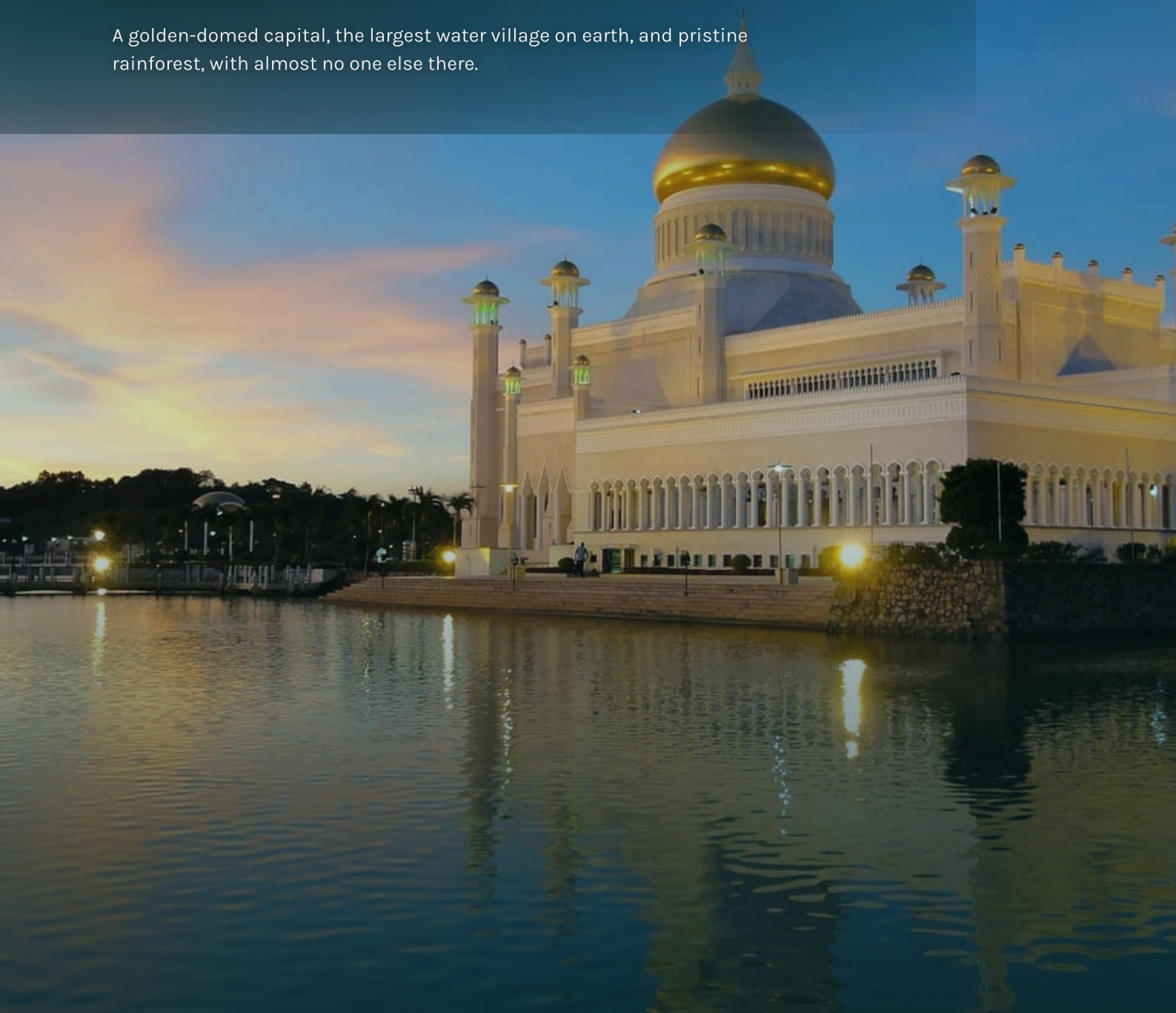
PACK LIGHTLY

THE QUIET SULTANATE

Brunei

A golden-domed capital, the largest water village on earth, and pristine rainforest, with almost no one else there.



p. 11 Ulu Temburong: the rainforest most travellers never reach

p. 25 What a day really costs, printed as a till receipt

p. 33 The dry, devout state: what the rules actually mean

41 PAGES USD PRICES VISA-FREE FOR MOST EDITION 2026.06

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Start here

the shape of a Brunei trip, what it costs, what to sort first


KAMPONG AYER, THE WATER VILLAGE

Brunei is the small, oil-rich sultanate on the north coast of Borneo, and the antidote to a touristed Southeast Asia: a calm, devout, spotless country where you may have a world sight almost to yourself. Three days covers it. The compact capital of Bandar Seri Begawan holds two of the grandest mosques in the region and the largest stilt-village on earth; an hour away, the Temburong rainforest is some of the best-protected jungle in Borneo. This guide is built around that small, rich circuit. All of it offline, in your pocket.

The shape of a trip

Two or three days: the capital and its mosques, a boat through Kampong Ayer to find proboscis monkeys, and a day in the Ulu Temburong rainforest. A long stopover on Royal Brunei does it justice.

What a day costs

Backpacking runs about 40 USD a day, mid-range around 80, captured May 2026. Brunei has little budget infrastructure but no tourist mark-up; the real cost is getting there.

Sort before you fly

Most passports enter visa-free. The country is dry, so bring nothing to drink; pack modest clothing and an eSIM. Page 29 lists the bookings worth doing early.


SULTAN OMAR ALI SAIFUDDIEN MOSQUE


ULU TEMBURONG RAINFOREST

HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure is on the last page.

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QUICK JUMPS

Ulu Temburong, the rainforest day 11

What a day really costs 25

The dry, devout state explained 33

Your trip on one page

2 to 3 days · 40 to 200 USD/day · best Feb to Aug

If you read nothing else, this page is the trip. Brunei is small and the circuit is short: the capital and its mosques, a river boat to the water village and the proboscis monkeys, and a day in the Temburong rainforest. Budget from the bars below. There is little to book ahead beyond a hotel, the Temburong day tour, and an eSIM; the country is calm, safe, and easy to arrive in.

