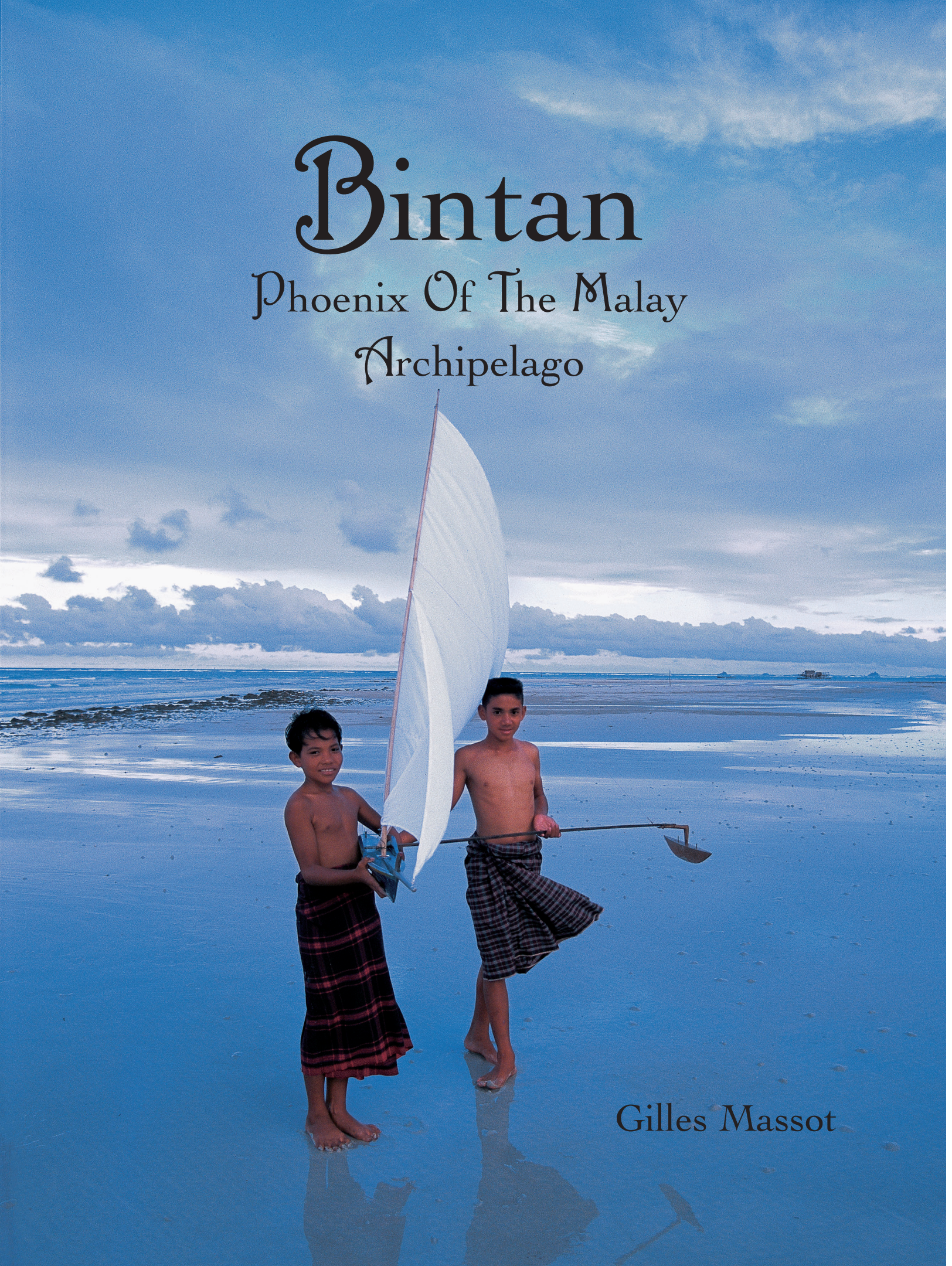
Bintan

Phoenix Of The Malay Archipelago



Gilles Massot

Bintan

Phoenix Of The Malay Archipelago

To Sri Tri Buana,
Lord of the Three Worlds.

To Wan Seri Beni,
The Queen with whom it all began.

Researched by Gilles Massot and Marc Thalmann
Written, photographed, designed and illustrated by Gilles Massot
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Phoenix Of The Malay Archipelago

by

Gilles Massot

GUNUNG
BINTAN

Contents

Thank you

Although this book truly is the work of one person in its content and design, nothing could have taken shape without the help of the many persons who contributed their time and knowledge. In many ways, the human aspect of this adventure has been an essential part of it.

In Riau:

First and foremost we would like to thank Raja Hamzah, the man who initiated the movement aimed at preserving Penyengat's past. We would have loved to present him with a copy of this book, but he sadly passed away a year after helping us with the initial stage of the research work in September 2000. Since then, his son Raja Malik Hafrizal, his daughter Raja Suzanna Fitri and his wife Ibu Raja Zainab, have thoughtfully followed in his steps and provided us with invaluable help. Raja Rachman Razak and Raja Mansur Razak re-opened the door of the Kandil museum for us. Other people who helped us in Penyengat include Raja Abdurahim Mansur, Raja Daud, and Yanto who showed us how to assemble a *jong*.

The gentle smile of Wahid and his friends from Bintan Nau opened the way to the top of Gunung Bintan. Ramli's equally gentle smile welcomed us in the best maintained rubber tree plantation we saw in Bintan. This visit nicely completed the information earlier provided by Pak Sulaiman from PT Pulau Bintan Djaya Crumb Rubber Factory. In Bukit Batu, Abdul Zaman Atan, better known as Pak Atan, opened the door to secrets he had yet to tell to non-Malay persons. We are deeply grateful for his trust. It is also there that we met Pak Andi Anhar Chalid, Head of the Riau Islands Parliament, who cleared many obstacles in our pursuit. Through him we met with the enthusiastic Pak Basirun Ali, who shared the work he had already done on the subject of Malay customs and history in Riau, together with his brother H. Bahrum Ali in Karimun.

In Tanjung Pinang, a special mention must be given to the generosity of Pak Ah Beng, in his Melati shop, who provided many of the antiques photographed in this book and shared a great deal of his time and resources to assist in the research among the local Chinese community. Tok Mohd. Arif Syah allowed us to document his healing practice. Père Henri Jourdain gave us a heart-warming account of his first-hand experience with the Boat People. Pak Herman gave us a good insight into the fishing industry. Sugiri, Nelly and all the team of Mutiara also made many things possible by organising and tracing contacts. Ms. Sita Rohana contributed the legend of Gunung Bintan and Gunung Daik, and together with her colleague, Dr. Evawarni of the Balai Kajian Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, assisted us at an early stage of the research. Drs. H. Robert Iwan Loriaux, Head of the Riau Archipelago Tourist Office, Drs. Syamsul Khairil and Drs. Abdul Kadir Ibrahim from the Tanjung Pinang Tourism Office, kept us informed of the latest tourism developments in the city.

In Kijang, Panca Meilandi and his family made the discovery of the little mining town a friendly affair. Pak Injamar traced the existence of the *mak yong* troop on Pulau Mantang and took us to Pak Halid Kassim, while Pak Mohd. Atan Rahman gave us the opportunity to photograph his collection of ancient masks and *mak yong* actors in full costume. In Lingga, Pak Mazlan took me into the depths of the island's jungle, while Douglas and Joel made me feel at home in Pancur. In Batam, Father Willem provided information on the Christian communities, along with Father Rolf who contributed lively memories from his 40 years ministry in Riau.

In Lagoi and Singapore, Robert Hussey and Peter Ho with the Mana Mana team have always provided friendly help. Peter Elston offered his expertise on the subject of golf, while Evan Jones in Batam shared the knowledge he had compiled over the years on the Riau Archipelago through the running of his company, Riau Island Adventures. Many thanks to Carsten Hüttche for his last minute contribution.

In Singapore and elsewhere:

Ilsa Sharp opened the way with the first contacts leading to professionals from the academic world, along with Dr. Sharon Siddique who also gave the early encouragement that helped me through the work.

