



THE ASSOCIATION
MAGAZINE

BUSINESS EVENTS **SABAH**

**SPECIAL MICE
DESTINATION REPORT**

©Mengkabong River Bridge view with Mount Kinabalu
Sabah Convention Bureau

Beyond the Rainforest: Sabah's Rise as a Regional Knowledge Gateway

©Kota Kinabalu City View/Sabah Convention Bureau

Sabah is entering the international business events market with a clear purpose. While it was once mainly recognised for its natural landscapes and cultural heritage, the Malaysian state at the northern tip of Borneo is now positioning itself as a regional connector for knowledge exchange and professional collaboration. Its progress is not measured by slogans, but by how effectively the government, academia and industry are working together to attract and deliver valuable events.

At the heart of this evolution lies the **Sabah Convention Bureau (SCB)**, which was established in 2024 with the aim of formalising and expanding the state's presence within the global meetings network. Rather than being promotional, the bureau's role is strategic: identifying areas in which Sabah already has expertise and building event opportunities around them. This approach has raised the profile of sectors such as biodiversity research, marine science, healthcare, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy, fields that now form the backbone of Sabah's event proposition.

The State's position within the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) strengthens this direction. The state functions as a natural meeting point for regional cooperation and as a gateway for international organisers seeking access to wider Southeast Asian markets. Improved air connectivity through Kota Kinabalu International Airport, combined with purpose-built infrastructure such as the **Sabah International Convention Centre (SICC)**, ensures the capacity and logistics expected by international associations and corporate planners.

The following pages illustrate how these elements come together in practice. We will begin our journey with the industries that sustain Sabah's event landscape, from energy and agribusiness to tourism and healthcare. Then, we will move through the state's venue portfolio and hotel infrastructure before exploring how the bureau and its partners are measuring event legacy through knowledge partnerships and community impact. Finally, an exclusive interview with **SCB's CEO, Noredah Othman**, outlines how Sabah intends to compete through credibility, regional relevance and long-term value creation.

Contents

Sabah's MICE Landscape & Industry Drivers	2-3
Venues, Hotels & Hosting Capacity	4-5
Event Legacy & Lasting Impact	6-7
In Conversation with the Sabah Convention Bureau	8-9
Incentives with Purpose	10-11





When Industries Fuel the Pulse of Sabah's Event Landscape!

In every destination, the strength of its business events industry is tightly interwoven with the vitality of its economic backbone. When key sectors are active and expanding, they generate a steady flow of congresses, trade shows and professional forums. These events are not stand-alone occasions but reflections of the industries that host them, stages where ideas are tested, talent is cultivated, and innovation takes root. They create spaces for collaboration between universities, entrepreneurs and global corporations, stimulating local employment, nurturing specialised skills and expanding opportunities for research and development. In this sense, the business events sector acts as both mirror and catalyst, it showcases the destination's strength while fuelling its future growth.

The Link Between Sabah's Event Community and Their Sectors

Sabah is increasingly embracing this connection. With a diversified economic base and growing ambitions in the business events market, the state is positioning itself as a regional hub where industry and MICE development advance hand in hand. The establishment of the **SICC** provided the infrastructure; now industries such as energy, tourism, healthcare and agribusiness are supplying the content, audiences and opportunities that sustain a vibrant events calendar.

"Many delegates come with the perception of Sabah as a leisure destination known for its rainforests and islands. When they discover our modern venues, global-standard hotels, knowledge clusters, and proven record of hosting international congresses, their perspective shifts dramatically," shares **Noredah Othman**.

Oil and gas remain a cornerstone of Sabah's economy, with upstream and downstream projects placing the state firmly on the energy map of Southeast Asia. Palm oil and broader agribusiness contribute significantly to exports, while tourism and hospitality are globally recognised thanks to Sabah's natural treasures, from Mount Kinabalu to the islands of the Sulu Sea. More recently, healthcare and medical research have gained visibility, with Sabah hosting regional gatherings for societies and associations in the sector. These industries not only sustain economic growth but also provide fertile ground for events with regional and global resonance.