THREE DAYS, BY AREA

The capital — day 1

river boat

Kampong Ayer — day 2

speedboat

Ulu Temburong — day 3

BUDGET PER DAY

Backpacker	40 USD
Standard	80 USD
Comfort	200 USD

BOOK FIRST

01	Flights, often a Royal Brunei stopover	Aviasales
02	A central hotel in the capital	Booking.com
03	eSIM, install before departure	Saily

BEST MONTHS

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
shoulder	best	best	shoulder	shoulder	best	best	best	shoulder	wettest	wettest	wettest

best: drier spells · shoulder: hot and humid · wettest monsoon months

Brunei at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data

SCORECARD

Safety	90
Friendliness	80
Nature	75
Culture	65
Food and drinks	60
Tourist infrastructure	50

Budget travel	40 USD/day
Mid-range	80 USD/day
Luxury	200 USD/day

RAINFOREST · MOSQUES · QUIET · WILDLIFE · STOPOVER

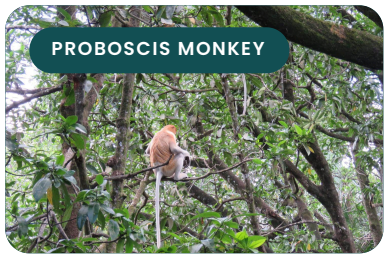
source: country-comparison tool, 2026-06

SIX FRAMES OF THE TRIP













01

The country

What Brunei is, what it costs, and the small, rich country on the coast of Borneo you need to understand before you arrive.

IN THIS CHAPTER

One sultanate, two halves, who goes 07

What Brunei is

460,000 people · an oil-rich sultanate · the calm corner of Borneo

A small, oil-rich sultanate of about 460,000 people on the north coast of Borneo, wrapped on three sides by Malaysia and split into two by a wedge of it. Brunei has been ruled by the same family for six centuries, and the current sultan is one of the wealthiest men on earth; the oil and gas pay for free healthcare, free education, and no income tax. The result is a quiet, devout, immaculate country with no nightlife and almost no tourists, where a grand mosque or a stretch of rainforest can be yours alone. It is the least-visited country in this series and, for the right traveller, the most surprising.

CAPITAL	POPULATION	CURRENCY	CLIMATE
Bandar S.B.	**460k**	**BND**	**equatorial**
~100k people	mostly Muslim	at par with SGD	hot, humid, year-round

THE COUNTRY IN FOUR PARTS



Bandar Seri Begawan

capital · mosques · the base

The compact capital where almost everything is: two grand mosques, the royal museums, and the river to the water village.



Kampong Ayer

water village · the largest on earth

A whole town on stilts over the river, home to thousands, with mosques, schools and shops above the water. The living heart of old Brunei.



Temburong, the green exclave

rainforest · canopy · the other half

The eastern half, cut off by Malaysia, almost entirely protected rainforest. Reached by speedboat and bridge; the country's wild jewel.



The west: Tutong and the coast

beaches · resorts · lakes

West of the capital: the Empire luxury resort, quiet beaches, and the lake of Tasek Merimbun. The slow, leafy half for a longer stay.

WHO THIS GUIDE IS WRITTEN FOR

Stopover visitor
2 days on a Royal Brunei layover; mosques and a river boat.

Borneo completist
Adding Brunei between Sabah and Sarawak overland.

Nature traveller
Temburong rainforest and the proboscis monkeys.

Quiet-seeker
A calm, dry, crowd-free corner of Southeast Asia.

02

Where to go

A small country with a handful of standout places. The capital and its mosques, the water village, and the rainforest you cross a border within a border to reach.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Bandar Seri Begawan and the mosques 09

Kampong Ayer, the water village 10

Ulu Temburong rainforest 11

The west: coast, lake and resort 12

Where to base, mapped 13

Bandar Seri Begawan and the mosques

the capital · a full day · the base for everything



Bandar Seri Begawan, BSB to everyone, is a small, low-rise capital you can walk in a morning, and the base for the whole trip. Its two great mosques are the headline. The Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque, a 1958 marble-and-gold landmark mirrored in its own lagoon with a ceremonial stone barge, is the postcard of the country. The newer Jame' Asr Hassanil Bolkiah Mosque, built for the sultan's silver jubilee, is bigger still, with four minarets and twenty-nine golden domes.

Pair the mosques with the Royal Regalia Museum, a free hall of coronation gifts, jewelled crowns and gold ceremonial arms that explains the wealth of the place, and the waterfront where the river boats leave. Non-Muslims can enter the mosques outside prayer times, robed and shoeless. The city is dry and quiet by night, so plan around the call to prayer and the Friday closures, and use the evenings for the Gadong night market.

☆

Both mosques close to visitors during the five daily prayers and most of Friday. Check the times; robes are lent free at the door.

The Royal Regalia Museum is free and air-conditioned, the best hour out of the midday heat and the clearest window into the sultanate.

Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien

The marble-and-gold mosque in its lagoon; the symbol of the country, best at dusk.

Jame' Asr mosque

The larger jubilee mosque, four minarets and twenty-nine domes; vast and quiet.

Royal Regalia Museum

Free, gilded, and the clearest read on the wealth and history of the sultanate.

Gadong night market

The evening that the dry capital does have; grilled food, satay and local sweets.

GO DEEPER

The mosques and shrines in the religious landmarks rundown, the city picks in the best places page, and the calendar in the public holidays guide.

Kampong Ayer, the water village

the largest stilt-village on earth · half a day by boat



Across the river from the capital sits Kampong Ayer, a whole town built on stilts over the water and home to thousands of people, the largest village of its kind in the world. It is not a museum: there are mosques, schools, clinics, fire stations and shops, all on boardwalks above the tide, and water taxis dart between them like buses. People have lived here for over a thousand years, and many still choose the village over the modern houses on shore.

Hire a water taxi from the waterfront, agree a price, and ask the boatman to weave through the village and out along the mangroves to look for proboscis monkeys, the big-nosed Borneo endemic, in the trees at dawn or dusk. Stop at the cultural-tourism gallery to understand the village, and accept an invitation for tea if one comes; the hospitality here is genuine. It is the most memorable hour in Brunei.

Agree the water-taxi fare before you board, and combine the village with the mangrove monkey loop in one trip; the boatmen do both.

Proboscis monkeys are easiest to spot in the mangroves at first light or late afternoon; go early or stay out past five.

The water taxi ride

Weave the boardwalk channels by boat; the only way to see the village properly.

Mangrove monkey loop

Out along the river for proboscis monkeys, kingfishers and the odd crocodile.

Cultural gallery

The small museum on stilts; the history of a thousand years of life on the water.

READ ON The village and the river in the best places rundown, and the wildlife you may meet in the animals breakdown.

Ulu Temburong rainforest

the green jewel · a full day from the capital · the reason to come



Brunei's eastern half, the Temburong district, is cut off from the rest of the country by a slice of Malaysia, and almost all of it is protected rainforest. Ulu Temburong National Park, the green jewel, is some of the most pristine and best-funded jungle in Borneo, precisely because the oil wealth means it was never logged. A canopy walkway climbs a steel tower above the treetops for a view over unbroken forest, and the rivers run clear enough to swim.

