Nai Nyelai Kenyah!

WELCOME TO THE KEDAYA TELANG USAN!

A brochure for Kedaya Telang Usan Travel

* Come and visit the Kenyah in the Kedaya Telang Usan!
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Introduction

Above the Kedaya Telang Usan Travels’ logo is written the welcoming cry of the Kenyahs, “Nai Nyelai Kenyah”. It literally means, Come Visit the Kenyah. This book highlights the tourism destinations within the Kedaya Telang Usan, which is stretching from Long Akah to Lio Mato and located at the upper reaches of “Alo Telang Usan” in Kenyah, also called the Baram River by the Government Administrators during the Rajah Brookes era. As a tourism brochure, it documents and profiles the places of interests in order to expose the hidden wonders that are deep in the country’s interior. Since Kedaya Telang Usan is far up in the hinterland, it is high above sea level, its rivers loop and twist through valleys of the mountains before crossing their journey to the sea. At times it is broad and peaceful, at others they rage violently through gorges, forming waterfalls such as U’Ong Geneh, Arau, Paih and the Julan Waterfall.

The river bank of Kedaya Telang Usan is home to the Kenyah and Penan tribes. The rich traditional culture of the the Kenyahs in Kedaya Telang Usan is captured here in the pictures of their dancing and musical instruments and their mural designs on the walls of their traditional longhouses and rice barns. In the olden days, there was no alternative way to travel from one longhouse to another except by longboat, riding through some dangerous rapids along the Alo Telang Usan like Kah Benuang.

This book also shows that people are still living by their ancient traditions and customs, and this is explicit by the artefacts of their Pagan deities and ritual. Although Kenyahs have been devoted Pagans, worshipping the spirits of nature, holding fast to a fear of demons and living a life that was guided by faith and superstitions in the past, today they are mostly Christians.

Except for a few in Long Moh where we can see hanging human skulls at the veranda of their ritual hut. The past glories of Long Akah City is also seen in the remnants of the decaying shop buildings at Long Akah. It used to be a convenient trading centre for the whole of Kedaya Telang Usan until it was abandoned in the late 80s. Besides that, the historical Kubu (British Fort) of Long Akah and Lio Mato, the catholic mission and the missionary primary school of St. Pius at Long San bring to light the existence of the colonial reign in the area.

In an effort to promote tourism in Kedaya Telang Usan, this book emphasises on some of the history, adventure, culture, nature and legends found in the region of the Kedaya Telang Usan, which you will see if you Nai Nyelai Kenyah!

Simpson Njock Lenjau
Councillor, Marudi District Council
04 May 2015
Long San is the first place may visitors of the Kedaya Telang Usan will visit because the region’s only rural airport is located here. It is one of the biggest communities in the area, and home to the local secondary school. It has several shops where you can buy food and drinks and local crafts, or hang out with the locals drinking coffee and eating local delicacies.

Long San was the first Kenyah community on the Baram to convert to Christianity in the 1950s. Long San is the home of the first Kenyah Paramount Chief, the late Dato Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau. The Temenggong felt that the Kenyah needed to move on from their traditional religion. The old religion imposed many restrictions on daily life. The Temenggong requested for a Christian missionary to be deployed to the area and built the first church here, St. Paul’s of Long San.
The Roman Catholic Missionaries brought along a mission school and a maternity clinic to cater for the needs of the people. In the 80’s the first Secondary School was also built in Long San and it was named after Dato' Temenggong called SMK Temenggong Dato’ Lawai Jau. From Long San Christianity spread to all surrounding communities. Today, only very few people practice the old religion among the Kenyah, for instance in Long Moh.

You can fly to Long San with a small twin otter airplane from Miri on Mondays and Fridays. You can also reach Long San by logging road from Miri, which is a 4 hour drive. From here, you can explore the whole of the Kedaya Telang Usan. Long San itself has a long history and many interesting places to visit, for instance nearby Long Akah Fort or Kubu, the lost city of Long Akah, and there are nice small rivers all around to go swimming or fishing. You can also visit the Penan who make and sell parangs in Long San.

It’s a great place to habituate yourself to the region, and it’s quite multicultural: You may meet Kenyah, Kayan, Kelabit, Penan and many other people who have moved here!
Many of the people of the Baram practice traditional shifting cultivation of rice, and during harvesting time everyone is in their farm harvesting their padi. The harvesting season is usually sometime in February. The time of planting is determined communally, and is dependent on the phases of the moon. Because they plant at the same time, people also harvest at roughly the same time six months after the seed has been planted, when the rice in the fields starts to turn yellow. Harvesting is usually done by hand, with home-made implements with which the stalk of each plant is cut. It is tiring work in the hot sun, but it will provide families with the rice they need for the whole year!

If you are visiting the Kenyah during this time, you may be invited to take part in the harvest for a while, and experience the hard work which is necessary to provide people with their most important staple.
Depending on how much rice people have planted the harvest can take days, and even over a week. But there is always a lunch with the new rice and fresh vegetables from the farm to look forward to, and sometimes even some of the rice wine or borak made with the freshly harvested rice!

People in Sarawak are very specific in their rice-related vocabulary. When it is still in the field, or harvested but not yet threshed, it is called ‘padi’. After it has been threshed and husked, it is called ‘beras’, and when it is cooked and ready to eat it is called ‘nasi’.

After the rice has been harvested it is dried in the sun for several hours. The Kenyah, like most other Dayak in Sarawak use woven mats to spread their rice to let it dry. After drying, it is removed from the stalk, and you can often still see women treading on mounds of harvested rice to separate the grains from the stalk. After this the rice is husked, and separated from its outer layer. Voila! It is now ready to be cooked and eaten.

In Sarawak there are different varieties of rice. The most common one is dry padi, which grows in most regions and relies on regular rain, although
people also fertilize and come at least once during the season to weed the growing plants. People are increasingly also growing wet padi, which is grown in areas where water can be regulated and whose roots are submerged in standing water. Wet padi has the opportunity that it can be grown over many years in the same location, whereas dry pady is often practiced as shifting agriculture. This means that every few years a new area needs to be cleared while the old padi fields are left fallow to regenerate. Another popular variety is sticky, or glutinous rice. This variety is used for cakes and sweets, and for making rice wine called borak, which used to be an important element of the harvesting celebration. This celebration called ‘mamat’ by the Kenyah Lepo’ Tau and ‘So’en’ by the Sebup, to name a few, had to make way to more Christian celebrations, but is recently being revived by many communities.
To make cakes and other produce based on rice flour, people used to pound the rice in large wooden mortars, although now many villages have a rice mill.

Many travellers still recall hearing the sound of pounding pestles in the morning, which would tell them that they were approaching the longhouse. Some old people still remember the songs they would sing to the rhythm of the pounding of the wooden pestle, as they were standing on the mortar pounding the rice in turn. As so many things in the Ulu, pounding rice was a communal affair!

You can already tell that growing rice is hard work. This is why people who grow their own rice very rarely sell it. It’s even more reason to enjoy eating the local rice during your visit! To experience traditional rice agriculture when you visit the Kenyah, ask your host if you can help to plant, weed, or harvest their padi!

There is much to learn about what it takes to be a rice farmer. Sometimes, if the farm is far away, people will even sleep at their farm house for days or even weeks! If you visit outside the rice growing season, which starts roughly in August and ends in February, you can of course take part in other agricultural activities.

This page, left: A woman from Long Makabar is separating the padi from the husk with the help of her electric fan.

This page, bottom left: After harvesting the padi is dried in front of the longhouse for several hours. Either rotan mats or, as in this case in Long Semiang, plastic sheets are used for the purpose. Most people in the villages keep chicken, and a long pole suspended over the padi is used to keep them from getting to the padi.

This page, top right: A woman from Long Jekitan is pounding rice on a wooden mortar. Most villages now have rice mills but often wooden mortars can still be seen in or underneath people’s storage sheds, where gunny sacks of rice and valuables are kept.
Long Akah Kubu

The Long Akah Kubu, or fort, has a long history which is closely linked with nearby Long Akah, which was for a long time the main trading post and the location of a row of Chinese longhouses. Long Akah kubu was built in 1929 as the main administrative centre in the area under the government of Charles Vyner Brooke. During the colonial days the fort was used to train local men to become soldiers to fight the Japanese in the 1900’s. It was also used as a High Court to settle disputes among the locals. It’s other role was that of a trading centre where locals could bring their jungle products and do barter trade with the government appointed trader.

The fort is a two-storey structure similar to other forts, such as the one in Lio Mato, or Fort Alice in Sri Aman. A 5 minute boatride from Long San, it stands only a few hundred meters from the old town,
and a small Chinese temple and cemetery which gives evidence of the town’s former inhabitants and which is still maintained by their descendants. The Long Akah fort is rather overgrown, but the structure still tells of its former usage. The lower ground consists of one main room and several smaller ones.

The entrance hall leads onto a big room subdivided by a chest-high wall topped with a railing, which used to be the area where goods could be bartered. Adjoining smaller rooms were used for storage of the bartered goods, such as rubber or other forest produce. One room is a dedicated bathroom with a concrete basin.

From the entrance a staircase leads up to the first floor and directly onto the old court chambers. The judge’s bench still remains, and it is beautifully decorated with local Kenyah designs, or kalong, with a human figure at its centre.
The walls have sliding windows from which cannons could be directed at approaching enemies. Like other Sarawak forts, the Long Akah kubu has a varied history, having once been used as the local school. It is now under the administration of the Sarawak Museum. Unlike other forts such as Fort Hose, Fort Alice or Fort Sylvia, the Long Akah kubu has not yet been restored. In the future it may find new use as a museum, like many of the other forts. It is an outstanding example of Sarawak heritage architecture and part of the region’s history. However, since nobody now uses the fort it has become overgrown and now only hunters looking for wild boar come to the area.

If you want to visit the fort, ask your guide to take you across the river from Long San. Please visit with care since it is an old building and some areas may have become dangerous. Make sure the planks you step on are solid. Please also make sure not to contribute to the fort’s decay. Be aware that there are a number of bats that now live in the lower rooms.
Long Akah Lost City

This page, bottom left: Old bridge leading to the lost city. The bridge leads to the first house in Long Akah, which was inhabited until some years ago. The rest of Long Akah was abandoned earlier, as business became scarce from the 1970s onwards.

