Jerudong Park Playground** (p603)
- Pounding sago, thatching palm leaves and visiting skulls at **Kuala Balai** (p606)



■ POPULATION: 379,400

■ AREA: 5765 SQ KM

Saifuddin abdicated in 1967, leaving the throne to his popular son and heir, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. 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 Sandhurst Royal Military Academy, 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 insitutionalised 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 (see p604). 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 grow up to 45 members in the future, with 15 of them elected by the public. In another significant step, former radical leader Muhamad 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.

### A RIGHT ROYAL FAMILY

The Sultan of Brunei may no longer be the richest man in the world, but he does still have one claim to fame: he is the present-day head of the world's longest-running hereditary monarchy.

The unbroken royal line goes right back to Sang Aji Brunei in the 14th century, and contains many revered names, such as Sharif Ali, a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed; the legendary Sultan Bolkiah, who presided over Brunei's 15th-century Golden Age; and Omar Ali Saifuddin III, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah's father.

Of course, like all families, the House of Brunei has its less favoured relatives, and not all of the current sultan's 28 predecessors led such distinguished lives. Few people will remember sultan number 11, for instance, one Abdul Jalil Jabbar, who died in 1660 before he had even been crowned. Jabbar's successor, Haji Muhammed Ali, might even have preferred obscurity: his execution in place of his errant son earned him the posthumous nickname Marhum Tumbang Dirumput, 'Revered Late Sultan Who Met His End on the Grass'.

Of all the royal renegades, though, the prize has to go to the 22nd sultan, Muhammed Alam, who enjoyed the kind of reputation usually reserved for Mongolian warlords. Dubbing himself the 'King of Fire', rumours abounded that the despotic Alam ate children's livers to stay young, and even his own sister plotted to assassinate him. Finally realising his unpopularity, Alam surrendered to his siblings and, given a choice of execution, opted to be publicly garrotted. With family like that, it's a wonder the dynasty has made it so far!

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.

### National Parks & Reserves

Brunei has one major national park and several forest reserves.

**Luagan Lalak Forest Reserve** (p605; 2.7 sq km) A small wetland zone 25km inland, south of Seria.

**Merimbun Heritage Park** (p605; 1.2 sq km) Centred on Brunei's largest lake, this park, 27km inland south of Tutong, has trails and nature observation posts.

**Peradayan Forest Reserve** (p608; 10.7 sq km) A section of the Peradayan Forest Reserve in Brunei's Temburong district; treks through the jungle lead to the summits of Bukit Patoi (310m) and Bukit Peradayan (410m).

**Ulu Temburong National Park** (p608; 500 sq km) An untouched expanse of forest, with trails and a canopy walk; accessible by boat only.

### BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

pop 50,000

If you're expecting some kind of lavish mini-Dubai, think again – Brunei may fancy itself as an oil state, but there's no nouveau-riche ostentation here, and the country's capital is as polite and unassuming as its people, wearing its wealth almost prosaically in places. The most interesting buildings in the quiet centre, eg the main mosque and the bigger shopping malls, certainly reflect the expenditure put into them, but without much sense of flashiness, and on the whole there's little to distinguish BSB, as it's usually known, from any medium-sized city in Malaysia. You'll have to head to the suburbs to start to see the stupendous riches at play here.

For most visitors, BSB forms the entirety of their experience of Brunei, and while there's plenty to keep you occupied for a

couple of days, the city itself is unlikely to inspire any great devotion. However, if you take the time to relax and talk to the locals, you may find you start to understand what makes this modest metropolis tick.

### 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. In the city centre you'll find most hotels and places to eat, banks, the bus station, airline offices and shops. 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 Hassanal Bolkiah Complex. Usually called the Yayasan Complex, this huge shopping mall leads to Jln MacArthur, across which are waterfront cafés and the customs wharf for boats to Sabah and Sarawak.

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.

### Information

#### BOOKSHOPS

**Paul & Elizabeth Book Services** (☎ 222 0958; Lot 2.14-2.19 Yayasan Complex; ☎ 10am-10pm; 📖) Stocks the largest range of books and magazines, including a repository of ancient LP guides!

**Wordzone Bookshop** (☎ 223 2764; Basement, Yayasan Complex; ☎ 9.30am-10pm) Has a small range of periodicals and newspapers.

#### EMERGENCY

**Ambulance** (☎ 991, 222 2366)

**Fire** (☎ 995, 238 0402)

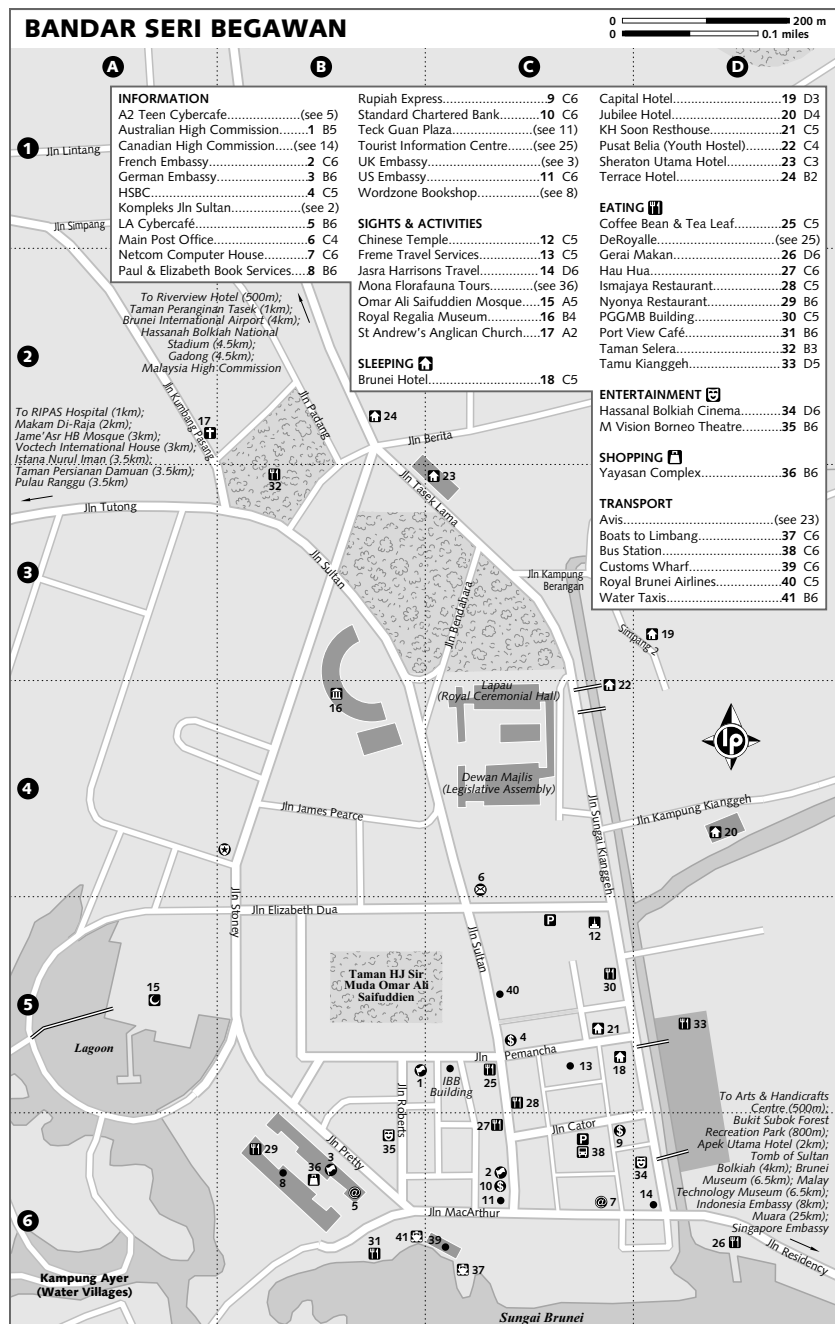
**Police** (☎ 993, 222 2333)

#### INTERNET ACCESS

**A2 Teen Cybercafé** (1st fl, Yayasan Complex; per hr B\$1; ☎ 9am-10pm) Noisy gamers' place.

**Clique Internet** (☎ 242 2989; The Mall, Gadong; per hr B\$2; ☎ 10am-10pm)

**LA Cybercafé** (☎ 222 5303; 2nd fl, Yayasan Complex; per hr 80c; ☎ 9am-9.30pm)



**Netcom Computer House** (☎ 223 1563; Jln MacArthur; per hr 50c-B\$1; ☎ 1pm-11.30pm)

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**Jerudong Park Medical Centre** (☎ 261 1433; www.jpmmc.com.bn; Jerudong Park B63122)

**RIPAS Hospital** (☎ 224 2424; Jln Tutong)

## MONEY

All banks in BSB charge a fee to cash travellers cheques and to carry out credit-card advances. ATMs are common in the city centre. There's an ATM and a moneychanger at the airport.

