

Brunei

The Sultanate of **Brunei** is a small but — thanks to natural gas and petroleum resources — very rich country on the island of [Borneo](#) in [Southeast Asia](#).

Although Brunei is not on most travellers' radar, it is a country of tranquil mosques, pristine jungles, and friendly inhabitants. Its full name is *Negara Brunei Darussalam*, with Darussalam appropriately meaning "Abode of Peace".

Regions

Brunei and Muara

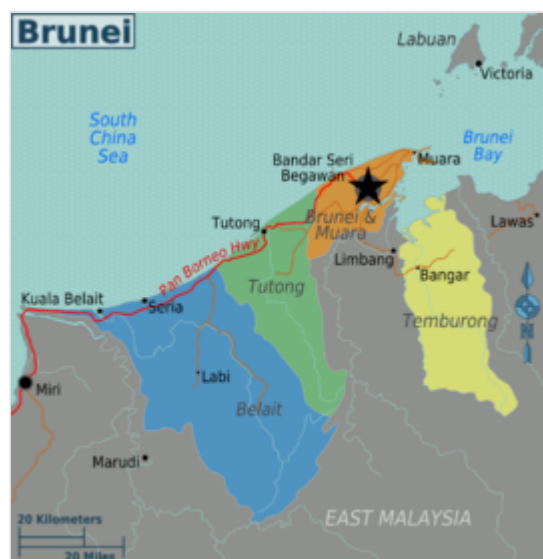
The most important and bustling district where the capital of the country, Bandar Seri Begawan, is located.

Tutong

Lies under the coverage of the virgin forest, scattered small scale plantations.

Belait

Western-most district, also the centre of the country's petroleum industry.



Brunei regions - Color-coded map

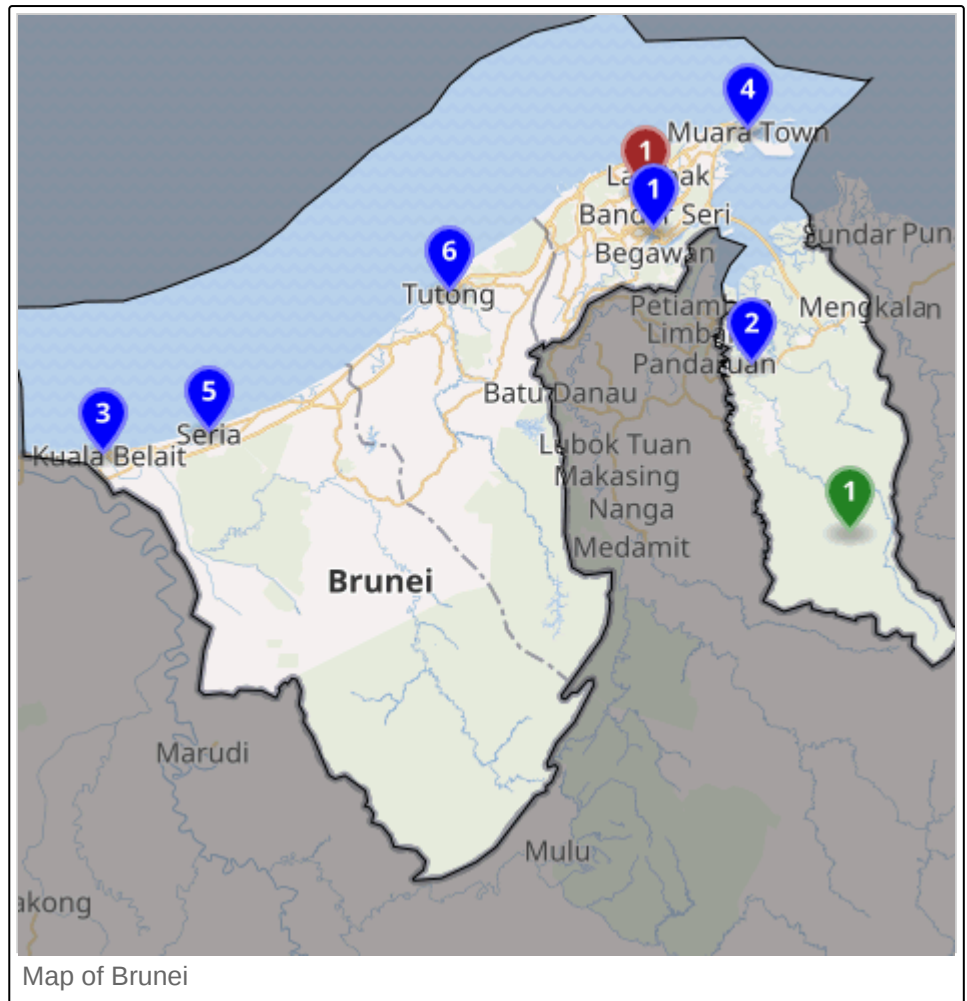


Temburong

Isolated eastern district, separated from the rest of country by the Malaysian district of Limbang, but now connected by a 30 km bridge across the sea