This page, top right: Remnants of an old house or storage hut. The area is strewn with indicators of former habitation, often only just visible through the dense growth. Many wooden structures have disappeared almost completely.

The upper reaches of the Baram river have only recently become accessible by road. Previously, it took villagers from Lio Mato to Long Moh several days to go down to Marudi to sell their products and buy supplies to take back home. It is hard now to think back to a time when all river transport relied on manpower, before small boat engines became available. In those days it took not days but weeks for people to do their shopping in town.

Because of its relative inaccessibility most villagers in the area used to come to Long Akah, a trading outpost not far from Long San. Here, a row of shophouses run by Chinese traders offered basic products and in turn bought products brought in from the surrounding villages. In those days, the bright white light produced by the mantle of their pressure lamp was equivalent to the electric light made it appear like a big metropolis in the area.
This was the only trading centre where locals could buy basic supplies in those days. Then, in the 1970's, more and more village shops started to operate in many of the longhouses in Kedaya Telang Usan, and the business in Long Akah started to perish. Slowly Long Akah was abandoned, and now the single row of wooden shophouses is slowly disintegrating and returning to the forest which surrounds it. The concrete walkway leading from the nearby fort to the village is almost impossible to find, and the lost city itself is testimony to the force of the tropical environment.

When you visit Long Akah, please remember to be very careful. The structures in the city which still stand may fall any day, and there may be sharp or pointy objects hidden in the rubble or under newly grown shrubs. Long Akah is a historical site so please do not contribute to its disappearance.
Kah Benuang

This page, left: Boatmen contemplating how to tackle the level five rapids between Long San and Long Selatong.
This page, right: Two boatmen decide to move the boat through the right side of the rapid manually.
Next page, top left to bottom left: The wooden boat with its motor and luggage is heavy, and it takes two determined people to push it up through the current and over the rocks to the other side. In the rear, the job consists mainly of providing forward movement.
Next page, top to bottom right: The person in front is responsible for guiding the vessel through the large rocks on the side of the river, and helping forward movement by pulling the boat along.
Kah Benuang is the most dangerous rapid of the Baram. The word Kah in Kenyah means ’rapid’, and Kah Benuang is categorized as Class 5 World Standard. Accidents and tragedies have occurred here in the past.

The condition of the rapid changes each day with the water level of the Baram. If the water is high it can be easier to navigate up the river, but it also means that the current is stronger.

If the water is neither too high nor too low it can be safer to push the boat up the rapid manually, although this requires a lot of time and physical strength. Locally made boats are made with solid planks of locally grown wood, which makes them heavy. The motor, extra fuel and luggage add to the weight.

If your trip to the Baram takes you up the rapids you may ask to leave the boat and walk on the shore instead. That way you can watch how your guides manage to pass this difficult and dangerous place. You may want to take the ride along with them - they are experienced boatmen and will know how to handle the situation.

Going down the rapids is mostly no problem, so sit down and enjoy the ride, but make sure you are wearing your safety jacket! Better safe than sorry!
Long Selatong is a small longhouse just up from Kah Benuang. The village, inhabited by Lepo Dikan people, is part of the Gerakan Daya Wawasan, a program by the Ministry of Community Development aiming to facilitate development for the local community in terms of People, Longhouse and its Leaders focused on physical, economic, education and safety issues concerning the longhouse community. The village boasts a newly built kindergarten to allow parents to go to their farms knowing that their youngest children will be well looked after. The village tadika are also aimed at augmenting rural children’s chances of doing well once they enter primary and then secondary school. Rural children usually board during primary school, even when the school is in their own village. In the Kedaya Telang Usan, all children go to the Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau secondary school.
in Long San once they finish primary six, and only come back to their village during holidays, or on the weekend, if it’s close enough for their parents to pick them up.

People in Long Selatong belong to the Kenyah Lepo Dikan subgroup, one among many diverse groups in the area with their own particular culture and language or dialect. Around 30 such groups live in the Baram and Tinjar area. Some of them are only made up of one or two longhouses, and with only few hundred members. If you stay at Long Selatong, ask your host to explain what makes the local culture different from those around them. You will hear many interesting stories about the people in the area, their traditions, oral history and culture. An important part of local culture are stories about the ancestors, who they were and where they came from. So don’t forget to ask people about the migration history of local people.

Often, these can be traced back many generations, from the mythical homeland in the Usun Apau or the highlands of what is today Kalimantan, a province of Indonesia. In some cases, people may still have relatives living in Indonesia, when groups split in the times of the ancestors and moved out of the highlands into different directions. Now, many among the Kenyah migrate further downriver to the cities and towns along the coast. Most everyone here will have relatives in the city! If you like, this is also part of migration history.

Previous page, left: The boat jetty at Long Selatong. Most villages along the Baram are either Roman Catholic or follow SIB (Sidang Injil Borneo or Borneo Evangelical Church).

This page, top left: Long Selatong is part of the Gerakan Daya Wawasan, a program by the Ministry of Community Development to enhance local livelihoods.

This page, top right: The Long Selatong longhouse complete with basketball courts. It’s a wooden longhouse but not elevated on stilts, as it would have been traditionally.
Tanjong Tepalit is a small Lepo Gah community just a few hundred meters distance from Long Selatong. The people of Tanjong Tepalit are of the Lepo Gah Kenyah subgroup, which is also a very small group among the Kenyah. Their longhouse is located a very short distance away from U’Ong Geneh, the Geneh river waterfall by the riverside of the Baram. If you visit Tanjong Tepalit, You can also ask about good places to go for jala fishing, or try your luck with the fishing with nets suspended in the river. Another of the pleasures of country life is just to hang out with people in front of the longhouse near the jetty to chat about this and that, about issues and events, and about family and friends. Longhouses are very social places, as everyone knows each other well and is most likely related to half of the longhouse by one means or another.
Socializing and spending time together is one of the great pleasures of living here - although, as you may find out, there is sometimes little privacy either! If you visit a longhouse surely everyone will know about your presence in a very short time, and may come over to have a chat. If this is the case, be open to make new friends! It is the best thing you can acquire during your holiday. Also, don’t be shy to talk to people you meet. They may be a bit shy about their language skills, but most will be happy to have a chat. You may learn lots about local people, their activities, issues and interests. You may also pick up some of the local languages on the way!

If you stop by at Tanjong Tepalit, you may choose to spend a night at the former headman’s guesthouse near the waterfall. From here you can make short trips up the river, and enjoy the view of the Baram river with people going past up and down the river in their small wooden boats.
The Kenyah word for ‘waterfall’ is U’Ong. U’Ong Geneh is a waterfall with three separate currents and only a few metres up from the rivermouth of the Geneh river, where the river joins the Baram. Depending on the water level a pebbly beach leads to the main pool, which is deep enough for a swim. The waterfall is just across the river from Tanjong Tepalit longhouse, and the villagers have built a small house next to the waterfall for visitors to come, stay, and enjoy the environment.

If you visit Tanjong Tepalit, or even if your trip takes you past the waterfall on your way up or down the river, make sure you stay and have a break, a meal or a quick bath. You may even decide to stay longer at the U’Ong Geneh guesthouse. Just ask your guides. The people of Tanjong Tepalit will look after you during your stay, and help you to explore the area together with them.
Last page, left: The U’Ong Geneh waterfall with its three separate streams and pool.
This page, left: Top of the U’Ong Geneh waterfall.
This page, top right: The guesthouse near U’Ong Geneh belongs to nearby Tanjong Tepalit village.
This page, bottom right: Depending on the water level of the Baram, you may visit the waterfall and have a meal on the pebbly beach leading up to it from the main river. If the water level is high, the beach is submerged however. The waterfall also has a pool just perfect for a swim or quick bath.
Long Apu belongs to a Kenyah subgroup called Uma Pawak. It is located not far from Long Julan and Long Julan Pelutan. If you like you can include a hike from Long Apu to Long Julan into your travel itinerary! It is not a long hike but will take you and your guides around 2 hours, through village farmland and forest. While you walk, take the opportunity to ask your guide about some of the plants and animals in the area! They will be able to point out to you tracks and traces of animals such as wild boar, different types of deer such as barking deer and sambar deer, as well as many others. Of course, encountering such tracks is not guaranteed! But surely you will see many other interesting things. Many of the plants in the forest are useful to people, and your guide will be able to explain what they are and what purposes they are put to. For instance, you may find edible ginger, berries and other fruit and rotan vines used for basketry.
When walking through people’s farmland, have a look at what kinds of agricultural products people in the Baram cultivate! Your trail may lead through rubber plantations, rice fields edged by corn, tapioca and other food sources. Some fruit or other may be in season, such as belimbing, or pineapple, or rambutan. If you’re lucky you may be in time for the durian season, which is a very popular fruit around Southeast Asia. In any case, whether or not you are in time for the durian season, Long Apu is a charming small community and you will be very well taken care of if you decide to stay over.
Long Julan is one of the smaller longhouses in the area with only 14 amin, or apartments. It is also beautifully set in a bend of the river just a short distance from the main Baram. Branching off the Baram, the Julan river eventually leads on to the Julan waterfalls, the tallest waterfalls in Sarawak. Coming from the jetty the path to the longhouse leads past a row of traditional storage huts, where the old traditional padi mortars are still stored. If you stay for a night, ask your hosts about them!
Long Julan is so small that it has neither a school nor a clinic and no direct road access either. The longhouse is so short that you may think it’s not really a longhouse at all, but remember that the word ‘long’ in Kenyah means the place where a smaller river joins a bigger river - in this case the Julan river joins the Baram. To reach the road villagers need to cross the Julan river by boat. The nearest community to Long Julan is Long Julan Pelutan across the river, which split up from the original Long Julan but which is now quite a bit bigger. From Long Julan you can hike to nearby Long Apu, which takes only an hour or two depending on your walking speed.