Industry Perspectives: Driving Growth Through Collaboration

The calendar of conferences and exhibitions illustrates this synergy, from the **Sabah Oil, Gas & Energy Conference & Exhibition (SOGCE)** to the **Global AgriTech Summit** and international medical congresses, each showcasing a facet of Sabah's diverse economy.

For the **Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Malaysia Section**, global events are driven by criteria such as connectivity, infrastructure, academic collaboration, and government support. "When evaluating destinations, IEEE looks for cities that demonstrate strong local research communities, institutional backing, and seamless access for regional and international participants. Sabah's growing academic and technical ecosystem shows great promise in this regard," notes **Dr. Bernard Lim, Chair of the IEEE Malaysia Section**.

Tourism, one of Sabah's most recognisable sectors, continues to evolve through events such as the **Sabah Hospitality Fiesta** and **BE in Sabah**, which celebrate excellence in service and showcase the region's hospitality assets. "Every major hospitality event held here strengthens our collective brand as a quality tourism and MICE destination," says **Suresh Ramasamy, Chairman of the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH), Sabah/Labuan Chapter**. "MAH remains committed to supporting the business events ecosystem, from promoting service excellence to ensuring our hotels and resorts are ever-ready to host world-class gatherings."

Meanwhile, the healthcare sector is emerging as an important contributor to Sabah's event calendar. The state recently hosted the **20th Annual Congress of the Asia Pacific Federation of Coloproctology 2025**, placing Sabah on the scientific map. "Medical conferences held here encourage the sharing of regional expertise and strengthen Sabah's position as a growing centre for healthcare excellence," observes **Dr. Eugene Tan, Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) Sabah Branch**.

Agribusiness, particularly palm oil, also plays a pivotal role, inspiring technical seminars and regional forums that address sustainability, innovation and trade.

A Destination Defined by Industry and Innovation

The diversity of these gatherings demonstrates how Sabah acts as a meeting ground for professionals across multiple disciplines. Importantly, the state is not only defined by industry-specific meetings, it also welcomes international cultural festivals, educational congresses and trade shows that cut across sectors, reinforcing its role as a versatile destination.

As Othman concludes, "Sabah's business events ecosystem thrives when our industries thrive. Every successful event held here amplifies our economic story, one that is driven by collaboration, innovation, and the spirit of Borneo."



©SICC Aerial View/Sabah Convention Bureau

A Soulful MICE Destination: Convention Facilities, Venues and Event Spaces in Sabah

Sabah has evolved into a dynamic contender on the international business events circuit. From contemporary waterfront convention halls to cultural venues rooted in tradition, the region offers a unique balance of technical sophistication and authentic local character. This section focuses exclusively on its venues, event facilities and meeting spaces, offering organisers and planners a clear and inspiring portrait of an unforgettable destination.

Kota Kinabalu stands at the heart of Sabah's event landscape, blending world-class venues with cultural halls and internationally branded hotels. From major congresses to one-on-one meetings, the city offers facilities for every scale and purpose. The opening of the **SICC** – Borneo's largest purpose-built convention centre – redefined the region's capacity for global events, complemented by venues like **Hakka Hall**, **KDCA Hall** and the **ITCC Grand Ballroom**. More than a meeting point, Sabah is a destination where technical excellence merges with cultural depth, providing an environment that is both professional and memorable.

Over the past decade, Sabah has strengthened its event infrastructure with hybrid-ready spaces, advanced AV systems and professional services that ensure seamless delivery. Supported by nearly 27,000 hotel rooms and growing air connectivity through **Kota Kinabalu International Airport** – a rising hub in Southeast

Asia – the State offers smooth logistics and exceptional hospitality. Beyond the capital, destinations like **Sandakan** and **Tawau** extend these capabilities, creating a complementary network of reliable and safe events across Sabah. "Our message to organisers is simple: Sabah brings together modern-day facilities, strong air connectivity and professional services with a delegate journey that is seamless, authentic and memorable," confirms Othman.