I am deeply honoured to have found the friendly and thoughtful assistance of eminent academics such Dr. John Miksic, Dr. Pierre Yves Manguin, Dr. Leonard Andaya, Prof. Barbara Watson Andaya, Dr. Peter Borschberg, Dr. Julian Davison, Dr. Jan van der Putten and Dr. Michael Flecker working in the historical field, Prof. Victor Savage, head of the NUS Geography Department, the musicologists Dr Patricia Matusky and Asst. Prof. Larry Francis Hilarian, the linguist Dr. Geoffrey Benjamin, all of whom I could either personally meet or with whom I could discuss matters via email. Three anthropologists, Dr. Vivienne Wee, Dr. Carole Faucher and Dr. Cynthia Chou, have been particularly inspiring for the thoughtful approach of their research on the subject of the *Orang Laut* population in Riau. A special thank you to Dr. Wee for her thorough reading of the almost completed manuscript, and to the artist Zai Kuning who was the first Malay to read it. I am certainly looking forward to seeing his movie on his *Orang Laut* friends and relatives.

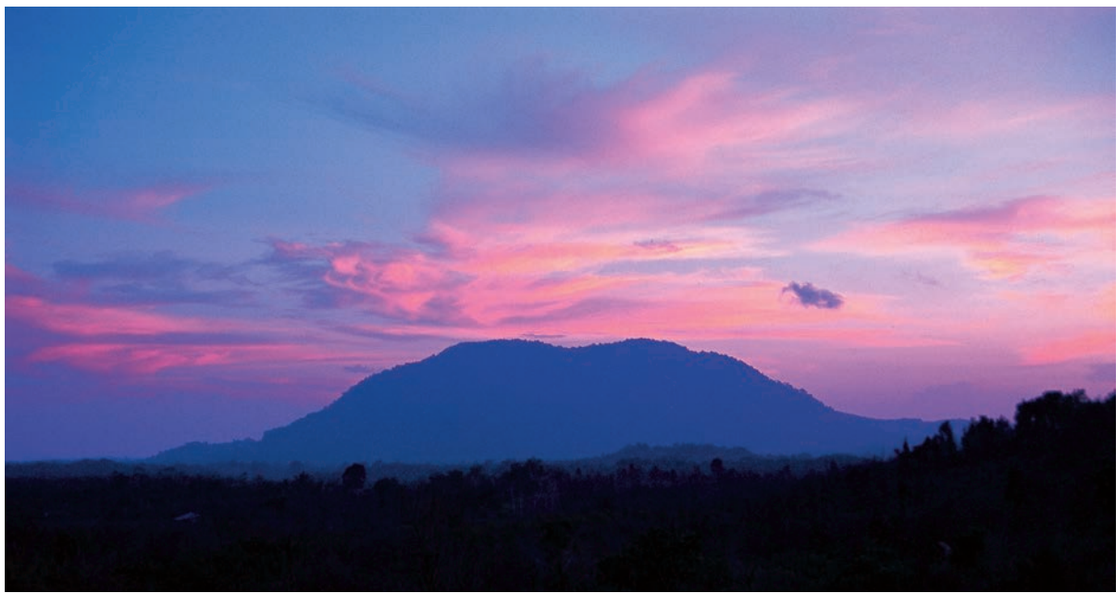
Mr. Kwa Chong Guan's work for the Visitors Centre of Pasar Oleh Oleh was very useful at an early stage of the work, while Sabri Zain's remarkable website on the history of the Malay world was another decisive source of inspiration. I contacted Paul de Souza over the internet on the subject of Malay *keris*, only to find out that he too lived in Singapore! Peter Schoppert provided friendly encouragement and support from the beginning. Pauline Fan from Kuala Lumpur gave greater depth to our information on *mak yong*. Julie Larson corrected my Gaelic form of English in the first drafts, a daunting task later thoroughly completed by Helen West who contributed her invaluable experience. Special thanks to See Phui Yee too. Have I forgotten anyone? I hope not… if I have, please accept my sincere apologies.

To all of you *terimakasih* for making this adventure a wonderful one.

Foreword

When in August 2000 Marc Thalmann suggested that we should begin collecting information to produce a souvenir book on Bintan, little did I realise that almost three years later, the most difficult part of the project would be to decide when to stop. If at first sight Bintan appeared to be hardly more than a sleepy backwater of nearby bustling Singapore, the image of a place occupying a pivotal role in the history and economy of the region progressively imposed itself.

For the next two years, every research trip to Bintan brought a wealth of new data further enriching the vivid picture that was slowly emerging, often opening new doors into new fields that at times left us a little dizzy, so rich and wide they were. Right till the end of the research work, new material continued coming in, contradicting earlier information, forcing us to reconsider things that had been taken for granted.



Marc's original idea was to bridge the gap between the thousands of visitors coming to the resorts on the scenic northern coast of Bintan, and the rest of the island whose life unfolds beyond the gates of Simpang Lagoi. In the process we discovered that the Riau Archipelago had already been a fascinating subject of research for many a writer and academic from all over the world, but their work was often so highly specialised that it remained beyond the reach of the larger public.

We hope by now that we will have completed as comprehensive as possible a work on Riau-Bintan, covering, or at least mentioning, most of its many and varied aspects of history, geography, economy and social life. We also hope that the format chosen for the presentation of this wealth of information will be at once entertaining and informative for anyone wishing to know more about this island.

A great deal of attention was thus given to collecting information which would be as relevant as possible, while checking facts and figures preferably twice. Yet the subject of Malay history and the very nature of the Malay world are such that the possibility of some inaccuracies slipping in, despite our care and attention, remains likely. Should this prove to be the case, we would like to extend our apologies beforehand and hope we will have the opportunity to correct our mistakes in the future. Lastly, it has to be said that although information was up-to-date early 2003 at the time of publication, (very!) fast changes are currently underway in Bintan, and some aspects of the contemporary sections of this book may soon become history.

Gilles Massot – Singapore, May 2003

above
Gunung Bintan
previous page
Jetty in Tanjung Pinang

Introduction

Monsoon clouds over Trikora Beach on Bintan's east coast

previous pages
Glittering sunset over Tanjung Pinang Bay
Faces of Bintan
Sumatran wedding head-dress

opposite page
Bandar Bentan Telani Ferry Terminal

Bandar Bentan Telani Ferry Terminal, north coast of Bintan – sometime in the early 21st century. The white silhouette of the ferry coming from Singapore can be seen approaching from afar, as people in the terminal ready themselves for its arrival. Every few hours, one of two ferries, *Indera Bupala* or *Aria Bupala*, brings something of the agitation of cosmopolitan Singapore to the tranquil shores of this Indonesian island. In a babel of languages the alighting passengers go through the arrival procedures, while on the other side of the building departing guests prepare to board the same ferry on their return journey. Outside, buses are waiting, their engines running to keep the air conditioning going. In the terminal lobby, hotel attendants stand waiting, guest lists in hand, while shop assistants rearrange their retail displays. In the lull between the frantic activity that accompanies arrivals and departures, the terminal returns to its relaxed pace, more in keeping with Bintan's character.

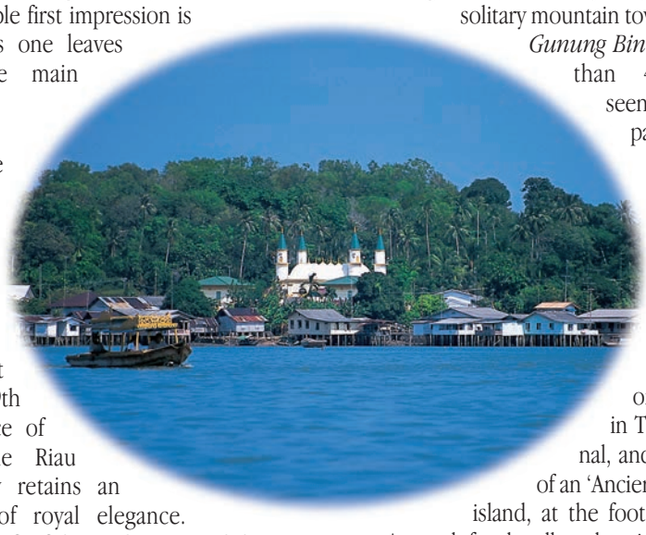
One of the real charms of Indonesia and Bintan in particular, is being able to just hang around and enjoy the moment without a second thought.

If at first sight Bintan doesn't offer the breathtaking landscapes and dazzling culture seen in other parts of the country, the island is still very much Indonesian at heart and can reveal its own delightful surprises if only one takes the trouble to look beyond first impressions. There is a certain romance to Bintan that springs from its rich history, its rugged nature and the warmth of its people, elements which once pieced together, form a vivid tapestry with a bold and unique touch. The island may seem remote and detached from the modern fast-moving world, but it has on many occasions played an important, even essential role in the region's history. Indeed, the presence of a cosmopolitan crowd on its shores is nothing new to Bintan.