It is a full-day trip and worth every hour. The journey is half the experience: a speedboat through the mangroves, a road across the new Temburong bridge or a longboat poled up the shallow river, then the climb. Go with a licensed guide or a lodge tour, since the park is reached only by arranged transport. For the deepest experience, stay a night at the eco-lodge to hear the dawn chorus and walk the forest before the day-trippers arrive.

The canopy walkway is a steep climb up an exposed steel tower; go early for the clearest air, and bring water and grip shoes.

The park is reached only by arranged boat and guide. Book a day tour or an eco-lodge stay from the capital; you cannot turn up alone.

The canopy walkway

A steel tower above the treetops; the view over unbroken primary rainforest.

The river journey

Speedboat through mangroves, then a longboat up the clear shallows; half the trip.

The eco-lodge night

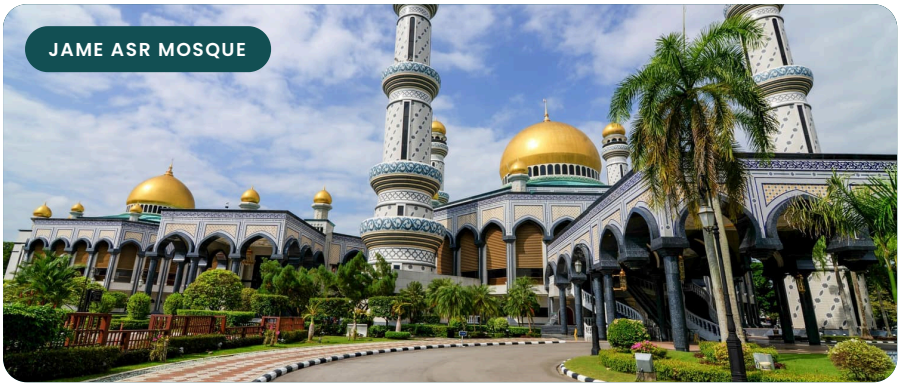
Stay over for the dawn chorus and a guided night walk; the deepest version.

KEEP READING

The parks in the national parks rundown, the wildlife in the animals page, and the forest trails in the mountains breakdown.

The west: coast, lake and resort

the slow, leafy half · for a third or fourth day



West of the capital the country spreads into quiet coast and forest, the part that fills a longer stay. The Empire Brunei is the headline: a vast, gilded resort built by the royal family as a guesthouse and now open to all, with a beach, a championship golf course and a marble lobby on a scale that makes sense only here. You do not need to stay to walk in for a coffee and a look at the most opulent public building in the country.

Beyond it, the coast runs to empty beaches at Muara and the long sweep of Jerudong, with the faded fun of the once-grand Jerudong Park. Inland, Tasek Merimbun is the country's largest lake, a black-water reserve of forest and birdlife with a boardwalk to a small island. None of this is unmissable, but it rounds out a trip beyond the capital and shows the unhurried, green side of Brunei that few visitors ever see.

You can visit the Empire without staying: walk in for a coffee in the marble lobby and a look at the beach and the pools.

Public transport west is thin. Hire a car or a driver for the coast and the lake; the roads are good and almost empty.

The Empire Brunei

The royal-built mega-resort; the most opulent building you can simply walk into.

Muara and Jerudong beaches

Long, empty stretches of sand; quiet at any time, with the old fun park nearby.

Tasek Merimbun

The black-water lake reserve; a boardwalk, birdlife, and forest stillness.

MORE ON THE SITE The coast in the beaches rundown, the lake and reserves in the off the beaten path page, and the islands in the islands breakdown.

Where to base, mapped to what you want

a small country, one real base · read down the column you care about

Brunei is small enough that you base in the capital and day-trip everywhere, so the question is which sights get your limited time rather than where to sleep. The matrix below sorts the main places by what each is strongest for. Two days covers the capital and the water village; a third unlocks the Temburong rainforest, the real prize.

PLACE	FOR	CULTURE	NATURE	PHOTOS	EASY
Bandar Seri Begawan	capital	●●●	●○○	●●●	●●●
Kampong Ayer	water village	●●●	●●○	●●●	●●○
Ulu Temburong	rainforest	●○○	●●●	●●○	●○○
The Empire / west coast	resort	●○○	●●○	●●○	●●○
Tasek Merimbun	lake	●○○	●●●	●●○	●○○

● filled dots = stronger fit (3 = built for it)

assessment: pack-lightly Brunei cluster, 2026-06

Two days: the capital, the mosques and the water village. Three days: add the Temburong rainforest, the single best thing in the country.

Base in the capital regardless; everything is a short drive or a boat away, and the few hotels are clustered there.

ON THE WEBSITE The ranked sights in the best places rundown and the three-day plan in the 3-day itinerary.

03

What to do

The rainforest and its wildlife, the sultanate and its mosques, and the food. Plus where to sleep and which tours are worth paying for in a country where most are private.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Rainforest and wildlife 15

The sultanate and its mosques 16

Food, the calibration dishes 17

Stay and tours worth paying for 18

Rainforest and wildlife

Borneo's best-protected jungle · the real reason to come



Brunei's oil wealth bought something rare in Borneo: rainforest that was never logged. More than two-thirds of the country is still forest, much of it primary, and the wildlife that vanished elsewhere on the island survives here. The headline animal is the proboscis monkey, the big-bellied, long-nosed Borneo endemic, easily seen along the mangrove rivers near the capital at dawn and dusk. Hornbills, gibbons, monitor lizards and the odd saltwater crocodile share the canopy and the water.

The two ways to see it are the mangrove river safari from Kampong Ayer, a short, cheap boat trip with a high hit-rate for monkeys, and the full day in Ulu Temburong on page 11, where the canopy walkway puts you above the treetops. Neither needs a hardcore expedition; both are gentle, guided, and astonishingly quiet. For a country this small and this rich, the nature is the unexpected headline and the thing travellers remember.

The mangrove river safari has the best odds for proboscis monkeys, and it is cheap and short; the deeper experience is the Temburong day.

Pack light rain gear and insect repellent for the forest; the jungle is humid, the leeches are harmless, and the dawn is the magic hour.

Proboscis monkeys

The big-nosed Borneo endemic, in the mangroves near the capital; near-guaranteed at dusk.

Temburong canopy

The walkway tower over primary forest; hornbills, gibbons and a view of the unbroken green.