Cities

- **1 Bandar Seri Begawan** – the capital, sometimes known as "Bandar" or "BSB" for short
- **2 Bangar** – gateway town to the unspoilt nature of Temburong
- **3 Kuala Belait** – second largest city and border town on the way to Sarawak, Malaysia
- **4 Muara** – a small port town
- **5 Seria** – centre for the oil industry, with a dedicated museum and the Billionth Barrel Monument
- **6 Tutong** – a small town, located on the banks of Tutong River



Other destinations

- **1 Ulu Temburong National Park** – the first and the only national park established in Brunei, contains unspoilt jungle and is known as the "Green Jewel of Brunei"

Understand



Brunei is a pint-sized oil-rich sultanate with a population of 450,000 as of 2016, strategically positioned on the South China Sea, close to vital sea lanes linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Its oil resources have generated great wealth for the Sultan and some of the local people, and the best evidence of this is seen in the palaces and mosques. However many Bruneians, including those who live in the water village (Kampong Ayer), still have relatively simple, albeit comfortable livelihoods.

The description of an "oil-rich sultanate" might conjure the images of Dubai or Qatar, but travellers with such expectations will likely be disappointed. Brunei does not have much in terms of grandiose man-made attractions, and although excellent diving and jungle trekking are available, it does not have mind-blowing natural parks as the neighbouring Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak do. Many people that visit Brunei actually do so only for the sake of "country collection" or "passport stamp collection".

If there are attractions particular to Brunei, it is perhaps the absence of crowds, the comfortable but relaxed atmosphere, and the way that society remains religious and conservative, refusing to embrace modernity and globalisation despite having the material wealth to do so.

History

The Sultanate of Brunei's heyday occurred between the 15th-17th centuries, when its control extended over coastal areas of northwest Borneo and the southern Philippines. Brunei subsequently entered a period of decline brought on by internal strife over royal succession, colonial expansion of European powers, and piracy. In 1888, Brunei became a British protectorate. It was offered the opportunity to join Malaysia as a state in 1963, but opted out of the federation due to a disagreement on the amount of its oil income that would have to be given to the central government in Kuala Lumpur. After an Indonesian-backed insurrection failed in 1962, the Sultan consolidated power as an absolute monarch, and the country is under a constant state of emergency renewed every 2 years. Independence was achieved in 1984. One family has ruled Brunei for over six centuries.

	
	
Capital	Bandar Seri Begawan
Currency	Brunei dollar (BND)
Population	428.6 thousand (2017)
Electricity	240 volt / 50 hertz (BS 1363)
Country code	+673
Time zone	UTC+08:00, Asia/Brunei
Emergencies	993 (police), 991 (emergency medical services), 995 (fire department)
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After independence, the Brunei Investment Agency invested some US\$40 billion of Brunei's funds in Crown Prince and Finance Minister Jefri Bolkiah's Amedeo fund. When the Asian financial crisis hit in 1998, it turned out that Jefri had appropriated some \$14.8 billion of the sum for himself, using the funds to amass 2,000 cars, a private Boeing 747 jumbo jet, a yacht named *Tits* and life-size golden statues of himself having sex. Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah sent Jefri to the naughty corner and has personally overseen the sultanate's finances ever since.

Independence

1 Jan 1984 (from the UK)

National holiday

National Day, 23 Feb (1984); by tradition Brunei's independence is celebrated on this day — 23 Feb 1984 was the date of independence from British protection, while 1 Jan 1984 was the date of political independence from the UK

Constitution

29 Sep 1959 (some provisions suspended under a State of Emergency since Dec 1962, others since independence)

Landmarks

The Istana Nurul Iman is the world's largest occupied residential palace. The 300-acre palace sits on a man-made hill with a clear view of Kampong Ayer. Istana Nurul Iman is the residence of the Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, and the palace is quoted to have an estimated value at USD 600 million.

Economy

The backbone of Brunei's economy is **oil and gas** and the Sultan of Brunei is, famously, one of the richest people in the world with an estimated personal wealth of around USD 40 billion. Per capita GDP is far above most other developing countries, and substantial income from overseas investment supplements income from domestic production. The government provides all citizens with a comprehensive welfare state without levying any income tax.

All sectors of the economy are fairly heavily regulated and government policy is an odd mixture of subsidies, protectionism and encouragement of entrepreneurship. Brunei's leaders are attempting to balance the country's steadily increasing integration into the world economy with internal social cohesion. It became a more prominent player in the world by serving as chairman for the 2005 APEC (Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation) Forum. Plans for the future include upgrading the workforce, reducing unemployment, strengthening the banking and tourist sectors, and, in general, widening the economic base beyond oil and gas.

Culture

Given their shared history, Brunei shares many cultural similarities with neighbouring Malaysia, with the Malay language serving as a common link between both countries.