Arriving at Tanjung Pinang Ferry Terminal

One may also reach Bintan by way of Tanjung Pinang, the capital of the Riau Archipelago and the island's main town, located on the south-west coast. In doing so, one would already come a little closer to the true spirit of the place. From here ferries continuously arrive and depart throughout the day for Singapore, Malaysia, the nearby island of Batam and the more remote parts of the Riau Archipelago, while fishing boats and cargo ships come to shore after days at sea. This incessant coming and going of all manner of ships and boats to and from the harbour of Tanjung Pinang portrays a truer image of Bintan. Indeed Bintan's present role as a maritime transportation hub is a reflection of its past role as a regional capital.

At first glance, however, Tanjung Pinang does not necessarily stand out as an ancient or even pleasant town. This is partly due to the occasional destructive fires the town has suffered – the latest of which destroyed over 200 houses in the waterfront district in August 2002. These fires have abetted the rash of graceless concrete cubicles, now ubiquitous to urban landscapes in developing countries. Here too, they have come to replace the charm of 19th century shop-houses and wooden houses built on stilts over the water. Combined with this urban blight is the no less obnoxious traffic of deafening motorcycles. Fortunately this less than favourable first impression is dispelled as soon as one leaves the hustle of the main commercial streets.



Only a ten-minute boat ride from the ferry terminal, the little island of Penyengat reveals an altogether different facet of Bintan's character. Penyengat was throughout the 19th century the residence of the viceroy of the Riau sultanate and today retains an unmistakable aura of royal elegance. Unfortunately little is left of the settlement and the port on which the fame and wealth of Bintan was built during its golden age in the 17th and 18th centuries. However, the Chinese temples in the village of Senggarang date back to the 18th century and preserve the memory of some of the earliest Chinese migrants in the region.

If one hops into a taxi and heads for Bintan's hinterland, it doesn't take long to reach the beaches and countryside where one finds the prevailing unhurried way of life which hasn't changed for centuries. Tranquil villages surrounded by gardens, orchards and plantations set amidst the wilderness of tropical vegetation form the core of the agrarian scenery on this bean-shaped island of about 50 km square that covers an area of some 110,200 hectares. Little hills stretch across this rustic landscape which for the most part remains sparsely inhabited. The inhabitants of the little fishing villages along the coasts make a living by sending their daily catch to the market and producing an assortment of dried seafood, the main local gastronomic speciality.

Bintan's natural resources – rocks, sand and wood, seafood, fruits and vegetables – are contributing significantly to the growth and life of the island-state of Singapore. The recent establishment of the resort area of Lagoi on Bintan's north coast, under Singaporean management, is only the latest step in a long symbiotic relationship. Bintan's industrial side is found near the little towns of Kijang and Tanjung Uban.

A sinuous road cuts across the centre of the island. Driving along this inland route, one cannot fail to be intrigued by the majestic, rounded silhouette of a solitary mountain towering above the landscape: *Gunung Bintan* or 'Mount Bintan'. Less than 400 metres high, yet seen nonetheless from most parts of the island, and even from Singapore on a clear day, Gunung Bintan is the ever-present and ever-interrogating entity around which the soul of the island breathes. A visitor with an inquisitive eye may notice a map on the wall of the arrival hall in Tanjung Pinang's ferry terminal, and on that map, the mention of an 'Ancient Town' in the centre of the island, at the foot of the enigmatic *gunung*. A search for the alleged ancient town might prove a little disappointing since no visible physical traces of it remain. Yet, it is here that our story truly begins…

above
A motorbike with a typical rattan basket on Bintan's winding roads
centre
Penyengat and its Royal Mosque

Gunung Bintan seen from Bintan Bay

opposite page

Two serunai from the Penyengat nobat. The nobat is still used as a symbol to enthrone a new Sultan in four of the modern Malaysian sultanates. It is also a key feature of the ceremony installing the Sultan Agung, the Malaysian king, a title alternately shared for five years by the nine Malaysian ruling families. The music, slow in tempo, has a majestic nature. The rhythmic pattern is provided by a pair of double-headed drums, the gendang nobat. A kettle-drum, the nengkara, signals the change of one section to another in a piece. The serunai, a type of oboe, plays a highly ornamented melodic line in fast repeated notes. A valve-less long trumpet, the nafiri, plays a fanfare-like melodic motif that features long sustained notes.

The Gunung And The Malays

The Queen And The Mysterious Prince

Bintan – sometime in the late 13th century.

From the window of her bedroom, Queen Wan Seri Beni looks out at the expanse of sea, eagerly awaiting the return of her ministers, Indra Bopal and Aria Bopal. She is expecting them to bring detailed news concerning a glorious king from Palembang, said to be sailing towards Bintan on board his *Lancang Kuning*. The *lancang,* or 'sculpted prow', already ascribes much prestige to this sailing ship, but above all, the *kuning* or yellow colour indicates high ranking royalty. Surely this golden vessel marks the importance of the *raja* known as Sang Nila Utama, or Sri Tri Buana, a Sanskrit name meaning 'Lord of the Three Worlds'. The news of his coming to Bintan spread quickly around the port located at the estuary of the river and reached Queen Wan Seri Beni in her palace at the foot of the mountain. The man himself, however, remained rather mysterious.

Legend has it that Sri Tri Buana and his two brothers miraculously appeared one night on Bukit Siguntang in **Palembang**. Adorned like kings, wearing crowns studded with precious stones, and riding upon white elephants, they presented themselves to Wan Empok and Wan Malini, two widows who grew rice on the hill, as direct descendants of the legendary Raja Iskandar Dzu'l Karnain (the Arabic name of Alexander the Great). Surely, this had to be true, as the grains of rice in the paddy field where they appeared had turned to gold and the leaves to silver. The eldest brother was invited to rule the **Minangkabau** country in west Sumatra, while the second was called upon to rule **Tanjung Pura** in north-east Sumatra. As for Sri Tri Buana, after descending from heaven to rule the Malay world, he reigned for a short while in Palembang before leaving in search of a suitable site on which to establish a new city.

According to the legend, when Queen Wan Seri Beni heard of Sang Nila Utama's coming to Bintan, she had contemplated the idea of a marriage between them. To her disappointment, Sri Tri Buana proved not only to be too young for her but also already married to Princess Wan Sendari. The princess was the daughter of Demang Lebar Daun, the former Raja of Palembang who had abdicated to become Sri Tri Buana's chief minister. So instead, Wan Seri Beni adopted him as a son and had him installed as her successor, thus marking the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal society. Wan Seri Beni is credited on that occasion for initiating the use of the *nobat*, a set of musical instruments that became the most important regalia of the Malay world. The use of the 'drum of sovereignty' became the symbol by which sultans in diverse Malaysian states would officially take charge of their function, a tradition still in use to this day.

The miraculous deeds of Sang Nila Utama continued with his meeting a strange animal on a beach of the nearby island of **Temasek**. The animal, which his companions identified as a lion, had a red body, a black head, a white breast, and moved with great speed. The auspicious vision of this powerful creature led Sri Tri Buana to choose the island as the site of his new city. He named it Singapura, the 'Lion City'. The port of Singapura grew strong and prosperous under his reign and continued thus under the rule of his descendants. During the reign of Iskandar Shah, Singapura's fifth ruler, the port fell under Javanese attack and Iskandar withdrew to the Malay Peninsula where he founded the port of **Malacca**.

And thus, according to the *Sejarah Melayu*, or 'Malay Annals', unfolded the events that led to the foundation of the Royal House of Malacca, the glorious Sultanate widely considered as the forefather of Malay culture. The history of the manuscript itself is rather obscure. Generally regarded as the finest of all Malay classics, it was assumed for a long time that the *Sejarah Melayu* had been written in the early 16th century before the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese. It is now thought that the work started out as a genealogy of kings commissioned in the 15th century by the 3rd Sultan of Malacca to support his claim as ruler of the Malay world. It later developed as a cumulative text in 17th century Johor, when the Sultanate of Johor, who viewed himself as the direct heir of Malacca, needed to re-affirm its identity and strength against frequent Portuguese and Acehnese invasions. There are different versions of the story just told, and names can vary. In the version today most widely accepted, Wan Seri Beni for example is called Wan Seri Benian. However, Wan Seri Beni, the name by which she is best known in Bintan, is how we will know her throughout this book. Despite all these uncertainties, the *Sejarah Melayu* remains one of the very few written accounts of early Malay history as told by the Malays themselves, and as such constitutes an invaluable source of information on the organisation of their society. The *Malay Annals* also present the earliest extensive mention of the port of 'Bentan', said to be at that time 400 sails strong.

