

# M.V. SOLITA'S CRUISING NOTES

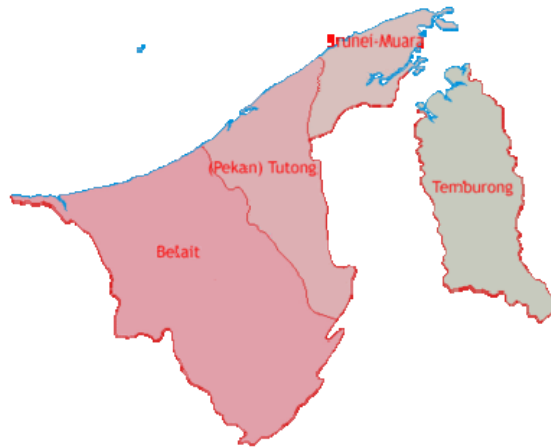


# BRUNEI

# BORNEO

# UPDATED MAY 2013

## **BACKGROUND**



Brunei is a kingdom of Islamic monarchy, run solely by the Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, who is the supreme executive authority in Brunei. He is also the Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Defense Minister. This title passes on through the one family, from elder son to elder son - the country has been ruled by the current sultan's family for over 6 centuries. The Sultan is fantastically wealthy, with "old money" but also topped up with the proceeds of the incredible gas and oil resources that the country owns.

The Sultanate of Brunei's influence peaked between the 15th and 17th centuries when its control extended over coastal areas of northwest Borneo and the southern Philippines. Brunei subsequently entered a period of decline brought on by internal strife over royal succession, colonial expansion of European powers, and piracy. In 1888, Brunei became a British protectorate; independence was achieved in 1984. It is now a very small country of 5,769 square kms and has a population of about 400,000 (the same population but just one twelfth the size of the Australian ACT), sandwiched between the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. It is a modern Islamic country which "maintains a quiet contemplative respect for tradition, reflected in its noble Islamic architecture, sincerely hospitable people and reverence for its century's old monarchy". As a Muslim country there are restrictions imposed on those living here. There is no alcohol for sale, smoking is discouraged and they have very strict drug laws. Entertainment is censored to a degree and even their television programs are quite bland. There are no Hollywood movies with violent, adult or frivolous themes. Adam Sandler and Bruce Lee movies do well here. You can watch documentaries, local reality "soapies" with strong Muslim values demonstrated, some imported cooking and gardening shows on television. The main pursuits of Brunei locals seem to be shopping and dining out. Even so, citizenship is highly prized and difficult to obtain. Even to have been born here does not guarantee you rights. In 2012 only 446 people were awarded citizenship, and they had to attend a conference to learn the required knowledge and values needed to be good citizens. The citizens of Brunei seem very happy with their lot and revere their Sultan. Some describe that their way of life is peaceful and safe, and that they have a good standard of living. There definitely are advantages to life as a citizen of Brunei – free education and health care, a social welfare system, no income, export, sales or payroll tax, very cheap fuel and privatization is being



encouraged. There is a very high rate of car ownership – 1 car per every 2.09 citizens. There are many public facilities, all public buildings are well maintained, there is minimal garbage around the town, the town has many imposing museums, mosques, palaces and other buildings. There are many green belts within the town and the country has extensive areas of pristine rainforests, traditional villages, freshwater lakes and beautiful beaches. The main industries are petroleum, gas and timber. The kingdom also embraces tourism and there quite a few world-class hotels and resorts and some tourist-focused activities promoted here - mainly golf, diving, and viewing the wildlife. A new International Airport is being built to cope with the anticipated increase in tourist numbers.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

The main features of Brunei are its low lying coastal areas and small mountain ranges of dense rainforest well inland. Most of the population lives in the coastal regions and main towns. There are still traditional kampongs in the interior of the country but it is understood that the number of people living a traditional way of life is decreasing. The road system is concentrated along the coast (the coastal highway is a well-maintained dual carriageway for most of its length from Muara to the Sarawak border) and around the capital of Bander Seri Begawan. Roads leading inland quickly become gravel 4WD tracks. Many of the smaller villages and kampongs are only accessible by boat along an extensive river system that is fed by several large rivers.

## **COASTLINE**

Brunei has just 161 miles of coastline, which is contiguous with the coastlines of Sabah to the north and Sarawak to the south. A small tongue of Sarawak extends into Brunei Bay to interrupt Brunei's coastline for just a few miles.

