

Sabah's pinnacle of nature

Mount Kinabalu, Sabah's most dramatic feature, is the tallest peak in South-East Asia – in fact, it's the tallest between the Himalayas on the Asian continent and New Guinea in the south-western Pacific Ocean. Those who have climbed it say it has a magical quality that is indescribable yet somehow palpable. Almost constantly covered in wisps of clouds, its granite peaks sometimes resemble a graceful woman peeping out coyly from behind a veil when the clouds clear.

A great hobby that pays

A LOVE for running and physical challenge has kept porter Daved Simpat passionate about his line of work for the past 18 years – it's "a great hobby that pays", he says.

The 43-year-old Dusun native from Kg Kiau Nulu, Ranau, started out as a rookie porter and worked his way up to become the Mount Kinabalu Porters' Association chairman for six years. He stepped down

to participate in the men's veteran category in the Mount Kinabalu international climbathon, which he won in 2024 and 2025.

"He's loved sports since he was young – his academic performance never could compare with his sports success, he admits. "So after secondary school, I quit the ordinary job I had put up with for a few months and became a porter," he says.

This is a dream job that gives him a sense of satisfaction he knows he'd never be able to find in any other field.

He maintains his love of running too, and has learned that he has to limit the loads he carries up the mountain according to his weight. 55kg, to make sure that his legs stay in good condition.

"I need to take good care of my legs. For a person of my weight, the ideal weight to carry is between 30kg and 35kg while those around 70kg in weight can carry up to 55kg worth of items up the mountain," he says.

According to the father of two, porters and mountain guides must take care of their physical and mental health so that they can function well.

Low's Peak is the main destination for most climbers, he said, though reaching all the major peaks is considered a "true conquest" of the mountain by some.



The Kadazan-Dusun phrase "Huguan mananund tutumak nulu Kinabalu ih nokopogulu" translates to "The leader/guide who ascended Mount Kinabalu has returned", celebrating every safe return.



Engaging a porter for your climb

Hiring a porter is optional. If you do hire one, pack a separate waterproof backpack with items that you will not need during the climb to Laban Rata, where most climbers stop before heading for the peak the next day.

Porters may not trek at the same speed as you. Their job is to carry your belongings to where you're headed, so you might only be able to access their loads when you reach the rest stop. Water, medication, snacks, and anything else you will need during your hike should always be kept with you. Of course, keep your valuables with you too.

You may engage a porter at Kinabalu Park headquarters during your climb registration, and fees are paid directly to the porter.

Porter's bag

A porter's bag is specially designed to carry heavy items and is usually made of a metal frame, a piece of plywood and elastic straps. Despite extending above the head it is very lightweight, which makes it easy to carry heavy loads.

Porters handle the heavy lifting to make the climb more manageable for visitors.



Who are the porters?

- Locals from nearby villages
- Physically strong and acclimatised to the high altitude
- Know the terrain and trail conditions
- Often have deep cultural ties to the mountain
- Proud stewards of their homeland

What does a mountain porter do?

- Carries loads for climbers, typically 10kg-15kg per trip
- Helps set up camps or make sleeping arrangements
- Guides beginners, especially on steep paths

Source: sabahparks.org.my/kinabalu-park

The Star graphics by MOHD ZUDIN, ISMAIL MOHD SYAHRI, MOHD JAMIL

Permit and porter fees

Citizenship	Age 18 and above	Age 17 and below
Malaysians	RM 100	RM 50
Foreigners	RM 400	RM 200

Mountain Guide: A guide costs RM350 for up to five people.

If you wish to hire a porter to carry your belongings or assist an injured participant, the following are the rates based on weight:

Destination	Type	Price
Timponhon Gate to Low's Peak	porter (climber)	RM 14 per kg
Timponhon Gate to Low's Peak	porter (luggage)	RM 14 per kg

Porter fees

- RM140 per porter, up to 10kg
 - RM14 per additional kilo
 - Advance booking recommended
- Working with the porters**
- Pack light and label bags clearly
 - Tip generously for good service
 - Respect your porter's pace and load
 - Engage with them – learn about the local culture!

Acute mountain sickness (AMS)

SYMPTOMS OF AMS
Symptoms of altitude sickness usually start six to 10 hours after being at a high altitude. The main symptoms include:

- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling or being sick
- Feeling tired or exhausted
- Dizziness
- Difficulty sleeping

Sometimes, it can develop into more serious symptoms such as high altitude pulmonary oedema (fluid in the lungs) and high altitude cerebral oedema (fluid in the brain). Signs to look for:

- Breathlessness
- Heart palpitations
- Blue-tinged lips and nails
- Frequent coughing/sputum may be frothy/tinged pink with blood from damaged lung tissue
- Irrational behaviour, such as refusing to know ledge symptoms
- Inability to stop or walk in a straight line – betterheal.org.au

DESCEND IMMEDIATELY if any of these symptoms occur and seek medical attention.

How to prevent AMS?

- Walk at a slower pace than usual, and ascend slowly to allow your body to acclimatise.
- You can become dangerously dehydrated without noticing at high altitudes, so make sure to keep up a steady intake of fluids.
- Avoid cigarettes and alcohol.
- Do not take sleeping tablets as they can lead to an increase in hypoxia (insufficient oxygen) because they work by depressing the central nervous system.
- You can take paracetamol or a diuretic like acetazolamide, used to treat fluid retention, at the local doctor/pharmacist recommended doses to prevent or ease AMS symptoms.
- Only climb with experienced guides.