Key Venues in Sabah

• Sabah International Convention Centre (SICC)

The SICC is the largest purpose-built convention and exhibition facility in East Malaysia. Located on Kota Kinabalu's scenic harbour, this six-hectare multi-functional complex can accommodate up to 5,000 delegates across its 153,000 m² of event space, with expansive

exhibition halls, modular breakout rooms, and dedicated VIP spaces. Spanning five levels, its design ensures smooth delegate flow, and its integrated AV and staging systems make it the premier choice for major congresses, trade shows and cultural showcases. Set close to both the coast and the airport, the centre combines convenience and connectivity, simplifying travel for delegates and event logistics alike.

• Sabah Hakka Hall

The Hakka Hall Complex is a community icon that has grown into one of the most versatile event venues in town. Known for its spacious interiors, it regularly hosts conventions, gala dinners and large assemblies. The compound consists of two main buildings – **Wisma Hakka** and **Dewan Hakka** – and includes a multifunctional event hall and a renowned seafood restaurant. Built as a gift to the Hakka Chinese community, its architectural design



blends tradition with modern functionality, combining authenticity, cultural heritage and professional event capacity.

- **KDCA Hall Penampang**

Founded in 1966, the **Kadazandusun Cultural Association (KDCA) Hall** in Panampang is the cultural symbol of the Kadazan-Dusun community, blending tradition, hospitality and functionality to craft large gatherings in an historic venue. Its pavilions and halls host conventions, forums, and vibrant cultural festivals, offering organisers an authentic local dimension for their events. Beyond event hosting, KDCA fosters community engagement through initiatives in music, dance, language and indigenous rights, while its annual **Kaamatan Festival** has become a cultural highlight.

- **ITCC Grand Ballroom**

The ITCC Grand Ballroom at the **International Technology & Commercial Centre** in Penampang, embodies the modern face of Sabah's event scene. Designed with sleek contemporary style, it offers flexible layouts, advanced AV capabilities and the capacity to host conferences and corporate receptions as well as banquets and dinners. Integrated within a vibrant mixed-use complex of retail, offices and hospitality, the ballroom ensures accessibility and convenience for delegates, bringing an urban energy and multipurpose reach to the city's venue repertoire.

Other Complementary Venues

Beyond these flagship venues, Sabah also features several complementary facilities that enrich its business events landscape. The iconic **Tun Mustapha Tower** offers auditoriums and exhibition foyers with panoramic views, while the **Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)** provides well-equipped lecture theatres and halls suited for conventions and academic forums. In addition, the **JKKN Auditorium Sabah** and **Sabah Cultural Centre Penampang** serve as dynamic spaces for conferences, cultural performances, and creative showcases – adding depth and diversity to the range of event experiences available across the state.

Hotels with Meeting Capacity

Sabah's hospitality infrastructure is a cornerstone of its MICE offer, and boasts some internationally recognised brands such as **Hilton, Hyatt Regency, Marriott, Le Méridien** and **Shangri-La**. State-wide, **685 hotels** with **26,822 rooms** – including more than 10,500 in the 3–5-star segment – provide reliable accommodation for delegations of all sizes. This breadth of choice, from beachfront resorts to centrally located business hotels, ensures organisers can tailor delegate stays to suit every event. Here is a showcase of the most iconic ones:

- **Hilton Kota Kinabalu**

This five-star property in the city centre, offers 304 contemporary rooms and suites designed for business travellers. Its MICE facilities span over 3,600 m², highlighted by a pillarless Grand

Ballroom that accommodates up to 1,000 guests in theatre style or 670 for banquets. With versatile breakout spaces, advanced in-house AV systems, and a professional events team, the hotel offers an exceptional setting for successful corporate meetings and conferences.