Tasek Merimbun

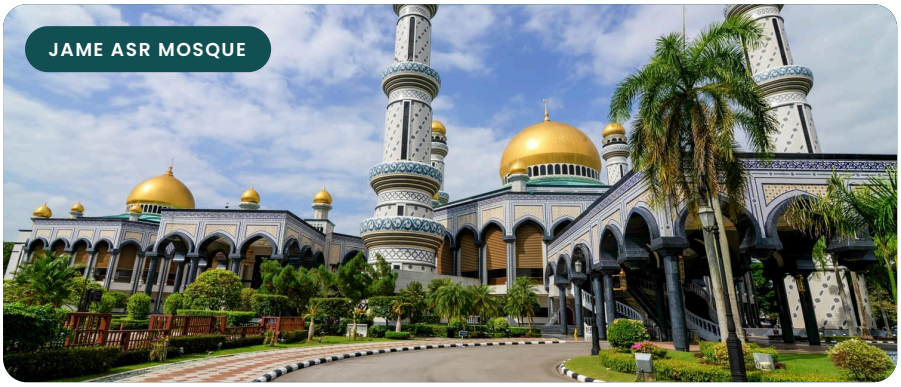
The black-water lake reserve; birdlife, a boardwalk, and forest quiet for a half-day.

GO DEEPER

The wildlife in the animals rundown, the parks in the national parks page, and the forest peaks in the mountains breakdown.

The sultanate and its mosques

six centuries of one dynasty · written in gold and marble



Dress fully covered to enter a mosque, and skip prayer times and Friday midday. Robes are lent free; women cover the hair inside.

The palace opens to the public only for three days at the end of Ramadan, when the sultan greets visitors in person; a remarkable sight if your dates line up.

Brunei is one of the world's last absolute monarchies, ruled by the same family since the fourteenth century, and the trip is partly an education in what that looks like. The wealth is on open display: the two great mosques, the Istana Nurul Iman palace with its 1,788 rooms (the largest residential palace on earth, open to the public only at the end of Ramadan), and the Royal Regalia Museum's gilded coronation chariots and jewelled crowns. Islam is the state religion and shapes daily life, gently but completely.

Visiting the mosques is the way in, and the etiquette is simple: dress modestly with shoulders, arms and knees covered, remove shoes, and time your visit outside the five daily prayers and the Friday midday closure, when non-Muslims cannot enter. Robes are lent at the door. Behave as a respectful guest in a devout country and you are welcomed warmly; the full protocol is on page 33. Understanding the sultanate is half of understanding Brunei.

The two grand mosques

Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien and Jame' Asr; gold domes, marble, and stillness.

Istana Nurul Iman

The 1,788-room royal palace; viewed from the river, open only at the end of Ramadan.

Royal Regalia Museum

Coronation chariots, crowns and gifts; the free, gilded story of the dynasty.

WORTH A READ The mosques in the religious landmarks page, the customs and faith in the culture write-up, and the holiday calendar in the public holidays guide.

Food: the four calibration dishes

Malay roots, no alcohol · 1 to 5 USD a plate

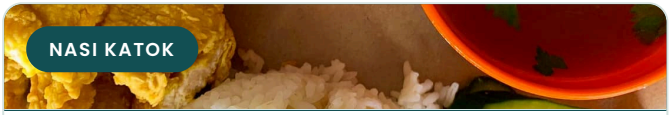
Bruneian food is Malay at heart, close to its Sabah and Sarawak neighbours but with its own signatures, and best found at the night markets and humble eateries rather than hotel restaurants. The country is dry, so the meal is the event, washed down with sweet teh tarik or fresh juice. Eat at the Gadong night market and the kedai kopi coffee shops, and order these four to calibrate the rest.



Ambuyat the national dish

USD 3-6 · sit-down

The signature: a sticky, near-flavourless sago starch you twirl onto bamboo chopsticks and dunk in a sour, pungent dipping sauce. It is the national dish and an experience as much as a meal; order it to share and let the table show you the technique.



Nasi katok the cheap classic

USD 1 · everywhere

A no-frills plate of rice, fried chicken and a fierce sambal, wrapped in paper for about a dollar. The cheapest, most beloved fast food in the country, named for the knock on the door of the late-night stall that first sold it.

SOTO BRUNEI

Soto the breakfast soup

USD 2-4 · morning

A fragrant beef or chicken noodle soup with rice cakes, the local breakfast and comfort food. Spiced, warming, and a gentler introduction to the kitchen than ambuyat; the markets do the best bowls.

SATAY SKEWERS

Satay and grills night market

USD 0.50 a stick · nightly

Charcoal-grilled skewers and barbecued fish are the heart of the Gadong night market, the closest the dry capital comes to nightlife. Graze a plate of satay, grilled chicken wings and rice cakes for a few dollars.

Brunei is dry: no alcohol is sold anywhere. Non-Muslim visitors may bring a small personal allowance in, declared at the border.

Teh tarik, sweet pulled tea, is the national drink; order it everywhere, and try the cendol shaved ice in the heat.

ON THE WEBSITE

The full dish-by-dish list in the food and drinks rundown, and the dry-country rules in the culture page.

Where to stay and what to book

prices per night, double room · base in the capital, tours are private

Brunei has few hotels and they cluster in the capital, so the choice is simple: a central business hotel for the trip, or the Empire resort for a splurge night. Budget infrastructure is thin, with only a couple of guesthouses, so backpacker rates run higher than the region. Tours here are mostly private, since visitor numbers are small; the upside is a guide to yourself.

Bandar Seri Begawan

guesthouse **30 USD** mid **65 USD** comfort **120 USD**

The only sensible base: central business hotels near the mosques and the waterfront, walkable to almost everything. Check what a room costs in the centre before you commit; the handful of budget beds show on Hostelworld.

The Empire (west coast)

standard **140 USD** sea view **250 USD** suite **500 USD**

The one splurge worth it: the royal-built resort with a beach, a golf course and a marble lobby, often surprisingly affordable for the grandeur. Compare the resort and coast rates on the live map for your dates.

Hotels across the capital and the coast, with free cancellation while your plans are still moving.

Find Stays on Booking.com

TOURS WORTH PAYING FOR

Proboscis monkey mangrove river safari

from 95 USD

4.9 (20 reviews)

2 hours

Bandar heritage and water village tour

from 130 USD

4.9 (20 reviews)

5 hours

Full Brunei day: city, water village and mangroves

from 205 USD

4.8 (20 reviews)

9 hours

Live Viator tours, prices captured June 2026, ratings from verified bookings. Brunei tours run mostly private, so prices are per group. Tap a card to book.

04

Plan your days

Six ways to spend a short stay, the three-day circuit done right, and how Brunei fits into a wider Borneo trip across the two Malaysian states that surround it.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Pick your trip, 6 ways 20

Three days, done right 21

Brunei in a Borneo trip 22

Pick your trip

how long you have, what you are here for · six ways to spend it

Brunei is a short stay by nature, from a one-day stopover to a three-day circuit or a leg of a longer Borneo trip. Find your row below; the three-day route on the next page covers the full version, and the country is small enough to flex the order to your flights.