Brunei is officially an **Islamic** state, with many large beautiful mosques across the country. Sale of alcohol is banned. Bringing in meat (other than seafood) that has not been certified "halal" (slaughtered according to Islamic law) is also banned. It is possible, however, to find pork at eateries catering to the ethnic Chinese community. During the fasting month of Ramadan, many non-Muslim-owned shops and restaurants will be open. However, eating, drinking or smoking in front of people who are fasting is considered rude and asking permission is appropriate. **Expect everything to be closed** - including hotel restaurants, and all shops - during **Friday prayers** (12:00-14:00) (<https://www.islamicfinder.org/world/brunei/>) all year. Things start closing around 11:00, and start reopening again around 14:00. Even the buses stop running, though you might still be able to catch a water taxi.

The bulk of the population is **Malay** (67%) and there is also a significant **Chinese** minority of around 15% as well as a number of indigenous peoples, including the **Iban** and **Dusun** tribes who inhabit the jungle upriver and the **Temburong** district (the smaller eastern part detached from the rest of Brunei). There are many **foreign workers** who work on the oil and gas production or in lower positions such as restaurant staff, field workers and domestic staff. The male to female ratio is 3:2. More than a quarter of the people are short term immigrant workers, most of whom are men.

Geography and climate



Jame' Asr Hassanil Bolkiah
Mosque in Bandar Seri Begawan

Brunei's climate is sub-tropical. Temperatures range from 14-33°C, January being the hottest month. The rainy season is always mild and humid, followed by a hot and humid dry season. The difference between the two seasons is not that marked, however. The rainforest and jungle areas tend to be cooler and wetter than the coastal region.

Brunei's topology is of a flat coastal plain rises to mountains in the east, the highest point being **Bukit Pagan** at 1,850 metres, with some hilly lowlands in the west.

There are no typhoons, earthquakes, severe flooding or other forms of natural disasters to contend with, and the biggest environmental issue is the seasonal **haze** resulting from forest fires (that is caused by illegal clearing of land) in nearby Indonesia.

Tourist information

- [Brunei Tourism \(https://www.bruneitourism.com/\)](https://www.bruneitourism.com/) website

Talk

See also: [Malay phrasebook](#)

The official language of Brunei is **Malay** (*Bahasa Melayu*), but due to its British colonial past, **English** is widely spoken and understood in urban areas, though sometimes with a thick accent. A little Malay will come in handy in rural areas, as English proficiency is limited there.

While all Bruneians are able to speak standard Malay, the local dialect of Malay has some ideosyncrasies that can make it tricky to understand if you only just started learning Malay. Brunei also officially uses the Arabic script for Malay known as *Jawi*. Outside of government signage and religious publications almost all signs use the Roman alphabet.

The ethnic Chinese community in Brunei continues to speak a variety of Chinese languages, including [Hokkien](#), [Teochew](#), and several others. [Mandarin](#) is taught in Chinese schools, so most ethnic Chinese are conversant in it as well.

Tourist sites always have signage in English, and often in Chinese as well due to the large numbers of Chinese tourists.

Get in



Visa restrictions:

Entry **will be refused** to citizens of [Israel](#). Those with other passports that contain stamps and/or visas from Israel **will** be allowed to enter.

(Information last updated Feb 2024)

Compared to other nations in South East Asia, Brunei's visa policy is a bit more restrictive.

Entry requirements

All foreign nationals must fill out an **online arrival form** (<https://www.imm.gov.bn/>) prior to their arrival in Brunei.

Foreign nationals of the following countries/territories can enter Brunei **visa-free** as long as they present a passport valid for at least 6 months:

For up to 90 days: All European Union member states, British citizens and subjects with right of abode in the United Kingdom, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, United States

For up to 30 days: Malaysia, New Zealand, Oman, San Marino, Singapore, South Korea, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates

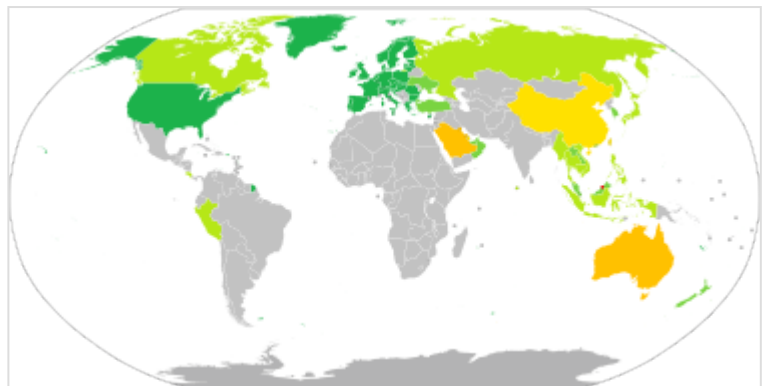
For up to 14 days: Cambodia, Canada, Japan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Laos, Macau, Maldives, Myanmar, Peru, Russia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam

Nationals of Israel are not allowed to enter Brunei, though other passports containing Israeli stamps and visas are not a problem for entry.