- **Kota Kinabalu Marriott Hotel**

This Marriott seafront retreat blends modern luxury with panoramic views of the South China Sea, standing as a prime choice for high-profile conferences. It features elegant accommodation across 332 rooms and suites, complemented by five dining options and leisure facilities such as an outdoor pool and fitness centre. Designed for versatility, the Grand Ballroom accommodates up to 1,080 guests, theatre-style, or 650 for banquets, supported by eight breakout rooms.

- **Sutera Harbour Resort, Kota Kinabalu**

Perfectly positioned between Kota Kinabalu's vibrant city centre and the South China Sea, Sutera Harbour is Sabah's premier integrated resort for MICE events. Comprising the Pacific Sutera and the Magellan Sutera, the resort offers 956 guest rooms, a Grand Ballroom for up to 1,200 guests, and multiple meeting rooms, boardrooms, and scenic outdoor venues. Equipped with hybrid meeting technology, professional event support, and curated catering, Sutera Harbour ensures seamless, memorable experiences for events of any scale. Blending luxury, versatility, and waterfront beauty, it remains a benchmark for world-class business events in East Malaysia.



© View of Mt. Kinabalu from Kota Belud/
Wong Hen Kon/Sabah Tourism Board

Measuring Sabah's Event Legacy

In Sabah, the value of a meeting is increasingly defined by its contribution to the region's knowledge base, workforce, and communities. The bureau has built a framework that ensures events leave behind expertise, connections, and outcomes that endure. Their goal is to connect what happens during a meeting with what the destination can continue developing after it ends. "We actively map Sabah's strengths and use them as a foundation for building partnerships. It is not only about bringing delegates in. It is about ensuring their work has continuity after the event ends," Othman says.

This continuity is already evident. At the **2025 International Conference on Knowledge Management in Organisations (KMO)**, hosted with **Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)**, extended that approach. The event drew participants from across Asia and Europe to explore digital transformation and institutional learning, generating formal partnerships between faculties and research institutions. Similarly, the **Borneo Vascular Conference 2025**, which gathered regional and international medical specialists, advanced knowledge exchange in vascular health and strengthened professional collaboration within Sabah's healthcare cluster. In both cases, legacy was an operational goal, not a theoretical aspiration.

The bureau's focus is on attracting meetings that align with Sabah's established strengths in areas such as biodiversity, marine science, healthcare and sustainable agriculture. "Collaborating with local clusters is central to our approach," said Othman. "Through partnerships with institutions such as UMS and the Sabah state healthcare cluster, we identify

ambassadors who can champion bids and co-create legacy programmes."

The close collaboration between academia and stakeholders in the meetings industry is yielding concrete outcomes. For example, medical congresses have provided training for local practitioners, and biodiversity conferences have collaborated with conservation NGOs to develop long-term field projects. This logic can be applied across disciplines: each event builds on local expertise, producing outcomes that continue within existing institutional frameworks.

Legacy in Sabah also operates through community partnerships. Incentive programmes increasingly integrate cultural and ecological elements that benefit local groups while enhancing delegate engagement. A regional incentive in early 2025, for instance, combined adventure activities with coral reef restoration, cultural exchanges, and school outreach. These activities are organised with local partners from the outset to ensure authenticity and fair benefit-sharing.

Sabah's leadership in conservation firmly reinforces its reputation as a model sustainable destination. As a **UNESCO Triple Crown site** – encompassing **Kinabalu Park** (World Heritage Site), **Kinabalu Geopark**, and the **Crocker Range Biosphere Reserve** – along with natural treasures such as the Kinabatangan River, a UNESCO-recognised Biosphere Reserve, and **Tun Mustapha Marine Park** in Kudat, Malaysia's largest marine park – Sabah stands among the world's rare destinations celebrated for both terrestrial and marine biodiversity.

This remarkable distinction underscores the state's capacity to host international events focused on environmental science, sustainable tourism, and climate resilience. For event organisers, Sabah offers not only an inspiring and meaningful setting but also access to a living laboratory of conservation excellence and community-driven sustainability initiatives.