STOPOVER · 1 DAY

The Royal Brunei layover

USD 60 · taxi + boat

- The two mosques
- Royal Regalia Museum
- A water-taxi loop

SOLO · 2D · BUDGET

The capital and the river

USD 130 · guesthouse

- Mosques + museum day one
- Kampong Ayer + monkeys
- Gadong night market

ANY · 3D · THE CLASSIC

Capital, village, rainforest

USD 350 · the full circuit

- Capital and mosques
- Water village and monkeys
- Ulu Temburong day

COUPLE · 3D · COMFORT

The Empire and the forest

USD 900 for 2 · resort night

- The capital and mosques
- A night at the Empire
- Temburong eco-lodge

NATURE · 2D

Rainforest first

USD 300 · lodge + safari

- Temburong overnight
- Mangrove monkey safari
- One capital morning

BORNEO LEG · +2D

Between Sabah and Sarawak

USD 250 · overland stop

- Bus in from Miri or KK
- Capital and village
- Bus on across the border

WORTH A READ

The full day-by-day version in the 3-day itinerary, and the ranked sights in the best places rundown.

Three days, done right

capital, water village, rainforest · the full small circuit

The classic route, one focus a day, built around the heat and the prayer times. Book the Temburong day or eco-lodge ahead, since the park is reached only by arranged boat and guide; the rest can be sorted on the ground.

1 The capital and the mosques
morning + evening

The Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien mosque early, the Royal Regalia Museum in the midday heat, the Jame' Asr mosque at golden hour, and the Gadong night market for dinner.

2 Kampong Ayer and the river
water taxi day

Boat into the water village, weave the boardwalk channels, then out along the mangroves for proboscis monkeys. Afternoon free for the west coast or the Empire.

3 Ulu Temburong
full-day tour

Speedboat through the mangroves to the rainforest, the canopy walkway above the treetops, a swim in a clear river, and back to the capital by evening. The day people remember.

Plan around the five daily prayers and the Friday midday mosque closures; the rhythm of the day follows the call to prayer.

Book the Temburong day before you arrive; it needs a licensed boat and guide, and the eco-lodge night is worth it if you can spare it.

Brunei in a Borneo trip

the small state between two big ones · how it connects

Brunei sits wedged into the Malaysian state of Sarawak, with Sabah just beyond, so many travellers fold it into a wider Borneo overland trip rather than flying in for it alone. The borders are straightforward, the buses run daily, and a couple of days in Brunei breaks up the longer Bornean journey with a very different pace.

WEST, FROM SARAWAK

Miri to Bandar

A few hours by bus from the oil town of Miri, the gateway from Sarawak and the Mulu caves; the most common overland entry.

EAST, TO SABAH

On to Kota Kinabalu

Buses run east across the border to Kota Kinabalu, the base for Mount Kinabalu and the islands; a long but easy day.

BY AIR

The Royal Brunei stopover

Royal Brunei flies a wide network and often allows a free stopover; the easiest way to add Brunei to a longer route for almost no cost.

→

The overland route crosses several border posts in a day, including the Temburong exclave. Carry your passport and small cash for each.

Ask your airline about a Royal Brunei stopover; it can add the country to a long-haul ticket for little or nothing.

ON THE WEBSITE Border and transport notes in the getting-around breakdown, and the offbeat corners in the off the beaten path page.

05

When to go

One hot season all year, a wetter monsoon, and a calendar shaped by the Islamic year. Plus what a day really costs, printed as a receipt.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Weather, crowds, price 24

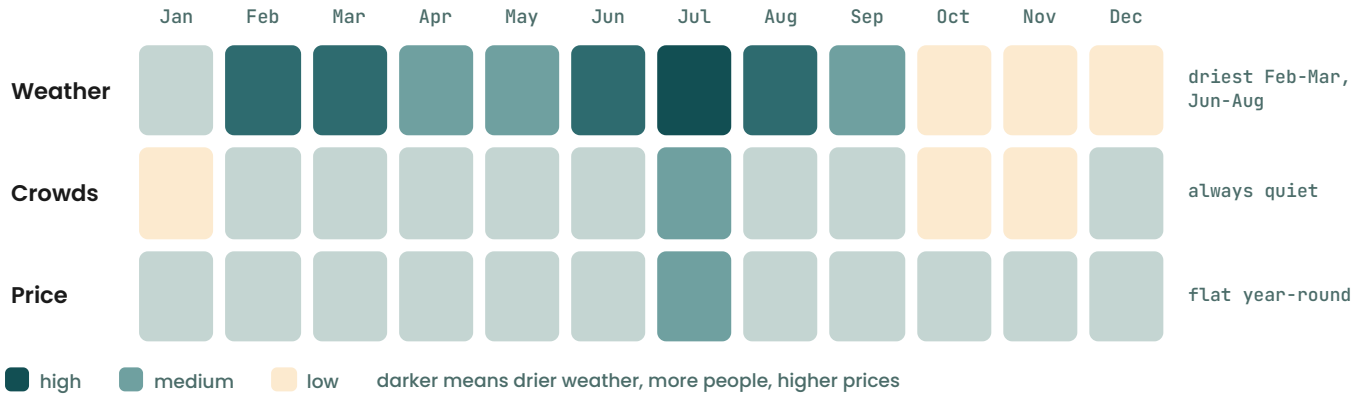
What a day really costs 25

Festivals and the Islamic calendar 26

Weather, crowds, price

12-month calendar · one hot season, all year

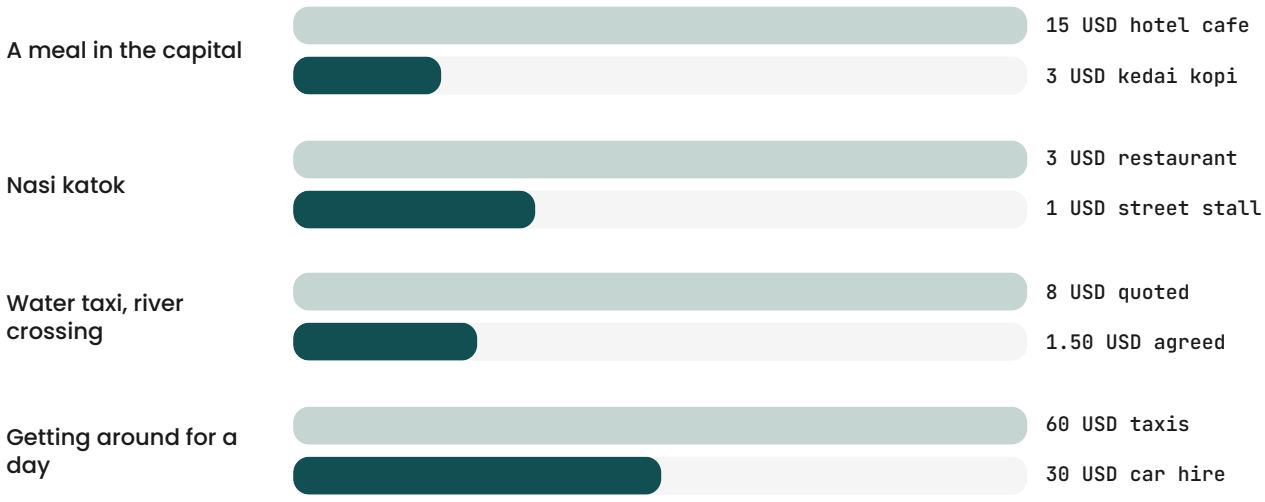
Brunei sits a few degrees off the equator, so the climate is hot and humid every month with little seasonal change. There is no bad time and no perfect one. The drier stretches fall around February to March and June to August; the heaviest rain comes with the northeast monsoon from October to December, though it rarely lasts all day. Crowds are never an issue, this is one of the least-visited countries in Asia, so the calendar to watch is the Islamic one, when Ramadan and the holidays change what is open.