Citizens of Australia and Bahrain can obtain a visa on arrival (single or multiple entry) for 30 days. Citizens of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait can get a single-entry, 30-day visa on arrival. Citizens of China, Qatar and Taiwan can obtain a visa on arrival for 14 days. These citizens can obtain a visa on arrival for \$20 or a 3-day transit visa for \$5. Immigration officers at Sungai Tujoh Checkpoint between Miri and Kuala Belait will not accept payment for a visa on arrival other than in Brunei or Singapore dollars — there is no ATM and cheques are not accepted. At Brunei airport payment must also be made in cash. There is a money changer (with reasonable rates), but no ATM prior to immigration. If you need a visa-on-arrival, make sure you join the right queue at entry. Joining the foreign passport queue will see you sent to the back of the line. Large tour groups requiring visas on arrival can jam up the system. You may have to be quick, persistent or patient.

Proof of return or onward travel is officially required to check in for your flight to Brunei. If you are leaving overland, for example via Kuala Belait and onwards to Miri, then your flight out of Miri is acceptable. If you plan to leave by ferry you will need to purchase a cheap flight out of Brunei before you arrive there. Alternatively, you can book an expensive (but fully refundable) flight, and cancel it afterwards.

From Kuala Lumpur, Air Asia is *not* enforcing this rule; hence you probably won't need such a proof of return if you fly from KL.



A map showing the visa requirements of Brunei, with countries in green having visa-free access; and countries in yellow and orange having visa on arrival

Those who need a visa must apply in advance at a Brunei embassy, where processing can take up to 3 days and costs \$20 for a single entry visa. See [Brunei Immigration Department \(http://www.immigration.gov.bn/\)](http://www.immigration.gov.bn/) for the latest details.


By plane

- **1 Brunei International Airport** (<http://www.mincom.gov.bn/dca/Theme/Home.aspx>) (**BWN** ^{IATA}). This is Brunei's sole airport of significance and the hub of national carrier **Royal Brunei Airlines** (<http://www.bruneiair.com/>) (RBA). The airport is compact, immaculate and functional.



Royal Brunei Airlines plane in BWN

There are cafes airside and landside, and customs and immigration are smooth. There are additional fast food restaurants outside of arrivals. There are ATMs landside at departures, but none airside or at arrivals.

RBA offers a reasonably comprehensive network, with daily flights from [London](#), [Dubai](#), [Brisbane](#), [Melbourne](#), [Kuala Lumpur](#), [Singapore](#) and [Kota Kinabalu](#), and four times weekly non-stop flights from [Kuching](#). Fares that transit via Brunei are attractively priced and you are guaranteed service with a smile. [Singapore Airlines](#) (<http://www.singaporeair.com/>) flies 5 times a week from Singapore. Budget airline [AirAsia](#) (<http://www.airasia.com/>) provide flights from Kuala Lumpur at as low as US\$35 one-way. For other destinations the best transit airports are [Singapore Changi](#) and [Kuala Lumpur](#). 

Getting there/away: A taxi to [Bandar Seri Begawan](#) downtown takes 20 minutes and costs around \$25. A covered walk down to the end of the car park further away from the Terminal (turn right from Arrivals) leads to a bus stop for Purple buses to the city centre (\$1) that only run during the day.

If flights to Brunei are full or expensive, an alternative is flying to nearby [Miri](#) in Malaysia and taking the bus to Brunei instead (3 hours).

By car

You can drive into Brunei from [Sarawak](#), [Malaysia](#). There are two entry points for the main part of Brunei, one from [Miri](#) at **Sungai Tujuh** and one from [Limbang](#) at **Kuala Lurah** (Tedungan on the Malaysian side). Both these crossings have drive-through immigration checkpoints at the border but queues can be horribly long, especially during weekends.

It is also possible to drive from the Sarawak towns of [Limbang](#) and [Lawas](#) to the Temburong district of Brunei. A bridge across the Pandaruan River was opened in December 2013 and the ferry service has been discontinued. Immigration is conducted at Pandaruan (Malaysia side) and at Puni (Brunei side). From Lawas (which is connected by road to [Kota Kinabalu](#) in [Sabah](#), Malaysia), another bridge completes the connection between the banks of the Trusan River (and no ferry ride is required anymore). Malaysian immigration formalities are done in Trusan (the Mengkalap immigration checkpoint is in a shoptlot just east of the ferry crossing) about 8 km away, and no longer in Lawas. Those for Brunei can be done at the Labu checkpoint at the border.

It is possible to drive from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah to [Bandar Seri Begawan](#) in one day. See the **[Kota Kinabalu to Brunei by land](#)** page for details.

Only some petrol stations in the country are permitted to sell petrol to cars with non-Brunei plates due to a tax issue. It can be frustrating to find these stations and so ensure your car is topped up.

The toll-free Friendship Bridge connects the two borders at the eastern side of Limbang.

