

## - SARAWAK'S FAR NORTH - LIMBANG AND LAWAS

### **LIMBANG**

The small market and port town of Limbang is situated on the narrow tongue of land that divides Brunei in two. The town has an idyllic location stretched out along the eastern bank of the Sungai Limbang. A bustling Malay water-village directly across river simply adds to the charm of the location. Limbang is a popular weekend destination for neighbouring Bruneians, but is otherwise seldom visited.

#### Nearby Attractions

Many of Limbang's attractions are spread out around the town, and it is well worth booking a short tour (see Around Limbang, below) or chartering a taxi for an hour or two. Bukit Mas (gold hill) is a 210m high jungle-clad limestone outcrop which dominates the town. The summit offers excellent views of nearby Brunei and is accessible via a steep road leading off Jln Pandaruan, or by foot via a long staircase leading from the Lake Garden at the eastern end of the town. There is a small Buddhist shrine halfway up the summit road.

There are some well kept Malay and Chinese kampungs (traditional villages) along Jln Pandaruan which offer excellent photo opportunities. Further along the road towards the Brunei Ferry are a number of Kedayan kampungs where delicious fresh swamp clams are offered for sale. If you buy some, most seafood restaurants in town will be happy to cook them for you.

Back in town, the **Esplanade** is a popular place for strolling in the evening (it is used as a car park until 4pm) with a memorial of the Limbang Rebellion as its focal point. The wooden Limbang Museum, 200 metres upriver, has a modest collection of archaeological finds and ethnic artifacts. Downriver is an attractive Chinese Temple across from the Purnama Hotel. There is also a public library (4<sup>th</sup> floor of Limbang District Council building, adjoining Purnama Hotel) with a reference collection of books on the Limbang region. The bustling Tamu or wet market is on the waterfront in the centre of town, while the informal 'bawah payung' ('under the umbrella') market sets up at weekends outside the shophouses across the road, selling all manner of cheap goods.

#### Around Limbang

Borneo Touch Ecotour, the only local operator, offers a choice of interesting trips around Limbang. Possibilities include proboscis monkey and crocodile spotting boat tours amongst the mangroves, the bizarre 80cm high mud volcanoes at Kampung Meritam, 35km from town, day and overnight trips to nearby Iban longhouses, mountain bike trips to Gunung Buda, visits to the idyllic Mentawi Ranger Station at the northern border of Gunung Mulu National Park, and trekking to Mulu via the historic Headhunters Trail (See National Parks, Gunung Mulu). Call the ever-helpful Mr. Lim Chong Teah on 013-8443861, E-mail: walktomulu@yahoo.com.my, or look for him at his wife's confectionery shop next to the Sport Toto outlet on Jln Merdeka, which also double s as Limbang's unofficial tourist information centre. Visitors requiring further information on Limbang and its surroundings should feel free to call Mr. Chua Eng Hin, a knowledgeable and enthusiastic local citizen who acts as Limbang's one-man tourism promotion and information service, at 019-8145355, or E-mail him at chualbg@streamyx.com.

## Accommodation

All addresses are 98700 Limbang, Sarawak, Malaysia. Telephone dialing code is +6085 from overseas and 085 within Malaysia.

### Business Class Hotels

**Purnama Hotel**, Jln Buangsiol. 3-star business hotel with the best location in town. Get a river view room if you can. Tel: 216700 Fax: 216711. Room rate RM92-97.

### Budget Hotels

**Centre Point Hotel**, Lot 1587-8, Jln Buatnsiol. Tel: 213699 Fax: 217637. Room rate RM35-45.

**Hota Inn**, Lot 1453, Jln Buangsiol. Tel: 212733 Fax: 212788. Room rate RM30-45

**Jia Lun Hotel**, Lot 1116, Jln Buangsiol. Tel: 215060 Fax: 215898. Room rate RM40-50.

**Mariner Inn**, Lot 1371-3, Jln Buangsiol. Tel: 212922/3/5/6 Fax: 215898. Room rate RM50-53.

**Muhibbah Inn**, Lot 790-2, Jln Bank. Tel: 212482 Fax: 212153. Room rate RM30-40.

**Prime Hotel**, Lot 112, Jln Buangsiol. Tel: 213833 Fax: 217999. Room rate RM45-55.

**Royal Park Hotel**, Lot 1089-90 Jln Buangsiol. Tel: 212155 Fax: 212233. Room rate RM58-60.

## **Eating Out**

For a small town, Limbang has a remarkably wide choice of dining possibilities. The following are just a small selection.