climate: 10-year averages, captured 2026-05-17 · crowd and price: pack-lightly estimate

WHAT THINGS COST: TOURIST HABIT VS LOCAL HABIT

SAMPLE DATA



What a day really costs

bed to nightcap, three ways · itemised, with a capture date

The headline numbers, made concrete. Three days in Brunei, priced line by line. The food and the river boats are cheap, but the thin hotel choice and the lack of public transport push the daily total up, and the Temburong day tour is the one real expense. There is no nightcap line here; the country is dry. Captured May 2026; the budget calculator keeps the live version.

A DAY IN BRUNEI

* backpacker *

guesthouse bed	22.00
kedai kopi breakfast	2.00
nasi katok lunch	1.50
night-market dinner	4.00
water taxi + bus	4.00
mangrove monkey boat, split	5.00
teh tarik and water	1.50
TOTAL / DAY	**~40 USD**

budget-calculator estimate · 2026-05-17

A DAY IN BRUNEI

* standard *

3-star double, half	33.00
cafe breakfast	5.00
local restaurant lunch	6.00
dinner	10.00
taxi or car hire share	15.00
museum and river tour	11.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~80 USD**

budget-calculator estimate · 2026-05-17

A DAY IN BRUNEI

* comfort *

the Empire, half	90.00
resort breakfast	incl.
restaurant lunch	18.00
dinner, good table	30.00
private driver, half day	40.00
Temburong private tour	incl. above
spa or golf	22.00
TOTAL / DAY	**~200 USD**

budget-calculator estimate · 2026-05-17

Festivals and the Islamic calendar

the year runs on the Islamic calendar · one date opens the palace



Brunei's calendar is shaped by Islam, and timing a trip around it changes the experience for better or worse. Hari Raya Aidilfitri, the end of Ramadan, is the great festival: the streets light up, families gather, and for three days the sultan opens the Istana palace to the public to greet visitors in person, a remarkable sight. The Sultan's birthday in July brings parades and an open-house spirit across the country.

The flip side is Ramadan itself, the fasting month, when eating in public during daylight is frowned upon, many restaurants close until dusk, and the pace slows. It is a fascinating but tricky time to visit; the night markets come alive after the fast, but daytime dining is awkward. The dates shift each year with the lunar calendar, so check before you book, and decide whether you want to be there for Hari Raya or well clear of the fast.

During Ramadan, do not eat, drink or smoke in public in daylight; many eateries close until dusk, then the night markets buzz.

For three days at Hari Raya, the sultan's 1,788-room palace opens to the public and he greets visitors in person; a once-a-year sight worth timing for.

NINTH ISLAMIC MONTH

Ramadan

The fasting month; daytime dining closes, the country slows, the night markets come alive after dark.

END OF RAMADAN

Hari Raya Aidilfitri

The big festival; the palace opens, families feast, and the whole country celebrates for days.

JULY

The Sultan's birthday

Parades, ceremonies and an open-house mood; the biggest fixed-date event of the year.

SEE ALSO The month-by-month breakdown in the best travel time page, and the full calendar in the public holidays guide.

06

Practical

The few things to book before you fly, how money and the thin transport network work, and the short list that keeps a Brunei trip simple in a dry, devout country.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Book in this order 28

Money and transport 29

Bed, bag, signal 30

Health basics 31

Book in this order

three things before you fly · the rest is simple on arrival

Brunei takes little planning, but the few moving parts reward a bit of forethought, mostly because the hotel choice is small and the Temburong rainforest needs an arranged tour. Three things have a natural order. Most passports enter visa-free, so the visa step is a quick check.

8 wk before

Flights, often a stopover

Royal Brunei is the main carrier and frequently allows a free stopover on a longer ticket, the cheapest way to add the country. Otherwise fly in from Singapore, Kuala Lumpur or the Borneo hubs.

Compare fares on Aviasales

4 wk before

A hotel and the Temburong day

Book a central capital hotel early; the choice is small. At the same time, arrange the Ulu Temburong day tour or eco-lodge, since the park is reached only by licensed boat and guide. Then confirm your visa-free entry rule.

Find Stays on Booking.com

1 wk before

eSIM

Install before departure and activate on landing. Coverage is good in and around the capital, patchier in the forest. A small data plan covers a short stay; download offline maps before you go.

Set up a Saily eSIM

Passport rule: valid six months beyond arrival. Declare any personal alcohol allowance at the border; the country itself is dry.

If you can spare the night, the Temburong eco-lodge is the highlight of a Brunei trip; book it before everything else.

06

Money and transport

cash and card both · thin public transport, easy car hire

The Brunei dollar is pegged at par to the Singapore dollar, and Singapore notes are accepted interchangeably. Cards work at hotels and larger restaurants; carry cash for the markets, the water taxis and the small eateries. The catch is getting around: public transport is sparse and infrequent, so most travellers rely on the ride-hail app Dart, metered taxis, or a hire car, which is cheap with petrol among the cheapest on earth.

ITEM	BACKPACKER	MID	COMFORT
Guesthouse / hotel double	USD 22	USD 65	USD 140
Market meal / restaurant	USD 2	USD 8	USD 25
Teh tarik / fresh juice	USD 1	USD 2	USD 4
Water taxi crossing	USD 1.50	USD 2	USD 4
Hire car, per day	USD 30	USD 40	USD 60

verified 2026-05-14 · pack-lightly Brunei estimate · per-category numbers in the budget guide

TRANSPORT: WHAT BEATS WHAT

A hire car is the freedom play: roads are good and empty, fuel is almost free, and it opens the west coast and the lake that buses never reach. If you would rather not drive, the Dart ride-hail app and metered taxis cover the capital, though both can be slow to appear off the main streets. The water taxis are the way across the river to Kampong Ayer and out to the mangroves, agreed by price not meter. There is a sparse public bus network in the capital, but for a two or three day trip a car or a driver saves far more than it costs. The Temburong rainforest is reached only by arranged boat and guide.

