

The current logistics & prices for an independent hike on Mount Kinabalu (as of late June 2012).

The cheapest price I could find for an organised 2 day, 1 night trip from any Kota Kinabalu (KK) guesthouse, hostel, hotel or travel agent was MYR900 (US\$280/€225), a tidy sum of cash to pay to torture yourself for the best part of two days. Although expensive this price does include everything, with everything being:

1. Return transfer (KK - Kinabalu National Park Headquarters (HQ) - KK)
2. National Park Entrance Fee
3. Shuttle Bus (National Park HQ - Timpohon Gate - National Park HQ)
4. Trek Guide
5. Insurance
6. Climbing Permit
7. Accommodation & Meals

I decided to see if the climb could be done any cheaper independently. It can, but not by much and after reading what I did you might just decide to pay the MYR900 asking price for the convenience. It's your call.

## Set Costs

Before I get into it, expenses 2 (National Park Entrance Fee (MYR15)), 5 (Insurance (MYR7)) & 6 (Climbing Permit (MYR100)) listed above are set & unavoidable regardless of how you organise or who you pay to climb the mountain. Collectively they'll cost you MYR122.

## Cost Breakdown

### 1. Transport, KK – Kinabalu National Park HQ – KK

Mt. Kinabalu sits in a UNESCO World heritage certified national park. The park entrance, National Park HQ, is 85km from KK on the road east to Sandakan (& the orang-utan sanctuary in Sepilok). You can opt to go:

- a) via public coach from Inanam Bus Terminal (MYR10), 9km north of KK (local bus number 3 (1MYR, 15-20 minutes) runs from the local bus station beside Wawasan Plaza in KK to Inanam Terminal),
- b) via private mini bus from Merdeka Square (MYR20), adjacent to the Atkinson Clock Tower in central KK, or
- c) via chartered taxi (MYR150 for up to 4 people).

It's recommended you be in Park HQ at 8:00-9:00am on the first morning of your walk. You can opt to make your way there the day before & stay in a guesthouse outside the park & simply report to Park HQ the next morning. However, if like me you stay in KK the night before then probably neither of the aforementioned bus options will suit – they are unlikely they'd get you from KK to Park HQ in time. For me, arriving at Merdeka Square at 6:00am I was reassuringly told the first minibus would be departing 'about' 7:00am... or 'maybe' 7:30am. It was then that a fellow climber & I were offered a MYR60 taxi fare (MYR30 each) ride to Park HQ by a taxi driver on the prowl. Considering the going rate for this is MYR150 (we had been offered this very rate by another taxi driver only minutes previous) we took him up on his offer & 90 minutes later we were in Park HQ registering for our climb.

As for returning from Park HQ. The easiest, foolproof way is to stand on the side of the road outside Park HQ and wait for the next KK bound bus (almost ALL buses that pass are KK bound). Buses pass every 20-40 minutes (up to about 4:30-5:00pm) & cost MYR10 for the 90-minute trip to Inanam Bus Terminal. You pay the driver upon boarding the bus.

### 2. National Park Entrance Fee – MYR15.

Paid upon arrival at Park HQ.

### 3. National Park HQ to Timpohon Gate Shuttle – MYR33 (MYR16.5 each way)

From Park HQ, where you register for the climb, to the summit of Mt. Kinabalu is 12.75km (& it's uphill the whole way). The first 4k is along a sealed road to a gate called Timpohon Gate, the official start of the walk, meaning the summit route is officially an 8.75km one-way hike. Shuttle buses ferry walkers from Park HQ to the gate and you'll already have paid for this transfer if you arrive having forked over MYR900+ to a KK guesthouse, hotel or travel agent. Those travelling independently have to pay this upon registering at Park HQ & at present it costs MYR33 (MYR16.50 each way). Of course, if you're really skimping you could walk the 4k to the gate from the park HQ, save yourself a bit of cash & add an extra 8km on to your walk over the two days. Needless to say this frugality isn't recommended; at the very least you'll be glad of the 4k transfer from the gate back to Park HQ when you stumble back down the mountain at the end of the hike the next day.