**Chinese:** Dozens of Chinese hawker stalls set up every evening around the three rows of old wooden shophouses in the town centre. Offering economical noodle and rice dishes and local specialities. More Chinese hawker stalls operate from early morning to late afternoon on the first floor of the Tamu (wet market) building. More demanding diners will find a good selection of Chinese seafood restaurants; amongst the most popular are Waterfront Seafood and King's Seafood (both facing the riverfront on Jln Buangsiol opposite the Customs Department building), and Maggie Café (open late to 2am) on the riverside to the north of town. The town is full of traditional Chinese coffee shops serving drinks and simple breakfast and lunch dishes- for sheer atmosphere none of them beats the tiny and very friendly Ah Mee Face in an old wooden building on Jln Merdeka.

**Malay:** A selection of Muslim food stalls operate from early evening to around midnight near the waterfront off Jln Buangsiol, and more Malay stalls can be found on the first floor of the Tamu (wet market). Good Malay restaurants include the busy and popular Sarimah Curry House, uphill from the clock tower on Jln Rickett, Adnan Restaurant next to the airport road roundabout near RHB Bank, Mesra opposite the bus station and Selare Muhibbah on Jln Bank.

**Western:** Fast food lovers will find KFC and Sugar Bun outlets in Limbang Plaza, the shopping centre adjoining the Purnama Hotel, while Maggie Café (see Chinese, above) serves simple western dishes such as steaks and fish and chips.

### Entertainment

Much of Limbang's nightlife is geared up to catering to thrill-seeking male visitors from Brunei. If you don't want to pay for 'ladies drinks' then stick to the regular coffee shops or the Purnama Hotel Lounge, which usually features decent live bands and affordable drink prices.

### Useful Information

**Internet Access:** Media Cybercafe, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Limbang Plaza

**Swimming Pool:** The public swimming pool is on Jln Panduran about 10mins drive from town. There are a few private clinics in the town itself.

**Money Changer:** Thanks to the weekend trade from Brunei, money changers are located on every street corner and shopping centre.

### Travel Connections

**Air:** MASWings currently operates regular Fokker 50 and Twin Otter turboprop flight sto and from Miri and Lawas.

**Bus:** There is no bus service between Temburong (Brunei) and Limbang. However, regular buses travel as far as the Panduruan Ferry, but it is necessary to cross the border on foot and take a taxi onwards to Temburong.

**Boat:** There are express boat services to the island of Labuan (7.30 and 8.00am, jetty on the Esplanade wharf, 2hrs, RM25) and Lawas (8.00am, jetty off Jln Buangsiol opposite Royal Park Hotel, 3hrs, RM25) The speedboat service to Bandar Sri Begawan in Brunei (2x daily, 30 min, RM20) departs from the Customs wharf. Access via the Customs Department building next to the Tamu (wet market). Boats leave when full, so get there early. Alternatively, to charter a speedboat to Brunei, call Mr. Chiew (019-8066055) or Mr. Lai (013-8249551).

**Taxis:** The taxi stand is on the waterfront opposite the Customs Department building (Tel: 213781). Most trips around town are RM5-7, and the airport is RM15.

## **LAWAS**

Lawas is a bustling little border town sandwiched between the Temburong district of Brunei and the neighbouring Malaysian state of Sabah on the Lawas River (Sungai Lawas). The only significant attraction in town are the large and spotlessly clean Central market (Pasar Raya), which offers a great selection of tropical fruits and vegetables, an attractive Chinese Temple on Jln Bunga Teratai, and an old Mosque on the banks of the Sungai Lawas about 400m east of town.