By bus

- **From Miri:** As of 2022, there is no direct service between Miri and Bandar Seri Begawan. PHLS Express used to operate a service between Miri and Bandar Seri Begawan twice a day. It is possible to book a cab with ride hailing app Dart.
- **From Limbang:** There are no direct buses between Bandar Seri Begawan and Limbang in Sarawak. However, you can catch a local bus from Bandar's bus station to Kuala Lurah on the border, walk across the checkpoint into Tedungan in Sarawak and catch a Syarikat Bas Limbang bus to Limbang. Do the reverse if coming from Limbang to Bandar. Buses depart from Limbang bus terminal several times a day and bear the destination "Batu Danau". Taxis are also available on both sides of the border but bargain hard for the fare. You can also get to Temburong district by bus from Limbang, although again, there are no direct buses into Bangar; all buses (destination "Pandaruan") stop at the ferry landing at Pandaruan, where there is now a Malaysian immigration checkpoint. Cross the river by ferry and catch a taxi for the 5 km to Bangar.
- **From Kota Kinabalu:** buses run once a day between BSB and Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

By boat

The main ferry terminal in Brunei is the **Serasa Ferry Terminal** at Muara, some 25 km from Bandar Seri Begawan. See Bandar Seri Begawan#By boat for details about the terminal.

Labuan Ferry (<https://labuanferry.com/index>) operates services from Labuan, taking around 2 hours. As of April 2023, two ferries are operating on most days, one at 8:30am and another at 1.00pm or 4:30pm, with schedules changing on short notice. With a change of boats in Labuan, you can even make it to/from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, in a day. See the Kota Kinabalu to Brunei by land page.

Get around

Use caution when asking locals for transportation information. People here are friendly and very helpful, but when asking about transportation, you'll get three different answers from three different people, even people whose job it is to help tourists.

By car

There is one "motorway", from Bandar Seri Begawan (the capital) along the coast. It is almost all dual carriageway from Muara to Kuala Belait and the toll bridge to Malaysia/Sarawak in the west.

There is also a side road off this, which runs into the jungle towards the settlement of Labi and beyond. Excellent scenery, and a 4-wheel drive may be useful, but the road is now sealed up to the longhouses some distance beyond Labi. Stock up on water at the convenient shop at the junction.



Route bus



Driving between Temburong and the rest of Brunei used to require passing through Malaysian territory, and clearing Malaysian customs and immigration, but since the completion of the Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Bridge in 2020, that is no longer necessary.

By taxi

There are not many taxis in Brunei, because car ownership and usage are high. There are always some at the airport and some in the Belait District, but little chance of finding a free taxi along the road, especially during morning and afternoon peak hours when they are hired by businessmen. Needing a taxi might require a phone call. The main taxi stand is direct north of the bus station in the capital with only a few taxis waiting.

None of the taxis has a taxi meter since there is no taxi company nor regulation requiring to have one. Drivers have fixed prices for most trips, although the tariffs may vary between different drivers, or they will give a price for an irregular trip.

By ride-hailing

The main ride-hailing app in Brunei is **Dart** (<https://www.dartbrunei.com/>). Well-known ride-hailing apps found elsewhere in Southeast Asia, such as Grab and Gojek, **do not** operate in Brunei.

By tour vans

Another alternative is hiring a tour van to drive you around Brunei, for example, for a whole day, or several hours. Try asking them from the ferry counters in Muara. Discuss the price first before agreeing to board the van.

By boat

Waterways

209 km; navigable by craft drawing less than 1.2 m.
Water taxis are available in the capital.

By bus

Around the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, there is a good-sized network of minibuses. Brunei's high rate of private car ownership means very few Bruneians take these buses, which largely cater to foreign workers. The speed of the buses is limited to 50 km/h but are quite efficient and reliable.



Water taxis



In general, the bus system around the capital radiates from the bus terminal in the central district. There are designated bus stops along each route but passengers are picked up or let off at unofficial locations at the discretion of the driver. The unofficial mode of operation makes easy travel and entices patronage. There are maps of the bus routes at the terminal. Routes are numbered and the buses are different colors depending on the route. The fare is \$1 which is normally collected by a conductor but may also be collected by the driver. The passenger can advise the driver the location to disembark. The buses run every 20–40 minutes from about 06:00 to 18:00. Sometimes, the conductor asks the passengers their

respective locations to disembark and skips part of the route, to the dismay of passengers who wish to catch the bus. The buses run *roughly* every 20–40 minutes from 06:00 to 18:00, but there's no strict schedule. It is quite normal to wait 30 to 45 minutes for a bus.

There is also an infrequent long-distance bus which runs between BSB and Seria through Tutong.

By thumb

Hitchhiking is doable in Brunei – drivers are very willing to stop.

See

- Ulu Temburong National Park in [Temburong](#)
- The Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque in [Bandar Seri Begawan](#)
- Bandar Seri Begawan has a couple of museums dedicated to the history of Brunei and that of the monarchy.

Do

For things to do in and in the near vicinity of Bandar Seri Begawan, see [Bandar Seri Begawan](#).

There are many eco-tours which typically go to the **Temburong** district by boat then to a native "longhouse". It is then followed by a powered boat (by the natives) up the river to the **Belalong reserve** in the Borneo rainforest. There is a canopy walk and research centre at the park headquarters.