Last page, left: The entrance to Long Julan is a short way up the Sungai Julan, set beautifully among lush palm trees.
Last page, right: Boat arriving at Long Julan rivermouth, with the main Baram visible in the background.
This page, left: Long Julan is a small community with only 14 amin, or appartments, but it is a traditionally built wooden longhouse and set in a beautiful natural sceneruy. It is the smallest longhouse in the region.
This page, right: One of the many small huts around the village of Long Julan. Such huts are often built as storage either for padi and valuables, or for gasoline and tools.
The people in Long Julan belong to the Lepo Abong subgroup, which is a group among the Kenyah. Some of these groups are so small that they have only very few members, and if those intermarry with members of other groups, their children may not learn the local language. Because of this many in Sarawak are worried that the smaller language and cultural groups are under threat. Thus, if you happen to visit the Kenyah of the Baram, take some time to talk with people about their unique culture and oral history. Right now, there are still older people around in the longhouses who remember what their parents and grandparents told them. Often, they will be happy to share those old stories they were told during the long nights on the longhouse verandah before the villages had generators. It can be a very rewarding experience because you will pick up some rare knowledge which may soon be lost.
Long Julan Pelutan is just across the Baram river on the other side from Long Julan. The people from Long Julan and Long Julan Pelutan used to live together in Long Julan, but then split up to form two separate communities. Such splits can happen for various reasons, just like longhouses may also move from one location to another on occasion. In the past, this happened for instance when one longhouse burned down, as was unfortunately the case quite regularly. Longhouse fires are still common, although people are getting better prepared. Longhouses could also move after the event of a disease, or for other reasons, for instance where longhouses grew too big or people had political differences they could not reconcile. These movements then become part of the local oral history, and deeply connected with people’s culture.

The shifting locations can also explain how some people live in separated places but belong to the same Kenyah subgroup, for instance the Lepo Anan, or the Seping. This was in spite of the fact that building a longhouse is a hard and difficult task which can take many years, and that people had to leave behind their fruit trees and cash crops and cultivated fields. It has become more difficult to claim and clear new land but people still do it today, for instance by cultivating new fields near
the road which provide better access by car or motorbike. It is one of the many ways in which the logging roads have changed the local landscape and lifestyle. Of course, people here are very happy about road access to the city because it cuts down on travel times and it allows people to travel more cheaply and to bring more goods from the city to the village. Visiting the Kenyah has become much easier as a result. Of course, it also means that much of the primary forest in Sarawak has already been harvested.

The people in Long Julan Pelutan are also Lepo Abong Kenyah, like the people from Long Pelutan. Both Long Pelutan and Long Pelutan Julan have to cross the river to get to the road, so there is no direct access. Instead people have to take the boat and park their cars on the other side of the river.
Batu Awang is a well known location in local Kenyah oral history. According to legend, this is the place where the Kenyah from the area once encountered a trader coming upriver from Brunei. The Kenyah stopped him, unaware that he was in fact the Sultan of Brunei and challenged him. They said: “We will not let you travel upriver from here, so you better turn back to where you came from.” But the Sultan, whose name was Raja Semaun, instead challenged them to a duel with their blowpipes. The two sides agreed that the winner of the competition would have their way. If the Raja won, he would continue upriver unhindered to do his business, and if the Kenyah won he would turn back and not try to come back to the area again.

This page, top left: If the forest has been cleared around the rock you can see Batu Awang and the hole in it from the river.
This page, bottom left: When the hills near the river are overgrown you can only see the limestone cliff!
This page, middle: The ascent to Batu Awang
The Kenyah were the first to try their skill in the competition. They directed their blowpipes at the rock face on the opposite side of the river, high up above the river. When they shot, their darts flew all the way across and hit the rock face.

When it was time for the Raja to show his skills, he lifted his weapon. Then, according to the legend, just before shooting his arrow, he reached down and took something from his shirt pocket. When he shot, there was an immense sound and the dart had blown a hole right through the limestone rock on the other side of the river. Seeing this, the Kenyah had to concede defeat and let the Raja go on his way upriver to carry out his business.

The story is many generations old, but it is a reminder of the close relationship people in the
area had with the Sultanate of Brunei. According to oral history the links between the Kenyah and the Sultan’s family go back a long way. When you visit the area, remember that it only became part of Sarawak in 1888, when the second Rajah Brooke bought it from the Sultan of Brunei for an annual sum of money.

When you visit Batu Awang Raja Semaun, you may already see the hole in the rock from your boat on the river. You can also climb right up until you reach the limestone rock, and then further up clambering up the rock until you can sit right inside the hole and look down. You will see the mighty Baram river and the hills and ranges in the area. When you do, think of the generations of Kenyah for whom this river has been the main method of travel for centuries, and about the Raja coming to trade for jungle produce with the people here.
Long Anap

Long Anap is located between Long Apu and Long Pelutan. The people who live here are from the Lepo Sawak group. It is a beautiful village with a school near the river and the main longhouse and church further up the hill. Along with other communities in the area Long Anap also has a telecommunications tower located in front of the longhouse, providing mobile phone and internet connection. Unfortunately Long Anap burned down just weeks after these photographs were taken. Longhouse fires are still common in Sarawak in spite of efforts to improve fire safety, and can devastate whole communities. Often people’s entire possessions are destroyed in these events, and it takes a long time for people to build up their communities in the aftermath. Fortunately, surrounding communities and the government can help in the effort.
It will depend on the kind of resources the Long Anap people will be able to mobilize to determine when the house will be completely reconstructed. In front of the house stands a carved pole with a human figure and hornbill on top. The community also has a primary school at the foot of the hill on which the longhouse was built.
The fishtrap is another landmark which features importantly in local oral history. It is connected to Awang Pamen, the Baram river gate near Lio Mato and the 100 Islands. So, before you read on, move forward a little to page 54 and read the story about Alan, his wife and son and their attempt to cross the Baram river that ended with Alan’s son being swept away by the river. Well, this fishtrap was built by Alan, the mythical giant from the Baram, and his wife in their attempt to find their son after he fell into the river and disappeared in the water. Having searched all along the river from Lio Mato down to this place, they finally constructed this trap in the river which acts like one of the traditional fishtraps you may have seen in people’s homes around the area. Two ridges of rock in the middle of the river which become narrow towards the rear, so that anything that is washed through can be caught.
When the water is low the river runs right through the two rocky outcrops, but when the water is high boats can also go around it.

Well, Alan and his wife finally found their son here, but he had already drowned in the rapid waters of the river - after all, he was only a toddler and the Baram has thwarted more than one unfortunate soul! Especially when the water is high the river has a strong current, so beware you don’t fall in accidentally when you visit the area. But also remember, the story of Alan and his son is a local legend only and part of oral history, which is sometimes inaccurate. Make sure you ask your hosts to tell you their version of the story! It may have a happier ending. When you reach this point you will know that you have soon reached Long Palai, where you may stop over or spend the night.

Last page, top left: The left side of the two rocky outcrops that make up the fishtrap where Alan the Giant and his wife finally found their son, who had been washed away at Awang Pamen.
Last page, top right: A boat going upriver to the left of the fishtrap, struggling to fight the current.
Last page, bottom right: View of the fishtrap from upriver.
This page, bottom: Depending on the water level the fishtrap may be partially hidden. When the water is low, the river runs straight through it. When the water is high, boats can also go around on either side.
Long Palai

Long Palai is the next longhouse on your way up the Baram. Long Palai consists of several longhouses, one of them a traditional wooden construction on stilts whereas the other is a modern longhouse made from bricks and concrete on ground level. Long Palai also has a primary school, just like Long Anap. Just like everywhere else, though, the students from Long Palai go on to secondary school in Long San. When you reach Long Palai by boat you have to walk through the school compound to get to the village.
It is a picturesque village inhabited by Leper Laang people, with some experimental wet padi surrounding the settlement, which is not that common in an area where most people rely on the shifting cultivation of dry or hill padi. The main difference is that wet padi can be grown in the same field for many seasons, which is a benefit although the irrigation system can be complex. If you stay in Long Palai, ask your host to show you how it is done! If you stay at Long Palai, you should stay for long enough to make a trip to U’Ong Arau just a few minutes upriver. Here, you can try your skills at the jala, the traditional circular fishnet, as described in the next few pages. It’s also a great place to just come and relax, take a swim and enjoy the surroundings. The area around Long Palai is also stunning, with impressive rock formations on each side of the river you see as you go past by boat.

Last page, left: Long Palai jetty
Last page, right: Signboard at the entrance to Long Palai
This page, top left: Long Palai at nightfall with the picturesque mountain range in the background.
This page, bottom left and middle: Long Palai practices wet padi agriculture near the longhouse. Wet padi has the advantage that the same area can be cultivated many times without the need to resort to shifting cultivation. Most villages in the Baram area traditionally practice dry, or hill padi agriculture.
This page, top left: Long Palai seen from the jetty. To cross over from the beach to the village visitors need to cross a shallow river. This becomes more difficult when the water levels rise!

This page, bottom left: Long Palai houses. Long Palai has two main longhouse parts, one of which is a traditional wooden building while the other is a modern concrete and brick longhouse. There are also several individual buildings. This home owner grows the daun sireh used for the consumption of betel nut. Locals wrap a piece of the nut in a leaf covered in lime, and chew the parcel they have thus created from the three ingredients.

This page, right: Flower in front of Long Palai primary school.
Batu Palau is another rock formation you will pass through when you come from Long Palai. It’s a series of rock outcrops which look like river gates, which have opened up for you. The local people call it Batu Palau, as Batu is the word for “rock” and Palau is the name of a local fish which can be caught around this area. In fact, people from Long Palai say that it is here where they first encountered the species, so that they named the area after it - or perhaps did they name the fish after the area?

While you visit the Kenyah, make sure to ask your hosts lots of questions about the local flora and fauna, because they will have a vast knowledge about what plants can be eaten, how to catch different kinds of fish, and many other things. For the Kenyah, the whole forest is like a larder. Local fern, ginger, fruits and leaves can often be eaten, but it’s important to know precisely which ones and how to prepare them.
The same goes for wildlife, which includes fish, snails, and almost anything that moves. Many species are now protected and it is important to preserve them. For instance, bats should not be eaten because they are important pollinators, but many people don’t know that! Also, other wildlife like python or civets used to be part of the local menu but they have become so rare that it is really better not to hunt them at all. On the other hand, local people are allowed to hunt some species for their own consumption. Wild boar is among the most popular, and fortunately the wild boar is still quite abundant since it’s a very adaptable animal which can live even in disturbed environments.