The story of Sang Nila Utama as told by the *Sejarah Melayu* certainly presents too many supernatural aspects to be blindly taken as historical fact. Yet the tale strangely echoes that of another *raja* (lord), said to have ruled 100 years later, recorded in 1512 by the Portuguese apothecary Tome Pires in his book *Suma Oriental*. Pires came to Malacca in the 16th century to supervise the spice trade. According to Javanese sources, Pires credited another prince from Palembang with the creation of Malacca. He was called Parameswara, or rather such was his title for this means 'Supreme Lord'. The man seems to have been as charismatic as Sri Tri Buana, albeit in a somewhat more boisterous way. He is said to have founded Malacca after fleeing an attack on his Singapura kingdom, although the assailants in this version of the story were Thai. The story goes that he had seized power in Temasek – then already a prosperous entrepot – by assassinating the local ruler, son-in-law of the King of Siam and thus triggering the later Thai retaliation. Prior to that, and just as Sri Tri Buana had done, he also stopped in Bintan while on his way from Palembang. The circumstances of his leaving Palembang around 1392, however, are less prestigious than that of Sri Tri Buana, since he was fleeing from the Javanese after a failed attempt at reasserting his independence from their domination.

The similarities between the respective trajectories and deeds of these two kings are simply too great to be regarded as coincidental. They have on one hand raised strong speculation that the early chapters of the *Malay Annals* may have been conceived as a way of turning Parameswara's eventful journey into a fabulous tale thereby providing the royal house of Malacca with its pre-requisite prestigious lineage. On the other hand, Parameswara's eventful story could be the result of historical inaccuracies entertained by Tome Pires, tailored to fit his government's colonialist agenda. A last option superimposing both story lines could be that Iskandar Shah was the name taken by Parameswara after his conversion to Islam. This part of Malay history remains largely speculative. Which of the two characters, Sri Tri Buana or Parameswara, and which part of their respective stories is most likely to have existed in truth is a question still being debated by the academic world. Nonetheless, even if an element of romance was introduced, there had to be a factual basis, as indeed legends are, more often than not, the reflection of a hidden reality.

Srivijaya And The Early Malay World

A 'grain of pepper' in the expanse of sea

The history of the two Malay kingdoms of Malacca and Johor-Riau, in which Bintan plays a decisive role, is somewhat convoluted and made all the more complicated by conflicting historical reports. It is a history filled with splendour and glory, rivalry and exile, and never-ending dynastic disputes. The contrasting and elusive nature at the core of the kingdom's history may be seen as the reflection of the fluid, rising and falling sea and tidal estuaries around which the life of the Malays was organised. A typical Malay settlement usually took the form of a port located beside a coastal estuary, next to a zone of irrigated agricultural land. The river gave direct access to a hinterland covered with thick jungle that provided rainforest products such as camphor resin and rare wood – items of profitable maritime trade.

Bintan is one of the largest islands of the Riau Archipelago that lies between Sumatra and the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. The physical appearance of these islands scattered across the expanse of sea is best reflected in the name *segantang lada* (a handful of pepper grains), commonly used by the local population and the local newspapers to designate their archipelago. Bintan is part of the Sunda Shelf, a currently stable geological formation that extends south of the Asian continent and comprises most of Indochina, the Malay Peninsula and Borneo. The structure of the Sunda Shelf includes a first period of sedimentary formation in Triassic times, 245 to 208 million years ago, followed by later periods of volcanic activity in the later Tertiary (65 to 1.8 millions of years ago) and Quaternary periods. The volcanic belt has since moved over 200km west in Sumatra, along the southern edge of the Sunda Shelf. At the end of the last Ice Age, about 11,000 years ago, the rising sea level formed the Java Sea (a shallow sea with a depth not greater than 180 metres), giving rise to the numerous islands of the Indonesian Archipelago.

The Malay world lives and breathes with the ebb and flow of the tides

Bintan – often simply called Riau in historical sources – lies at the very heart of a region occupied by the Malay people. This maze of more than 3,000 islands is home to the *Orang Laut* (people of the sea). who are also Malays but many of whom remain non-Muslim and non-sedentary to this day. Also known by the local population as *Melayu Asli* or 'original/aboriginal Malays', they are often described as 'sea gypsies'. While a typical Malay house is built on stilts on the waters edge, many *Orang Laut* still spend their entire lives in their tiny boats on the water, living symbiotically with the coastal mangrove. Today mostly peaceful, yet fiercely independent, the *Orang Laut* in the past easily turned to piracy as a way to complement their basic mode of subsistence which centres on fishing. Thus, the allegiance of the *Orang Laut* to the Malay overlords and kings was a decisive element in the stability of the trading ports. When Parameswara stopped in Bintan before reaching Temasek, he was probably aiming at securing the support and loyalty of the local *Orang Laut* population. In the 1330's, a Chinese merchant by the name of Wang Dayun described Temasek (today's Singapore) as a harbour of honest traders unfortunately made unsafe by the constant threat of pirates lurking in the surrounding seas. Parameswara knew all too well what could make or break the success of a trading port. When he left Palembang, he carried with him his considerable experience of such a place.

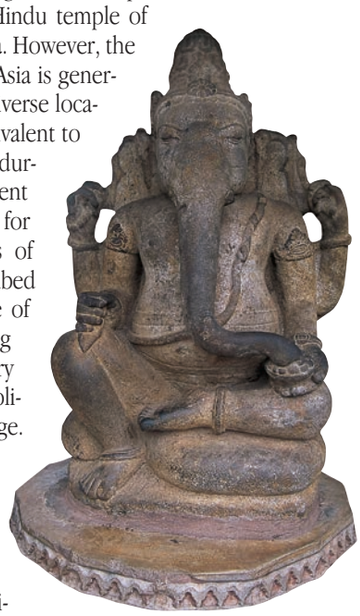
Archeological findings from 500 BCE suggest that the Malay world was part of an international trade pattern from at least the latter part of the Bronze Age, when tin, an essential constituent of the alloy, was found in large quantities on the western coast of the Malay Peninsula. The region assumed a pivotal role when the great civilisations of antiquity began reaching out to each other for rare and luxurious commodities at the beginning of the Common Era (CE is equivalent to AD).

The Malay kampung (village) of the little town of Pancur in Lingga epitomises the maritime way of life of the Malay people

The earliest archeological evidence of this activity to date has been found in the Bujang Valley in the Malaysian state of **Kedah**, where traces of an important trading settlement have been dated to the 5th century CE. A convenient alternative to the famous Silk Road, which carried highly-prized fabrics from China to Rome through the deserts and mountains of Central Asia, was found by going through and around the Malay Peninsula. The maritime route relied upon the seasonal monsoons that allowed boats to travel at predictable periods of the year. Chinese vessels crossing the South China Sea with the north-east monsoon could easily meet Indian and Arab vessels crossing the Indian Ocean with the south-west monsoon. This route was combined with a few overland passages linking the Bay of Bengal and the Golf of Siam across the Malay Peninsula and the Thai isthmus. Via these itineraries, gold, tropical spices, and desirable rainforest products were made readily available to the world. The control and management of this trade progressively took the form of lucrative entrepot ports where goods could be stored and exchanged, and duties levied, while boats were waiting for the winds to change direction.