View of Jerudong Park



Jerudong Park was once a decent theme park with a multitude of rides. Sadly, a downward cycle of neglect, declining admission and unaffordable maintenance costs led to the closure and sale of most of the big-ticket rides, including the three roller coasters. This has given the park a sad "circus left town last week" air about it. Most people who visit only go at night to avoid the heat during the day. Outside the park, but very close, is a small complex of restaurants which is open at night, though only a few of the stalls are still operational. The local papers have reported plans to renovate the park with a new selection of attractions.

Scuba diving

Brunei offers some great diving. In addition to coral and fish, Brunei is home to several **shipwrecks** and many species of **nudibranch** (often spectacularly colourful molluscs)- one of the best places in SE Asia for macro photography. Water temperature is generally around 30 °C and visibility is usually around 10-30 metres, although this can be changeable during the monsoon season. As diving here is not overly developed, it means that the sites, and especially the coral reefs, are unspoiled and in pristine condition.

Popular dive sites include the **American Wreck**, Admirable Class Minesweeper, USS Salute (AM-294) lies broken in half on a sand bottom at 30m after hitting a Japanese mine on 8 June 1945, during pre-invasion sweeps of the Brunei Bay, with the loss of nine lives. **Australian Wreck**, In 1949 while on a

voyage to Manila it struck a mine off Brunei and sank. The wreck lies in 33 m of water and is roughly 85 m. **Dolphin 88 Wreck** Malaysian commercial vessel sunk in bad weather in 2013. Experienced divers will enjoy exploring the interior of the wreck. **Oil Rig Wreck**, a decommissioned oil rig. There are 9 structures to be explored, each seeming to be home to one dominant group of fish. **Baiei Maru Wreck** was a Japanese oil tanker that sank in October 1944 in Brunei Bay after hitting a Japanese mine. Discovered by the Brunei Shell Petroleum during a survey, the wreck sits in about 50 m of water. Other dive sites includes **Labuan Wreck**, **Bolkiah Wreck**, **UBD Wreck**, **Amai Wreck**, **Arun Wreck**, **Stone Wreck** to name a few.

Diving is very reasonable, averaging out to \$35-45 per dive depending on how many dives you do and whether you bring your own gear. There are a number of organisations you can do trips with such as; [Poni Divers \(http://www.ponidivers.com/\)](http://www.ponidivers.com/), [Oceanic Quest \(http://www.oceanicquest.com/\)](http://www.oceanicquest.com/), [The Brunei Sub Aqua Dive Club \(http://www.bsadc.com/Index.html\)](http://www.bsadc.com/Index.html) in Brunei-Muara & [Panaga Divers \(https://panagaclub.com/pages/divers-sub-aqua-club\)](https://panagaclub.com/pages/divers-sub-aqua-club) based in Seria.

Buy

Money

The local currency is the **Brunei dollar**, denoted by the symbol "\$" or "**B\$**" (ISO code: **BND**). You might hear *ringgit* used to refer to the dollar but be sure that the speaker is not talking about the Malaysian Ringgit (MYR) which is valued at less than a third of a Brunei dollar. All prices in this guide are in Brunei dollars unless otherwise noted.

The Brunei dollar is tied to the [Singapore](#) dollar at a 1:1 rate. By law the currencies can be used interchangeably, so if you're coming in from Singapore, there's no reason to change money as your cash will be readily accepted. (Likewise, any leftover Brunei dollars can be used at par in Singapore.) However, many stores refuse Singapore notes with seemingly microscopic tears in them, and notices to this effect are posted at the cash register. Malaysian ringgit (RM) will also be accepted in a pinch, but the exchange rate may not be in your favour. The ringgit is not available at Brunei banks but can be obtained from money changers.

Exchange rates for Brunei dollar As of January 2024:

- US\$1 ≈ \$1.3
- €1 ≈ \$1.45
- UK£1 ≈ \$1.7
- Japanese ¥100 ≈ \$0.9
- Chinese ¥1 ≈ \$0.19
- SG\$1 ≈ \$1.0 (fixed)
- Malaysian RM1 ≈ \$0.3

Exchange rates fluctuate. Current rates for these and other currencies are available from [XE.com \(https://www.xe.com/currency/bnd-bruneian-dollar\)](https://www.xe.com/currency/bnd-bruneian-dollar)

The Brunei dollar is divided into 100 cents. There are [banknotes \(http://www.finance.gov.bn/tt/EDITKKW/bcb/notes_cir_2nd.htm\)](http://www.finance.gov.bn/tt/EDITKKW/bcb/notes_cir_2nd.htm) from \$1 to a whopping \$10,000 (handy if you're shopping for Rolls-Royces) and [coins \(http://www.finance.gov.bn/tt/EDITKKW/bcb/notes_cir_2nd.htm\)](http://www.finance.gov.bn/tt/EDITKKW/bcb/notes_cir_2nd.htm) of 1-50 cents. All smaller notes and the 2004 series of larger notes are printed as brightly coloured polymer notes.

Costs

By Southeast Asian standards Brunei is roughly on par with Singapore, meaning roughly twice as expensive as neighbouring Malaysia. You can reduce costs by eating at local restaurants and avoiding the more expensive restaurants in hotels. Budget accommodation is available.