Depending on whether you’re an experimental eater you will certainly have some new dining experience during your visit to the Kenyah! You may also ask your host to take you on a fishing trip where you can experience the different methods of fishing used by local people. Fishing is one of the most popular pastimes, and people will surely be able to show you some beautiful spots to try your luck. You may even be able to provide dinner, if you’re successful!
U’ong Arau, or the Arau waterfall, is a small waterfall not far from Long Palai. It’s actually not that small, about four meters high. In fact, it’s just the right size for a nice swim in its pool which has its own whirlpool caused by the inflow from the waterfall. It’s located a short walk from the mouth of the Arau river. The Arau river itself is a beautiful waterway, quiet and overgrown. You can drive the boat right into the river mouth in a sheltered cove, land some distance further up and start walking. It’s an easy walk over the pebbly river bed and it’s not far to the waterfall. The river is one of the favourite areas for jala fishing for the people in the area (see page x). There is a lot of fish here so when you come for a visit don’t forget to try your luck. Just ask your guide how to throw the jala - basically everyone here will be able to show you. You can even climb up the waterfall and continue walking upstream.

There are more fish upriver, too. Just see how far you can get. Just remember not to throw the jala on the same spot twice! The fish will already be gone once you throw it the first time.

The local people come to U’ong Arau for picnics, to fish and just to have a good time. When you come you should also bring some rice and vegetables. If you catch some fish, you can fry them on the fire and add them to the meal. It always tastes better when you eat outdoors, and because the Kenyah know how to use leaves for their plates and their fingers instead of a fork there isn’t even any washing up to do. It’s really part of the local lifestyle.
Fresh fish is one of the staples of the people of the Baram. After all, Kenyah longhouses are built near the water, and indeed the word ‘long’ in the name of most villages signifies the confluence of a smaller into a larger river. For instance, Long Moh is situated near the confluence of the Moh river and the Baram, and you can find Long Silat at the place where the Silat and Baram rivers meet.

There are various ways of catching fish, and one of them is using the Jala, the circular fishnet. You can find one or more jala in most households. It will often be suspended from a rafter or beam, where it is kept clean and tidy until the next use. It is made from fishing line with a metal chain or other weights on the outside and a long string to retrieve it attached to the middle. Real jala enthusiasts spend much time mending...
and organising their nets, which is not an easy job. The net itself can be bought in the shop, but people can extend or mend holes torn by tree branches using extra fishing line.

The jala can be used in big or little rivers as long as they are shallow. In areas of deeper water a suspended fish net or fishing with a line and bait is more successful. The idea is that the fish are trapped underneath the net, whose ends are weighed down by the chain, and can then be retrieved by slowly and carefully pulling in the net by the central string.

After throwing the jala once there is no use in throwing it again in the same place, because all the fish in the immediate vicinity have probably already escaped. Instead, you move on to a new spot a bit further up the river.

If you see someone using the jala it looks complicated at first, since the net needs to be thrown in a way so that it spreads out all the way before hitting the surface. In order to throw the net in the right way the person throwing it must distribute the net evenly over his right elbow and his left elbow while taking a bunch into each of his or her hand. Then, the net is thrown either from a boat, the beach or while the person is wading in the shallow water.
Throwing the jala really requires some practice and coordination but it’s a lot of fun. When you visit the Kenyah, make sure that your hosts take you to a shallow part of the river or a small creek to try your skills. It’s a really popular pastime, and also it may just provide your dinner. You may catch various types of local fish, catfish or eel, although you may also just end up with a lot of sticks or leaves. Never mind! At least you will also get a bath in the river.

This page, top left to bottom right: Throwing the jala requires practice. The net should unfold entirely before hitting the water so that a maximum area is covered. It takes some time to arrange it over your arms to be ready to throw. Don’t let go of the strap! After you throw it, carefully pull it back in. You can already feel with your hands whether you caught anything!

Next page, top left: If you’re lucky you can catch your own dinner!
Next page, middle left: To clean the fish you remove the intestines, and with some species remove the scales. Strip the bark from a slim branch, which you use as a skewer. Voila!

Next page, bottom left: Fish frying over the fire.
Next page, top right: There will always be some firewood around!
Next page, middle right: Food always tastes better outdoors...
Next page, bottom right: Nothing to wash up if you use leaves as plates!
While you are out, ask your host or guide to tell you more about local species of fish, their names and habits, and about the river. People often have their favourite sites where they like to come back to regularly. There may just be a waterfall around that you can visit later. At times you can also spot animal tracks while you are out, so have a look around.

If you are lucky enough to catch something with your jala, you can extend your fishing trip with your hosts to include a picnic by the river! There is always enough firewood at hand. Of course, you need to clean the fish before you can fry it over the fire. Make sure that you pack some rice and perhaps a serving of veggies or two before you leave the house to start your jala adventure, bring a little salt and perhaps some chili or sambal to spice things up.

Sarawakians often package rice in the leaf of a certain type of local ginger. It tastes nice, and it’s good to eat while travelling! You can also learn how to eat with your hands, which sounds easy but surprisingly also takes a bit of practice. The best thing is that you won’t need to wash the dishes!
The Silat river

The next place you will visit on your trip up the Baram is one of its many tributaries, the Silat river. The Silat is home to several communities, both Kenyah and Penan, and it’s definitely worth exploring. There is much to see here! The first longhouse is Long Silat, which takes its name from the river near which it is located. The next longhouse is Long Makabar, where you can stay in the beautifully decorated cultural centre overlooking the village. The last stop is Penan Long Jekitan, the home of the region’s most prolific parang smiths. You can find parangs from Long Jekitan anywhere on the Baram, and even all the way down in Marudi and Miri. Don’t forget to bring a parang back home from your Sarawak trip! Not only is it a very important cultural artifact but it is also very useful around the house. On the following pages you will find out more about the places you can visit on the Silat river.

The Silat river

This page, top: Waterfall by the side of the Baram river. Travelling on the river is an exciting and interesting experience. Not only can you see the different communities and longhouses, people working in their farm and other boats going by. There are also waterfalls, rock formations, sandy beaches and pebbly shores, birds flying overhead and trees reaching out over the water. In some areas you may spot the wild tiger orchids growing on tree branches, or blossoms from flowering trees floating downriver. This page, left bottom: Longboats constitute the traditional method of travelling in the Baram. These boats are made in the villages from individual planks and waterproofed with tree resin.
Long Silat is the first community on the Silat river. As you may know by now, the word 'long' in longhouse means river mouth, and so Long Silat is located nearby where the Silat river joins the Baram. The people who live here are called Lepo Agak. It is a single stretch of longhouse, and it is also quite modern, and made from brick and mortar. These longhouses are becoming more and more popular, as people find them easier to maintain, cheaper to build and more long-lasting. Of course, as a visitor you may be more interested in the traditional wooden longhouse, where each of the apartments looks different from the next, and where everything is made from natural, local materials. But it’s important to realise that people here think differently, and often find that old wooden longhouses look a bit messy, and are also more difficult to maintain in the long run.
People feel that brick and cement longhouses are more modern, more appropriate to contemporary living, and that’s important to people here. Because the area has been logged in the past, it is also more difficult to find those building materials that used to be plentiful in the past. So, on your way up the Baram, just have a look and find out what people’s concerns are. Each time you stay in a longhouse, it will be very different from the next, and each family apartment you stay in will also be different from the one beside it. That is the great thing about homestays!

Last page, top left: Long Silat longhouse. Long Silat is a modern longhouse made from brick and concrete. The village has direct road access and so people can drive from Miri up to the village and park their cars directly in front of the house. While this may not look as traditional, it is of great benefit to local livelihoods and makes travel much easier for people living in rural communities.

Last page, bottom left: The traditional method of travelling by longboat takes much much longer. Boats are slower than cars, use more petrol and have a smaller capacity for storage. As the river meanders, the distance that needs to be covered grows! This is why it is important for local communities to be connected to the cities and towns near the coast by road. The problem is that the roads don’t belong to the government, they belong to the logging companies that will only maintain them as long as they are working in the area. Once they withdraw, the roads are usually no longer maintained and become impassible in a few months. When this happens, the villages are left once again without access to the coast.

This page, top left: Marker at Long Silat
This page, bottom: Long Silat longhouse.

People feel that brick and cement longhouses are more modern, more appropriate to contemporary living, and that’s important to people here. Because the area has been logged in the past, it is also more difficult to find those building materials that used to be plentiful in the past. So, on your way up the Baram, just have a look and find out what people’s concerns are. Each time you stay in a longhouse, it will be very different from the next, and each family apartment you stay in will also be different from the one beside it. That is the great thing about homestays!
Long Makabar is a Lepo Tau longhouse. The Lepo Tau are one of the bigger groups in the area, and it is their language, Kenyah Lepo Tau, which is widely spoken by other people in the area. It has become a kind of ‘lingua franca’ for the Baram. People are also likely to speak Bahasa Malaysia or English, though, but people from different groups are much more likely to speak Kenyah Lepo Tau with each other. Long Makabar is the site of the Kenyah Cultural Centre. This building was constructed to house local events and activities, but it is also used as a guesthouse for visitors. You will find it beautifully decorated with a traditional Kenyah tree of life mural on the upper floor, where the main communal verandah and the bedrooms are located. The view from the verandah is great, as the house is located on a small hill above the village.
Long Makabar is quite big, and has many individual houses as well as several longhouses clustered in the area. Among the longhouses, some are of the more traditional kind, made from wood and elevated on stilts, whereas others are built on the ground and made from bricks and concrete. It is very entertaining to wander around Long Makabar and look at how every family has built their own...
home according to their family background, their needs and wishes. There are a few small shops in Long Makabar where you can buy local produce like parangs and baskets, necessities such as soap and maggi mee, and where local people come to sell their goods. For instance, you may easily find someone offering you fish freshly caught in the river, and other things. Long Makabar is also a good place to find out more about local arts. The village has a few very skilled sape players, and if you are lucky to find them at home they may be able to give you a performance of their music.
Long Jekitan is a Penan village. It is situated on a beautiful pebbly beach, and as you approach you will find children playing there and women washing their clothes. Long Jekitan is quite a large community, with a primary school and the only clinic in the area. People from Long Makabar and Long Silat come here if they need treatment or medications. The most interesting thing about Long Jekitan is the proliferation of metal workshops around the village. Making parangs is one of the main economic activities in the village, although you may also spot people working with beads, or taking care of agricultural chores. In the following pages you will find a more detailed description of the process.

