

EXPLORE THE DEEP DARK OF MULU

Few places in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo can match the magnificence of Gunung Mulu National Park. This fascinating tropical rainforest locale about 100 kilometres away from Miri is riddled with some of the largest, longest, most fascinating cave systems on the planet. Gunung Mulu National Park ticks all the boxes, more than adequately meeting not just one but all criteria (*earth's history and geological features, ecological processes, superlative natural phenomena or natural beauty and aesthetic importance, as well as Biodiversity and threatened species*) needed for it to be listed among UNESCO's globally renowned World Heritage Sites in November 2000.

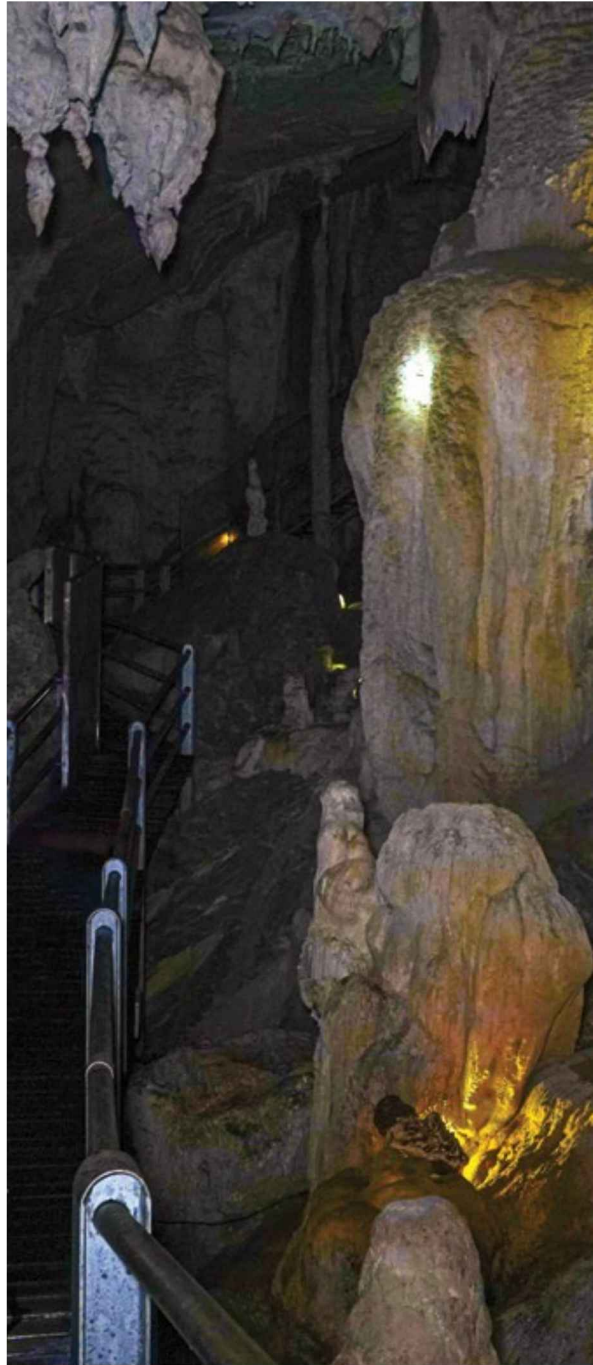




Rock formation resembling a camel's head.



Cave of the Winds



On the surface, the 544 sq km national park named after Gunung Mulu shows off an undulating mountainous landscape that takes you aback every time you gaze at its grandeur. As you venture deep into the national park, you will discover sights few have ever seen before. Roaring waterfalls, winding rivers, dense canopies and dazzling wildlife are a joy to come across on your temporary escape out of civilisation and into the very heart of nature. The Pinnacles on Mount Api are chief of all these attractions and are a must-see among mountain climbing enthusiasts.

Underneath it all however is a completely different story. The Mulu mountains hide within them some of the world's most impressive subterranean systems,

carved into shape over millions of years. We explored just a fraction of those cave systems during a recent excursion hosted by Sarawak Tourism Board (STB), in partnership with MASwings and Mulu Marriott Resort & Spa.