Souvenirs

There is not much of a local crafts industry in Brunei. You'll see a handful of different types of branded souvenirs with the Brunei brand - that are all imported. Souvenir type shops usually resort to selling imported curiosities, candles and generic gifts.

Eat

Main article: Cuisine of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei

Bruneians love to eat out and there are many excellent restaurants in Brunei serving a wide variety of cuisines, thanks to the large number of foreign workers in the country.

There is also the local *nasi katok*, a simple combination of rice and curried beef or chicken, which can be quite spicy. It is relatively inexpensive when compared to other food that you can buy, for example local food such as chicken rice. However, it is not a healthy option, with few vegetables and too much fat.

Another choice is *ambuyat*, a culinary experience unique to Borneo. It is a starchy and gooey paste made from sago that can be dipped into a savoury sauce.

Being a Muslim country, nearly all food sold in Brunei is **halal**, the exception being food stalls and restaurants catering to the ethnic Chinese community, which have been granted special permission to sell pork. Halal certification is handled by the **Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA)** (*Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama (KHEU)*).

Vegetarians should look for South Asian restaurants serving the large community of foreign workers. Another option is Chinese Buddhist vegetarian restaurants, as many ethnic Chinese in Brunei go on vegetarian fasts for specific Buddhist festivals. These can mainly be found in the suburbs of Bandar Seri Begawan, but you will need to make an effort to seek them out. Chinese Buddhist vegetarian restaurants are also the safest bet for **vegans**, as they traditionally do not use dairy products, but make sure your dish does not contain eggs.

It is **illegal** to eat in public during daylight hours in Ramadan, and most stalls and restaurants will be closed during the day. However, Chinese restaurants are permitted to remain open and sell takeaway meals to non-Muslims for consumption in private.

Knock knock, who's there? Nasi Katok

Katok is actually "ketuk" in the Malay language, and it means knock. There is a story behind the name Nasi Katok. It was begun by a couple of teenagers who were feeling very hungry after a midnight practice. They went to a place where they normally bought their food. This place was actually a residential house, which offered Nasi bungkus (a pack of rice with chicken and egg) even in the middle of the night. At any time you could just Katok (knock) on their door, and the owner would come up with fresh hot Nasi Katok. And that's how it became Nasi Katok.

Kosher food is basically non-existent in Brunei.


Desserts

- **Kueh melayu** (sugar, raisin, and peanut-filled sweet pancakes)

Drink

Brunei is a **dry country**: alcohol is not sold anywhere in the country and consumption of alcohol in public is prohibited by law. That said, non-Muslims are allowed to bring in up to two litres of alcohol (wine or spirits) plus up to twelve cans of beer every 48 hours for private consumption, and there is a wide array of duty-free shops just across the border in Malaysia to cater to this demand. However, alcohol must be declared upon arrival in Brunei while going through customs. There are also numerous bars and nightclubs in Tedungan just across the border in Malaysia's Limbang district, Sarawak, which is where many Bruneians go for a good night out.



Woman selling fruits at a market 
in Bandar Seri Begawan

Many higher-end restaurants allow guests to bring in their own alcohol and corkage is not charged, though this is actually illegal and it's best to keep a low profile if you choose to consume in a public establishment. At the lower end (particularly Chinese restaurants), many restaurants supply illicit booze under euphemisms like "special tea".

One should definitely try out *teh tarik*, a sweet milk tea, as well as the wide array of coffee (*kopi*) available in restaurants.

Sleep

Accommodation in Brunei used to be very expensive, but some reasonably cheap guesthouses and hostels can now be found here and there. See Bandar Seri Begawan for listings.

Stay safe



WARNING: Same-sex relationships are illegal. Possible penalties include imprisonment, caning, or **death by stoning**.

Government travel advisories

United States (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Brunei.html>)



Note: Brunei is notorious for its harsh punishments. Certain actions (such as adultery, criticising religion, and fornication) that are not crimes in other parts of the world are treated as crimes in Brunei. The Bruneian authorities severely punish drug offences. Convicted offenders can expect to be treated with **no degree of leniency**.

Brunei is a very safe country, with low crime rates and no major security concerns. Brunei has a strict legal system — which combines British common law and Sharia law — that punishes crime severely, adding a huge layer of deterrence. The full harshness of Brunei's laws is reserved for criminals and those actually looking for trouble.

Brunei, like Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, has **very strict** laws when it comes to drugs. Drug trafficking to a certain degree has a **mandatory death sentence**. Other crimes, such as murder, kidnapping and unauthorised possession of firearms are also punished with death. That said, an informal moratorium of capital punishment exists, though offenders should expect life imprisonment or long prison term. Brunei uses **caning** (for males only) for rapes, as well as for less serious crimes, including illegal entry, overstaying your visa for over 90 days, robbery, corruption and vandalism. Caning is no slap on the wrist. Strokes from the thick rattan cane are *excruciating*. They can take weeks to heal, and even scar for life. These laws apply to foreigners as well.