What to wear/take with you



Key facts about Mount Kinabalu



EVEREST vs KINABALU

8,850m vs 4,905m

Unique Species
The Kinabalu giant red leech and Kinabalu giant earthworm are notable endemic annelids.

Endemic species
Many species of moths, butterflies, reptiles, insects, and spiders are endemic to Kinabalu.

Other Animals
The mountain also hosts a variety of insects, spiders, reptiles, and amphibians.

Birds
Numerous bird species can be found, including the mountain serpent-eagle, Bornean green magpie, and various species of hawks, sunbirds, and thrushes.

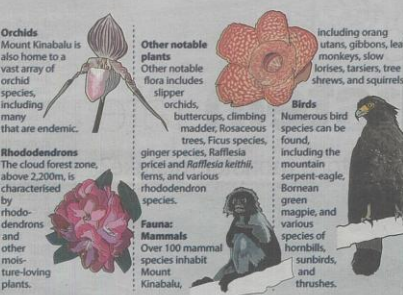
Other notable plants
Other notable flora includes slipper orchids, buttercup, climbing madder, Rosaceae trees, Ficus species, ginger species, Rafflesia species, and various rhododendron species.

Fauna:
Over 100 mammal species inhabit Mount Kinabalu, including orang utans, gibbons, leaf monkeys, slow lorises, tarsiers, tree shrews, and squirrels.

Wild Kinabalu

Diverse vegetation zones Mount Kinabalu features four distinct climate zones, each supporting unique plant life. These include lowland dipterocarp forests, montane oak and rhododendron forests, coniferous forests, alpine meadows, and stunted summit vegetation.

Carnivorous plants
The mountain is particularly renowned for its carnivorous plants, especially the Nepenthes Rajah pitcher plant.



PEAK OF MOUNT KINABALU

Low's Peak Summit 8.72km

Donkey Ears Peak

St. John Peak

South Peak

Ugly Sisters Peak

TuanKu Abdul Rahman Peak

King Edward's Peak

Lion Head Peak

Mesilau Peak

Red Rock Peak

Alexander Peak

West Peak

Panar Laban Peak 8.29km

Sayat-Sayat Hut (3,668m)

Panar Rata Resthouse (3,273m)

Laban Rata Resthouse (3,262m)

Waras Hut (3,244m)

PANABALAN BASECAMP

Paka Cave 3.5km

Paka Shelter (3,980m)

Helipad (3,052m)

Villosa Shelter (2,961m)

Layang Layang Shelter (2,702m)

RTM Station/Helipad (2,674m)

Kambororong Telecom Station/Helipad (2,252m)

Mempening Shelter (2,516m)

Lowii Shelter (2,267m)

Timponhon Trail

Ubah Shelter (2,081m)

Kandis Shelter (1,981m)

Carson Waterfall (1,866m)

Timponhon Gate (1,866m)

Kinabalu Park HQ (1,564m)

Mersilau Trail (closed)

1 The trail starts at Timponhon Gate, descending briefly to Carson's Waterfall before ascending through a mossy forest and gnarled roots.

2 The first shelter is Kandis (1,981m), offering views of the Kota Kinabalu road.

3 Next is Ubah Shelter (2,081m), home to the unique Nepenthes lowii pitcher plant. The trail continues past Kambororong Station (2,252m), which is named after a plant used in local rituals.

4 At Lowii Shelter (2,267m), rhododendrons and tree ferns abound.

5 The fourth stop, Mempening Shelter (2,516m), has wild begonias and tame wildlife.

6 The trail opens up at Layang-Layang (2,740m), where the Mesilau Trail joins.

7 At 3,080m, Paka Shelter lies near a helipad and the Paka Cave, once used by early explorers.

8 The overnight stop with resthouses like Panar Rata (3,272m).

9 Eventually, you'll reach Panar Laban (3,314.3m). This area is steeped in legend, and was once used for ritual sacrifices to appease mountain spirits.

10 An hour higher lies Sayat-Sayat Hut (3,668m), the final checkpoint. Beyond this, climbers traverse vast granite slabs in a surreal moonscape.

11 At dawn, you'll arrive at Low's Peak (4,095.2m). As the sun rises over Low's Gully, it marks a breathtaking and unforgettable summit moment.

5 Climbers reach Villosa Shelter (2,691m) on a rocky patch, where views of the mountain become dramatic. The forest here is twisted and stunted.

6 Located in Sabah, it's situated in Kinabalu Park in the state of Sabah, on the island of Borneo.

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8 Granite dome origin
Mount Kinabalu is a granite intrusion formed around 10 million years ago and pushed upward by tectonic activity.

9 Cultural context
It is considered sacred by the indigenous Kadazan-Dusun people, who believe the spirits of the dead reside on the mountain.

Day 1 Climb

Day 2 Climb to summit

Incredible biodiversity
The mountain and park are home to over 5,000 plant species, including the Rafflesia, the world's largest flower – 326 bird species, and 100 mammals.



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