"We work with indigenous groups, eco-tourism operators, and cultural associations to design programmes that are participatory and beneficial," said Othman. "All activities are curated to ensure authenticity and fair benefit-sharing, so that delegates experience genuine connection while communities gain tangible value."

The evidence supports this model. Between September and December 2024, SCB supported 19 events, 42% of which were conferences and conventions, contributing an estimated RM29.4 million (around €5.8 million) in direct economic impact. In the first eight months of 2025, 76 events were recorded, involving more than 36,800 participants, including close to 15,000 from outside the state, generating around RM50.6 million (about €10 million). Beyond those figures, outcomes include upskilled professionals, greater international collaboration, and expanded research networks.

Behind these results lies a deliberate ecosystem of partnerships. The SICC has strengthened this foundation, providing a venue that matches the scale and technical standards required for high-level international events. Its operations complement the bureau's strategic work,

helping to raise Sabah's international profile and attract meetings that contribute to long-term knowledge exchange.

Academic partners, particularly at UMS, also play an active role in this process. Their collaboration with international associations has translated into scientific progress through shared research projects, co-publications, and ongoing field studies. The continuity of these initiatives demonstrates how conferences hosted in Sabah can lead directly to enduring academic outcomes.

“We do not just help with venues or itineraries,” Othman said. “We advise organisers on how to connect with the right people and ensure the event contributes to Sabah's long-term goals.” That pragmatic role – part advisor, part enabler – has become one of Sabah's distinguishing features in a competitive regional market.

Delegates have become part of this framework too. Event design increasingly encourages participation in local knowledge and culture, from site visits to conservation projects to interactions with artisans and researchers. Organisers frequently cite the ease of integrating sustainability and legacy principles into their programmes, noting that Sabah's structure allows purpose-driven planning without logistical complexity.

The same ideas are also used to create the **BE in Sabah Forum**. Here, people meet to talk about how to make events more sustainable in the future. “The Forum is more than just a knowledge-sharing platform,” said Othman. “It is a statement of Sabah's commitment to sustainability and legacy. By convening global and regional partners under one roof, we reinforce Sabah's role as both a host and a contributor to the advancement of the business events industry.”

Through this forum and the network of partnerships it has helped to establish, the bureau has evolved from destination marketing to regional knowledge diplomacy. Each collaboration, from rainforest research to healthcare training, strengthens Sabah's institutions and expands its international reach. The results are quantifiable: RM29.4 million (around €5.8 million) by the end of 2024, increasing to RM50.6 million (approximately €10 million) by mid-2025, alongside a growing portfolio of projects that continue long after delegates depart. In the evolving conversation about the value created by business events, Sabah can now provide evidence rather than just make claims.



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be in
SABAH

3RD INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS EVENTS FORUM

4 – 5 FEBRUARY 2026

Sabah International Convention Centre
KOTA KINABALU, SABAH, MALAYSIA

Key Sectors

- Biodiversity and Rainforest Conservation
- Marine Science and Ocean Health
- Healthcare and Medical Research
- Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security
- Renewable Energy and Environmental Management

Academic and Industry Partners

- Universiti Malaysia Sabah: academic research and conference collaboration
- Sabah Healthcare Cluster: training and workforce development
- Local NGOs and conservation groups: CSR and legacy programmes
- Indigenous and community associations: cultural engagement and benefit-sharing

Legacy Outcomes

- Long-term research projects in biodiversity and climate adaptation
- Student exchanges and scholarship pathways through UMS
- Professional training in hybrid event management and sustainability
- Community programmes in conservation, education, and cultural heritage

Strategic Platform

- BE in Sabah Forum: this regional forum advancing sustainability, legacy frameworks, and cross-sector dialogue in the business events industry.