Petrol is among the cheapest on earth here, so a hire car is the value play; the roads are good and almost traffic-free.

Singapore dollars are accepted at par, so leftover SGD from a connection spends fine; cards work in hotels, cash everywhere else.

THE FULL PICTURE

Currency notes in the currency rundown, and getting-around detail in the traffic breakdown.

Bed, bag, signal

hotels · packing · eSIM, the three solved problems

BED

The choice is small, so book early. For hotels, Booking.com has the central capital options and the Empire resort; for the handful of guesthouses, Hostelworld lists the budget beds. The one splurge worth it is a night at the Empire, often surprisingly affordable for the grandeur; otherwise a central business hotel keeps you walking distance from the mosques.

BAG: THE MODEST-TROPICS CARRY-ON LIST

- [ ] Modest, breathable clothing; cover shoulders and knees
- [ ] A long-sleeve top and a scarf for the mosques
- [ ] A light layer for fierce indoor air-conditioning
- [ ] SPF 50, insect repellent, and a refillable water bottle
- [ ] Light rain gear and grip shoes for the rainforest
- [ ] Type G plug adapter; Brunei uses the UK three-pin
- [ ] Cash in Brunei or Singapore dollars
- [ ] A modest swimsuit for the river and the resort pool
- [ ] No alcohol to share or sell; a small personal allowance only
- [ ] A power bank for the forest day

Signal. Buy the eSIM before you fly and activate on landing. Coverage is good around the capital and patchier in the forest, so download offline maps first. A 3 to 5 GB plan covers a short stay; a local DST or Imagine SIM is the alternative for a longer one.

Set up a Saily eSIM

06

GO DEEPER The packing list in the packing guide, the dress code in the clothes page, and data plans in the eSIM write-up.

Health basics

a safe, low-drama destination · the list is short

Brunei is a low-risk health destination: the oil wealth funds good hospitals, hygiene is high, and tap water in the capital is generally safe though many prefer bottled. No special vaccinations are required for a normal visit. The list below is the whole of it, plus the two equatorial things worth a moment of care, the mosquito and the heat, and a note on the rainforest day.

THE SHORT LIST

- [ ] **Routine:** confirm your standard vaccines are current; nothing Brunei-specific is required for the usual trip.
- [ ] **Recommended:** Hepatitis A and typhoid are sensible for any Southeast Asia trip if you are not already covered.
- [ ] **Insurance:** care is good but private for visitors. A standard travel policy with rainforest activity cover is enough.
- [ ] **Dengue:** the one real local risk, carried by daytime mosquitoes. Use repellent, especially near the mangroves and the forest.
- [ ] **Heat:** the equatorial humidity is constant. Hydrate, rest in the air-conditioning at midday, and pace the forest day.
- [ ] **Pharmacies and hospitals:** well-stocked and modern in the capital; the RIPAS hospital handles anything serious.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

The capital's RIPAS hospital is modern and English is widely spoken, so communication is rarely a problem. Pharmacies handle minor issues over the counter. The one place you are genuinely remote is the Temburong rainforest, so ride and walk within your limits and stay with your guide. Dial 991 for an ambulance, 993 for police, 995 for fire.

Dengue is the main local health risk. Repellent at dawn and dusk near the mangroves and the forest is the whole protocol.

Carry a doctor's note for any prescription medication; the country is conservative and customs can be strict on what you bring in.

READ ON Vaccination detail in the vaccinations page, hospital and pharmacy notes in the hospitals breakdown, and cover in the travel insurance rundown.

07

Safe and smart

One of the safest countries on earth, where the thing to understand is the conservative law, not crime. Plus the manners that matter and a few words of Malay.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The dry, devout state explained 33

Etiquette: the short list 34

Emergency numbers and eight phrases 35

The dry, devout state explained

crime is near zero · the law and the faith are what to know

Brunei is one of the safest countries on earth: violent crime against visitors is almost unheard of, theft is rare, and you can walk anywhere at any hour. The thing to understand is not danger but the conservative, devout character of the place. It is a dry country under a strict legal code, and a respectful guest has no problems at all; the four points below are simply what to know before you arrive.

POINT 01

It is a dry country

No alcohol is sold or served anywhere, and public drinking is not allowed. Non-Muslim visitors may bring a small personal allowance in, declared at customs, to drink privately.

What to do: do not expect a bar or a beer with dinner. Declare any personal allowance at the border and keep it to your room.

POINT 02

A strict legal code

Brunei has adopted a strict criminal code alongside its civil law. In practice it is rarely enforced on tourists, but drug offences are extremely serious, and discretion in private matters is wise.

What to do: never go near drugs, dress and behave modestly in public, and keep private life private. Respect goes a long way here.

POINT 03

Modesty and the LGBTQ note

Dress is conservative, and public affection is frowned on for everyone. Same-sex relations are illegal in law, so LGBTQ travellers should be discreet, though tourists are not targeted.

What to do: dress modestly, keep affection private regardless of who you are, and travel with the same discretion locals use.

POINT 04

Friday and the call to prayer

Life pauses for the five daily prayers, and on Friday many shops and all mosques close to visitors around midday for the main prayers. It shapes the rhythm of every day.

What to do: plan around the prayer times and the Friday closures, and use the gaps for the museum, the market or a meal.

07

MORE ON THE SITE

The full safety picture in the safety breakdown, the customs and faith in the culture rundown, and the dress code in the clothes page.

Etiquette: the short list

first four are load-bearing · last four keep you welcome

Eight things that matter in a devout, conservative country. The first four keep you on the right side of local feeling and the law; the last four are courtesies that make you a good guest. Brunei is gentle and forgiving of respectful visitors, but the social code runs deep.

DO

Dress modestly, everywhere

Cover shoulders and knees in public, and fully at the mosques; robes are lent at the door.

DO NOT

Drink alcohol in public

The country is dry. A small personal allowance is for your room only, declared at the border.

DO

Use your right hand

Give, receive and eat with the right hand; the left is considered unclean.

DO NOT

Eat in public during Ramadan

If you visit during the fast, do not eat, drink or smoke in public in daylight.

DO

Accept hospitality graciously

An offer of tea or food is genuine; accept a little even if you decline the rest.

DO NOT

Point your feet or touch heads

Feet are the lowest part of the body; tuck them away, and never pat a head.