The few visitors who come to Lawas are usually stopping over on their way to Sabah, of to the remote settlement of Bakelalan (formerly Ba'Kelalan), home of the Lun Bawang ethnic group (See Kelabit Highlands chapter). There are some hot springs with resort accommodation at Merarap, about 70km from town along an old logging road (see Accommodation, below), and a pleasant beach at Punang (7km, minibus from bus station, RM3).

### Accommodation

The attitude of hoteliers in Lawas town is somewhat "Take-it-or-leave it" in regard to room rates, maintenance and quality of service. It's best to inspect your room and its facilities before accepting it. Expect to pay around RM60 for a very basic single and RM120 for a reasonably comfortable double. All addresses are 98750 Lawas, Sarawak, Malaysia. Telephone dialing code is +6085 from overseas and 085 within Malaysia.

**Eastern Hotel**, No. 18, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Lot 317, Jln Trusan, Tel: 285980.  
**Gaya Inn**, No. 18-19 Lot 363&364, Jln Punang, Tel: 285855 Fax: 285733.  
**Hotel Federal**, No. 8, Lot 252, Jln Masjid Baru. Tel: 285341 Fax: 283085.  
**Hotel Perdana**, No. 24, Lot 365, Jln Punang. Tel: 285888 Fax: 285999  
**Mega Inn**, No. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Lot 153, Jln Muhibbah Tel: 283888 Fax: 283800.  
**Mexion Hotel**, No. 7, Lot 406, Jln Pantai. Tel: 284699 Fax: 285233  
**Million Hotel**, No. 5, Lot 157, Jln Muhibbah. Tel: 285020  
**Sakura Inn**, No. 18, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Lot 375, Jln Datuk Pengiran Hj Matussin. Tel: 285054.  
**Shangsan Hotel**, No. 17, Lot 235-236, JLn Trusan. Tel: 285522 Fax: 285024  
**Soon Seng Hotel**, No. 1, Lot 346, Jln Punang. Tel: 283338/9 Fax: 285233.

**Merarap Hotspring Lodge**, Lawas, Sarawak. Tel: 283472 Fax: 283927 E-mail: meraramphotsp@yahoo.com. Room Rate RM110-150 includes breakfast. Features natural hot spring spa pools, restaurant. Activities include fishing, birdwatching, visits to local Lun Bawang communities, adventure trails. Note: return 4WD transport is provided for a flat fee of RM300, shared by however many guests are traveling together.

### **Eating Out**

**Chinese:** The town abound with traditional coffee shops serving noodle and rice dishes for breakfast and lunch. For dinner, the Soon Seng restaurant in Jln Punang ia a good choice, as is the bustling Good Corner Seafood behind the Ngiu Kee department store.

**Malay:** There is a good choice of Muslim food stalls upstairs at the Central market. Restoran Hajjah Latifah on the corner of Jln Pantai near the market is highly recommended for mixed rice dishes, as are the nearby Restoran Hj Narudin, and Al Amin behind the Shangsan Hotel.

**Western:** The Sugar Bun outlet on Jln Pantai offers burgers and fries. Good coffee, cakes and snacks are available at the Intan Cake House, also on Jln Pantai.

### Entertainment

There are quite a few bars and karaoke lounges in town, all of which feature hostesses anxious to consume 'ladies drinks'. Drinkers not looking for female company are advised to keep to the coffee shops.

### **Travel Connections**

**Air:** MASWings currently operates regular Twin Otter turboprop flights to and from Miri, Limbang and Bakelalan. – see Miri Travel Connections for full details.

**Bus:** There are regular bus connections to Kota Kinabalu in Sabah (7am onwards, 4hrs, RM20), and to Merapok in the Sarawak/Sabah border RM5) with onward connections to Beaufort (Sabah, 4hrs, RM20). Note: A passport is required to cross the Sarawak/Sabah border.

**Boat:** There is a daily express boat service to Limbang (8.00am, 2 ½ hours, RM25), a 5x weekly service to Labuan (7.30am, 2 hrs, RM25, returns at 1.30pm).

**Taxis:** The taxi stand is next to the bus station. Airport taxi fare is probably the lowest in Malaysia at RM4-5.