This page, top left: Young people at Long Jekitan  
This page, bottom left: Village houses at Long Jekitan  
This page, right: The headman of Long Jekitan preparing rice cooked in bamboo in front of his house.
Parang manufacture

Parangs are invaluable accessories of farming life in Sarawak. They are used for many things from chopping firewood to cutting grass, or making your way through the jungle on an overgrown trail. Traditionally, people in Sarawak’s rural interior made their own parangs from iron ore found in the rivers. Now, however, there are better resources for the raw material. The most popular and expensive is the blade of a chainsaw, which is highly prized as it is sharp and will not become blunt easily. The second most popular, and more easily available, source for parang blades are car springs.

But not everybody has the knowledge and knowhow or the time and patience to produce parangs. The main manufacturers in the Baram region are the Penan people. Formerly nomadic, many Penan have now settled down in villages where they plant
Parang manufacture

Padi and rear chickens. However, they are also the manufacturers of many traditional handicrafts. Many of the locally sold mats and baskets are Penan-made. These can often be identified by their striking black-and-white patterns.

Producing a parang is not an easy process and involves several complicated steps. A parang is sold in a custom-made sheath, or cover carved from wood. It is made in two halves which are tied together tightly with rotan, and which can be attached to the waist by a rotan loop. The case can be highly ornamented or plain. Ornamental sheaths are often produced as decorative items which can be displayed in people’s homes but are normally not used for everyday farmwork.

The parang itself consists of the blade and the handle. The handle is carved from wood, but for ornamental or decorative parangs it can also be made from deer horn. In the most highly decorated parangs bunches of goat hair are attached to the handle, which are at times coloured red or black or white. These decorative handles and parang cases are often highly ornamented and carved in the local design patterns called ‘kalong’. The kalong is an important part of local culture.
In the past, kalong were displayed on the wall of the headman, the tua kampong, or other community elders such as the Penghulu or the Temenggong of an area. They are very recognizable design systems consisting of interlocking spirals and animal and sometimes human figures. In the past, some figures were limited to the aristocratic members of the communities. Today however these limitations are less strict as the Kenyah class system has officially been abolished.

The blade of the parang has to be made in the age old process of metal production by heating the metal in a hot flame until it becomes malleable, and working it with a hammer into its eventual shape. The fire used in the process is only hot enough if it is provided with extra oxygen. Therefore the fire needs to be fanned constantly to reach a high temperature. Most Penan smiths work on several pieces simultaneously, hammering one blade while the other is heating up in the fire. A second person is needed to fan the fire.

Once the blade turns red it is hot enough to be worked on. The smith will then hammer the metal on his anvil. The metal only stays malleable for a few seconds, and then needs to go back into the fire.
When the blade is finished it needs to be filed to give it a sharp edge, and then polished until it is shiny. The blade is attached to the hilt with glue produced from tree resin applied over a tight band of woven rotan.

Parangs need to be sharpened frequently, but when they are newly made they are very sharp! The Penan parangs are sold in shops all over the Baram. There are other smaller workshops, but the main village which produces Parangs is Long Jekitan on the Silat river. There are several workshops here where people make parangs, and each worker is able to complete each stage of the process from carving the sheath to hammering and filing the blade. Another place is Long San, which is also home to some Penan people.

The price of the parang depends on its size and the intricacy of the carving. Buying directly from the maker is not always cheaper as the parangs are sold wholesale in many villages, for instance in Long Makabar, Lio Mato and Long San.

Used parangs are often more expensive than new ones because they have already proven themselves to be durable. Because parangs are such useful multi-purpose tools nobody can live without them!
Long Jeeh is a modern longhouse in many respects. It is built from brick and cement, and so it is made from modern materials. It also has a telecommunications tower which provides the community with mobile telephone coverage. It has direct road access, and so people can drive their cars right up to the longhouse all the way from Miri. In fact, Long Jeeh even has a blog! Have a look at it, it is very informative and you can learn a lot about the history of the community. The URL is longjeeh.blogspot.com. In other respects Long Jeeh is just as traditional as other communities. The people are friendly, welcoming and hospitable. Local foods may include exotic items such as fried fern, wild boar or deer, and pounded tapioca leaves. Traditional agriculture is widely practiced, chickens run everywhere and at night you can
hear the ubiquitous sound of generators. Indeed, not everybody has moved from the old wooden longhouse to the new construction yet. For the visitor, the new construction is surely more convenient, but the old part is definitely more picturesque. Fortunately it is possible to have both at Long Jeeh.

Long Jeeh is a Lepo Agak community, like Long Silat and Long Selawan.

Last page, left: Village marker at Long Jeeh. The engraving marks the construction of the new longhouse at Long Jeeh.
This page, top left: Long Jeeh consist of an old and a new part. This photograph shows some of the old houses in Long Jeeh.
This page, bottom left: People at Long Jeeh jetty. One of the business enterprises is selling sand from the beach for use in construction for making cement.
This page, bottom middle: Long Jeeh jetty leading up from the river to the village.
This page, bottom right: One of the old houses near the river at Long Jeeh with children playing in the foreground. Not everybody has moved from the old to the new longhouse yet.
Just like many other features of the local environment, the Angan Pampok is deeply embedded in local oral history. It is made up of three big stones which form a tripod, standing at 10 feet high each. The story of Angan Pampok goes like this:

According to local legend, there was a place not far from Long Moh called Lepok Empau Naah Pinggan, where mythical beings lived. It was a longhouse of giants and heroes. One fine day the ladies of the longhouse had nothing much to do, and decided they wanted to dance. They asked Balan Nyanding, who was a well-known warrior and one of the heads of the village, to play the jatung for them. The jatung is a big wooden drum. But Balan had no time for them. He was making blowpipe darts. Instead, he told them to go and ask Oyau Abeng to do it instead, who was also one of the village leaders. But when they asked Oyau Abeng he would not do it either, but sent them back to Balan. Balan got very angry. “Ho many heads of giants did Oyau Abeng chop off compared to me?” he asked them. When Oyau Abeng heard about this he felt slighted and insulted by Balan. He felt so bad that he refused to eat or drink and eventually died of starvation. When the rest of the people from Lepok Empau saw this everyone was very upset. Eventually, the people in the longhouse decided to pay their respect to Oyau Abeng by making him a tomb. They set out to find the biggest tombstone they could find and eventually cut of part of the peak of Batu Siman mountain. That is why today Batu Siman has two tall peaks and one shorter peak. Their leader, Pampok, pulled the huge rock with his loincloth all the way down the Buang river. When he needed a rest, he chose a place near the junction of the Buang river with the Baram river to sit for a while and cook his porridge.
Because he was a giant, he had a giant pot, and he used the rocks at Angan Pampok to cook his porridge. So, the rock tripod is in fact Pampok’s cooking stove. Indeed, Angan is the local word for a place to cook rice.

If this story from local oral history seems intriguing and unusual to you, there are many more stories which also all defy the usual storylines of Western fairy tales and legends. Just ask your host and guide about them! They are particularly relevant to the local geography, as many of them are centred around existing places. For instance, to give you a hint, you could ask your guide why it was not allowed to laugh about wild animals! They will be able to explain to you the dire consequences which this seemingly harmless act had on their ancestors.

Last page, left middle and bottom: Angan Pampok seen from the shore. It’s easier to make out the tripod structure from the water, but this would have been the place where Pampok had his lunch.

This page, left: Angan Pampok seen from the river. From this view one can really imagine a huge giant cooking his rice porridge in a big pot on the three rocks.

This page, top right: Just like Pampok, you can have your lunch at the water’s edge! Since the rice cooker is somewhat oversized, it might be a better idea to bring packed rice which is already cooked. Usually in the Kedaya Telang Usan, you will eat rice packed in the leaves of wild ginger, which makes it easy to carry.

This page, bottom right: Arriving by boat at Angan Pampok
There are several things which make Long Moh quite special, apart from its beautiful location on a river bend at the mouth of the Moh river. It is inhabited by Lepo Tau, Lepo Ngkau, and Lepo Jengan people. It also has an interesting mix of architectural styles, as longhouses and individual houses are cluttered along the river’s edge. The other interesting feature is the elevated footbridge, high above the river, which connects the longhouse with the site of the primary school. It is not for the faint at heart or for those with a fear of heights, but from the top of the bridge visitors can enjoy a beautiful view of the river. Long Moh also boasts a clinic. The most unique thing about Long Moh is that it is the home of the last members of the old religion, who still follow the old traditions and have not yet converted to Christianity. There is only a handful of people around who still practice the old
customs, while the rest of Long Moh is Christian. These traditional believers are quite private, as they understandably have become the focus of interest in the past decades. After all, they are the only people anywhere in the Baram region where the old religion still persists. So, to protect their privacy they charge visitors who want to visit their ritual house a monetary fee before allowing access. You may decide whether or not you would like to visit, but it is definitely a unique experience. Because most people in Long Moh believe in Christianity, the pagan group has moved their ritual hut out to the edge of the community. Here they keep the old traditional statues which ward off evil from the
community, along with other statues, ritual drums, ornaments and accessories and, indeed their ritual skulls. You can see some photographs on the following pages. Not to give away too much, but they aren’t actually human skulls, but they are real and definitely fascinating to see.