Trading barges on the Musi River in Palembang

From the 7th to the 11th centuries, the Srivijaya empire in south-east Sumatra grew rich and powerful from this commerce. It also developed as a renowned centre of Buddhist learning and Tantric practices. This Indian influence, which pervaded early Indonesian history, is evident in the Hindu temple of **Prambanan** and the Buddhist monument of **Borobudur** in **central Java**. However, the importance of Srivijaya in the political and spiritual history of Southeast Asia is generally less noted. Four of the oldest known Malay inscriptions – found in diverse locations across the Malay world and bearing Buddhist dates equivalent to 682 CE onward – present another aspect of Srivijaya's enduring legacy. These lithic inscriptions feature a form of ancient Indian orthography based on the Pallava script used for Sanskrit texts. They generally highlight the greatness of Srivijaya and the stones on which they are inscribed probably marked the extent of the empire's zone of influence. What is most interesting is that, according to linguists, they are written in a form of literary court style that bears witness to an early cosmopolitan and elevated setting register of the language. Srivijaya was the first state to use Malay as an administrative language, lending it a diplomatic dimension that would only be emphasised in the course of history. Concomitantly, the tongue as spoken in Srivijaya's port also became the vehicle of pragmatic communication between sailors of all horizons who came to trade there. These sailors took this trading lingua franca with them to far-flung parts of the world while along the coasts of the Malay world, the language actively interacted with the vernaculars spoken there, and in particular with other dialects of the Austronesian family to which Malay belongs. The international standing of the Malay language was further amplified from the 13th century onward when it became the written vehicle that fostered the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. By the time foreign powers came to rule in the 19th century (the British and the Dutch), Malay was so well entrenched as a regional speech that they chose it as the means of communication for their respective colonial administrations.



right
7th century Ganesha (Gedung Museum Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II, Palembang)

A standing Buddha in the 'no fear' position (Museum Balaputra Dewa, Palembang)

Srivijaya was for a long time known primarily through the writings of I Ching, a Chinese monk of the late 7th century. I Ching recommended that his fellow monks spend time in Srivijaya in order to learn Sanskrit before journeying on to India. In I Ching's opinion, the standard of Sanskrit then used for religious teaching in Srivijaya's monasteries was paradoxically higher than that of India. Another monk of historical importance corroborates this. Born 982 in today's Bangladesh, Atisha was about 40 years old when he travelled to Srivijaya to further his Buddhist studies,

which he felt had reached a standstill in India, and remained there for 12 years. By the time he returned to India his reputation had grown to such an extent that King Yeshe Ö's of Tibet called on him to restore the Buddha's teachings in the Land of Snow. Atisha accomplished this by travelling across Tibet for the remaining 13 years of his life. The teachings he then propagated in the Himalayas no doubt conveyed much of the esoteric form of Tantric Buddhism that he had practised in Srivijaya. Through Atisha, this early Malay empire thus played a surprisingly influential role in the history of Tibetan Buddhism.

From its capital located inland along the Musi River near present-day Palembang, Srivijaya pursued a monopoly over the trade in precious oriental products carried by boats passing along the coast. Srivijaya's strength sprang from its well organised government whose influence, at the height of its power, extended over the whole of Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand, and eastern Java. This loose suzerainty was made possible by the loyalty of the *Orang Laut*, whose fighting and maritime skills formed the backbone of Srivijaya's navy. With an open, pirate-free sea passage, foreign merchants were assured of a continuous supply of coveted Sumatran exports: gold, ebony, teak, perfumes, spices, elephant ivory and rhinoceros horns.

Musi River, Palembang

Merchants from many lands were attracted to this trading network due to its well-regulated commercial dealings and ready market for their goods. This economical and political predominance over an entire region essential to trade attracted the jealousy of other kingdoms wishing to bypass Srivijaya's hegemony. The empire fell in 1025 to an attack by the Indian kingdom of Chola which withdrew without occupying Srivijaya's territory. The neighbouring state of **Malayu** (today **Jambi**)**,** once a vassal, took advantage of this situation to reverse its position. Yet, despite this political eclipse, Srivijaya remained an important trading port until 1392, when Parameswara attracted the wrath of Hindu Majapahit, the most powerful Javanese kingdom ever, when he tried to re-establish the independence of his domain.

Due to a lack of stone quarries in Sumatra's lowlands, Srivijaya did not develop the sophisticated architectural forms found in other contemporary Javanese and Indochinese kingdoms. With the exception of a few archeological sites of Buddhist-Hindu temples – mostly of brick construction – found across the region under Srivijaya influence, very little remains of this early period of Malay history. Any wooden architecture would naturally have vanished in the harsh tropical climate, however the statues recovered from these sites indicate a highly sophisticated civilisation. Referred to as *San-fo-ts'i* in Chinese writings, *Sribuza* by the Arabs and *Sriwijaya* by the Indians, the Srivijaya empire's very existence long remained virtually mythical due to lack of physical evidence. Only in 1918 did George Coedes establish with certainty the empire's existence through his deciphering of some stone inscriptions, one of which described the Chola kingdom's devastating attack.

Bukit Siguntang

The exact location of the empire's capital was for a long time the subject of endless debate between scholars. It was only established with certainty as being in Palembang in the 1980's with the discovery of sufficient archeological evidence in a site between the Musi River and Bukit Siguntang. These findings located once and for all the Srivijayan capital as being near the hill where Sri Tri Buana and his brothers were to appear a few centuries later.

Was Srivijaya's civilisation ever present in Bintan? Not so if we are to believe Marco Polo who mentions Bintan in 1292 as a "very savage place" and adds " the forests are all of sweet smelling wood of great quality". Arab accounts of the 13th century do mention the existence of a centre of power at Bintan. It is known to have existed at least until 1323 when it sent a mission to China. The earliest historical evidence establishing the presence of civilisation in the Singapore Strait is the Karimun Stone, **Karimun** being the westernmost island in the Riau Archipelago. This stone presents a Sanskrit inscription dated between 800 and 1000 CE. A similar stone, which could have cast a decisive light on the question of human presence in the region, is known to have existed by the mouth of the Singapore River but was unfortunately destroyed in 1843. 9

In 1984, archeological findings on Fort Canning in Singapore established with certainty the presence of a sizeable Hindu-Buddhist trading port that prospered throughout the 14th century and probably before. In Bintan, a survey conducted by Prof. John Miksic in the mid-1990's did reveal a number of possible pre-Islamic sites, dating back to at least the early 14th century. Unfortunately, no comprehensive archeological work has ever been conducted and if the Sumatran civilisation was ever present in Bintan, traces of it have yet to surface.

The Karimun Stone

Even the existence, not to mention the exact location, of Queen Wan Seri Beni's palace and the port where our story begins is uncertain, but considering the specificity of Bintan's location, an early presence of civilisation there can be reasonably assumed. Gunung Bintan, although only 380 metres high, is the highest summit for miles around; its curves resemble a dragon rising from the otherwise rather flat island. Such a distinctive summit therefore must have been used as a navigation landmark from an early stage of maritime trade history. The sheltered waters of **Bintan Bay** too must have presented a hospitable harbour. An almost inevitable route for the sailors travelling between India and China, the Strait of Singapore, which Gunung Bintan overlooks, marks the meeting point of the China Sea and the Indian Ocean. One could even say that the waters of the Ganges and the Mekong symbolically meet at the foot of **Gunung Bintan**, and with it, the respective civilisations of the countries through which they flow. This remarkable geographical position may partly explain the mysterious pivotal role occupied by Bintan in regional history, as will be seen to unfold through the pages of this book. 1 2

The memory of Sri Tri Buana and the other heroes found in the third chapter of the *Sejarah Melayu* still endures, and with them, the legendary kingdom centred in Palembang still pervades the Malay sense of identity. Srivijaya was the most powerful Malay kingdom ever, a feat that the later Sultanates of Malacca and Johor and other Malay kingdoms tried to replicate. Some of the earliest clues of Bintan's history are to be found in a graveyard complex in the village of **Bintan Bukit Batu** on the eastern foot of Gunung Bintan. 3

Surrounded by the deceptive peace and quiet of the jungle, are six Muslim-style graves. One is believed to be that of Queen Wan Seri Beni (Dang Sri Bani in local terminology) while next to it are the resting places of Wan Empok (Dang Pok) and Wan Malini (Dang Menini), the widows who first saw Sri Tri Buana and his brothers.

According to the *Sejarah Melayu,* Sri Tri Buana was buried in Singapore, on the hill where the Malay kings lived, but the location of his grave is unknown – could it be the grave on Fort Canning reputed to be *keramat* (miracle-working), a site of pilgrimage and devotion for the local Muslim community? When Raffles first arrived in Singapore in 1819, his impression was that "the neglected tomb there is probably the memorial of this founder of ancient Singapore". The hill overlooking the mouth of the Singapore River was then called *Bukit Larang* or 'Forbidden Hill' (today Fort Canning). The name arose from a local belief that forbade its access without the authorisation of the kings who used to live there. In 1822, the British began clearing the jungle on the hill to build a residential bungalow for Raffles, extricating the grave from the encroaching vegetation in the process. Given a new life, the grave was then claimed for some unknown reason to be that of Sultan Iskandar Shah (or Parameswara depending on which version of the story one goes by). The academic world, however, generally accepts that he died in Malacca around 1413 and one can hardly see why Iskandar Shah's remains would have been taken back to Singapore at a time when the new Kingdom of Malacca was growing from strength to strength. If this grave is indeed that of an early Malay king, the possibility of it being in fact that of Sri Tri Buana should then be seriously considered. Mystery and legends are equally puzzling in Bintan Bukit Batu cemetery. The other three graves there are those of Megat Sri Rame, Dang Serene and Tok Telani. A probe into the identity of these characters brings about some unexpected findings.