**HSBC** (☎ 224 2305; Jln Sultan)

**Rupiah Express** (☎ 222 1961; Britannia House, 1 Jln Cator; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8am-3.30pm Sun) Currency exchange and regional money transfers.

**Standard Chartered Bank** (☎ 224 2386; Jln Sultan)

## POST

**Main post office** (Cnr Jln Sultan & Jln Elizabeth Dua)

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist information centre** (☎ 222 3734; wildlifa dventure@hotmail.com; Post Office Bldg, cnr Jln Sultan & Jln Elizabeth Dua; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8-11am & 2-5pm Fri) The private centre represents a number of different travel and tour companies, and you can book a variety of excursions here. These range in price from B\$39 per person for a three-hour city tour to B\$180 for an overnight rainforest camping trip. Despite the commercial setup staff are genuinely helpful and there are all kinds of (free) brochures and maps available. They can also supply the *Explore Brunei* guide, published by the government, which contains useful information for visitors, including bus routes and ferry timetables.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**www.tourismbrunei.com** For more information on Brunei visit this official website.

## Sights

### KAMPUNG AYER

Housing an estimated 30,000 people, Kampong Ayer is made up of 28 water villages built on either side of Sungai Brunei – exploring it is an interesting and often eye-opening experience. A maze of wooden plankwalks connects brightly painted shacks to shops, villages to schools, clinics to workshops, and floating petrol stations to fire houses on stilts. A traditional way of life continues in these prefab huts, even if many now have modern plumbing, electricity and colour TVs.

Some plankwalks head out from the shore into the nearest water villages, but these areas are often the least favoured and most rundown, inhabited mainly by low-income immigrant workers who need to be able to walk into work every day. Further out, only accessible by water taxi, are the more traditional dwellings, which conceal all sorts of shops and businesses. You might stumble across a handicraft shop selling silverwork, brass, woven cloth and baskets. If not, ask a boat operator to take you to one.

Water taxis shuttle people back and forth between early morning and late evening, and congregate like schools of fish at the area next to the customs wharf. They also stop at various piers along the riverside and villages. Wave frantically and they'll come by and pick you up. They cost about B\$1 from BSB, but if you're coming from further up or down the river the cost is about B\$2.

A **boat tour** in the early morning or evening is highly recommended and, when combined with a stopover near the sultan's palace (p604), should take about an hour. Any water taxi can take you (look out for boatmen making a circular finger-waving motion when they see you), and the standard rate is around B\$10 per hour, though bargaining is expected.

### OMAR ALI SAIFUDDIEN MOSQUE

Occupying a good proportion of BSB's compact centre, the **Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque** (☎ 222 2623; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon, 1-3.30pm, 4.30-5.30pm Sat-Wed, 4.30-5pm Fri, closed to non-Muslims Thu) was commissioned by and named after Brunei's 28th sultan, the father of the present monarch. It's easily the most impressive building in this part of town, especially when the setting sun flares in a red haze behind its golden domes and the well-placed night lighting kicks in.

This grand mosque was built in 1958 and stands next to Sungai Kedayan in its own artificial lagoon. The 44m minaret makes it the tallest building in central BSB, and woe betide anyone who tries to outdo it – apparently the Islamic Bank of Brunei building nearby originally exceeded this height, and consequently had to have its top storey removed by order of the sultan. 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.

### BRUNEI MUSEUM

Situated 6.5km east of the centre, overlooking the Sungai Brunei, the **Brunei Museum** (☎ 222 6495; Kota Batu; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-5pm Fri) is BSB's main cultural complex. Combined with a visit to the Malay Technology Museum (right), it's definitely worth the short trip from town.

The **Islamic Arts gallery** on the ground floor is arguably the highlight of the museum, displaying a rich collection of ceramics, jewellery, silverwork and weaponry from across the Islamic world. The illuminated Quran is superb, and there are plenty of unexpected treasures such as ornamented padlocks. There's certainly nothing to rival it in Southeast Asia; although if you've ever visited the Middle East you may be less impressed.

Next door, the **Oil and Gas gallery** is hardly enthralling, but offers worthwhile insights into the source of Brunei's modern wealth. There are interesting models of different oil rigs and the oil extraction process.

Upstairs, the museum has displays of artefacts representing the cultural heritage of Brunei from prehistory up until 1929, including musical instruments, baskets and brassware, and a large collection of Chinese ceramics. The accompanying text outlines the eventful history of the royal line, with quite a few intriguing factoids on lesser-known rulers (see boxed text, p592). A natural history section features exhibits

of mounted mammals, birds and insects, while the semipermanent Sunken Treasures exhibit uses a more modern interactive approach to examine the region's shipwrecks and their cargoes.

Purple buses 11 and 39 pass the museum (B\$1); passing cars may give you a lift but many will ask for money. Otherwise, it's a bit of a walk from town. After visiting the museum, you can walk down the steep bank to the Malay Technology Museum.

### MALAY TECHNOLOGY MUSEUM

Built on the edge of the river below the Brunei Museum, the **Malay Technology Museum** (☎ 224 4545; admission free; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Sat-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-4.30pm Fri) has three galleries of model reconstructions depicting traditional lifestyles and artisans. It can be a little difficult to take the life-sized mannequins seriously, and some of the English captions are hilariously bad, but the recreated buildings and homesteads are interesting if you don't have a chance to see the real thing.

Gallery 1 features water villages and includes reconstructions of how *kampung* (village) 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.

### ROYAL REGALIA MUSEUM

If you want a glimpse of how the other 0.1% lives, the **Royal Regalia Museum** (☎ 223 8358; Jln Sultan; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Sat-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-5pm Fri) showcases some of the glittering riches that come with the coveted post of 'world's richest monarch'. Half museum, half hagiography, the collection includes numerous photographs of His Majesty the sultan and other members of the royal family. However, it's the panoply of priceless artefacts that grab the attention, from coronation furniture and jewelled costumes to a wide selection of stupendously pointless gifts from fellow heads of state and other dignitaries (we're guessing the big gold platters got better thank-you notes than Colin Powell's pitiful General Grant figurine). It doesn't take long to get regalia fatigue, but the huge dragon carriage in the main atrium is a sight and a half.

Visitors must remove their shoes before entering. Guides are available to talk you through everything, though the sultan might not appreciate being referred to as 'chubby' in his younger days!

### ARTS & HANDICRAFTS CENTRE

Built to help develop local craftwork, the **Arts & Handicrafts Centre** (☎ 224 0676; Jln Kota Batu; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Sat-Thu, 8.30-11.30am & 2-4.30pm Fri) is on the waterfront towards the Brunei Museum, visible from town and within easy walking distance. While the concept of such a centre is a marvelous idea, it's a little disappointing if you're interested in traditional crafts; only new silverwork and weaving produced by the students are available and some items are very expensive. A traditional Muslim cap costs about B\$15, fabrics start at B\$50, and silverwork and woodwork can run to thousands of Brunei dollars for intricate pieces. It's more interesting to visit the workshops, though there's not always a lot of activity. If you're really serious about investing some cash, you can pick up a *Directory of Handicraft Entrepreneurs* here. The centre also has a shop outlet in BSB airport.

### PARKS

Just past the Arts & Handicrafts Centre, the **Bukit Subok Forest Recreation Park** is a wasteland rehabilitation project run by the Forestry Department, occupying a small hillside expanse of pines and secondary forest with an info hut, several viewing decks and an 'environmentally friendly' walkway running through it. There are good views from the top of the hill, and you can also visit the gabled **Twelve Roofs House** (Bumbungan Dua Belas; admission free; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am-11.30 & 2.30-4.30pm Fri), the former residence of the British High Commissioners, which 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 remem-

ber 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 Jln 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.

### OTHER SIGHTS

About halfway between downtown BSB and the Istana Nurul Iman (p604) is the **Makam Di-Raja** (Royal Mausoleum), overlooking the river. This is the burial place of the last four sultans; other members of the royal family are buried in the grounds.

On the other side of town, on the way to the Brunei Museum, is the **Tomb of Sultan Bolkiah**, the beloved fifth sultan of Brunei, who lived from 1473 to 1521, during a period when Brunei was the dominant power in the region. The small tomb and garden are in the historic setting of Kota Batu and the view across the river is nice, but unless you're particularly devoted to the man himself it's a very minor attraction.

There's also a brightly painted **Chinese temple** (Jln Elizabeth Dua & Jln Sungai Kianggeh) – it's a busy place on Saturday evenings, and Chinese opera is sometimes staged here. Also of interest is the charming little blue-painted **St Andrew's Anglican Church** (Jln Haji Basir), a wooden building that has services in various languages, including Iban.