VIPs and the media on arrival in Mulu via Maswings.



Journey into the deep

A 30-minute boat ride from Mulu Marriott took us to the starting point of our little adventure into the Cave of the Winds, the first of two show caves we explored during our excursion. A set of winding steps built into the limestone walls provided a much-needed exercise, complete with refreshing views of the surrounding jungle, as we made our way to the entrance of the cave.

Torchlights in hand, we proceeded along a wooden path leading us away from the light and deeper into the Cave of the Winds. The breeze we felt as we moved through the cave was indicative of how the Cave of the Winds got its name.

Within just minutes, unfamiliar sights began to reveal themselves. The deeper we ventured into the cave, the more alien this subterranean world appeared, with stalactites hanging down the ceiling and stalagmites emerging out of the guano-covered ground. Some of the formations joined over time to form columns. These features were especially prominent at the King's Chamber.

Moving through the dark passages inside the Cave of the Winds, we could see evidence that they were carved by a subterranean river that is now no longer there. What's left is an underground landscape that is truly fascinating.

Art by water

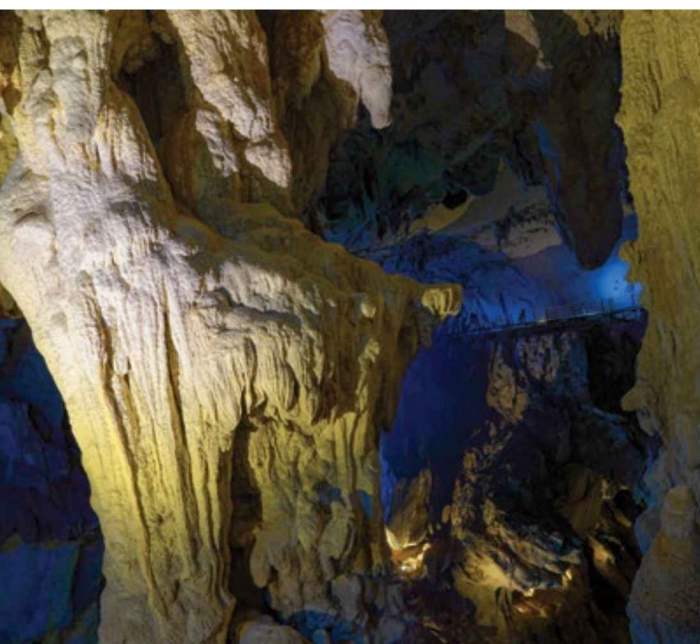
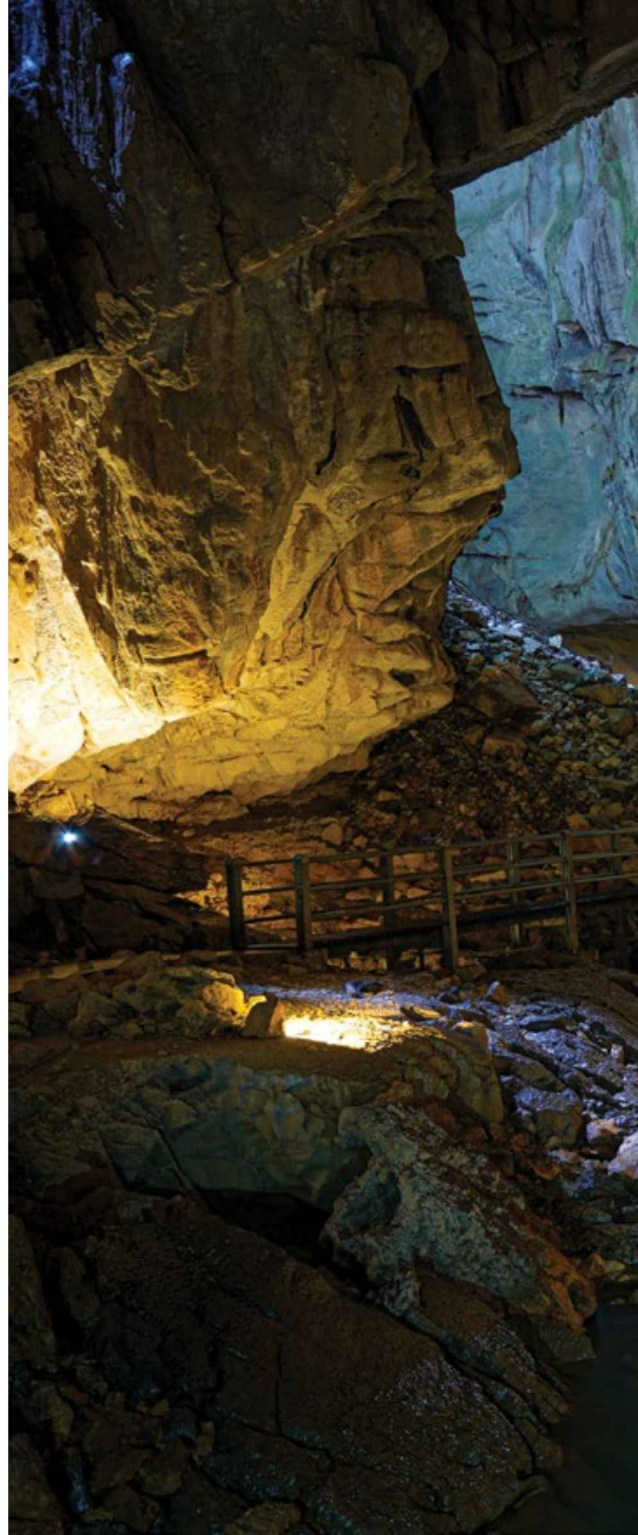
Each of the caves in Gunung Mulu National Park is unique. For Clearwater Cave, it is the clear river that flows through this impressive cave system of over 200 kilometres in length, and the “works of art” it created as it rushed through the limestone rocks over millions of years.