It is relatively shallow offshore and to the south there are many oil rigs, platforms and pipelines to service the petroleum and gas industries. It is also just 16 miles across Brunei Bay to Labuan, a Malaysian federal territory which is associated with Sabah. This area is very busy with many huge container ships, rig tenders and other vessels.

## **FORMALITIES**

Brunei requires yachts to check in with their Immigration, Customs and Harbourmaster departments when you arrive and just before you leave the country. Visas can be obtained on arrival – most nationalities are given three months for free, though Australians are only given a 14 day visa and are

required to pay a \$20 visa fee. It is sometimes possible to obtain a transit visa for \$5, which will give you 3 days in Brunei, if you fly in.

Australians are not popular officially - rumour has it that the Sultan was angered by the Australian Government's deportation of one of the Sultan's family members who committed some misdemeanor in Australia many years ago, though in May 2013 the Sultan met with Australia's Prime Minister to enhance relations between the two countries.

There are only 3 places to formally enter the country – Muara, another small port much further into Brunei Bay in the Temburong area (which caters more for the local boats moving between Brunei and Sarawak or Sabah), and Kuala Belait.

## **FLAG**



## **ANCHORAGES**

- **MUARA**

Muara is the main port of Brunei, and is located on the north-eastern tip of Brunei, at the southern end of Brunei Bay. There are leads to indicate the shipping channel for your approach from Labuan or the South China Sea, and the passage through the fringing island sweeps down into the bay past the Navy



Base, the International Ferry Terminal, container terminal and other marine buildings. Immigration, Customs and Jabatan Laut are located within the International Ferry Terminal one kilometre west of the Royal Brunei Yacht Club.

The Royal Brunei Yacht Club is located at Serassa, and it has several moorings as well as anchored local yachts in front of the clubhouse. The depth in the anchorage is around 4-6 M, but shoals quickly where there are markers. The club's facilities are excellent – there is a very attractive open-air

clubhouse with a great restaurant, a bar (for non-alcoholic drinks of course), wifi, showers and a wonderful pool and covered deck. They even offer free local phone calls from the bar if they are brief. The grounds are well-maintained with lovely gardens, boat ramp and a lovely beach foreshore. The staff are friendly and helpful. It is mainly used by ex-pats and some of the more wealthy Bruneians, but never seems to be busy. The jetty in front of the haul out yard is for dinghies, and has water piped to the end of the dock. Garbage bins are just past the end of the jetty.

When arriving, introduce yourself at the bar. They will issue you with a temporary membership card for B\$35 per week, or B\$5.00 per day. They will organise for you to “bank” some money into your account and you can use this card for your bar and restaurant purchases during your stay. The club opens at 9am and closes when the last person leaves.

The club is quite a long walk from the shops and ATM at Muara, but often locals will offer you a lift. A small purple mini bus passes by the yacht club every half hour during the day and this goes to the Muara shopping precinct. There is a well-stocked grocery store there with a good variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, some meat, dry and tinned goods. Another option is to dinghy to a small boat ramp located between the container terminal/tugboat wharf and the Police wharf/fuel tank farm, and then walk the kilometre or so to the shopping area. Buses to the main town of Bander Seri Begawan, or BSB, can be caught from the Muara shopping area, and takes approximately 50 minutes to reach town from Muara by bus, or 30 minutes by car. All bus fares appear to be B\$1.00.

**Note:** Locals told us there were a few small crocodiles that hang about this stretch of shore line.

## **BANDER SERI BEGAWAN**

BSB is the capital of Brunei and is located another few miles further upstream from Muara, along the river. The river is navigable up to and past BSB but the waterways here are very busy. There are conflicting stories about whether you can anchor here. Some yachts have done it, and others have been escorted back to Muara by the police.

It is a widespread city with no obvious city centre, but the Omar Ali Saifuddien mosque, main markets, main canal, central bus terminal and the Royal Regalia Exhibition are close to each other and the river front. The water village, Kampong Air, is across the river from the town and is said to be the largest in the world, with approx. 30,000 people living there. The Royal Brunei Yacht Club has another clubhouse here on the outskirts of BSB, on the coast road to Muara (Jalan Kotabatu).