### Activities

The **Hassanal Bolkiah National Stadium** (☎ 238 0700; Jln Berakas; ☎ 8am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm) is of Olympic proportions and includes a tennis centre, track-and-field complex, squash courts and swimming pool. It's open to the public and prices to use it are reasonable. The pool is often nearly deserted. The stadium is 5km north of the city; to get there, take purple buses 1 or 34.

Brunei has three **golf courses** close to BSB. Green fees range from B\$120 to B\$150 on weekdays.

**Mentiri Golf Club** (☎ 279 1021; Jln Pengkalan Si Baba near) International standard golf course northeast of BSB on the shore near the mouth of Sungai Brunei.

**Empire Golf & Country Club** (☎ 241 7815; www.empire.com.bn) Waterfront golf course designed by Jack Nicklaus, in the grounds of the luxurious Empire Hotel.

**Royal Brunei Recreation Club** (☎ 234 3724; Lebuhraya Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah) Driving range near the airport north of BSB city centre.

Some tour operators run **dive trips** to a few spots in the area, but you're better off saving your money for the islands off Semiporna in Sabah.

## Tours

In the city centre there's a host of travel agencies where you can book flights and local tours; many operate out of the tourist information centre as well as their own offices. The larger the group, the cheaper the rates, and a minimum of two people usually applies. River safaris and half-day tours of BSB start at B\$30 per person, and a range of trips into the countryside cost from B\$50 to B\$100 per day. Agents also offer evening trips to Jerudong Park Playground, the sultan's palace and other outlying attractions, though you may also find locals willing to take you for a much cheaper price.

If you're taking advantage of the 72-hour Brunei transit visa (see p611), **Royal Brunei Airlines** (☎ 221 2222; www.bruneiair.com) offers 1½- to four-hour excursions specifically aimed at stopover visitors, starting at B\$25 for a coach seat or B\$100 for a private tour.

Major tour operators in the city include the following.

**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.

**Jasra Harrison's Travel** (☎ 224 2911; jasratvl@brunei.bn; cnr Jln MacArthur & Jln Sungai Kianggeh) A good general travel agency, and the sales agent for British Airways and Qantas; it also organises trips to Ulu Temburong.

**Mona Florafauna Tours** (☎ 222 30761; mft@brunei.bn; Block A, Yayasan Complex) Specialises in outdoor and wildlife tours around Brunei.

**Sunshine Borneo Tours & Travel** (☎ 244 6509; www.exploreborneo.com; No 2, Simpang 146, Jln Kiarong) Runs tours of the city and further afield in Brunei and the rest of Borneo.

## Festivals & Events

**National Day** (23 February) Parades and processions in downtown BSB to celebrate Brunei's independence. Rehearsals begin weeks in advance.

**Royal Brunei Armed Forces Day** (31 May) Parades and dramatic military displays in central BSB and other districts.

**Sultan's Birthday** (15 July) A lively event marked by fireworks, processions and yet more parades in downtown BSB and around Brunei.

**Hari Raya Aidilfitri** (Variable timing, based on Islamic calendar) Probably the best time to visit Brunei, when feasting and celebration mark the end of Ramadan, and the sultan's palace is open to visitors.

## Sleeping BUDGET

Budget prices in Brunei are more like mid-range options in the rest of Malaysia, and there's only one truly 'cheap' option in town.

**Pusat Belia** (Youth Hostel; ☎ 222 2900, 8765515; Jln Sungai Kianggeh; dm B\$10; ☎ ☎) No backpacker comforts here: this is the kind of classic youth hostel that should remind you of school trips or summer camps, and still caters for exactly that kind of local clientele. The single-sex four-bed bunk rooms are basic but adequate, with rather flaky shared bathrooms; reception is only sporadically staffed, but hang around and someone should find you. And no, that icon's not a misprint – the youth centre really does have its own swimming pool (B\$1, open 9am to 7pm).

**Apek Utama Hotel** (☎ 222 0808; Simpang 229, Jln Kota Batu; r B\$30; ☎) If you'd rather have value, value, value than location, location, location, consider the Apek, widely tipped by travellers as the best budget deal in BSB. Friendly staff, bright, cosy rooms and a TV lounge give it good guesthouse appeal not found elsewhere. The hotel's about 2km east from town along Jln Residency, on the way to the Brunei Museum; purple bus 39 goes right by. Once you're settled, the best way to get back and forth to town is by water taxi.

**KH Soon Resthouse** (☎ 222 2052; http://khsoon-resthouse.tripod.com; 140 Jln Pemancha; s/d B\$35/39, with shared bathroom B\$30/35; ☎) It's quite a step up in price from the hostel to this simple Chinese-run place, but you don't get a whole lot for your extra 20 bucks apart from more space, better service and plenty of local information. Still, it's the only other budget option anywhere near the centre, and the bus station's almost right opposite.

**Voctech International House** (Seameo Voctech; ☎ 244 7992; www.voctech.org.bn; Jln Pasar Baharu Gadong; s/d B\$40/50; ☎ ☎) This educational centre runs conferences and hosts overseas groups, but also welcomes leisure travellers. The staff are helpful, each room has a TV and IDD phone, and there's an on-site cafeteria. Voctech is 4km from the centre, right by the Gadong shopping district and accessible by bus 22.

**Capital Hotel** (☎ 222 3561; 7 Simpang 2; r B\$50; ☎) Tucked away behind the youth hostel near the main Chinese community area, the Capital has a lovely trellised patio area out front but sadly not so much to recommend it inside. That said, you do get TV, phone and hi-fi with the dated décor, and if you want a kitchenette it's not a bad choice.

## MIDRANGE

If you're watching the pennies, the jump from budget to midrange accommodation can seem pretty brutal, though at least all rooms have air-con, TV, hot water and IDD phones.

**Terrace Hotel** (☎ 224 3554; www.terracebrunei.com; Jln Tasek Lama; r B\$60-80; ☎ ☎ ☎) A real bargain in Brunei terms: the influence of the Sheraton next door must have rubbed off, as this smart tourist hotel is efficient and immaculate even compared to its rivals at this price point. Marble bathrooms, fridges, wireless internet, a fitness centre, a snooker hall and a restaurant all conspire to upstage the refreshing pool.

**Jubilee Hotel** (☎ 222 8070; www.jubileehotelbrunei.com; Jln Kampung Kianggeh; r B\$70-154; ☎ ☎) For a rectangular block the seven-storey Jubilee Plaza seems to have some remarkably irregular rooms, but the in-house supermarket and Thai restaurant should distract from any geometric quirks. Apparently it's often full with Ministry of Health workers waiting for their government houses to be built! Breakfast and airport transfers are included.

**Traders Inn** (☎ 244 2828; tradersinn@brunei.bn; Lot 11620, Jln Gadong, Gadong-Beribi; r B\$80-120; ☎ ☎) If you want to stay out of the centre, this small business hotel is usefully located within easy reach of the Gadong shops; it has its own coffee lounge.

**Riverview Hotel** (☎ 223 8238; riverview@brunei.bn; Km 1, Jln Gadong; r B\$88-155, ste B\$170-270; ☎ ☎) Also out towards Gadong and the airport, the Riverview has top-end facilities seemingly

on permanent promotion, making it enviable value. The building has a tinge of Islamic style, and the poolside steamboat restaurant is a great touch. Rates include breakfast.

**Brunei Hotel** (☎ 224 2372; www.quanix.com/business/bruhotel; 95 Jln Pemancha; r B\$176-220, ste B\$242-440; ☎ ☎) Hovering at the upper end of the midrange, the Brunei is an earnest business hotel handily set in the centre of town. Huge humidifiers and slightly mentholated air-con help you breathe, and you even get a minibar (dry, of course). Discounts may be available.

## TOP END

BSB has a good selection of top-end hotels, although the midrange accommodation is perfectly adequate. For the extra money you can take advantage of added luxuries such as golf courses, sports centres and theatres.

**Centrepoint Hotel** (☎ 243 0430; www.arhbrunei.com; Centrepoint Shopping Centre, Gadong; r B\$235-265, ste B\$335-1650; ☎ ☎ ☎) The premier tourist hotel in the Gadong district is much more sophisticated than you'd expect for something built into a shopping mall, boasting a scarily comprehensive range of salon and sports facilities as well as slick top-end service.

**Sheraton Utama Hotel** (☎ 224 4272; www.sheraton.com/utama; Jln Tasek Lama; r from B\$240; ☎ ☎ ☎) Brunei's only Western chain hotel flies the flag for international standards on the edge of the town centre. Amenities are rife, and the lounge bar has live music on Saturday, a rare treat in BSB. Discounts can knock off up to B\$100 at weekends.