On the other side, Long Moh has much else to offer apart from its pagan believers. The village has several beautiful spots for bathing, you can visit the different parts of the longhouse, or wander around to meet villagers for a chat. If you do, you are very likely to be invited in by someone to talk about this and that, and to hear stories about other tourists in the area from as far back as the 1970s and 1980s. Before the region had access to the logging roads, it took days to travel to Long Moh by boat, and that is why few people came to visit. It’s still a long way away from almost everywhere, but today you can choose between river travel and access by road, which may be more convenient and also cheaper. Those tourists who did come in the 1970s, even though there weren’t many, are fondly remembered by the people who got to meet them back in the day. It’s an indication of the hospitality of people here.
Long Moh is the only community on the Baram where people still believe in the old religion. Under the old religion people watched for animal omens which would tell them if danger was near. Often, they would then have to give some sacrifice to appease the spirits. Other elements of the religion were spirit healers called dayung, who could go into a trance and communicate with the spirits. Out of respect for the old believers in Long Moh we will not show photographs of their place of worship. If you come to Long Moh, you can ask to be shown around, but people will ask for an admission fee. It’s because as the last old believers people have been subject to much curiosity in the past! However, visiting the house of worship is very interesting indeed. The photos on these pages show some of the surrounding items, such as the statues meant to ward off evil which were traditionally positioned at the end of each longhouse. Other statues are also part of traditional practices, as are the seven stones placed at the bottom of the statues and the leafy plants which surround them.
Long Selaan’s population is a mix between Kenyah Tepuan and Empok. The community is located between Long Moh and Long Semiang, in a picturesque river bend. Although it is a pretty village there are times where this longhouse, like the others around the area, will be all but deserted. If this happens you know that people are out for ‘maju’, or harvesting. If you happen to arrive during the rice harvesting season, you better join everyone or you might be home alone!
Long Semiang

Long Semiang, also sometimes spelled Long Semiyang, is a Morek community. The village consists of two longhouse parts, one closer to the river and the other some way up the hill. Between the two parts Long Semiang has its church. The community has telephone reception, but it is only available in the evening. This is because the new hydroelectric power plant, or mini-hydro nearby is still under construction. Once the mini-hydro is operational, Long Semiang will be one of the few longhouse with a constant supply of electricity, and people won’t have to rely on expensive generators fuelled with diesel or petrol anymore. It will be a big step for Long Semiang! At the moment, Long San is in the same situation, with a nearby mini-hydro under construction. Long Semiang also has a kindergarden, or tadika, for pre-schoolers to receive their first education. Long Semiang is the
original home to one of Sarawak’s most famous sape players by the name of Matthew Ngau Jau. Matthew lives near Kuching now. If you visit Long Semiang, perhaps you can find someone else to play the sape for you. It is quite a unique sound which you can find nowhere else in the world outside Sarawak. If you’re lucky you can find someone else to show you the traditional dances that go with the music.

Last page, middle left: Long Semiang storage huts.
Last page, bottom left: Crops drying in the front of the longhouse.
Last page, bottom right: Family from Long Semiang travelling on the river.
This page, top left: The lower longhouse at Long Semiang.
This page, top right: The Long Semiang telecommunications tower. The tower only works in the evening because the mini hydro which will power it in the future is not yet completed. It is powered by generator in the meantime.
This page, bottom right: Storage huts at Long Semiang, between the lower and the upper part of the longhouse.
Long Tungan is the last community before you reach Lio Mato, the furthest place on the Baram which is navigable by longboat. It is an interesting community, as it consists of two longhouses arranged in an L-shape around a central communal field. Here children can play sports, and other communal activities take part. The village also has a basketball court, so get ready to challenge the locals to a game! People here belong to the Jamok subgroup of Kenyah. Like in most rural communities people here excel at the traditional arts and crafts. For example, you could use your visit to Long Tungan to brush up on your basketry skills! You will find many people who can teach you how to make a basket from natural or manmade materials. The traditional material for basketry is, of course, rotan, although other dried leaves can be used. More recently people have started using plastic packing tape for basketry. It comes in cheerful colours, and while it is not as durable as rotan it is easy to buy and cheap! The traditional material, rotan, is a vine which grows in the forest. If you go for a hike while you are visiting the Kenyah, you will surely encounter it. It has very sharp thorns on its long leaves which tend to hang above the trail just where people are likely to walk. For traditional basketry these vines are harvested, dried in the sun and then split. The process takes a while, and so packing tape has become a popular option. Nevertheless, if you like to learn basketry with traditional materials this is, of course, possible. These materials are still more highly esteemed, and can also be dyed and coloured in several hues.
Last page, left: The Long Tungan boat jetty leading from the village to the river. This is a very traditional way of building a ladder by using a log into which steps have been hewn. The rising and falling water level and regular floods often wash away more elaborate concrete jetties. However, it’s quite scary to go up and down this construction at night or after rain, when the steps become slippery! This kind of ladder used to be very common. It was also used for access to the longhouse, and it could be easily withdrawn if enemies arrived. Sometimes there are also handrails, to make it easier to use.

This page, top: Individual house near the village
This page, bottom: Long Tungan is situated picturesquely at the foot of the hills near the river. The community is made up of two longhouse parts arranged in an L-shape with a central square. Both longhouses have the traditional common verandah which is sheltered by a low wall. The central square or meadow can be used for sports or leisure. Long Tungan also has a basketball court!
The people of the Baram can make a vast number of things from natural materials. Not too many generations ago people had to rely for their every-day needs on the forest around them because going down to the next town to trade would take weeks. Houses, boats, clothes, and all sorts of receptacles, ornaments and tools were made entirely from natural materials. In many areas these materials have been replaced by man-made ones as trade and travel have increasingly become easier for the people of the Ulu. However, basketry is the one craft which is still widely practiced. One of the reason is that many products produced from rotan, dried leaves or bamboo are uniquely suitable for their purposes. For instance, there are specific baskets for planting, harvesting, carrying the spiky Durian fruit, and many many other purposes.

This page top left: The local backpack is called ‘kiba’ in Kenyah. This page right: Locals prefer the kiba to backbacks because it does not get dirty, can easily be mended and is very light.
Next page top left, middle and bottom and top right: Local headdresses are important accessories for all occasions in the Kenyah calendar. They are made from dried leaves and decorated with colourful string, beads and sequins. They are very particular to Orang Ulu culture. The leaves are harvested, dried in the sun and then split before they are woven by hand into the intricate shapes shown in the bottom picture.
Traditional garments such as headgear, whose styles are particular to local communities, also can’t be bought in any shop. Many local people also find that bags made from rotan, such as the popular carrying basket called ‘kiba’, are more practical than backpacks made from fabric because they don’t get dirty, are very light and extendable to fit differently sized loads, apart from looking very attractive.

Another reason is, of course, that natural materials are free to collect. So the things made from them are also free unless one counts the time needed to look for them in the forest, dry them in the sun, process them and finally turn them into the desired end product. Among the most popular natural fibres is rotan, which is a thorny vine which grows to enormous lengths.
It is very flexible and comes in different types. It is traditionally used as a rope to tie boats and fix all sorts of things from parang sheaths to handrails. Rotan is dried in the sun, and then split to create the thin strips used for basketry. This was traditionally often a job of the men. Other materials are also popular. For the iconic local sun hats the young leaves of a palm are used. Bamboo is usually abundant but when used in basketry is less hardy. It is more suitable for mats where it is used in thicker strips.

When you visit the Kenyah, have a look around at the basketry. You can study the different patterns and find out which ones are typical for each group. You may even want to buy an item or two. You will also find baskets and mats for sale in local village shops, because many people don’t have as much time as their parents and grandparents did, and are happy to spend the money to buy baskets produced by someone else. Some of the materials are also becoming more scarce. Penan baskets are popular, and are recognizable by their black-and-white patterns. Of course, you can buy these products in Kuching or Miri, but you won’t have the opportunity there to chat with the makers!
In recent years baskets made from plastic packing tape have become very popular. In fact, the packing tape is not as durable according to local people, but it is easier to obtain. A roll may only cost MYR 5. in the shop, while a length of rotan has to be found in the jungle and then processed and split. They also come in all sorts of bright and cheerful colours, and can be made into all the traditional shapes. If you are worried whether you will be able to bring natural materials back home after your visit, these baskets are a great alternative. Also, if you start wearing them during your visit be sure to receive some compliments from the local people! Engaging with local culture is always appreciated.

If you are curious, you can take basketry classes in most villages of the Kedaya Telang Usan. Just approach your host or your guide and ask them for it. Your host will teach you basic shapes and patterns and show you how to create your own basket. If you like you can learn about different types of leaves and types of rotan and go to the forest to search for your raw materials. It’s an experience which is deeply linked with the history and culture of local communities and will give you a deeper understanding of local ways of life.
When you reach Lio Mato on your way up the Baram you will know that you have reached the uppermost village of the Kenyah. It is the last village which can be reached by longboat. This does not mean that nobody lives further up the Baram! There are various communities inhabited by Penan, Kenyah, and other groups. But the Kenyah are people who like to live near the river, and travel by river, and so Lio Mato is their last settlement on the Baram. Indeed, the Baram becomes navigable further up for kilometers, but waterfalls and rapids just above Lio Mato make it impossible for a boat to pass. The people in Lio Mato belong to the Kenyah Badeng group. Because of its position just below the rapids Lio Mato is the location of a government fort, or Kubu, similar to the one in Long San. The Lio Mato fort is not accessible though, because it is part of the local agricultural station run by
the Sarawak Agricultural Department. It is still an imposing building and significant part of local heritage! During the confrontation with Indonesia soldiers were stationed here in case of conflict at the nearby border with Kalimantan. The fort is not far from the local primary school, which was one of the first in the area. Indeed, old photographs from the Sarawak Museum show that the Kubu served as the school building when the school was first opened in the late 1950s! Today the school has outgrown the building, because Lio Mato is quite a large community. From Lio Mato you can do several interesting walking trips. You can visit the legendary 100 Islands, for instance. In fact, the name Lio Mato translates as 100 Islands. You can also visit the mythical Baram river gate, and the Hose falls on the way. These are only a day trip away, and will be explained in detail in the next pages. There are also several longer trips which start at Lio Mato. For instance you can hike to Long Banga, which is a two-day walk with one night spent in the forest. If you walk for five days you can walk all the way to Bario. Both from Long Banga and Bario you can then fly back to Miri.

There are various other things to do in Lio Mato, hikes, nature walks, animal walks, and you can also spend time exploring the village, its church, some small shops and the kubu, albeit only from the outside. Whatever you do, don’t leave without finding out about the 100 islands that gave Lio Mato its name, and the story of how they came to be!