In theory, offences such as rape, adultery, sodomy, robbery and insult or defamation of the Prophet Muhammad carry the maximum penalty of death, though this is not enforced. Homosexuality carries a penalty of 40 strokes of the cane and/or a maximum of 10 years in jail. The punishment for theft that exceeds a certain amount is **amputation**. Those who "persuade, tell or encourage" Muslim children under the age of 18 "to accept the teachings of religions other than Islam" are liable to a fine or jail. (These laws mostly apply to Muslims, though some aspects apply to non-Muslims.) Homosexuality and adultery are illegal in Brunei, and can result in being **stoned to death**.

During the Islamic month of *Ramadhan*, **avoid consumption of food and beverages in public** as a hefty fine in the thousands will be levied if caught doing so. Additionally, all restaurants, including non-halal ones, cease dine-in services during the day. It is best to avoid visiting Brunei during Ramadhan.

Driving in Brunei is easy. Most drivers obey the traffic rules, and the roads are well maintained. Distances are not great. If you're driving around Brunei, however, do watch out for impatient and/or dangerous drivers. Some drivers obviously consider themselves above the law, and given the social structure of Brunei, this is likely to actually be the case. Take extra caution around midnight and early morning as some drivers illegally race on the roads.

Public celebration of non-Muslim religious festivals such as Christmas and Easter is **illegal** in Brunei. It is still legal to celebrate them in private, so long as the celebrations are kept secret from Muslims.

Stay healthy

Eating out is generally safe because of good food safety standards. But drink **water** only if it's been boiled, or bottled water. **Protect yourself from mosquito bites**. Dengue fever is a real risk. Malaria risk is low.

Brunei's **hospitals** are generally adequate for most routine procedures. However, due to the lack of specialists, you may need to be airlifted to Singapore if your case requires complicated surgical procedures; ensure that your insurance covers this if you plan to be in Brunei.

Respect

The Brunei Government is run as a Malay Islamic Monarchy (*Melayu Islam Beraja*) principle, which means that the Sultan of Brunei, apart from being one of the richest men in the world, effectively runs the country. You can expect the Sultan to appear on the front page of the two local daily newspapers almost every day, and occupy the first ten minutes of the local TV news bulletins.

You'll see the wealth of the country in everything that the Sultan touches, but much of the rest of the country misses out on badly needed investment and development. Over half of the country are expatriate workers or permanent residents, and it's not hard to engage them in a conversation about the political situation once you gain their trust. Brunei is a country where your race, religion and heritage matter in day-to-day life. Still, it's best to approach the subject very carefully, especially with Bruneians.

The Bruneian Royal Family is protected by *lèse-majesté* laws; speaking out against them or making fun of them is a crime and will culminate in a prison sentence.

Bruneians are generally courteous and tolerant. Non-Muslim visitors are generally not restricted in their manner of dress. Women can wear sleeveless shirts and shorts and blend in, and are not legally required to wear the hijab, known locally as the *tudung*. Super-skimpy swimming attire is probably one step too far.

It is a good idea to keep your ideas to yourself on politics (domestic, regional, or international) and world events, particularly those relating to Islam or Islamic countries, but most Bruneians are more than happy to discuss the role their religion and royalty play in their lives if you listen respectfully.

Like in Malaysia, you'll often be expected to take your shoes off in Brunei, in places like hostels, museums, and mosques. Wear socks if you want, and be grateful for the opportunity to cool off your feet after walking around in the tropical heat.

Ramadan

Ramadan is the 9th and holiest month in the Islamic calendar and lasts 29–30 days. Muslims fast every day for its duration and most restaurants will be closed until the fast breaks at dusk. Nothing (including water and cigarettes) is supposed to pass through the lips from dawn to sunset. Non-Muslims are exempt from this, but should still refrain from eating or drinking in public as this is considered very impolite. Working hours are decreased as well in the corporate world. Exact dates of Ramadan depend on local astronomical observations and may vary somewhat from country to country. Ramadan concludes with the festival of *Eid al-Fitr*, which may last several days, usually three in most countries.

- 11 March – 9 April 2024 (1445 AH)
- 1 March – 29 March 2025 (1446 AH)
- 18 February – 19 March 2026 (1447 AH)
- 8 February – 8 March 2027 (1448 AH)

If you're planning to travel to Brunei during Ramadan, consider reading Travelling during Ramadan.

Connect

By phone

The international code for Brunei is **673**. The telephone numbers in Brunei consist of 7 digits with no local codes, although the first digit of the number indicates the area such as 3 for the Belait District and 2 for Bandar Seri Begawan.

The prepaid **Hallo Kad**, available from **TelBru** telephone offices (including one at the airport) and other outlets in denominations from \$5-50 can be used at any phone in the country to make local and international calls. Other phone cards are also available for use in public phones.

Mobile phone services are provided by two network operator **DST** (<https://dst.com.bn/>) e **Progresif Cellular** (<https://progresif.com/>). Coverage is completed across almost all of the country. Coverage in the Temburong national park areas may be patchy.



Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien
Mosque at night

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