## Eating

Most hotels in BSB have their own restaurants, and there are places in town to suit every budget. However, as most locals live outside the centre, suburbs such as Gadong can be much livelier at night.

## CAFÉS

**Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf** (☎ 222 0589; www.coffeebean.com; Lot 36, 67 Maya Puri Bldg, Jln Sultan; dishes B\$2.80-7.50; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Another entry in the highly successful Malaysian chain, propagating Western coffee-house culture right down to the wi-fi internet and board games. If you're getting sick of *kopi* (coffee with condensed milk), just try the choc toffee ice-blended latte.

### THE AMBUYAT EXPERIENCE

Brunei hasn't made many contributions to world cuisine, but the country does have one rather distinctive signature dish: *ambuyat*. Made from the pith of the sago tree, which is ground to a powder then mixed with water, this glutinous mass was apparently popularised during WWII, when the Japanese invaded Borneo and took control of the paddy fields. Cut off from their vital rice supply, Bruneian villagers resorted to traditional sago processing, adding a selection of accompaniments such as *sambal* (spicy chilli and shrimp mix) to leaven the lack of taste.

*Ambuyat* is still available in Brunei restaurants, served in big globs with plenty of dips, and eaten quickly with chopsticks before it really congeals. If that description hasn't put you off, the food court in the **PGGMB building** (☎ 222 3120; Jln Sungai Kianggeh) is a good place to give it a go. Sets start at B\$4.

**DeRoyalle** (☎ 222 0257; Maya Puri Bldg, 38 Jln Sultan & Jln Pemancha; dishes B\$3.90-6.50; ☎ 24hr) Crammed in next door to the Coffee Bean, DeRoyalle promises 'no gimmicks, no rip-offs', going for a British expat flavour rather than the Starbucks vibe. For our money the food's better here, particularly the breakfasts and Swedish meatballs, but the coffees are half the size.

**MRSA Bridal Café** (☎ 887 0009; The Mall, Gadong) Now this is what we call a concept café – whoever thought of combining coffee and cakes with suits and wedding dresses must either be a born romantic or a surrealist genius. If you're not already engaged, you may well be by the time you leave.

### FOOD COURTS & MARKETS

Informal eating is the cornerstone of central BSB's food scene, and every major shopping centre has its own air-conditioned food court. Wisma Setia, the Yayasan Complex and Gadong's Mall shopping centre are some of the larger specimens.

**Gerai Makan** (Jln MacArthur; dishes 70c-B\$4) This waterfront food centre is a great place to chow of an evening, with views over Kampong Ayer and water taxis bombing past every couple of minutes.

**Taman Selera** (Jln Kumbang Pasang; dishes B\$1-8) Another very popular night-time food spot, offering everything from burgers and noodles to seafood and traditional Muslim dishes (halal, curries etc). The 'smooters' (B\$2) at stall 4 are a damn good approximation of a real ice-cream milkshake.

**Tamu Kianggeh** (cnr Jln Sungai Kianggeh & Jln Pemancha) Good snack food can also be found at the local food market, across the canal. It's not very extensive but has plenty of local colour and is a popular spot for lunch.

**Pasar Gadong** (Lr Sultan, Gadong) Brunei's most famous night market, Pasar Gadong is a bustling marquee of munch parked near the big shopping centres in Gadong. Vendors offer every cooked comestible imaginable, from satay and barbecued fish to chicken wings and *kueh melayu* (sweet pancakes filled with peanuts, raisins and sugar), though quality varies widely. Annoyingly there's nowhere to sit, so you will either have to eat on your feet or take your grub elsewhere.

The large **Hua Ho Supermarket** (☎ 223 1120; Yayasan Complex; ☎ 10am-10pm) is a good place for self-catering.

### RESTAURANTS

**Ismajaya Restaurant** (☎ 222 0229; Jln Sultan; dishes B\$1-4; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) One of several simple cafeterias in the central area serving quick, inexpensive Malay and Indian meals, coffee and *roti canai* (flaky bread).

**Hau Hua** (☎ 222 5396; 48 Jln Sultan; dishes B\$2.50-12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) As if the extensive menu of excellent Chinese dishes, claypots and steamboats wasn't enough, Hau Hua (watch that spelling!) is one of the few places in Brunei that serves pork, has daily changing specials and set menus, and even rotates its selection of fresh juices and herbal drinks. Friday is mung-bean juice day. Nice.

**Nyonya Restaurant** (☎ 223 1236; Yayasan Complex; mains B\$6.80-18.80; ☎ lunch & dinner) The wide-ranging menu and bistro-style air-con chic accentuate the appeal of this new place on the Yayasan's central courtyard. As well as steak, soup, sandwiches, sea-bass, Indian, Chinese and Malay dishes, there's a good-value selection of pasta (B\$3 to B\$7.80).

**Port View Café** (☎ 223 1467; Jln MacArthur; mains B\$7-10.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) Not the most original name, but sure enough, the split-level Port View does indeed gaze out over the water towards Kampong Ayer. The downstairs café menu includes simple Western, Chinese and Malay dishes, while upstairs is a little more expensive and features Thai, Chinese and Japanese food.

**Fratini's** (☎ 245 1300; Centrepoint Shopping Centre, Gadong; mains B\$10-30; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Brunei's first-ever Italian restaurant has 10 years of service behind it and can still dish up the goods, attracting a keen crowd of local and expat Med-heads.

The various hotels in BSB also have lots of restaurant choices. For a special treat, try afternoon tea (B\$16.50) at the luxurious Empire Hotel (see p603).

### Entertainment

Brunei's capital isn't exactly the best place for night owls to stay restless, but there's no need to go to bed at sunset either. Most locals skip the centre and head for the big shopping malls in Gadong, where there are plenty of cafés, arcades and the **Mall Cineplex** (☎ 242 2455; tickets B\$4-8). In the absence of alcohol, you could even treat your body to a break and go for some evening pampering: the **Goodvibes Mindspa** (☎ 242 1913; www.goodvibesbrunei.com; K3, Kampung Pengkalan Gadong) specialises in flotation tanks and 'mind machines', while the **Amanha Spa** (☎ 233 7575; Orchid Garden Hotel, Simpang 9, Jln Berakas) goes for more-traditional massage and treatments.

In the centre, the **Hassanal Bolkhiah Cinema** (☎ 222 0840; Jln Sungai Kianggeh; tickets B\$3-6) and **M Vision Borneo Theatre** (☎ 223 6316; Jln Roberts; tickets B\$5-6) show a mix of English-language and Bollywood movies.

### Shopping

Shopping is a pastime in itself in Brunei, and you could spend days browsing the air-conditioned plazas, though there's little of specific interest to visitors. The snazzy **Yayasan Complex** has a dazzling selection of ritzy shops selling watches, sunglasses, Iranian chandeliers and other essentials. It also houses franchises like the Body Shop.

However, the main shopping district is at Gadong, about 4.5km west of the city centre. The giant **Centrepoint** and **The Mall** complexes are vast expanses of wall-to-wall

air-con retail and leisure space, and also act as social centres.

There are numerous photo-processing, camera and film shops in the shopping malls in the city centre and at Gadong, though if you have any special requirements you should stock up before you come to Brunei. There's no advantage in buying duty-free in Brunei, since you will get far more for your money in Malaysia.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

Royal Brunei Airlines often has promotional fares out of BSB, though, in general, international routes may be cheaper if bought through travel agents.

#### Airline Offices

Airlines flying into Brunei and with offices in BSB:

**British Airways & Qantas** (☎ 222 5871; www.britishairways.com) For ticket sales, contact Jasra Harrisons Travel (☎ 224 2911) on the corner of Jln MacArthur and Jln Sungai Kianggeh.

**Malaysia Airlines** (☎ 222 4141; www.malaysiaairlines.com; Maya Puri Bldg, 38-39 Jln Sultan)

**Singapore Airlines** (☎ 224 4901; www.singaporeair.com; Maya Puri Bldg, 38-39 Jln Sultan)

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

#### BOAT

Apart from flying, the most convenient way to travel between Brunei and Sabah or Sarawak is by boat. Boats to Lawas (Sarawak) and Pulau Labuan (for connections to Sabah) leave from the **ferry terminal** (☎ 277 3071) at Muara, 25km northeast of BSB. Numerous express boats go between Muara port and Pulau Labuan (economy/1st class B\$15/18, one hour) between 7.30am and 4.40pm. Departures from Labuan (RM24/30) are between 8.30am and 4.30pm. Extra services may be added at weekends and on public holidays. A boat leaves daily for Lawas in Sarawak (B\$10, two hours) at 11.30am. Boats leave from Lawas (RM25) for Muara at 7am daily. An express bus between town and the terminal costs B\$2.

Speedboats to Limbang (B\$10, 30 minutes) leave between 6am and 6pm from the customs wharf at the end of Jln Roberts in BSB and depart when full, which means you could be waiting a while.