Last page, left: Entrance to Lio Mato village
This page, left: The Baram river near Lio Mato. The river is not navigable for boats further up, and so Lio Mato is the last village accessible by longboat. The 100 Islands and the Awang Pamen make it impossible to go further up by boat. Therefore Lio Mato is the last longhouse inhabited by the Kenyah, who like to use the river for transport and livelihood. Villages further up are inhabited by Kenyah, Penan and other groups.
The hundred islands, which translates in local Kenyah as Lio Mato, is an area not far from the village of Lio Mato where the Baram becomes very shallow, forming several large islands. Hundreds of large smooth boulders are strewn everywhere. When the islands were counted by a dedicated person in the 1980s, it was found that there were only about 80 islands and not 100, as local tradition has it. By today that number has been further diminished by seasonal floods that have washed away all but seven of the islands. The hundred islands, like so many geographical features in the area, have a local legend attached to their creation. According to oral history it happened that one of the giant ancestors by the name of Alan together with his wife and his little son were walking along the Baram river, just having a look here and there.
When the family reached the Baram gate or Awang Pamen just a little further upriver, Alan decided that he wanted to cross over to the other side of the river. However, there was no bridge, and no boat to bring them across. So, Alan loosened his belt, stiffened it and laid it across the river. At this stage of the tale the old men in the village telling the story will start to chuckle because the exact thing he used for the river crossing wasn’t really a belt, as you will see. So, Alan’s wife, whose name has been lost to history, and the small child started to cross the river. As they were halfway across, some red ants on the other side stung Alan’s makeshift bridge - here you can already see that things don’t match up if you take them literally - and Alan, feeling the pain deeply, twitched, and the bridge started to shake. This caused the wife and son to topple off the bridge, and into the rapid waters of the Baram. Alan’s wife, who could swim well, made it to the shore but the child disappeared in the water. Alan and his wife immediately started looking for him, following the river back downstream. Trying to locate the boy, Alan raked the river with his bare hands and, being a giant, created hundred islands in the process. Unfortunately, there was no trace of the boy. As you may remember, Alan and his wife were only able to find him after they had built the fishtrap near Long Palai, and by that time he had already drowned! The story of the 100 islands is therefore quite a sad story.
Awang Pamen will be the uppermost place on the Baram river you will visit during your trip to the Kenyah. It is a two hour hike from Lio Mato to reach the massive rock formation that make up the Baram river gate and mark the location where Alan and his family wanted to cross the river. On the way, you will pass by the 100 islands, the cradle which Alan made for his son on their way upriver, and two sets of rapids which are named after one of the most well-known government administrators of the area during the Brooke area. These are the Hose falls, named after Charles Hose, the Government Resident in Marudi at the turn of the century. Hose spent almost 20 years as Government Resident. In 1899, he organised a great peace making ceremony which was meant at ending warfare between local groups. To mark the occasion the
first ever Baram regatta was held, an event which still takes place every two years in Marudi. Hose was an amateur naturalist, and numerous species of animals endemic to the region are named after him. He was also an amateur anthropologist, and wrote two large volumes about the people here, entitled “The Pagan Tribes of Borneo”.

Hose was a big man, and legend has it that because people at that time were mostly illiterate, his officers would carry his jacket with them to convince people that Hose and no one else had sent them to carry out his orders.

The hike past the Hose falls to Awang Pamen will take you past some incredibly beautiful country.
There are picturesque river bends, steep cliffs, fields or smooth rocks and finally one steep forested hill visitors need to climb to reach Awang Pamen. The hike is well worth it though. The gate is a massive and majestic wall of rock with a narrow opening for the water to flow through. On its other side the water runs through a channel of rock, only to emerge onto the rapids below.

The trail back takes you past formerly cultivated land with old rubber plantations. On the way you will find other interesting things to experience, such as the tracks of wild animals, wild and domesticated fruit trees, and of course the abundant forest on each side of the river. There will also be time for a meal by the riverside with stunning views of the surrounding area, and perhaps even a short nap before heading back to Lio Mato!
Batu Siman
Batu Siman is the only one among the wonders of the Kedaya Telang Usan introduced here which is not on the Baram river. Yet the name Batu Siman might already be familiar to you! It’s the mountain which Pampok cut to build a tomb for Oyau Abeng. It’s also the location of one of the famed edible birds nest caves in the area. In a deep cave just at the foot of the mountain a species of swiftlets builds nests out of spit and small feathers and bits of moss and sticks. This kind of birds nest is very popular among Chinese people, who say that it has rejuvenating qualities. Trade in bird’s nests between Sarawak and China dates back many centuries. Harvesting bird’s nests can be dangerous. Often, workers erect bamboo scaffolds to climb up to the ceiling of the cave where the birds build their nests, but accidents are common. This particular cave however is not that high, and so it’s a great place for visitors to explore the processes of the birds nest trade. The nests in this cave are harvested every two months, with longer breeding periods inbetween. During the harvesting period, workers descend into the cave using metal ladders. The entrance is narrow, and the chambers where
the birds build their nests is roughly 50 meters beneath the ground. It takes good nerves to follow the workers down all the way into the depths. If you do, you may feel safe in the knowledge that they know very well what they are doing, having been up and down the cave many times. And yet, the trip is not for the faint at heart.

When you visit Batu Siman you will learn a lot about birds nests and the swiftlets that produce them. Early in the morning you can watch them come out of the cave to start roaming the forest. At dusk they return to the cave to spend the night, and work on their nests. The nests, once they are harvested, still need to be processed. There are two different types of nest. One of them, the white nest, does not need much work, because its main component is the bird’s spit. The black nests are built with other components such as feathers and moss, and these need to be removed before the nests can be consumed.
But all this is not done in Batu Siman. Once the nests are harvested, Chinese middlemen buy them by the kilo and it is them who organise the processing and shipment. Have a look around in Miri and Kuching, and you can find a variety of bird’s nest products, such as drinks and sweets. If you feel like trying those, just remember that it’s really just bird spit!

If you aren’t fond of depths and decide not to visit the cave you will still enjoy the trip to Batu Siman. The air is cool and refreshing because of the height, with cool nights and misty mornings. The house near the cave, where you will stay, is surrounded by fruit trees, pineapple, betel nut palms and pepper vines. The place is peaceful, and as far removed from the big city as one can get. There are places to explore nearby, such as the Paih waterfall or U’Ong Paih, and due to its remoteness there is plenty of wildlife around. You may not see too many animals because they are shy, but you might see their tracks around, and you can also spot interesting birds in the area. Particularly in the fruit season, when the wild fig trees bear fruit, there are often hornbills around. Hornbills have special significance for local people in Sarawak, and the Sarawak coat of arms has a hornbill as its main symbol.
There is no road access and no navigable river so the only way to visit Batu Siman is by foot. The track includes some disused and overgrown logging road, and a hike through dense and pristine rainforest. It’s about four hours with plenty of breaks. There are some hills, but they aren’t very steep. Still, if you have not hiked in the area before, it’s better to accept some help to carry your luggage. In particular after the rain the hills can be very slippery. Once you have reached Batu Siman you can hike out in several directions to reach one of two nearby Penan communities, Long Mabui or Ba’ Ajeng. From there you can go to your next destination via the logging roads which crisscross the area. This trip is no pleasure cruise, but it’s a unique experience that you will never forget.
When you're in Batu Siman don't miss the opportunity to visit the Paih waterfall, U'Ong Paih. It’s only a short walk of half an hour from the house. The hike is not difficult but the trail can be slippery. Ask your guides about the best techniques for walking in the forest, and don’t be upset if you end up landing on your back once in a while. It just happens.

The waterfall is set in the most abundant, lush and verdant forest environment imaginable. You can come to have a picnic by the water, to play in the cascade or bathe in the pool. On your way, you may see animal tracks, spot interesting birds and experience the Borneo forest in its amazing variety. At the same time your ears will be filled with the sound of frogs, cicadas, the rustling of leaves and the rushing of the water. It is an experience that includes all the senses.
When you visit the Kenyah you will encounter many items on the dinner table you will never have seen before. Some of them can only be found in the area, while others are prepared in a way which is unique to local communities. One example is the popular midin, which is the young sprouts of a species of fern which commonly grows by the riverside. There are different types of ferns, too, and they can be prepared in various ways, with chili, belacan, or as a salad. It’s delicious! There are also types of local ginger with stems that have an edible core, which can be either boiled or eaten raw.

For local people wild meat is a delicacy. The Kenyah are skilled hunters, too, who will go out at night to look for wild boar or deer. Other animals are also commonly eaten, but whereas in the past it was permissible to eat bats, python, civets and porcupine, many species are today protected.
More abundant wildlife such as wild boar, which is the most popular wild meat for local people, is relatively more abundant. Local people can hunt wild boar for their own consumption, but selling the meat is not permitted. The wild boar meat can be prepared in a variety of ways. It can be boiled, cooked in soup, fried, dried or smoked. The fat of the wild boar can be collected and used as oil.
Fish is also a huge part of the local diet. A popular way of preparing fish is either to cook it as a soup or to deep fry it until it becomes crispy. Regardless of what you eat with it, the basis of most meals will be rice. The rice is usually home grown. Freshly harvested rice, which is called ‘new’ rice, is a particular delicacy. Rice can also be cooked in bamboo, eaten as porridge or ground into flour and baked or fried into cake. For travellers, rice is often packed into handy parcels by wrapping it into the leaf of wild ginger. Finally, rice can also be fermented and made into rice wine.

When you visit the Kenyah your guides will usually bring some food with them to help the people in the village look after you. It’s therefore a good idea to tell them what kinds of things you like! If you have an allergy, a food intolerance, or if you just don’t like a particular food it is important to let them know. People can accommodate special needs, and prepare food for vegans and vegetarians, lactose intolerance and those with celiac disease. However, you should always check yourself, in particular if you have a severe allergy, because people may not be that familiar with your specific needs. Remember that people here are not professional caterers, but
friendly and hospitable people who will share with you what they themselves eat every day, and what they have grown and hunted with their own hands. So if there is something you don’t like, try to stay polite and make sure that you communicate what your particular needs and wishes are.

At the same time, try to explore new ingredients and recipes with your host. For instance, you can accompany them when they go to harvest vegetables for your dinner, or take a walk through their gardens and orchards to take a look at what grows there. You will find many familiar and exotic plants such as tapioca, yam, papaya and pineapple, chili and kang kong. Ask the people you are staying with about these are prepared, what parts you can eat and how they need to be processed! There is a culinary world to explore.