DO

Ask before photographing people

Especially women and at the mosques; most are happy to be asked first.

DO NOT

Show public affection

Keep it private regardless of who you are; the country is conservative on this for everyone.

A respectful, modestly dressed visitor is warmly welcomed here. The etiquette is simply the courtesy of a guest in a devout home.

English is widely spoken alongside Malay, so you will never be stuck, but a "terima kasih" always earns a warm smile.

07

KEEP READING The customs and faith in the culture write-up, and the law detail in the safety page.

Emergency numbers and eight phrases

save the numbers now · a little Malay is warmly received

AMBULANCE
991
nationwide

POLICE
993
English spoken

FIRE AND RESCUE
995
nationwide

RIPAS HOSPITAL
+673 224 2424
main hospital, BSB

US EMBASSY
+673 238 4616
citizen services

SEARCH AND RESCUE
998
marine and forest

EIGHT MALAY PHRASES THAT OPEN THE COUNTRY

ENGLISH	MALAY	NOTES
Hello / peace	salam	the common greeting
Thank you	terima kasih	always warmly received
You're welcome	sama-sama	the natural reply
Yes / No	ya / tidak	simple and useful
How much?	berapa harga?	for the markets and boats
Delicious	sedap	say it about the food
Excuse me / sorry	maaf	polite and disarming
Help!	tolong!	emergencies only

English is widely spoken, so you will rarely be stuck, but a few words of Malay at a market stall earn an instant warmth.

These same phrases print as a wallet card on page 37; cut it out and keep it with your room key.

08

Tools and reference

The live tools this guide was built from, the cut-out cards for your wallet, and the sources behind every number.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Take the live tools with you 37

Print cards: cut, fold, take 38

Sources and methodology 39

A note on the links 41

Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL. Each one is preloaded with the same Brunei data this guide was built from.



Trip Budget Calculator

Brunei: 40 USD/day backpacker, 200 USD/day comfort.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/



Country Map

Brunei spots mapped, capital to rainforest.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/country-map/



Best Time to Travel

Driest Feb-Mar and Jun-Aug. Month-by-month for 140+ countries.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/



Visa Checker

Brunei: visa-free for most. Check your passport's rule.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/visa-checker/

Print cards: cut, fold, take

print at 100% scale · credit-card size, 85 x 54 mm

Print this page on A4 or US Letter at 100 percent (no fit-to-page), cut along the dashed lines, and the two cards live in your wallet for the trip. The form fields are interactive in Acrobat and iOS Preview if you would rather type than write.

MALAY · ESSENTIALS

Hello / peace	salam
Thank you	terima kasih
You're welcome	sama-sama
Yes / No	ya / tidak
How much?	berapa harga?
Delicious	sedap
Sorry	maaf
Help!	tolong!

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EMERGENCY · BRUNEI

Ambulance	991
Police	993
Fire and rescue	995
RIPAS Hospital	+673 224 2424
US Embassy	+673 238 4616

My hotel: _____

Address: _____

Insurance #: _____

Left card front, right card back: print double-sided on the short edge and they fold into one.

Lost the guide, kept the card? The QR opens the live Brunei hub with every page this guide links to, plus updates published after this edition went to print.

pack-lightly.com/brunei/

Photograph both cards before you cut. A phone copy of the emergency card still works when the wallet is back at the hotel.

A word of Malay and a modest manner open most doors here; keep the phrase card handy at the market and the boat jetty.

Sources and methodology

every number traces to a dated source



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Twenty-plus countries on the ground, with a performance-marketing background and a data-led approach to travel writing. Brunei is one of the least-documented countries in this series, so where a figure is an estimate it says so on the page; every other number is verified against a source below.

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Hotel pricing: Booking snapshot 2026-05-14, capital and resort sample.
2. Country scores: pack-lightly country-comparison dataset, re-scored 2026-02.
3. Visa policy: Brunei Immigration and Customs visa list, retrieved 2026-05-15.
4. Law and customs: Brunei government portal and FCDO country guidance, retrieved 2026-05.
5. Travel advisories: FCDO and US State Department, last update 2026-04-30.
6. Climate: Open-Meteo 10-year averages, captured 2026-05-17.
7. Pack Lightly Brunei cluster pages, retrieved 2026-06-15: visa · safety · best travel time · currency

Methodology. Pack Lightly's country scores aggregate eleven dimensions into the 0-100 scorecard on page 5, re-scored every six months; the last full re-score ran February 2026. Budget figures come from the country-comparison cost model, and the crowd and price calendar is a pack-lightly estimate, marked as such and stamped with its capture date. Brunei has fewer benchmark datasets than the rest of the series, so the daily costs lean more on field estimate than usual.

What changed in edition 2026.06: first Brunei release on the v2 design standard. Next planned update: December 2026. Not covered in depth here: the oil-town district of Kuala Belait, the longhouse interior, and the deeper Temburong treks, which get their own pages online.

Photo credits. Every photograph is sourced from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons or public-domain license. The full per-image list, with each photographer and license, is on the next page. Tour data and prices come from the Viator Partner API, captured June 2026.

Image credits

every photo, its author and license

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1. **Aerial view of Istana Nurul Iman**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.
2. **Ambuyat, the sago starch dish of**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 2.0.
3. **Brunei River cruise view**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 2.0.
4. **Gadong night market, Bandar Seri Begawan**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.
5. **Jame' Asr Hassanil Bolkiah Mosque, Brunei**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 2.0.
6. **Kampong Ayer water village, stilt houses**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 3.0.
7. **Longboat on Temburong River to Ulu**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC0.
8. **Nasi katok, Bruneian rice dish**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC0.
9. **Peradayan Forest Reserve, Brunei rainforest**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.
10. **Proboscis monkey along the Brunei River**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.
11. **Royal Regalia Museum, Bandar Seri Begawan**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 3.0.
12. **Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 2.0.
13. **Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 2.0.
14. **Tasek Merimbun Heritage Park lake, Brunei**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC0.
15. **The Empire Hotel and Country Club**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.
16. **View from the Waterfront, Bandar Seri**. Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured June 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

A note on the links in this guide

disclosure · why this guide is free

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a stay, a transport leg, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

The pick comes before the partner. A hotel or a way to travel is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. The rainforest and the water village, which earn no commission, get the most space, because they are the best of the country. The commission funds the guide, it does not choose for it.

Questions, corrections, or a place you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: **Aviasales** · **Booking.com** · **Saily** · **Hostelworld** · **Stay22** · **Viator** · via **Travelpayouts**

Links can outlive a print run. If one stops working, the live version of every page in this guide sits under pack-lightly.com/brunei.

This file is versioned; the edition is on the cover. The next planned update lands December 2026 and replaces this file at the same download.