For the Temburong district, speedboats go between BSB and Bangar throughout the day (B\$6, 45 minutes). The first departure is around 7am and the last at 5pm; boats leave (when full) from the jetty near the Gerai Makan. Road transport from Bangar can take you to Sarawak (see p607).

## BUS

Brunei's main highway links BSB with the town of Kuala Baram in Sarawak via Seria and Kuala Belait. Overland from BSB to Miri (Sarawak) or vice versa involves changing buses several times.

The BSB bus station is on Jln Cator, beneath the multistorey car park. For Miri, take a bus to Seria (B\$6, two hours), where you buy a combined ticket for the three buses you'll need to get to Miri. This comes to B\$11.20 and includes your ticket to Kuala Belait (B\$1, 30 minutes), from Kuala Belait to the border (B\$5.50) and from the border to Miri (RM5.50). You change buses in Sungai Belait to cross the river, and switch again at the Kuala Baram border point. Immigration and customs formalities are taken care of on both sides of the Brunei-Sarawak border.

The journey to Miri takes about four hours. Buses leave BSB for Seria between 6.30am and 5pm, with the last return around 8pm. It's best to get an early start to reach Miri by the early afternoon. From Seria, buses to Kuala Belait leave roughly every half-hour until 8pm. Buses from Kuala Belait to the border leave five times daily, though this can vary. Before you board, ask at the bus station in Seria if the bus will make the Miri connections.

Public bus 44 goes to the Sarawak border at Kuala Lurah, where you can continue on to Limbang.

## CAR

Hiring a car is the only feasible 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.

Ask at the tourist office or at your hotel about renting a car and staff can probably help you out. Rental operators in BSB:

**Avis** (☎ 222 7100; Sheraton Utama Hotel, Jln Tasek Lama)

**Azizah Car Rentals** (☎ 222 9388; Jln Puser Ulak)

**Hertz** (☎ 239 0300; Brunei International Airport)

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Purple buses 23, 24, 36, 38 and 57 will get you to/from the airport, about 4km north-west of the city, for B\$1. Leaving the terminal, keep to the right and walk south for about 300m to the bus stops.

Some major hotels have courtesy phones at the arrivals hall that you can use to request a free pick-up. Taxis go between the airport and town for about B\$16, but cost more after 9pm.

## 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 Jln Cator, and numbers are displayed on each bus. The *Explore Brunei* booklet and maps available from the tourist information centre also include a good bus-routes map. 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, 38 and 57.

**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.

**Voctech International House** Buses 1 and 22.

Express buses travel between BSB and the Muara ferry terminal roughly every half-hour between 6.50am and 4.50pm; the trip takes 40 minutes.

## TAXI

Taxis are metered at B\$3 for the first 1km and B\$1 for each additional kilometre. The rates go up to B\$4.50 for the first kilometre after 9pm. A charge of B\$1 is added for each piece of luggage and there's an added B\$5 for trips to and from the airport. Lots of taxis congregate at the bus station, but you may have trouble flagging one down further afield. Booking a **taxi** (☎ 222 2214) also incurs a charge of B\$3.

## WATER TAXI

Water taxis are longboats with powerful outboard motors that hurtle up and down Sungai Brunei, transporting passengers to/from Kampung Ayer's stilt villages. Getting in and out of them can be a bit of a balancing act, but they're lots of fun and definitely more exciting than a bus. Wave them down near the customs wharf or the Tamu Kianggeh food market or in front of the Yayasan Complex. Fares for short trips are between B\$1 and B\$2. To charter a boat for a tour of Kampung Ayer and the river shouldn't cost more than B\$10 per hour.

## AROUND BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

There are a handful of attractions just outside the BSB city limits, mainly in the outlying suburb of Jerudong. While they may be few, 'modest' is not a word that applies – it's no coincidence that the sultan has his palace here, and the whole area is effectively a huge royal cul-de-sac, displaying some of the finest fruits of Brunei's oil money.

### Jerudong Park Playground

Perhaps the biggest birthday gift ever, this vast **amusement park** (☎ 261 1894; Jerudong; adult/child B\$15/5; 🕒 5pm-midnight Wed-Fri & Sun) was constructed to mark the sultan's 48th birthday in 1994. Sadly, since admission stopped being free in 2000, visitor numbers and maintenance standards have dropped dramatically, and at the time of research virtually none of the major rides were working due to spare-part and insurance issues. However, exploring the fantasy landscape is still a good way of spending an evening in nightlife-challenged Brunei.

Wandering round the park, especially on a weekday evening, is a truly surreal experience unlike much 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 post-apocalyptic Manhattan. In fact you could even see it as a metaphor for Brunei itself, a spectacular but impractical jewel left to crumble quietly in the hands of people who just aren't quite sure what to do with it.

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.

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.

### Jame'Asr Hassanal Bolkiah Mosque

On the way out to Jerudong, the **Jame'Asr Hassanal Bolkiah Mosque** (☎ 223 8741; Kampung Kiarong, Jln Hassan Bolkiah; admission free) is the largest mosque in Brunei and a seriously impressive slice of Islamic design. It was built at great expense for the 25th anniversary of the sultan's reign in 1992, and most of the design elements have some numeric or symbolic significance. Take buses 1 or 22 to get there.

### Empire Hotel

As much an attraction as a place to stay, the stunning **Empire Hotel & Country Club** (☎ 241 8888; www.theempirehotel.com; Muara-Tutong Hwy, Kampung Jerudong; r B\$525-665, ste B\$798-24,200; 🕒 📞) is known locally as the 'six-star' hotel, and it's not hard to see how it differs from even the best five-star establishments. Commissioned by the infamous Prince Jefri (see boxed text, p604), the Empire is estimated to have cost US\$1.1 billion to build, an astronomical sum considering the Petronas Towers in KL cost US\$1.9 billion! The design manages to be stupendously luxurious yet elegantly understated at the same time, mainly by doing everything on a large scale – the five-storey atrium is 80m

high, for a start, not to mention the seven restaurants, golf course, beach, cinema, bowling alley and dinner theatre. If your jaw hasn't dropped lately, this is the place for it to do so.

### Istana Nurul Iman

The sultan's palace, the **Istana Nurul Iman** (☎ 222 9988; Jln Tutong), is an impressive sight, especially when lit up at night. It's larger than the Vatican Palace and no expense was spared in its construction; it cost US\$350 million and, among other features, has 1788 rooms, 200 toilets and a banquet hall with seating for 4000. Unfortunately, the istana is open to the public only during Hari Raya Aidilfitri, the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, when the sultan is often willing to meet his people.

The istana (palace) is about 3.5km out of town on the Tutong road, and the grounds look on to Sungai Brunei. You could spend a leisurely hour walking there, or charter a water taxi (p603) to **Taman Persiaran Damuan**, a large landscaped park along the riverbank nearby, which has some of the best views of the palace. Boatmen can also take you past **Pulau Runggu**, in the middle of the river, which is home to a large colony of proboscis monkeys. The best time to head out is late afternoon, so you can catch the monkeys around sunset and then get dropped off at the park to see the palace in the evening. Asking prices will probably start at B\$30 but you should be able to hire a boat for B\$20.

### PRINCELY SUMS

Any project mentioned in the same breath as Prince Jefri tends to come with a price tag, and the Empire Hotel was just one of the profligate prince's extravagances. The ultimate bored little rich boy, Jefri's appointment as finance minister was like putting a kid in charge of *all* the candy stores, and his financial flights of fancy were truly epic. His acquisitions through the Amedeo Development Corporation included five luxury hotels overseas, not least the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles, and by the time the sultan cut him off the prince had spent almost US\$4 billion on himself, with personal possessions including 2000 cars, several private jets, multiple lavish residences and some much-discussed gold-plated toilet brushes.

Prince Jefri left Brunei for London on a 'limited' US\$500,000-a-year allowance in 2004, barely enough to support his five wives and 35 children, but continued to enjoy an outlandish lifestyle, prompting the sultan and the Brunei Investment Agency (BIA) to pursue him again through the courts for an estimated US\$16 billion in missing funds. In early 2006 things got even more confusing: the British press reported that the sultan had unexpectedly agreed to drop the charges and even pay legal costs, a move strenuously denied by the BIA. The wrangles continue, the brothers are still not speaking to each other, and it seems it will be some time before the people of Brunei can start to put the whole fiasco behind them.

### Beaches

Not many people come to Brunei for a sun'n'sand experience, but if you do have some spare time to stretch out on the dunes there are a couple of options around the small port of Muara.

Two kilometres from town, **Pantai Muara** (Muara Beach) is a popular weekend retreat. The white sand is clean, but like many beaches in Borneo, it's littered with driftwood and other flotsam that comes in with the tide. It's quiet during the week and has food stalls, picnic tables and a children's playground.