The alleged grave of Sultan Iskandar Shah at Fort Canning

Bukit Batu And The Re-telling Of History

10

According to local oral history, the origin of the name 'Bintan' can be traced back to the 7th century with the saga of an enigmatic character, thereafter termed as 'the Javanese', who was originally from **Banten**. Conveniently located in a sheltered bay at the entrance of the Sunda Strait at the tip of Java's north-western coast, Banten in the 16th and 17th centuries became the main port of call for the spice trade of all Southeast Asia, rivalling even Amsterdam in size and importance. Its role in the 7th century is not well understood, but the region has the oldest stone inscriptions known in Javanese history and Banten was probably part of one of the ancient kingdoms that flourished in the Sunda region from the 5th century.

Magic and mysticism, deeply rooted in the Indonesian psyche since time immemorial, are part of any Indonesian legend or story and the tale pertaining to 'the Javanese' is no exception. 'The Javanese,' who had accessed powerful mystical secrets of the higher kind, felt that the time wasn't right for him to share them with his fellow men in Java. He then 'ran away', claiming that he was going to search for 'the white island'. The boat he embarked on took him first to China, from where he sailed to the Malay Peninsula, then on to Srivijaya-Palembang, and finally Bintan. There, he founded a settlement by the name of *Kota Segara* (Ocean Town) at the eastern foot of Gunung Bintan. According to legend, he named the island 'Bentan' in reference to the place of origin of his journey and its people *Melayu*, which means 'running away' in Javanese (actually a rather unlikely explanation of the name also associated in other sources with Parameswara's flight from Palembang and Singapura). The 'Javanese' installed a first *raja* as the ruler of the new Bintan kingdom and became his *tabib*, a later Arabic term describing a learned man and advisor.

The legendary origin of the name Bintan might be pondered about, but the fact remains that the inner most part of the island, encompassing Gunung Bintan and *Sungai Bintan* (Bintan River), truly holds the roots of Bintan's culture and identity. The name of the island itself derives from this area where the word Bintan always precedes the appellation of a place, such as in the case of Bintan Bukit Batu. The Malays originally named only parts of the island, and it was the Dutch who extended the use of the river and mountain's name to the whole island. The people of Bintan Bukit Batu are indeed the proud keepers of Bintan's core spirit and centuries later, they still thoughtfully watch over 'the Javanese' legacy. For generations the story had been kept secret by the village chiefs of Bintan Bukit Batu who were able to communicate with the spirits of the people gathered in the historical cemetery. The world, however, had changed with the great planetary alignment that had taken place in May 2000, when the so-called 'ancient planets' (visible to the naked eye) appeared in the Taurus constellation whilst aligning within a span of 30°. Similar events, known in astrology as 'grand stellium', were, in ancient cultures, points of beginning of calendars, eras, dynasties and myths. With this contemporary grand stellium, planet Earth entered yet another cycle of its existence and Abdul Zaman Atan, the last guardian of the legend, received instructions from his ancestors that the time had come. He began to openly tell parts of the tale in order to keep it alive in the coming new era

Bintan Bukit Batu sees a colourful festival in the Muslim month of Sapar, during which people bathe in the local river to ensure good health throughout the year. The ceremony called Mandi Sapar is concluded with a group prayer beside the keramat grave of Tun Putri Cempaka, wife of the founder of Kota Segara

The town of Kota Segara did not outlive its founder; 700 years later, the scene of the action had shifted to the south of Gunung Bintan, on a slope overlooking Bintan Bay. The island was then under the rule of Queen Megat Sri Rame, who had married a prince from the peninsula and had three daughters: Wan Empok and Wan Malini – in whose names we recognise the two widows who first saw Sang Nila Utama – and Wan Serna (Dang Serene). These three noble girls had since their childhood shared a deep friendship with Wan Seri Beni, the daughter of the High Priest. Although not of royal blood, the fair Wan Seri Beni was truly regarded as part of the family and showed a predisposition for the metaphysical world. As future events were to prove, she was in fact the leading figure of the group. During a trip to Palembang with her three daughters, Queen Megat Sri Rame was killed at sea when pirates attacked the royal boat. The three sisters, however, continued their journey to Palembang, reaching there in time to witness the apparition of the three brothers on Bukit Siguntang. Meanwhile, back in Bintan, the charismatic Wan Seri Beni had assumed leadership of the kingdom.

opposite
One of the graves in Bintan Bukit Batu cemetery, during an annual festival celebrated in the Islamic month of Rajab

This, according to Pak Atan, was the earliest part of the story which gave rise to the Malacca royal house. Questions arise as to why one of the sisters was not mentioned at all in the version of the story presented in the *Malay Annals*, why were the other two sisters presented as farmers? Why was the role of the Bintan family played down to let the story focus on Wan Seri Beni? There remains, all the while, a deep sense of mystery surrounding the role of Bintan and its inhabitants in regional history. Their names are often changed and transformed to preserve their secrecy. This is particularly evident in Abdul Zaman Atan's evasive explanations as to the mysterious identity of Tok Telani, whose name was chosen for the tourist ferry terminal in 1994. According to Pak Atan, Tok Telani was a mighty warrior, a human incarnation of Sultan Kuna Ini, in turn an aspect of the supreme reality. This later Arabic title is meant to signify the prevalence of a divine abstraction which existed "long before any religions" and defined by him as "a universal concept used by people around the world in their daily life".

Islamic calligraphy on the doors of a cabinet in the Royal Mosque at Penyengat

The Sultanates And The Europeans

The Malacca Sultanate And The Eunuch Admiral

The history of religion in Southeast Asia is inextricably linked with that of commercial trade. Where Indian traders had earlier brought Hinduism and Buddhism, their successors brought Islam. With them also came Muslim missionaries who taught writing with pen and ink on paper, and transcribed Malay into a written Arabic script called Jawi. As early as the 8th century CE, Muslim traders from India and the Middle East settled in the ports of the northern coast of Sumatra where they called for food and water after crossing the Indian Ocean. From this foothold, Islam began its rise in Southeast Asia around the 13th century, with such success that by the 16th century, the word 'Malay' came to be synonymous with 'Muslim'. This process is unfortunately rather poorly documented, however, it is generally accepted that the form of Islam then propagated in Southeast Asia was at first strongly influenced by Sufism. A mystical tradition at time verging on heterodoxy, Sufism echoed the spiritual Hindu-Buddhist heritage of the Malays and their beliefs in magic, thus blending effortlessly with the fabric of the society by respecting many aspects of their earlier tenets. In the 17th century, the orthodox Sunni traditions became established as the dominant paradigm of Islam in the region and remain so to this day.

Syair Raksi, a Jawi manuscript by Raja Ahmad Bin Hasan (circa 1902) from Penyengat's collection

Early 15th century Malacca probably saw Islam first establish its influence in the port where locals mingled with Muslim traders. The aristocracy, meanwhile, lived upstream in Bertram where Parameswara had first built his residence, and judging by the names of the first Malacca kings, at least part of the nobility remained true to the Hindu-Buddhist tradition of the homeland till mid-century. One can surmise that due to his Srivijayan heritage, Parameswara was likely a Hindu-Buddhist when he founded Malacca. This would explain the Sanskrit titles of the Malay nobility and other symbols found in Sri Tri Buana's legend, in the Malacca court of old, and in some aspects of today's Malaysian sultanates. For a long time it was thought that Parameswara had converted to Islam, taking the name Iskandar Shah. However, historians today consider that the first Malacca king to embrace Islam was probably his son, Megat Iskandar Shah, although little is known about him. The third ruler originally had a Srivijayan name and was enthroned as Sri Maharaja. The *Sejarah Melayu* emphasises his conversion in 1436 as a decisive event in the port's chronicles. In a famous episode of the literary work, Sri Maharaja wakes up from a prophetic dream, miraculously circumcised, in time to welcome a ship bringing a Muslim missionary from Juddah and to accept his new Muslim name as Muhammad Shah. An able and enlightened ruler, he is credited with implementing the structures of power of Malacca's court and initiating its rise to greatness. Recorded history, however, rather suggests the reign of his successor as the turning point of the port's religious life. When Muhammad Shah died in 1444, there were two claimants to the throne: Raja Ibrahim, the son of a Sumatran princess, was of pure Malay descent. His elder half-brother, Raja Kassim, the son of a Tamil common woman, had the support of a Tamil Muslim faction that enjoyed a growing influence in the court. Raja Ibrahim was invited to the throne by his uncle Bendhara Sri Amar and he too reverted to a Srivijayan name, Sri Parameswara Dewa Shah, albeit for a short-lived reign; he was killed in 1445 in a coup d'etat. Under Raja Kassim's rule, Islam then became the state religion and with the support of Arab and Tamil traders, the port grew into a powerful state. After extending his sway over the Peninsula through a series of military conquests, Raja Kassim assumed the title Sultan Muzaffar Shah (The Victorious); the first to use the title of sultan according to Chinese and Portuguese sources.

