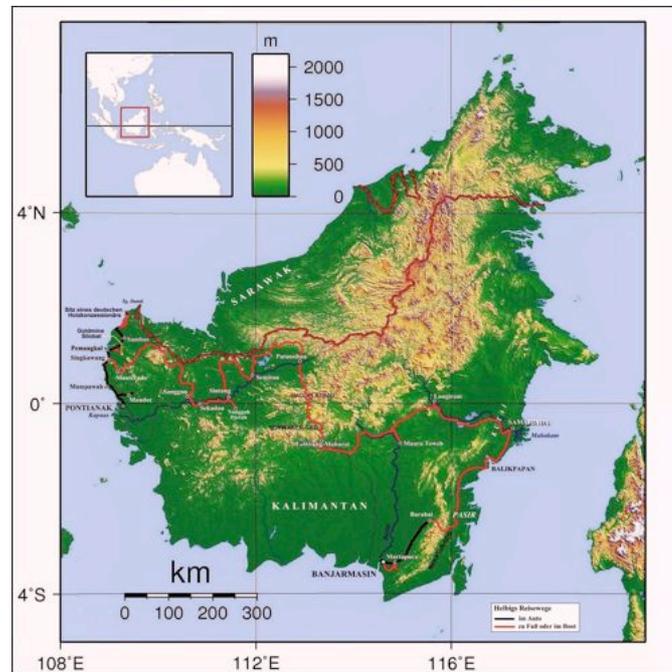


KALIMANTAN BORNEO 2010 by Lillian Agama, 31st March 2010

Lillian has worked in the tourism sector for much of her adult life, firstly as a guide then as a trainer and also as a promoter of tourism products which involved travelling to far-flung places. One day she woke up to the fact that she didn't really know her home island of Borneo as well as she thought she should. What to do? The only decision she felt she could make was to cancel all overseas trips and begin to get to know Borneo.



Not knowing too much about Kalimantan, and receiving only vague information about the State, she decided to begin her travels in Pontianak in the south west. From there she would travel eastwards by car, boat and flight, approximately following the coast line all the way to Balikpapan and then north to Sabah.

She found that there were no local tour operators to help organise her stay so she had to rely on information from local people. Her journey began at Port Kumai on the Kapuas river. This is a very busy port with quite a few “Hero” statues and many Burung Walet – large block houses for birds nest cultivation. One of these had been painted a striking blue colour which stood out dramatically from the surrounding buildings.

Making her way by river to Tanjung Puting Reserve and the Orang Utan Sanctuary at Tanjung Harapan through a huge wetlands area, she was struck by the near-absence of birds, the clarity of the tannin-stained water, the amazing reflections of the plants on the banks, especially in the early morning, and the absence of toilets on the river. On reaching the sanctuary at Camp Leakey, on the Leaky river, the first orang utans seen were in the water scooping up handfuls to drink. In this area, there were no fruiting trees sighted, orang utans would have a difficult time living naturally in the wild. They are so used to people, who feed them, and it is accepted locally that they are looked after as they are not living wild. At feeding platforms, orang-utans are given sweet potatoes, tapioca, bananas and milk. Around the jetty, visitors and boat crew distract them with a handful of peanuts or rice, which keeps them busy and less aggressive, and prevents any damage to boats and buildings, which does happen from time to time. Because life is easy for them, one can see a mother with two babies - unknown here in Sabah. Lillian watched one mother teaching her young one to climb trees by putting it up on a branch. It cried and came back to mum, who repeated the exercise elsewhere until baby understood what to do.



The next stage of the journey was to Banjarmasin. From there everyone said there were no roads, but, not to be deterred, Lillian hired a car with driver and set off, to find that the roads were raised, had high edges and ran over peat swamps. The Cempaka open mines there mined diamonds and other gems, which were on sale at the gem market at Martapura. The buildings were very highly decorated, as were the many towers there. Along the Barito River nearby, the buildings were wooden shacks and the traffic was so bad that most people wore face masks.



Further on, a floating market was enjoyed, the Pasar Terapung. Everything was sold from long, narrow boats. Next came Pulau Kembang which comes under the Department of the Environment. Long tailed macaques were everywhere – so much so that houses had to be protected from them.

The next port of call was to Batak Beach, a visit the driver could not understand as the area was featureless, but it **was** the southernmost Tip of Borneo. The journey then continued on to Balikpapan, with its well kept Australian War Memorial, then to Samarinda where there is a beautiful Islamic Centre and a Cultural Centre with magnificent century old carved pillars. Here, Lillian was shocked to be charged sixty thousand rupiah - per child - for taking a photo of a group of them. A brief visit to the sun bear conservation area was followed by a visit to the mangrove conservation area at Tarakan, where there is another Australian War Memorial. From there, it was a short trip northwards to Tawau, and then home.