



The canopy walkway at Taman Negara National Park, Malaysia

## Welcome to the Jungle: Malaysia's Taman Negara National Park

By Matt Totsky

The place: Malaysia's Taman Negara National Park. The vantage point: a 550 meter, man-made canopy walkway (the longest of its kind in the world) towering 40 meters above the ground. The view: breathtaking!

The walkways are surely one of the highlights of Taman Negara, and looking down from their secured planks, the people below appearing to be a bit like ants (which is appropriate because the ants seem as big as people). The canopy walkway is one of the best ways to take it all in. From this lofty perch, you may be lucky to spot one of the park's 650 native bird species (like hornbills and kingfishers) as well as the occasional squirrel and monkey frolicking atop the majestic mersawa, keladan and keruing trees.

Back on the ground, explorers will discover a vast array of wildlife (some endangered) among feathered friends and insects that seem impossibly large. Gibbons, wild boar, tapir, pythons, rhinos, elephants, leopards and tigers are just a few of the species that call Taman Negara home. And because the trees are so thick and dense, you may be closer to some of these beasts than you think as you traipse along the jungle's paths. Some visitors may be disappointed

about the lack of close encounters with the wild inhabitants of Taman Negara, but a majority of the animals are nocturnal and/or have been pushed deeper into the jungle as tourism has increased around the various park headquarters.

There is a logical explanation for Taman Negara's large collection of wildlife and flora: the park is home to the oldest jungle in the world. Checking in around 130 million years, the jungle's inhabitants never had to deal with the effects of the Ice Age, volcanic eruptions, geological disturbances and other natural disasters. Anyone who sets foot in Taman Negara is entering the finest unspoiled rainforest in existence.

Taman Negara National Park itself is unthinkable huge (4343 sq km) and stretches out over three Malaysian states (Pahang, Kelantan and Terengganu). This makes for an intimidating excursion and you need to plan appropriately to avoid getting overwhelmed by it all. Most guests gravitate towards the Pahang section because of the wide variety of recreational activities available there. Aside from the canopy walkway, one can choose to explore beautiful limestone caves or brave the rapids on a whitewater rafting trip on the Tembeling River. Fishermen will

love the Keniam River and a visit to the Orang Asli aboriginal village can be a cultural as well as educational experience. For those who found the swinging gangplanks of the walkway a bit too mild, the highest peak in peninsular Malaysia might be a challenge worth undertaking, but be prepared, Gunung Tahan and its steep slopes and complex rivers will take at least seven days to scale. Throughout Taman Negara, bungalows, suites, chalets, hostels and campsites are available for those who want to have an extended stay and take in all that the park has to offer.

Like just about any holiday, a trip to Taman Negara can only be as great as you want to make it. Just to trek along paths steeped in such significant natural history may be enough for some people, while others may want to take more of an extreme approach. Whatever you decide to do, just be thankful such a place exists and marvel at your surroundings as you explore it. The experience can be both humbling and extremely rewarding.