Other beaches include **Pantai Serasa**, a thin bit of beach on an equally thin spit of land jutting out into the sea. The Royal Brunei Yacht Club is here, as well as a water-sports centre and lots of food stalls on the weekend. About 4km west of Muara along the Muara-Tutong highway, **Pantai Meragang** (Crocodile Beach) is another beach that's pleasant and not quite as crowded as the others on weekends. There's a couple of food stalls and it's a good place for a picnic, but it's difficult to get to without your own transport.

Buses 37, 38 or 39 go from BSB to Muara town (B\$2); bus 33 will take you from there to Pantai Muara or Pantai Serasa (B\$1).

### Pulau Selirong

This small island (25 sq km) off Brunei Bay, about one hour by boat from Muara, is on the itinerary of some tour companies for

day trips – see p598 for operator listings. The island is a good example of mangrove ecology, with 2km of wooden walkways and an observation tower. A guide is necessary and caution is advised because of venomous snakes.

### TUTONG & BELAIT

These two districts make up the bulk of Brunei's western territory, with the principal towns strung out along the coastal highway down to Sabah. Buses do use the main road, but if you want to see the sights the most feasible way is to take a tour or rent a car.

### Tutong

Tutong is the main town in Tutong district and is about halfway between Seria and BSB. The town itself is unremarkable, but 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 **istana** 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 Seri Kenangan the beach road continues for another 5km to Kuala Tutong; the beach at the end is quiet and ideal for camping.

### Kuala Lurah

Reached by bus 44 from BSB, this is the least useful Sarawak border post for travellers but one of the most heavily used for locals. It's essentially a mini Tijuana, with a roaring trade in cheap Malaysian booze, hookers and, um, chicken wings – by all means explore, but if that's really your thing maybe you shouldn't be in Brunei in the first place...

### Tasek Merimbun

The 7800-hectare Merimbun Heritage Park is 27km inland from Tutong, gazetted as an ASEAN Heritage Park to protect Tasek Merimbun, Brunei's largest lake. The black-

water habitat is unique in Borneo, dyed a distinctive tea colour by tannin from leaves falling in the water, and supports a wide variety of birds, mammals and snakes. It's a pretty, tranquil spot surrounded by forest and rarely troubled by large groups; you can follow a couple of walking trails or hire a boat (B\$30 per hour) to take you around the lake's two islands. There's an **exhibition hall** (☎ 9am-4pm) just down the road from the lakefront.

The tourist information centre in BSB (p595) has day trips to Merimbun for B\$98 per person. The only way to get there on your own is by car and the road is a little rough in places.

### Labi

As you enter the Belait district, east of Seria, a road branches inland to Labi, taking you past some prime forest areas. The first of these, about 500m from the main highway, is the **Sungai Liang Forest Recreation Park**, one of the few intact lowland forests in South-east Asia, with numerous walking trails and a canopy walkway.

About halfway between the Sungai Liang Forest Recreation Park and Labi is the **Luagan Lalak Forest Reserve**, a wetland zone that becomes a lake after heavy rain. A weathered wooden boardwalk traverses the area, crossing an emerald-green field of lush swamp grasses. Further on, about 10km south of Kampung Labi, there are several modern, relatively small **iban long-houses** open to visitors, including Rumah Panjang Mendaram Besar and Rumah Panjang Teraja. Off the road near here a 20-minute trail through the forest leads to the **Wasai Wong Kadir**, a waterfall and crystal-clear pool.

There are more trekking possibilities south of Kampung Labi. Heading down the road past Rumah Panjang Teraja, you'll find the Sungai Teraja and a trail to another waterfall and **Bukit Teraja**, the highest hill in the area, with good views across Brunei and Sarawak. The main trail to the summit is signposted about 7km beyond Labi, though it can be tricky to spot from a moving car. The walk through primary forest to the top takes about two hours. Travel agencies do day trips to Bukit Teraja and charge around B\$100 per person. To get there on your own you'll need to rent a car.



For a more extensive trip to Dusun and Penan villages at Kampung Sukang and Kampung Melilas, deep in the jungle along Sungai Belait, you'll have to go by boat; expect to pay around B\$300 per day to hire a suitable craft. Try asking at Kampung Sungai Mau, on the Labi road where it meets Sungai Belait before Luagan Lalak.

## Seria

Seria is a transit stop on the road to Sarawak, a company town spread out along the coast between Tutong and Kuala Belait. In fact, it's hard to tell where Seria ends and Kuala Belait begins. 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; F20, 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.

There are a few modern blocks of shops, a market and one small hotel, the **Hotel Koperasi** (☎ 322 7592; r B\$55-99; 🍷), opposite the bus station.

About 10 buses a day trundle along the road from BSB (B\$6, two hours), with frequent departures between 6.30am and 5pm (8pm returning to BSB). If you're travelling by bus to Sarawak, you must change at Seria. You can buy tickets all the way through to Miri from the bus station here (see p602 for details).

## 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' (not to be

confused with Kuala Baram on the Sarawak side of the border, or Kota Belud in Sabah, or indeed a 'knock-back' anywhere else) has colonial shophouses 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 Jln McKerron.

You can hire a boat by the market for trips south 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, but locals do maintain a traditional-style longhouse for tourists to visit. The 45-minute trip (one way) passes by lush jungle at the river's edge. Price is by negotiation, but expect to pay about B\$150 each way. Tours from BSB cost from B\$120 per person, including jungle trekking, a visit to a tribal skull house and a chance to try out traditional activities such as sago processing and roof thatching.

## EATING & SLEEPING

**Government Rest House** (☎ 333 4288; Jln Carey; r B\$50; 🍷) 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 200m to the right on Jln Carey. It's a good idea to phone in advance.

**Hotel Sentosa** (☎ 333 4341; www.bruneisentosa.com; 92-93 Jln McKerron; r B\$85-95; 🍷 📺) Conveniently situated near the bus station, this is a comfortable, reasonably priced business hotel with its own café and snooker bar.

**Seaview Hotel** (☎ 333 2651; Jln Maulana; r B\$77-120; 🍷 📺) About 4km out of town along the beach road towards Seria, this is probably the best place to stay if you're planning to do trips around Kuala Belait. Breakfast is included and there's a well-stocked supermarket frequented by expats. The hotel can also arrange car rental.

Kuala Belait has plenty of *kedai kopi* (coffee shops) within noodle-spitting distance of the bus station.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

See p602 for details of buses to Kuala Belait and on to Miri.

From Kuala Belait it's a five-minute bus ride or 20-minute walk to Sungai Belait, where small *tambang* (ferryboats) ply back and forth. Once across the river it's a short ride to the Brunei immigration checkpoint. After going through Brunei customs a Malaysian bus takes passengers to the Malaysian immigration checkpoint and on to Miri.

## TEMBURONG

If the KB-BSB run leaves you wondering where all that famous rainforest is, just head down into the Temburong district to escape into the green expanses of Brunei's untouched primary jungle. Jutting out into Sarawak like a stranded finger, Temburong is often overlooked by travellers who simply step straight onto the boat from BSB to Pulau Labuan, although it is increasingly and deservedly marketed as one of the country's finest natural attractions.

The Peradayan Forest Reserve is a good outing for a jungle walk, or you can visit the Iban longhouse at Batang Duri. For a longer and richer jungle experience, Ulu Temburong National Park and the Kuala Belalong Rainforest Field Studies Centre in the Batu Apoi Forest Reserve receive visitors, but independent travel seems almost actively discouraged – if you aren't visiting on a tour you'll have to spend time obtaining a permit.

## Bangar

pop 3500

Bangar is a quiet little town on the banks of Sungai Temburong. Despite being barely three blocks across, it's the district centre and has the only convenient facilities this side of Sarawak, plus a road bridge that makes a perfect spot for sunset.

The speedboat trip from BSB is a highlight in itself, roaring down Sungai Brunei and slapping through the open sea of Brunei Bay, then tilting and weaving through the dense mangroves into the mouth of Sungai Temburong. Bangar can be visited as a day trip if you catch an early boat, but you'll get more out of it if you stay over and explore the area more thoroughly.

Bangar's handy **tourist office** (☎ 522 1439; norma@brunet.bn; 13-14 Kedai Rakyat; ☎ 8am-noon & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) is in the wooden shop complex opposite the youth hostel. Ask here and around town for transport to local

attractions, or to see if you can arrange a stay at one of the Iban longhouses in the area.

From Bangar you can travel overland to Sarawak, either west to Limbang or east to Lawas. The **immigration office** (☎ 6am-10pm) is a few kilometres west of Bangar on the way to Limbang.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Pusat Belia** (Youth Hostel; ☎ 522 1694; dm B\$10; 🍷) Basic as you like but immaculately clean. The toilet setup is slightly strange (you'll have to wander through the icily air-conditioned meeting room); otherwise, it's slightly more comfortable than its counterpart in BSB. To find the hostel, head west from the boat wharf, past the shops.

