

Exploring World Natural Heritage

An Eco-trip to Sabah (4 January - 9 January, 2016)

Twenty-eight (28) students, among which 27 and 1 are students of Environmental Studies (AScES) and Engineering (AEng) respectively, participated in an eco-tour “Exploring World Natural Heritage” to Sabah of Malaysia from 4 January to 9 January of 2016. The study tour was organized by Division of Applied Science and Technology, and subsidized by CCCU Quality Campus Life Fund (CQCLF).

Sabah is located on the northeastern of the island of Borneo. Thanks to the ecological efforts of saving the natural rainforests in Sabah beginning in early 1980s, Sabah’s economy has been migrating from relying heavily on tropical timber exportation that resulted in serious environmental degradation due to deforestation and destroying of the habitats for wildlife such as Borneo pygmy elephant, proboscis monkey, orangutan and



rhinoceros, to becoming a popular destination of choice in eco-tourism which is currently the state’s major national income contributor. The main natural conservation regions in Sabah are the six national parks among which is the renowned Kinabalu National Park that was officially designated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site in 2000, in recognizing and encouraging natural conservation of bio-species that are rich in terms of both quantities as well as diversities found in the Mount Kinabalu.

In this 6-day trip, we visited the Kinabalu National Park, the Borneo Kellybays, the Kota Kinabalu Wetland Centre, the Mari-Mari Culture Village, Lok Kawi Wildlife Park, the Klias / Kawa River Wetland, the Gaya Street, the Muzium Sabah, and the Kota Kinabalu City Mosque.

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The Kinabalu National Park are tropical rainforests of rich biodiversity sustaining in its unique geological, topographical, and climatic conditions in the 4095 metres high Mount Kinabalu montane alpine meadows ecoregion, where over 5000 and 400 flora and fauna species respectively are found having their habitats. A deep breath of the air in the rainforest was not only just smelling the bouquets of the varieties of trees and flowers around but also feeling the fresh and

vital of natural biodiversity, with which any concentrations of aggregating yet monotonous fragrances of artificial perfumes cannot be commensurate. This is a gift of the nature, and it reminds us that to protect the environment must not forget to conserve the natural biodiversity.

Further to getting into the Kinabalu National Park for observing and feeling the nature of rainforest type, we paid a visit to the Kota Kinabalu Wetland Centre (KK Wetland) for the types of ecosystems thriving in swamps, marshes, and bogs which are typical wetlands of areas linking up land and the water surrounding the 1 and. Biochemically, wetlands prevent salt build-up in surrounding freshwater supplies, stabilizing sedimentation, storing nutrients and removing toxins. Environmentally, wetlands provide shelters and food for both resident and migratory species of wildlife. Because the ecological services and the richness of ecosystems developed on wetlands, "wetlands" is commonly a "must-learn" syllabus item in conservation and environmental study courses. Being a study tour of conservation, Kota Kinabalu Wetland Centre (KK Wetland) indispensably became a place of "must-go" in the itinerary.



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Due to over development in last century, KK Wetland is now the only remains of the 24 hectares of mangrove forest that once existed extensively along the coastal region of Kota Kinabalu, the capital of the state of Sabah. Thanks to the wetland officers' explanations, we learned about that KK Wetland is the Kota Kinabalu City Bird Sanctuary which is an important refuge and feeding ground for many species of resident birds, as well as several migratory bird species from Northern Asia. In addition, it is a breeding ground for marine life

protected by the Fishery Department of Sabah. To highlight its important position in the national efforts on natural conservation, KK Wetland was accorded State Cultural Heritage status in 1998.

An additional view of wildlife on wetland in this tour was the river cruise on Kawa River Wetland which was carefully kept to be a wildlife environment. There, we saw varieties of birds and monkeys such as long tail macaques and proboscis monkeys jumping between tree tops under sunlight, and the fireflies flashing around the mangrove after sunset.

The scene of conserving the nature was commensurate with the appreciation of conserving the culture of, both its indigenous generations and the modern history, of the island of Borneo. In Mari-Mari Culture Village, we were shared the knowledge, history, culture, and tradition of Borneo. The Mari-Mari Culture Village featured 5 different ethnic tribes in one village, namely the rice farmer Kadazan-Dusun, the longhouse resident Rungus, the hunters and fisherman Lundayeh, the cowboy and gypsy bajau, and the famously feared headhunting tribe Murut. We were also given the opportunity to watch demonstrations as well as experiencing the culture and lifestyle of how these indigenous ethnic groups of Borneo used to live in the olden days when modern technologies, in particular electricity, had not yet been introduced in their land.



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To learn about the modern history of Sabah at a glance, we visited the Atkinson Clock Tower which was the oldest standing and one of the most enduring landmarks in Kota Kinabalu. Stood up in 1905, this all-wood, no nails structure was built in memory of Francis George Atkinson, the popular first District Officer of Jesselton during the British North Borneo Chartered Company Administration. We went also to Gaya Street and the Kota Kinabalu City Mosque which



are respectively one of the most historic and important metropolitan areas in the city and the biggest mosque in Kota Kinabalu today.



Specific species of animals and plants are nonetheless difficult to locate and observe in wildlife only. As a compensating yet efficient approach of getting to know more about the flora and fauna of Sabah at a glance, we paid a visit to the Lok Kawi Wildlife Park which was a combination of a zoo and a botanical garden, collecting and showcasing both abundant as well as rarely found species of tropical rainforest. Sprawling on a land of over 280 acres, the park housed 88 animals comprising birds, reptiles, and mammals, including the Sumatran rhino, Proboscis Monkey, Malayan tigers, Orang Utan and Borneo Pygmy Elephants, which could be seen living and roaming wild inside the protective enclosures resembling the natural habitats of the individual species.



To complement the learning of preservation and conservation by direct observations, we visited also the Muzium Sabah, which is the Sabah state museum, where we learned about Sabah's history, culture, social and natural historical development through guided viewing and perusal of the systematically organized exhibitions of collections and documentations of ethnographic,

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archaeological, historical, numismatic, art-historical, botanical, zoological and mineralogical collections from throughout the state of Sabah.

This 6-day study tour “Exploring World Natural Heritage” in Sabah has been a mixture of fun and inspirations. Benefited directly by this study tour, the participating students enhanced their understanding of natural and cultural conservations, as well as witnessing that eco-

tourism can bring living quality enrichment and make significant contribution to the local economy.

Accompanying our memories of the scenes and appreciations in this 6-day trip are the fresh air, beautiful sunrise and harmonious sunset. This tour inspires us with the affirmation that the ultimate sustainability of human beings in specific must rely on the sustainability of the earth ecosystem in global. More importantly, while economic developments are purporting to improve living quality, the relating activities will unavoidably be impacting the environment. Therefore, human behaviours must consider the anthropogenic impacts on the environment based on the triple bottom line approach of balancing the economic development, living quality, and environmental management.