Positioning Sabah for Impact

An Exclusive Conversation with Sabah Convention Bureau's Founding CEO

As one of the most recently established convention bureaus in Southeast Asia, the SCB was launched in the middle of 2024 with a mission as audacious as it was ambitious: to reposition the Malaysian state of Borneo as a reliable destination for international meetings and events grounded in knowledge, transcending its status as a purely tourist destination of pristine natural landscapes, rich cultural heritage and warm hospitality.

Leading this transformation is **Noredah Othman**, SCB's founding CEO – previously serving as CEO of the **Sabah Tourism Board (STB)** – who brings more than three decades of experience in tourism strategy, global MICE networks, and government collaboration. With a sharp focus on legacy, partnerships, and sustainable growth, she is helping steer Sabah from its traditional reputation as a nature escape into a serious business events contender.

In this interview with *HQ*, Othman outlines the early challenges, landmark milestones, and what it takes to build a destination from the ground up, with a clear eye on impact.

The Sabah Convention Bureau was established as part of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment. As the state's first dedicated destination marketing organisation of its kind, how did you define your strategic role in the early months, and what shaped your initial priorities?

When the Bureau was launched in June 2024, our mandate was clear: to transform business events into a driver of inclusive economic growth and social impact. In those early months, my focus was on defining our value proposition as more than just an events bureau. We positioned ourselves as a connector, bridging government, academia and industry, and emphasised legacy outcomes as a core priority. Our first steps involved engaging stakeholders across Sabah to build alignment, establish trust and map the sectors where our expertise could resonate globally, such as biodiversity, medical research and sustainability.

While Sabah is well known for its biodiversity and cultural heritage, it is relatively new to the international business events community. How are you positioning Sabah among international association planners, particularly those unfamiliar with its capabilities as a business events destination?

We recognised early on that Sabah needed to be reintroduced not only as a place of natural wonder but also as a centre of professional excellence. Our strategy includes active participation at global trade shows, hosting familiarisation trips for association leaders and leveraging Sabah's reputation in conservation and research to align with knowledge-driven

events. We showcase modern infrastructure like the **SICC** alongside our strong higher education institutions and industry clusters. This dual narrative, professional capacity paired with unforgettable delegate experiences, is resonating strongly with association planners who are seeking distinctive yet reliable destinations.

The BE in SABAH Forum has positioned itself as a platform for international dialogue on sustainable and impactful business events. How has this initiative evolved, and in what ways does it reflect the Bureau's wider goals in terms of positioning, partnerships, and regional relevance?

The BE in SABAH Forum was conceived as more than a knowledge-sharing platform; it is a statement of Sabah's commitment to sustainability and legacy. Since its inception, the Forum has evolved into a meeting point

for local and international stakeholders to exchange best practices on impactful event delivery. It reflects our broader vision to position Sabah as a thought leader in Southeast Asia, where conversations about event design, legacy frameworks and sustainability intersect. By convening global and regional partners under one roof, we are reinforcing Sabah's role not only as a host but as a contributor to the advancement of the business events industry.

Sabah has recently hosted the 19th International Conference on Knowledge Management in Organizations (KMO 2025) at Universiti Malaysia Sabah, the IEEE Region 10 Conference (TENCON) and the International Conference on Big Data and Smart Computing (BigComp). What were the key factors in securing these bids, and how do they reflect Sabah's growing ability to attract and deliver knowledge-driven international meetings?



©MICE off-site venue/Lim Sheng Haw/
Sabah Tourism Board



©Noredah Othman, Sabah Convention Bureau's founding CEO

Hosting these prestigious conferences was made possible through strong collaboration with local higher education institutions, professional associations, and the international networks we have built. The process highlighted Sabah's academic expertise, state-of-the-art facilities, and the appeal of offering delegates experiences beyond the conference room. These events affirm that Sabah is ready to host high-level, knowledge-driven gatherings while delivering international standards and a distinctive delegate journey rooted in nature and culture.