Last page, top left: Cooked rice wrapped in the leaf of a wild ginger species, and spring onion.
Last page, bottom left: Deep fried crispy fish.
Last page, top right: Your help in preparing food will surely be appreciated, and you can learn lots about local recipes!
Last page, bottom right: The next supermarket is a long way away, and so your guide will bring food for you when you visit the Kenyah. Make sure you tell him or her about what you like!
This page, top left: Pepper is more of a cash crop rather than part of most local recipes.
This page, bottom left: The pepper vine.
Next page: A stingless bee visiting the flower of a chili plant.
When you visit the Kenyah, don’t miss out on one of the greatest and most simple activities. You can do hikes of various durations, from an hour to a week, and longer, if you are the adventurous sort. There are trails everywhere, some leading to people’s farms, some to waterfalls, local sights, roads, other villages and other destinations. Some are difficult and include river crossings, hills and mountains, muddy and rocky terrain, whereas others will lead you past picturesque padi fields and through old rubber plantations. You can ask your host or guide to give a dedicated nature walk, but mostly they will take the opportunity to explain what you see around you while you are on your way anyway. While hiking you can encounter animal tracks, and other hints that wildlife, although momentarily invisible, is always around you, such as marks on trees or mounts of leaves and burrows.
You will find fruit trees with fruit consumed by particular birds or mammals, poison dart trees, palm trees used in basketry, edible plants and many many other things in the forest which are part of local culture and the local environment. As some locals put it, ‘The forest is our supermarket!’ And there is a lot of truth to it.

Similarly interesting as a walk in the forest is a walk through local farmland. There are many interesting plants used locally for food production. At times, different parts of a plant can be used, for instance tapioca, where both the starchy root and the leaves can be eaten. There may be fruits and vegetables you’ve not seen before, such as langsat, belimbing or mangosteen. Once you’ve seen where these grow, you will recognise them when you are having your dinner in the evening.
In Sarawak’s remote rainforests wildlife is as abundant as it is invisible. There are many often endemic and rare mammals around, but they are very difficult to spot. If you are keen to have an encounter with local wildlife, one option is to ask one of the local hunters to take you on a night-time tour of the area. You may prefer not to kill any animal you might spot, and if so you should let your guide know. In fact, you should make sure that if you come across any rare species the animal is not killed for food! Some areas are particularly suitable for animal spotting, such as salt licks where different species come to drink the nutrient rich water. Hunters are very adept at recognizing and following animal tracks. They know much about the habits of different animals, which makes it easier for them to find them. Not all animals are that hard to spot. If you are interested in birds, for instance, you will have a great time waking up early to roam about the villages, fields and forests with a pair of binocular looking for rare and endemic species. You can spot many interesting kinds of birds everywhere you go. Indeed, omen birds were an important part of the old traditional religion. Depending on where a bird call was heard or a bird was spotted different prohibitions came into force. Some of these birds are still believed to bring bad or good luck, even though most people in the Kedaya Telang Usan converted to Christianity.

Apart from birds there are also many other interesting critters you will encounter everywhere. Stick insects, cicadas, frogs, and other small creatures are abundantly present everywhere you go.
Playing Sape

The sape is a traditional Sarawakian instrument and among the Kenyah there are some expert players well known around the world. The instrument is not that different from a guitar, but it has fewer strings, and is usually open in the back. In the past, two-string sapes were often used for the performances of dayung, or spirit mediums. There are three-string and four-string sapes too. Even though the sape may look somewhat like a guitar, one would not mistake the sound of the sape for anything else. The sound as well as the melodies typically played on it are unmistakably Sarawakian. There are many other local instruments, some of which have fallen out of fashion in the last decades while others have become more popular. One is the nose-flute, similar to a normal flute but played through blowing air through the nose. Another is the keledi, made from bamboo pipes and a hollow gourd.
There is also a type of xylophone made from wood and string, and a kind of harp made from bamboo, where the strings are created by carving into the skin of the bamboo. If you are interested in local music and musical instruments, ask your host about what kind of instruments people play in the different villages. They may be able to give you a demonstration, or even a little concert. There are various other instruments, and which ones are popular depends on the taste of the different groups and villages. There are also percussion instruments, for instance the long drums which were part of religious ceremonies, and which can still be found in places like Long San, suspended from rafters on the longhouse verandah. Another important instrument, mostly played for rhythm rather than melody, are gongs which were used as payments in local adat, or native customary law, for payments such as bridal gifts or fines. Such brass gongs were not manufactured in the villages and were imported from the cities, and thus they were important heirloom artifacts. Musical instruments reveal much about local culture, and they're a fascinating area of traditional heritage to explore.
In the Kedaya Telang Usan people take much pride and pleasure in hunting. Of course, wild meat is an important food source, too. While many locals own guns and hold gun licenses, there are still some who hunt with blowpipes and poison darts, the traditional way. For one thing, guns and bullets are expensive, although home made rifles can be found here and there in the villages. The art of hunting with a blowpipe and poison dart goes back many, many generations.
Making blowpipes is a difficult art because they must be perfectly straight, with a straight hole drilled right through. The main ingredient for the poison into which the darts are dipped is the sap of a local tree. The location of these trees in the forest is usually well known, and scars in the bark tell of past usage. There are other components to the poison too, but this tree sap is the main one. The poison is fast acting and whoever handles the darts must take great care not to pierce his or her own skin. Stories of such mishaps are widely known. While there are some traditional medicines around said to be able to counteract the poison it would be unwise to tempt their potency. There are different types of arrows for different kinds of prey, for instance birds, monkeys and wild boar.

Last page, left: Equipment needed to hunt with a blowpipe and poison dart: A blowpipe, carrying case for the darts made from bamboo with an attachment to hook it into the belt, and the thin darts with a plug-like end which fits neatly into the blowpipe made from the soft core of some trees.

Last page, bottom right: All parts of the equipment are hand made. The most difficult part is making the blowpipe which is usually carved from a piece of hardwood. The hole on the inside through which the dart is shot needs to be perfectly straight, and is drilled by hand.

This page, top left: Darts dipped in poison.
This page, top centre: Darts with carrying case.
This page, right top and bottom: The poison tree with marks where the sap has been tapped.
The following are some things you might want to consider before you head out to visit the Kenyah. The list below will give you an idea of some of the things you might want to prepare for.

**Equipment:** When you come to visit the Kenyah, bring a towel, soap, sarong and a pair of rubber shoes as seen on page 117. Both will be indispensable and can be bought in Kuching, Miri, Marudi or Long San.

People’s eating habits may be different from what you are used to. You may be served biscuits and mee in the morning and then rice twice a day, with meat, fish or vegetable. If you have any dietary needs, please make sure to discuss this with your guides before you leave!

Some villages have shops but the selection is often small. Try to bring what you need with you.

Sleeping arrangements for guests are often communal. Bring ear plugs if you worry about other people snoring.

Bring lots of extra batteries.

There are no ATMs. While there is little to buy make sure you bring all the money you need to pay for services and souvenirs.

Consider filling a first aid kit with basic supplies, oral rehydration salts, betadine, band aids, cream for itchy insect bites etc. Check rear (appendix) for more details.

There will be cats and dogs chicken and pigs. If you have any particular allergy or aversion, make sure you come prepared.

It will rain. You may want to bring a loose poncho to cover yourself and your gear if you get caught out in a rainshower.

Bring dry bags for electronics.
Travel: The water levels of local rivers are subject to daily changes. This can complicate trips on the river and lead to delays. Make sure you have enough time at the end of your trip to take into account that the weather can impact on your travel plans.

Local logging roads have their own rules. Drivers must always give way to the big logging trucks travelling on these roads. Roads are often either dusty or muddy, which can provide driving hazards. Not all vehicles are appropriately lit. Make sure you wear your seat belt.

Longhouses: Because of the agricultural cycle people may not always be home, but are often away at their farms.

Facilities such as toilets, showers and kitchens may not be like what you are used to. Facilities will be different from place to place, but most village showers function in the following way: There is a big tub filled with water, and a pail. Pour water over yourself until thoroughly wet, lather, and rinse. People usually shower in the late afternoon after work and before dinner, as well as in the morning.

Careful when charging electronic devices with generators. Power surges can destroy your appliances. Ask for surge protectors. Generators are usually switched off after a few hours. Keep a flashlight next to the bed. Water supply will be from the local rivers but people usually boil water to make it fit for consumption.

General advice: There are no life guards, park wardens, ambulances, policemen, so look after yourself and use common sense. The next doctor is a long way off but for minor complaints many villages have a clinic with an attendant nurse. Villages have no rubbish collection and no landfill sites. Try to reduce your own rubbish, and if you see people around you dealing with their rubbish inappropriately use your discretion to let them know you disapprove. Never just throw rubbish on the trail or in the river. No one will come to pick it up and it will be there forever.

Consider buying travel insurance for your property. It is a humid environment and things may get damaged, fall into the river, get eaten by dogs, lost and so on.
When walking in the forest your guide may use his parang to clear the trail and mark trees by cutting their bark. This is not random environmental damage but will help you and others to find your way.

Leech bites are unpleasant but leeches don’t transmit diseases. Wear long trousers and check once in a while.

On your trip you will be staying in people’s private homes. If you feel that some aspects of the place are not appropriate, please bring this up with your guide who will help the home owner to address the issue.
The following is a short vocabulary of some words you may need when you are visiting the Kenyah. This vocabulary is in Kenyah Lepo’ Tau, which is the language of one group of the Kenyah, but is widely spoken among most people. It is a lingua franca of the Baram.

This list will give you a starting point from where you will learn many other words, if you ask your hosts about their own dialect or language. People will be happy to teach you and you will find many opportunities to use your new skills.

Of course, some of these language groups are very small and only comprise a few hundred speakers. Nevertheless each language is a unique part of local culture, and while you learn each language you will learn much about local traditions, practices, and history.

**Kenyah Lepo’ Tau**  **English**

- Nai Nyelai Kenyah .............Come to visit Kenyah
- Akek ......................................Me or I
- Ikok .................................You
- Inu Dengah ..............................How are You?
- Kelok .................................Want
- Uman .................................Eat
- Nisep ......................................Drink
- Luntok .................................Sleep
- Ake kelok uman .................I want to eat
- Ikok kelok uman .................You want to eat
- Akek kelok nisep .....................I want to drink

**Kenyah Lepo’ Tau**  **English**

- Na at kini ..............................Look here
- Kelok luntok .......................Want to sleep
- Tai ......................................Go
- Entok ......................................Bath
- Sungai .................................River / water
- Tiga .................................I am fine
- Tiga Tawai .........................Thankyou
- Nyat lesau .................Sorry
- La uh ..............................Hungry
- La uh tekak kek ...................I am hungry
- Nyaek nah ................................Goodbye!