**Rumah Persinggahan Kerajaan** (Bangar Resthouse; ☎ 522 1239; Jln Batang Duri; dm/s/d B\$10/25/30, chalets B\$80; 🍷) This government resthouse has simple six-bed dorms and a range of private rooms, including two smart little chalets. The house canteen does some good-value buffets (B\$3).

**Restoran Hijrah** (☎ 522 1522; Kedai 8; dishes B\$2.50-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) A 'proper' air-con restaurant in the row of shops and *kedai kopi* up the road from the boat wharf. The menu offers a good mix of Chinese and Malay flavours, including the region's famous *udang gallah* (river prawns) and steamboat meals (B\$12 to B\$16, minimum two people).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Bicycle

Cycling is a great way of getting around this corner of Brunei, and there's not even that much traffic to get in your way. You can hire bikes from the Maryani camping shop next to the tourist office for B\$30 per day.

### Boat

From BSB, speedboats (B\$6, 45 minutes) leave from the wharf near the food centre when they're full. Boats run in either direction between 7am and 5pm; you shouldn't usually have to wait very long.

### Hitchhiking

Hitchhiking is possible, though you may be in for a wait, especially on the way back from Batang Duri. The road to the Peradayan Forest Reserve – and Lawas – is across the bridge from Bangar wharf, on the east side of the river.

## Taxi

Temburong has two main roads; both are sealed but traffic is light. One leads south to Batang Duri and the other runs between the east and west borders with Sarawak. Private and unofficial taxis are the only form of transport in the district, and drivers congregate near the wharf. They don't have meters, and prices must be negotiated.

Taxis go to Limbang in Sarawak for about B\$15. There's no border post, so make sure you stop at the immigration office in Bangar before leaving Brunei. Report to immigration in Limbang.

A taxi to the eastern Sarawak border costs B\$30. You may be able to persuade the driver to take you all the way to Lawas, but this will cost around B\$80, including a stop at the Bangar immigration office.

## Batang Duri

Batang Duri is an Iban longhouse on Sungai Temburong, 17km south of Bangar. Boats to the Kuala Belalong Rainforest Field Studies Centre leave from the village jetty. If you visit the longhouse, introduce yourself first, preferably to the *penghulu* (chief). Take your shoes off when you enter and don't wander up and down the veranda; this is like walking unannounced into someone's living room. Batang Duri can be visited as a day trip or as part of a tour, but overnight stays must be pre-arranged. A taxi from Bangar costs B\$15 each way.

## Ulu Temburong National Park

This up-and-coming national park is situated within the wider Batu Apoi Forest Reserve, a large area of primary rainforest that covers most of southern Temburong. It's rapidly becoming Temburong's prime attraction for locals and tourists.

The forest is rich in flora and fauna, and the jungle can be explored along walking trails. The main visitor route leads to a lofty **canopy walkway**, one of the longest in the world. When floods and overgrown undergrowth permit, you should be able to continue to the Sungai Apan waterfall or tackle the rugged two-day walk to Bukit Belalong.

The **Kuala Belalong Rainforest Field Studies Centre** was developed by Brunei Shell and the Universiti Brunei Darussalam to provide facilities for research into tropical rainforests. It's primarily for scientists and

school groups, though interested overseas visitors can stay here, usually arranged through a tour.

Most tours embark at the **Outward Bound centre** ([www.kkbs.gov.bn/program.htm](http://www.kkbs.gov.bn/program.htm)) on Sungai Temburong, which offers outdoor adventure programs and activities for groups and individuals.

A permit is required to visit the reserve. Travellers usually take a tour; if you want to visit independently, you'll need to contact the **Forestry Department** ([forestrybrunei@hotmail.com](mailto:forestrybrunei@hotmail.com); BSB ☎ 238 1687; Bangar ☎ 522 1839; ) to inquire about individual and overnight permits, a process that can take several days. As travel within the park also requires hiring a boat (B\$150), it's often easier to go on a tour.

Tour companies in BSB (p598) offer a variety of packages. The standard rate is around B\$245 per person for a two-day trip to the park, including an overnight stay at a Murut village on the way up the Sungai Temburong. There's plenty of scope for group rates and other discounts, though it's cheaper by far to get the boat to Bangar and either book at the tourist office (B\$85) or hang around and try to negotiate a ride-along with an existing group.

## Peradayan Forest Reserve

This forest reserve is about 15km from Bangar along the road to Labu. It protects the forested peaks of Bukit Patoi and Bukit Peradayan. Walking trails lead to the summits and this is the most accessible rainforest for visitors to Brunei. You'll have to start early to maximise chances of seeing the mainly nocturnal mammals, but the park also contains many bird species, including hornbills.

The most popular walk is to **Bukit Patoi**, and starts at the entrance to the park. The trail is steep in parts but is well marked, with plank walkways, steps and rest huts along the way. It's about a 20-minute walk to Batu Berdinding (a sandstone outcrop), and then another hour to the summit. From the summit there are fine views to the east across the South China Sea and the Lawas area of Sarawak.

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, so much so that it's sometimes impassable; if staff tell you not to attempt it, ask them about alternative trails such as the Challenge Route.

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, but bring water and food for the walk. The return taxi trip from Bangar should cost around B\$30. The driver will wait for you to do the summit walk, or if you want to spend more time in the reserve, arrange for a pick-up.

# DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATION

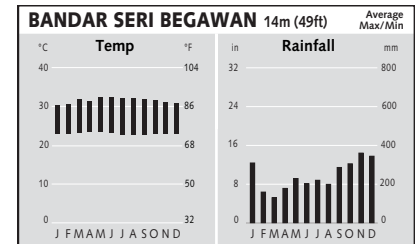
In Brunei budget places are under B\$60, midrange is B\$60 to B\$200, and top end is over B\$200. Most prices are quoted net, inclusive of 10% service charge.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices are open from 7.45am to 12.15pm and 1.30pm to 4.30pm (closed on Friday and Sunday); private-business offices are generally open from 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday and from 8am to noon on Saturday. Banks are open from 9am to 3pm weekdays and from 9am to 11am on Saturday. Most shops in the central area of Bandar Seri Begawan open daily around 9am and are closed by 6pm. Shopping malls generally open an hour or so later and close between 9.30pm and 10pm (some may close earlier on Sunday). Hours may be shorter during the fasting month of Ramadan. As a rough guide, cafés are generally open 7am to 9pm, restaurants 11am to 10pm.

## CLIMATE

Like the rest of Borneo, Brunei experiences high average temperatures, humidity and rainfall. Temperatures consistently fall between 24°C and 31°C, with an average humidity of 79%. Average annual rainfall is about 3295mm. Although Brunei doesn't really have marked wet and dry seasons, the wettest months are from September to January, during the northeast monsoon, and the driest period is February to April. See p18 for more info.



## CUSTOMS

Duty-free allowances for persons over 17 years of age are 200 cigarettes or 250g of tobacco, 60ml of perfume and 250ml of eau de toilette. Non-Muslims may import two bottles of liquor and 12 cans of beer, which must be declared upon arrival.

The importation of drugs carries the death penalty.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### Brunei Embassies & Consulates

**Australia** (☎ 02-6285 4500; 10 Beale Cres, Deakin, ACT 2600)

**Canada** (☎ 613-234 5656; 395 Laurier Ave East, Ottawa, ON K1N 6R4)

**France** (☎ 01-53 64 67 60; No 7, Rue de Presparg, Paris 75017)

**Germany** (☎ 030-206 07 600; Kronenstrasse 55-58, 10117 Berlin)

**Indonesia** (☎ 021-574 1438; Jln Tanjung Karang 1, Jakarta Pusat, Jakarta 10210)

**Malaysia** (☎ 03-2161 2800; 19th fl, Menara Tun & Tan, Jln Tun Razak, Kuala Lumpur)

## PRACTICALITIES

### Newspapers

- The *Borneo Bulletin* is Brunei's English-language daily.

### Radio

- English radio broadcasts can be heard on the FM bands Pilihan Network and Pelangi Network.

### Television

- State channel RTB can be received on Channel 5.