Getting to the mouth of Clearwater Cave was a challenge for the mind. There were 200 steps to climb, which sounded difficult for some. But as we soon discovered, it was not difficult at all.

From the mouth of Clearwater Cave, we could see how massive it was. As we moved further into the cave, its sheer size became more apparent. It's truly a monster of a cave passage, and it's not even the biggest one in Mulu. That title belongs to Deer Cave.

Down where the water flowed through the passages with such an impressive force, we witnessed the true might of the subterranean river that shaped Clearwater Cave – not in the river itself but on the cave walls that had been carved by water over the course of a few million years. To be standing on the bridge over the flowing river below and in the middle of the cave passage resembling a painting was quite something else. Its immense beauty shone through even when there was little light. But 30-second exposed images really captured the finer details of nature's artistry found within the dark hollows of Clearwater Cave.

That, for us, was the highlight of our cave exploration trip in Mulu National Park. That rare opportunity to capture the splendour of Clearwater Cave. Suddenly everything else paled in comparison – for this trip at least. With such rare beauty presented before us, we wondered what else could be waiting in the hundreds of kilometres of dark passages within Clearwater Cave.





Clearwater Cave

Experience Mulu

Now that it's possible to travel again, we recommend a trip to Mulu for its amazing caves and climbs. Getting there is by plane, via MASwings flights to Mulu Airport from Miri (30 mins), Kuching (1 hr 20 mins) or Kota Kinabalu (55 mins). Check flight schedules or make your booking at <https://www.maswings.com.my/>.

As for accommodation, Mulu has several options. If you want to bask in luxury while reconnecting with nature, Mulu Marriott Resort & Spa is the ideal option. Its lavishly appointed rooms ensure a comfortable, luxurious stay amid a pristine tropical jungle surrounding. More info at <https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/myymu-mulu-marriott-resort-and-spa/>.

The park HQ offers different levels of accommodations to suit your budget and preferences. Here you can also purchase Wi-Fi passes in case you need to stay connected to everyone else back home. More information can be found at <https://mulupark.com/accomodations-facilities-2/>.

Other options would be homestays within Mulu area, owned and managed by local homestay operators.

For bookings and more information about Mulu National Park, go to <https://mulupark.com/>.