Your approach seems strongly rooted in collaboration across knowledge institutions, healthcare, and industry. How is the Bureau engaging with local clusters (such as medical research, agriculture, biodiversity), and higher education institutions like Universiti Malaysia Sabah to shape event attraction strategies that are rooted in regional expertise and designed to leave a meaningful legacy?

Collaboration with local clusters is central to our approach. We actively map Sabah's key strengths such as biodiversity research, marine science, healthcare and sustainable agriculture, and align these with international

association interests. Through partnerships with institutions like UMS and the Sabah state healthcare cluster and association, we identify ambassadors who can champion bids and co-create legacy programmes. For example, a medical congress may include training for local practitioners, or a biodiversity symposium may partner with conservation NGOs to implement long-term projects. This ensures that events create outcomes that endure well beyond their closing sessions.

As you speak with international associations and PCOs who are exploring Sabah as a new destination, what tends to shift in their perspective once they learn about Sabah's capabilities?

The most common reaction is surprise at the depth of what Sabah offers. Many come with the perception of Sabah as a leisure destination known for its rainforests and islands. When they learn about our modern venues, global-standard hotels, knowledge clusters and proven track record of hosting international congresses, their perspective shifts dramatically. They begin to see Sabah not as a new or risky destination, but as a distinctive and reliable partner capable of delivering both immediate ROI and long-term legacy.

As Othman sees it, building a successful business events destination is not only about venues or connectivity, but about its purpose: cultivating an ecosystem where professionalism, creativity, sustainability, and inclusivity converge. Sabah is shaping itself into a truly legacy-driven destination, from landmark hotel developments and innovative creative hubs to grassroots initiatives and talent-building programmes. For a new bureau with global ambition, Sabah's approach is less about scale and more about substance: anchoring events in legacy, local relevance, and professional trust.

"For international planners, Sabah is more than a destination; it is an experience. From the moment delegates arrive, they are welcomed by breathtaking natural beauty, genuine hospitality, and opportunities to make a real difference, perfectly captured in the tagline, **Sabah – Your Business Events Playground**. Beyond that, delegates are invited to discover a destination where business meets inspiration: contemporary venues framed by stunning landscapes, enriched with adventure and vibrant cultural encounters that leave a lasting impression," she concludes.



©JSK Floating Island Kayaking/Sabah Tourism Board

Cultural Experiences and Incentive Programmes in Sabah

In Sabah, every incentive journey becomes more than a reward – it is an awakening. Between rainforest canopies and the South China Sea, the region transforms corporate travel into an exploration of nature, culture, and community. Here, achievement is celebrated not only in boardrooms but in shared experiences that inspire connection, purpose, and renewal.

Set between lush rainforests and the South China Sea, Sabah has evolved into one of Asia's most compelling destinations for incentive travel and corporate experiences. For planners, it is where achievement meets adventure – a place that transforms ordinary business gatherings into journeys of inspiration, connection, and discovery. In Sabah, boardroom success flows seamlessly into rainforest immersion, and leadership goals are strengthened by shared moments of awe.

From trekking Mount Kinabalu at sunrise to cruising the Kinabatangan River, diving amid Sipadan's pristine reefs, spotting fascinating wildlife, or joining local communities in vibrant cultural celebrations – every moment tells a story of authenticity and renewal.

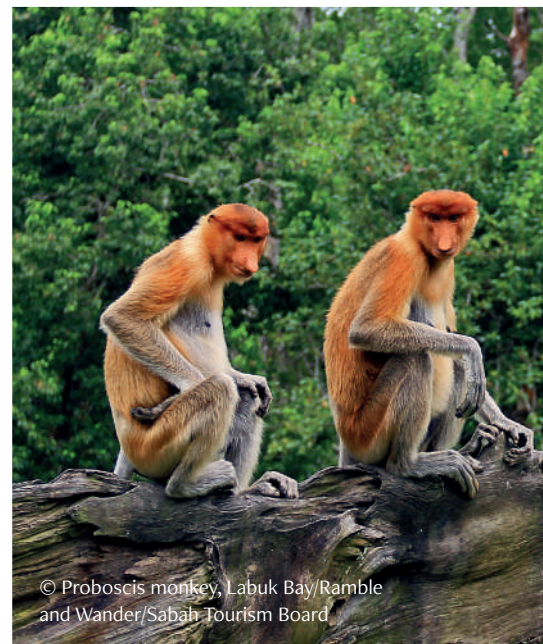
Each programme is carefully designed to combine authenticity, excellence, and sustainability, ensuring enriching experiences for participants while benefiting communities and ecosystems. For organisations seeking more than just a destination – those aiming to build purpose, collaboration, and lasting memories – Sabah