Malacca – the famed port below the winds – has always been described in the most lyrical terms. As many as two thousand ships at one time could be anchored off its coast and their contents protected from fire and theft in warehouses until they could be dispatched with the next monsoon. Arab ships came to Malacca bringing cargoes of raisins, rose water, arms, wool, copper and glass. Ships from India unloaded cloth, drugs, cane sugar and dyes; from China came tea, silk, porcelain, and silver. All returned with the precious woods, gold and spices of Sumatra and Java. The regional importance of the Malay language grew in tandem with the economic expansion and Jawi even became the diplomatic written language used by kings from the Malay world to communicate with their European counterparts. Indeed Malacca's greatest glory was the flowering of Malay culture and society. The government had an elaborate hierarchy; ceremonies were carried out with much pomp and the court set standards for literature, music, dance, games and dress that were emulated for centuries to come. In fact it would seem that this is when the name *Melayu* (which until then primarily referred to the Sumatran kingdom) began to designate the people and their culture.

19th century gold thread embroidery on silk with Malay motif

The ruler, variously called *sultan*, as in Turkey, or *raja*, as in India, also took a Malay title, *yang dipertuan* or 'he who is made Lord'. The Sultan was regarded as the living embodiment of God's will on earth by his people, who submitted their petitions directly to his kingly attention during public audiences held in his palace. Sitting on a raised platform, below the yellow umbrella, surrounded by richly embroidered cushions, he was assisted by his ministers, a few steps below him.The *bendahara*, or prime minister, came second to the ruler and on many occasions received similar signs of respect. The Bendahara title Parameswara gave to the Bintan family attests to the loyalty of this family and the *Malay Annals* mention many occasions when the alliance between both families was fostered by marriage. The *temenggong* was governor and minister of justice in charge of towns and ports. The *laksamana*, was the chief of military affairs. The most famous Laksamana of all time was the handsome Hang Tua whose fidelity to Sultan Mansur Shah made him the most popular legendary figure of the Malay world.

The distinctive style of Malaccca's mosques

Parameswara's most clever diplomatic move was to forge an alliance with China in 1403, when an envoy from the Ming court visited Malacca. Recognised as a city and a kingdom owing fealty to China alone, Malacca was then guaranteed protection from the Siamese while given prestige and respectability. The famous Eunuch Admiral Cheng Ho, himself a Muslim, visited Malacca for the first time in 1409. He later returned repeatedly in the course of his seven journeys across Southeast Asia and on his way to Africa. Successive missions saw Parameswara and his son travelling all the way to Beijing. Malacca enjoyed a brisk trade with the Ming vessels. This fruitful relationship endured until 1433 when the 5th Ming emperor banned private trade and restricted state trade, enclosing China unto itself. According to historical Chinese sources, this unfortunate turn of events took place while Sri Maharaja, third ruler of Malacca, was visiting the Ming court. He met with great difficulties finding his way back home as no boat was allowed to leave China. Sri Maharaja married a princess from **Pasai** and converted to Islam shortly after his return to Malacca in 1435, a fact which could therefore suggest a pragmatic version of the 'ship from Juddah' episode found in the *Sejarah Melayu.* The kingdom of Pasai in northern Sumatra was the earliest centre of Islamic scholarship in the region and enjoyed great support from fellow Muslim traders. Since Chinese trade had almost dried up, Sri Maharaja-Muhammad Shah possibly felt that the time had come to fully welcome the Arab traders and their faith, which by then had made great progress among the port's population.

In the late 1970s, a Singapore antique dealer learned of the existence of a shipwreck lying under water at the foot of Gunung Bintan and known in local dialect as *Jong To' Ili* (*Jong Datuk Hilir* in standard Malay or 'the junk of the prince from the estuary'). This wreck inspired a rather colourful story in which Cheng Ho would have found refuge with his fleet in the port of Teluk Bintan (Bintan Bay) after being caught in a storm.

One of the damaged ships would have then been left to sink in the river. Archeological research conducted in 1988 by Pierre Yves Manguin proved the dealer partly right, but mostly wrong. The process of carbon 14 dating used on the wood of the wreck established that it was from the 15th century and so presumably contemporary to Cheng Ho's visits. The building techniques, however, indicated a vessel of
4 Southeast Asian origin and ruled out the possibility of it being Chinese. The **Bukit Jakas wreck**, as Dr. Manguin named it, seems to have been that of a large trading ship, left to sink after a long period of extensive use. Although it contained no cargo of importance, it remains an important finding, as it represents, to date, the only physical trace of Bintan's earliest port.

The mysterious grave on the slope of Gunung Bintan

Manguin, however, found that the wreck had lost one prestigious captain only to gain another, at least according to the local population. To them this ship was the glorious *prahu* or 'sailing vessel' of Nakhoda Ragam, also known as the Singing Captain, the nickname of Sultan Bolkiah, 5th Sultan of Brunei. Famous for his sea-faring career and con-
12 quests, Sultan Bolkiah marked the golden age of the **Brunei sultanate**. He travelled widely across the region, becoming a legendary figure of the Malay world in the process. A legend from Malacca relates how, after being crushed in a storm, the different parts of his ship were turned into the six islands off the Malaccan coast. Another sees him naming the different bays, rivers and capes of the island of Penang. For the people of Gunung Bintan, his life's journey came to an end at the foot of their mountain. After drowning with his ship, he was buried in the small graveyard above the site of the wreck, where lies an ancient grave with an unusually long distance separating the two stones traditional to Muslim graves – a sign that a person endowed with mystical powers is buried there. Such graves are known as *makam panjang* or 'long grave' and according to Malay beliefs, the lengthening of the space between the head and the foot stones is supposedly the manifestation of the deceased's supernatural powers.

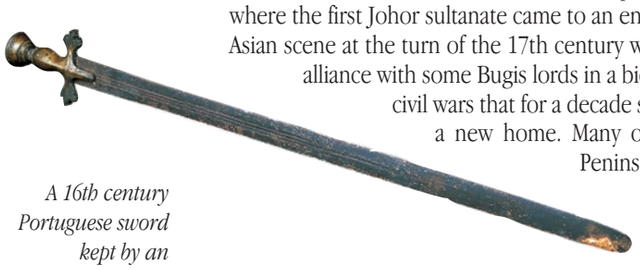
The Ever-shifting Sultanate Of Johor-Riau And The Married Mountains

The coat of arms on Santiago Gate, the entrance to Al Famosa, the Portuguese fort in Malacca

The glorious age of Malacca lasted until 1511 when the Portuguese armada led by Afonso de Albuquerque captured the port. By rounding the Cape of Good Hope in 1497, Vasco Da Gama had discovered a maritime route that bypassed the monopoly on the spice trade held by Venice and the Mameluke empire in Egypt. A desire for Asian spices, combined with an anti-Muslim crusading spirit, saw the Portuguese, led by Albuquerque, embark in 1509 on a campaign to dominate the key points of the Muslim trading network. Malacca was naturally among the first targets. By this time the Malay state had become a formidable power, calling for allegiance throughout the peninsula and across the Strait. The city counted around 100,000 inhabitants, a cosmopolitan society who had come to share the port's prosperity. When faced by superior Portuguese firepower, Malacca forces, however, posed little resistance. On 10 August 1511, Sultan Ahmad Syah – the last ruling Sultan of Malacca – and his father Sultan Mahmud, fled
13 in search of a strategic place from where to fight back. They moved to Muar, then to **Pahang** on the peninsula. Sultan Mahmud finally settled in Bintan where he built **Istana Kopak**, a new palace on the western slope of Gunung Bintan, defended by two forts at the river mouth. Both the forts and Malay bravery resisted the first round of fierce fighting that took place in 1521 when d'Albuquerque attacked from Portuguese Malacca, but in 1526 the Portuguese finally managed to break through the Malay defence. Kopak went up
14 in flames and Sultan Mahmud fled to **Kampar** in Sumatra where he passed away in 1528. His second son
15 Raja Mudzafar went to **Perak** where he founded the dynasty of Malay sultans who still reign there today.