### Electricity

- UK-type three-square-pin plug (220V to 240V, 50 cycles); metric system

**Singapore** (☎ 065-6733 9055; 325 Tanglin Rd, Singapore 247955)

**UK** (☎ 020-7581 0521; 19-20 Belgrave Sq, London SW1X 8PG)

**USA** (☎ 202-237 1838; www.bruneiembassy.org; 3520 International Court, Washington DC 20008)

### Embassies & Consulates in Brunei

Countries with diplomatic representation in Bandar Seri Begawan:

**Australia** High Commission (Map p594; ☎ 222 9436; www.brunaidarussalam.embassy.gov.au; Jln Pemancha)

**Canada** High Commission (Map p594; ☎ 222 0043; hiomcda@brnet.bn; 5th fl, Jln McArthur Bldg, 1 Jln McArthur)

**France** (Map p594; ☎ 222 0960; france@brnet.bn; 51-55 Kompleks Jln Sultan, Jln Sultan)

**Germany** (Map p594; ☎ 222 5574; pregerman@brnet.bn; 2nd fl, Unit 2.01, Block D, Yayasan Complex)

**Indonesia** (Map p594; ☎ 233 0180; www.indonesia.org.bn; 4498 Simpang 528, Jln Muara, Kampung Sungai Hanching)

**Malaysia** High Commission (Map p594; ☎ 238 1095; mwbrunei@brnet.bn; 61 Simpang 396-39, Jln Kebangsaan Lama, Kampung Sungai Akar)

**Singapore** High Commission (Map p594; ☎ 226 2741; www.mfa.gov.sg/brunei; 8 Simpang 74, Jln Subok)

**UK** High Commission (Map p594; ☎ 222 2231; www.britain-brunei.org/gov; 2nd fl, Block D, Yayasan Complex)

**USA** (Map p594; ☎ 222 0384; http://bandar.usembassy.gov; 3rd fl, Teck Guan Plaza, Jln Sultan)

### HOLIDAYS

Brunei has many of the same holidays as Malaysia, based on the Islamic calendar but including Chinese New Year, Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

**Brunei National Day** 23 February

**Hari Raya Aidiladha** Variable February/March

**Muslim New Year (Hizrah)** Variable

**Royal Brunei Armed Forces Day** 31 May

**Prophet's Birthday** Variable (in Malaysia and Brunei only)

**Sultan of Brunei's Birthday** 15 July

**Hari Raya Aidilfitri** Variable

### LEGAL MATTERS

The sale of alcohol is illegal in Brunei. For being caught in homosexual acts you can be jailed for up to 10 years and fined B\$30,000.

### MAPS

Shell publishes a folding road-map of Brunei, but it's not as useful as its larger and more comprehensive *Road Map and Street Index of Brunei Darussalam*.

### COMING OF AGE IN BRUNEI

- Age of legal responsibility – 18
- Age of consent (heterosexual) – 14
- Driving age – 18
- Drinking age – never (for Muslims)
- Voting age – never (for anyone!)

### MONEY

The official currency is the Brunei dollar (B\$), but Singapore dollars are exchanged at an equal rate and can be used.

Banks in the region are efficient and there are plenty of moneychangers. For changing travellers cheques, banks usually charge around 3% and will only change a maximum of US\$200, whereas moneychangers have no charges (theoretically there should be no limit for moneychangers but travellers may have problems with larger amounts).

There is no sales tax in Brunei. Some hotels add a 10% service charge, though this is mostly included in the published price.

See the Quick Reference page (i) for currency exchange rates.

International cards are widely accepted and ATMs are readily available.

### POST

Post offices open from 8am to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday and Saturday (8am to 11am and 2pm to 4pm Friday; closed Sunday).

Letters (up to 10g) cost 75c to Australia and New Zealand, 90c to the UK, and B\$1.20 to the USA and Canada. An airmail postcard to Malaysia and Singapore is 20c; to most other places in Southeast Asia it's 35c; to the Pacific, Europe, Africa and Australia it's 50c; and to the Americas it's 60c. Aerograms are 45c regardless of destination.

### TELEPHONE

To call Brunei from outside the country, the country code is ☎ 673; from Brunei, the international access code is ☎ 00. Within Brunei, there are no area codes.

Hallo Kad and JTB are the most common types of phonecard. They're available from Telecom offices and retail stores in

denominations of B\$10, B\$20, B\$50 and B\$100, and can be used in public booths to make international calls. Most hotels have IDD phones, and faxes can be sent from the Telecom office or from major hotels.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

The government has an official tourism website at www.tourismbrunei.com.

There are no overseas tourist offices, just the commercial **tourist information centre** (Map p594; ☎ 227 3734; wildlifeadventure@hotmail.com; Post Office Bldg, cnr Jln Sultan & Jln Elizabeth Dua) in Bandar Seri Begawan.

### VISAS

Visitors must have a valid passport or internationally recognised travel document valid for at least six months beyond the date of entry into Brunei.

For those travellers wishing to visit up to 14 days, visas are not necessary for citizens of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand and the Republic of the Maldives. Austrian, British, German, Malaysian, New Zealand, Singaporean and South Korean nationals do not require a visa for visits of 30 days or less. US citizens do not need a visa for visits of up to 90 days. Australian citizens entering by air can get 30-day visas on arrival for B\$30.

Israeli citizens are not permitted to enter Brunei, and North Korean passport holders may also be turned away. People of all other nationalities should obtain a visa before visiting Brunei.

Bruneian embassies overseas have been known to give incorrect advice, so you should double-check if in doubt. Visas can be renewed when in Brunei.

Transit passengers are issued a 72-hour visa at the airport, which is enough to see most of the sights, but ties you to travelling by air.

### WOMEN TRAVELLERS

As Brunei is a conservative Muslim society, dressing modestly is advised in most areas. This may also help avoid occasional nuisances such as catcalls from youths and advances from elderly men.

## TRANSPORT

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

For Brunei, many travellers will need to obtain a visa in advance. Brunei may not admit nationals of Israel or North Korea. For more details of visa and other entry requirements, see left.

### Air

**Brunei International Airport** (☎ 233 2531, flight inquiries 233 1747) is about 4km out of the centre of Bandar Seri Begawan.

**Royal Brunei Airlines** (Map p594; ☎ 221 2222; www.brunei-air.com; RBA Plaza, Jln Sultan) has direct flights between Bandar Seri Begawan and many destinations in Asia, plus Sydney, Darwin, Brisbane and Perth in Australia, Auckland in New Zealand and Jeddah and Dubai in the Middle East. Stopover flights go to London and Frankfurt for connections throughout Europe and further afield.

Brunei levies a departure tax of B\$12 on all flights (B\$5 to Kota Kinabalu).

A number of other companies serve regional destinations; for airline offices in BSB see p601.

### Land

The main overland route into Brunei is by bus from Miri in Sarawak; see p602. You can travel overland between Limbang or Lawas in Sarawak and Bangar in the eastern part of Brunei, although a boat to Bandar Seri Begawan is far more convenient. See Bangar (p608), Limbang (p413) and Lawas (p413) for details on these border crossings.

### Sea

Boats connect Brunei to Lawas and Limbang in Sarawak, and to Pulau Labuan, from where boats go to Sabah. With the exception of speedboats for Limbang, all international boats now depart from Muara, 25km north-east of Bandar Seri Begawan, where Brunei immigration formalities are also handled. See p601 for more information.

Buy your ticket at the dock the previous day if you are catching an early boat, especially on weekends and public holidays, and aim to check in 45 minutes before departure time to clear immigration. You'll need to catch the first express bus to Muara from BSB to get the first ferry.

From Muara, there are numerous express boats daily to Pulau Labuan between 7.30am and 4.40pm. The fare from Brunei is B\$15; first class is only B\$3 (or RM6) more and a lot more comfortable.

Boats to Limbang in Sarawak leave from the customs wharf at the end of Jln Roberts in Bandar Seri Begawan, where there's also an immigration office. Private express boats do this run between 6am and 6pm, departing when full. The fare is B\$10 and the trip takes about 30 minutes.

One express boat goes daily from Muara to Lawas in Sarawak (B\$10, two hours) at 11.30am. Returning to Muara, a boat leaves Lawas at 7am and costs RM25.

### GETTING AROUND

Transport around Brunei is by bus, rental car or taxi. The public bus system is easy and reliable, but only operates in and around Bandar Seri Begawan. Buses mostly run between 6am and 6pm daily. On the main highway you'll be subjected to the

incessant, irritating beeping noise of overstressed speed alerts.

If you want to get off the main road to explore the hinterland, a rental car (p602) or organised tour (p598) are the best options. Taxis aren't good value for long trips. If you're thinking of renting a car, remember that Bruneians drive on the left side of the road.

Hitchhikers are quite a novelty in Brunei so chances of getting a lift aren't bad, though cars are less inclined to stop on the main highway and may expect money for lifts. However, hitching is never entirely safe, and we don't recommend it. Hitchhikers should understand that they are taking a potentially serious risk. If you do decide to hitchhike, it is safer to travel in pairs and let someone know where you are planning to go.

Boats regularly connect Bangar in the Temburong district with BSB. Temburong has a limited road network, and taxis are the only way to get around independently.

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