#### 4. Trek Guide – MYR128, maximum of 4 climbers to 1 guide.

It's obligatory to go with a local guide the whole 25km from National Park HQ to the summit and back again to park HQ; you won't get on the shuttle bus at Park HQ or through Timpohon Gate if you're not with a guide. Of course they are not needed; all they do is follow you (they will gladly walk, or crawl, at your preferred pace) & will rarely interact with you. At the very least you can take solace with fact that you're helping the local economy by employing their services. The present guide rate is MYR128. Again, if you arrive having shelled over MYR900+ in KK then you'll probably find you & you alone are assigned to a guide. Arriving independently you can request to share a guide, & thus costs, with other independent climbers... assuming there are any. If not then you're on your own and will have to pay fully yourself for a guide. I teamed up with another independent hiker and we split the cost, paying MYR64 each. So, the guide fee will cost anywhere from MYR32 (as a member of a group of 4 climbers) to MYR128 (climbing alone).

#### 5. Insurance – MYR7

Insurance for... well, I'm not too sure what for. Regardless, it's compulsory.

#### 6. Climbing Permit – MYR100.

The best souvenir you'll take off the mountain is your climbing permit (forget the tacky 'I Did It' certificate you get for completing the climb... assuming you came on an organised junket... those doing this independently can opt to pay MYR20 to have this printed for them after the climb in Park HQ). You'll be given this during registration & before setting out on the walk. It's a nice credit card-sized badge printed on which will be your name & climbing date. You're also given a Mt. Kinabalu lanyard to enable you to proudly display your permit around your neck when walking... & you probably should - you're asked to show your permit at various stages of the hike including, rather bizarrely, 1.75k for the summit in black darkness at 4:00-4:30am in the morning or day two (as if you'd sneak up there at that time).

#### 7. Accommodation & Meals - MYR448, Laban Rata Rest House

Accommodation on the mountain is handled by a scattering of huts & a huge 2-story wooden rest house, Laban Rata, some 2.75k from the summit (& 6k from Timpohon Gate). Between them they have a capacity to sleep 160 climbers. All accommodation bookings are handled through a private company called Sutera Sanctuary Lodges. Organising the climb independently means booking directly through them – they have an office conveniently located in central KK, on the ground floor of the Wisma Sabah building where you'll find virtually all tourist-related offices in KK (travel agents, car hire desks etc.). When visiting their office I could tell they didn't deal directly with travellers very often, if at all, but I didn't have too much trouble reserving a bed in a 4-bed dorm in Laban Rata Rest House for the following evening. It, plus 5 meals, cost MYR448 (hut beds may be cheaper... I don't know). If you pay all up for the trip through a hostel, guesthouse or travel agent you'll be allocated a bed upon registration at Park HQ, most likely in a hut; the huts are, by & large, more basic accommodation options than the Laban Rata Rest House, the main accommodation option & the only accommodation option on the mountain with a restaurant. Regardless of where you stay you'll eat at designated times in the restaurant of Laban Rata Rest House. And the 5 meals I mentioned? You receive a basic packed lunch when registering at Park HQ for lunch on-the-go on the first day; dinner in Laban Rata Rest House on the first evening; early breakfast (2-3:30am) in Laban Rata Rest House before leaving for the summit on day two; main breakfast in Laban Rata Rest House after returning from the summit (8:30-10am); & lunch in the restaurant at Park HQ when finished the hike (11:30am-4pm). Food is plentiful & the three meals in Laban Rata Rest House, all buffet style, are awesome. The packed lunch you receive on day one not so. Finally, the cost of accommodation & meals is easily the bulk of the cost of the 2 day, 1 night climb, meaning if you were fit or crazy enough to summit the mountain in the one day then you could cut out this cost altogether.

So all in my climb cost me:

1. Taxi (KK - Park HQ) & bus (Park HQ – KK): MYR40 (30+10)
2. National Park Entrance Fee: MYR15
3. Shuttle Bus (National Park HQ – Timpohon Gate – National Park HQ): MYR33
4. Trek Guide: MYR64
5. Insurance: MYR7
6. Climbing Permit: MYR100
7. Accommodation & Meals: MYR448

**TOTAL: MYR707**

A bit of a saving from the cheapest advertised price of MYR900... plus the satisfaction of doing it independently.

## Climbing Mount Kinabalu in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo



dMb Blog Entry - <http://davidmbyrne.com/main/2012/06/25/mt-kinabalu-borneo/>

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A final heads up. The tourism infrastructure in Sabah is quite regimented. Travel agents & organised tours rule the roost and while they will humour independent travellers they'd rather you just succumb & do whatever you want to do as part of an overpriced tour (& one can't deny the convenience of same). But keep in mind that pretty much any trip you see advertised in a hostel, guesthouse or travel agent can be done independently... it might just take a bit of extra work (& you might have to answer a few 'why don't you just buy the tour?' questions from tourist-industry locals who cross your path).

Regards,  
David M