### **ATTRACTIONS:**

Within BSB:   WATER VILLAGE- KAMPONG AIR

OMAR ALI SAIFUDDIEN MOSQUE

HASSANIL BOLKIAH MOSQUE

BRUNEI MUSUEM

ROYAL REGALIA EXHIBITION

ISTANA NURUL IMAN

MARKETING/COOKING EXPERIENCE

MONKEY VIEWING TOUR ON THE RIVER

VARIOUS SHOPPING MALLS

Outside BSB: JERUDONG PARK (night only)

TEMBURONG NATIONAL PARK

SUNGAI LIANG FOREST RESERVE

SERIA/OILTOWN AREA

SELIRONG ISLAND MANGROVE TOUR

**MUARA/BSB SERVICES:**

Note: Phone calls – Brunei prefix is +673.

RBYC Muara clubhouse phone number is Ph. 2772011, email is [kay@brunet.bn](mailto:kay@brunet.bn)

CAR HIRE: AA Car Rentals (Jeffrey Abd Suresh). 50RM per day for an older car, no air-con but mechanically OK. Will deliver and pick-up at RBYC. Ph. 8117884 or 2427238, email [aacarrental@gmail.com](mailto:aacarrental@gmail.com) .

TAXI: Brunei Taxi Service – Amy. Ph. 8811889

BRUNEI-MIRI SHUTTLE: Brunei Passenger Transport - car and driver. Contact Mr Chin on Ph. 8715876

FUEL: Fuel is very cheap here (approx. AU\$0.31 per litre) but it can be a sensitive issue for visiting yachtees wanting to buy a lot of fuel at local prices. Ask the local boat owners in the anchorage or haul out yard at the RBYC who should be able to inform you how to obtain fuel.

MARINA RADIO/SSS INFORMATION: Alan Ritchie is happy to assist with marina radio and SSB information as well as information about local tours, fuelling and sightseeing. He can be contacted on [radio@bruneibay.net](mailto:radio@bruneibay.net)

SUPA-SAVE SUPERMARKET: Lot no. 16397 Mabohai Shopping Complex, Kg Mabohai, Jalan Kebangsaan, BSB. Ph. 2223107. Excellent range of imported western food, incl. steaks & cheese.

SIGHTSEEING TOURS: Brunei Sightseeing. Ph. 2224026 or 2224027.

- **PRINCE JEFRI'S MARINA**

The Sultan's brother Jefri has built a huge protective seawall with a narrow entrance and a set of leads in front of his palace at Jerundong. The enclosed waters have not been developed at all, except for the small man-made island in front of his istana or palace. Many yachts have used this unofficial "marina" as an overnight anchorage but apparently it is not encouraged. People have advised that if you intend to use this as an anchorage, it is best to arrive in the afternoon, anchor out of sight of the palace and if you are Australian, lower your country of origin flag. We anchored at 4°57.2'N, 114°48.5'E for an overnight stop and no-one bothered us.

There are no facilities at all here, but you could dinghy out of the marina and along the coast to Jerundong.

- **KUALA BELAIT**

Kuala Belait is situated just a few miles north of the Sarawak border and is the centre of the petroleum and gas industries of Brunei. There are several large oil rig complexes just off-shore from the town, and many petroleum industry companies have their premises, tank farms and jetties along the coast just north of Kuala Belait. Just outside the town there are several huge housing estates for the industry workers.

The river entrance to this town is well marked and of good depth, and is protected to some extent by seawalls that extend out about half a kilometre. The river is used by rig tenders and small ships frequently. The best anchorage is opposite the main marine services building and the small boat jetty in town, in about 5 M over mud. Anchoring is prohibited in certain areas – usually signed – because of submarine pipelines.

The Immigration, Customs and Jabatan Laut all have offices in this building, and the staff were friendly and helpful. The main shopping centre consists of a few streets of mixed businesses and wet market is another kilometre out from the town centre. Along the town side of the riverfront there is a 4-star hotel (the Riviera), a park, a yacht club and a small boat-building yard (Atoll Yachts) before you reach the road bridge over the river.



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**SERVICES:**

SHIP BUILDING & REPAIR: Atoll Yachts. Repair and maintenance for wood, steel, aluminum F/G and epoxy hulls, machinery repairs, welding, awnings, etc. Ph. 3332759 or 7154719.

## **OTHER BRUNEI SERVICES:**

FIBREGLASS DINGHIES: Perusahaan Seri Melati, at Tutong. Contact Afian Abbas on Ph. 8777124.