offers a blueprint for ecological, human-centred incentives that engage minds and move hearts.

“Community integration is handled with care and respect. We work with indigenous groups, eco-tourism operators, and cultural associations to design programmes that are participatory and beneficial,” says Noredah Othman.

Cultural Visits and Community Engagement

Beyond its breathtaking landscapes, Sabah's true heartbeat lies in its people – a vibrant tapestry of more than 42 indigenous ethnic groups whose traditions and artistry shape Borneo's cultural identity. The **Kadazan-Dusun, Murut, Rungus, and Bajau** communities' welcome visitors into their world with open arms, transforming passive observation into genuine participation. Delegates can explore heritage villages alive with the rhythm of gongs, learn traditional crafts such as beadwork or bamboo weaving, and join families in preparing local delicacies infused with ancestral knowledge. Each encounter becomes an exchange of



© Proboscis monkey, Labuk Bay/Ramble and Wander/Sabah Tourism Board

values – where curiosity meets tradition, and culture turns into connection.

For planners seeking experiences with purpose, community-based engagement adds a transformative dimension to incentive programmes. Delegates can join reforestation projects, contribute to marine conservation, or take part in village volunteering initiatives that directly benefit local livelihoods. These immersive experiences nurture empathy, teamwork, and awareness – redefining corporate success through collaboration and shared humanity.

“Sabah’s meetings and incentive sector is deeply rooted in social responsibility. Organisers often collaborate with NGOs, social entrepreneurs, and community groups, ensuring that events create tangible benefits for local communities. CSR activities might involve working with rural artisans, supporting conservation efforts, or contributing to community-based projects – leaving a positive footprint long after delegates have gone home,” says Othman.

“ In Sabah, culture is more than heritage; it is a catalyst for creativity, sustainability, and leadership that continues to resonate long after the journey ends.

Existing Offers, Providers and DMCs

Delivering impactful incentive and teambuilding experiences in Sabah relies on a network of trusted Destination Management Companies (DMCs) and local experts who blend logistics with creativity and cultural insight. These professionals curate one- to multi-day programmes featuring tailored activities, cultural immersion, and professional facilitation, ensuring seamless and meaningful experiences for every group.

From mountain treks and river rafting adventures in Kinabalu Park to eco-luxury retreats within pristine rainforest reserves, Sabah offers a wealth of opportunities for team bonding and personal growth. Local teambuilding specialists design engaging 2D1N and 3D2N group packages that range from beach challenges to cultural leadership games, supported by unique venues and nature-based environments across the state.

Together, these providers form Sabah’s dynamic incentive ecosystem – professional, sustainable, and purpose-driven – ensuring that every event inspires collaboration and connection in the heart of Borneo. “Incentive groups may take part in mangrove planting, contribute to orangutan rehabilitation programmes, or engage in cultural workshops with local artisans. All activities are curated to ensure authenticity and fair benefit-sharing, so that delegates experience genuine connection while communities gain tangible economic and social value,” says Othman.



©Clement Liew/Sabah Tourism Board



©Murut Warrior on Hanging Bridge/John Kong/Sabah Tourism Board



©Rungus Girls in Kudat/Thaddeus Yap/Sabah Tourism Board

Host Your Business Event In Sabah

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