Sultan Ahmad having been killed to the instigation of his father, Mahmud's third son became Sultan Alauddin Riayat Shah. After staying for a while in Pahang, Sultan Alauddin laid the foundation of a new settlement on the **Johor River** in the 1530's. This location marked the establishment of the Johor sultanate which included large parts of Malacca's original territory, with of course the exception of Malacca where the Portuguese remained entrenched behind the walls of a formidable fortress, without venturing much inland. Occasional conflicts within the reigning family weakened the Johor sultanate; foreign matters were just as unsettled and the next century saw the Johor sultans frequently relocating their capital, due to repeated attacks from the **Aceh** sultanate and Portuguese Malacca. This ongoing three-way power struggle took the form of sea battles involving large fleets of hundreds of sails and the siege of *kota* or 'forts', the traces of which can be read today in the names of Malaysian towns beginning with the word *kota*. Among the many battles and shifts of alliance, following a Portuguese attack in 1587, the capital was moved upstream from Johor Lama to Batu Sawar which in turn fell to the Acehnese in 1613. The capital was later transferred to the still existing town of **Kota Tinggi** where the first Johor sultanate came to an end in 1699. Meanwhile, the arrival of the Dutch on the Southeast Asian scene at the turn of the 17th century was to prove yet another destabilising factor. In 1669, the Dutch alliance with some Bugis lords in a bid to control the port of **Makassar** in Sulawesi resulted in raging civil wars that for a decade sent thousands of Bugis refugees across the Java Sea in search of a new home. Many of them eventually came to settle in **Selangor** on the Malay Peninsula, establishing a stronghold from where they would play a decisive role in regional history. The Dutch also introduced the concept of signed agreements, which from then on came to rule diplomatic matters.

16 17 18 19 20



A 16th century Portuguese sword kept by an aristocratic family on Penyengat

In 1618, one of the many episodes of this tumultuous history took the then Sultan Abdullah to **Lingga**, Riau's second largest island, located about 100km south of Bintan. The two islands of Lingga and Bintan are linked throughout the history of the archipelago as if they were two siblings or even husband and wife! Lingga is easy to spot from afar at sea by the jagged 1,164 metre peak of Gunung Daik. The much lower Gunung Bintan is nonetheless distinguished by the rounded shape of its double summit. A local folk tale tells how the form of the two mountains came about. They were originally husband and wife and must have been giants of sorts, for during a quarrel between them, the husband, then on Lingga, threw a pan at his wife in Bintan while she was breast feeding. The pan hit her on the head thus creating the two bumps now crowning the top of the hill, while her son fell to the ground and became Gunung Demit, a small hill on the side of Gunung Bintan. Enraged, she threw a trident at her husband. This in turn left him with three jagged teeth as a summit. One of the teeth partly collapsed in the 1970's but misty Gunung Daik still preserves much of its mighty character.

21

Gunung Daik overlooks Lingga's mountainous landscape

Sultan Abdullah saw the Dutch as possible allies against his most hated enemies, Aceh and the Portuguese. On 17 May 1606 he signed with the Dutch an agreement initiating the coalition that would eventually bring about the downfall of Portuguese Malacca in 1641. Sultan Abdullah's stay in Lingga, from 1618 to 1623, was to prove equally seminal given that in 1806 the island became the permanent capital of the Lingga-Riau sultanate (successor to the Sultanate of Johor), by which time the Sultan officiated mostly as a spiritual leader. The island today has preserved something of that mystical aura. Covered in thick pristine jungle, far from the world's agitation, Lingga is a mysterious destination that requires long hours of travelling and some effort to reach. Leaving Bintan at midday, the ferry first crosses a long stretch of open sea. The second half of the journey is more entertaining as the ferry enters the Lingga Archipelago and hops from one island to another, each stop a visual feast of colourful and vivid scenes along the jetty, as both people and goods are loaded and unloaded in a mad shamble. This daily ferry is often the only means of communication with the outside world for the isolated islets, and its arrival is an important event that brings some excitement to the otherwise sleepy shores. Somewhere on the way, one truly enters a new world as the embarkation crosses the equator and the journey carries on in the southern hemisphere. By late afternoon, one can finally see the hazy silhouette of Gunung Daik in the distance and the little town of Pancur on the eastern coast is reached in the warm glow of the setting sun.

Mesjid Jamik, Lingga's Royal Mosque

The ruins of the Sultan's palace in Daik

Daik, the main town on the mangrove-lined southern coast is reached by motorbike, the only means of transport available on the few roads of the whole island. Save for one street lined with Chinese shophouses, the town mainly comprises quiet *kampungs* (villages) scattered in the greenery. Traces of the royal presence are centred in and around Daik. The Royal Mosque, Masjid Jamik, is the only historical building still fully standing. It holds a few artifacts pertaining to its prestigious past, such as a 19th century drum used to call the faithful to prayer, and a beautifully wooden screen. Legend has it that the crasftman was later put to death so that this masterpiece would remain unique. The yard behind the mosque contains the grave of Sultan Mahmud who first made Daik the capital of the Riau kingdom. The ruins of the palace near the foothills of Gunung Daik offer the pleasure of an atmospheric setting. Not much remains of the wooden palace except an elegant concrete staircase, a few decorative elements scattered in the garden and the foundations of a huge harem that was under construction when the Dutch deposed the last Sultan. A few earth and stone forts bristling with cannons protected the island. One of these, Benteng Bukit Cening, has been partially restored and can be reached with a one-hour walk across scenic countryside. Two handsome pieces of artillery can be seen in Daik's district offices, framing the entrance to the officers' mess. One is called *pecah piring* (plate breaker), and the other *padam pelita* (lamp extinguisher).

The pecah piring in Daik

Lingga's mountainous skyline includes another mountain range, Gunung Sepincan, with an altitude of 750 metres

New Port And Sunken Treasures

In 1595, two Dutch brothers, Cornelis and Frederik Houtman, sailed with four ships to the East Indies, as far as Bali, and managed to break the Portuguese monopoly on the spice trade. By 1601, 14 private Dutch companies operated 65 ships on the oriental trade routes. In 1602 these companies merged to form the Dutch East India Company, also known as the VOC (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie), one of the first joint stock companies in the world – the English East India Company was founded in 1600. The Dutch parliament granted immediately the VOC the rights to maintain an army, to declare war and to make peace. In 1603, the company established its first trading post in Java at Banten, and in 1619, took over the nearby port of Jayakarta which was renamed **Batavia** (today **Jakarta**). From this new stronghold, the Dutch began looking for ways to overthrow the Portuguese in Malacca. They finally managed to do so in January 1641 with the help of a Johor contingent, 40 ships and 1,500 men strong. The final attack was preceded by a seven-month siege with horror stories galore. It is said that when Portuguese Malacca finally fell, it had sustained fourteen sieges from Aceh, six from Johor and Bintan, three from Jepara and two from the Dutch, in addition to innumerable attempts of lesser note. With the Portuguese presence cleared from the Strait, the Dutch became all-powerful. The Malays in Riau and Johor initially benefited from this situation as under Dutch protection, pressure imposed by enemies was alleviated. The Dutch, who wanted to retain Batavia as the main port in the region, were not keen on returning Malacca to its former glory, thus allowing room for other entrepots to develop. Despite sporadic conflicts with the kingdom of Jambi in the 1670's, ports in Johor and Riau thereby experienced great expansion during most of the second half of the 17th century.

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A coin from the Dutch East India Company (VOC)

After the disastrous Portuguese attack of 1526, the centre of Bintan's unfolding saga moved from Bintan Bay to the estuary of ***Sungai Riau*** (Riau River), where it has been located ever since. The name 'Riau' appears to have come into use at that time. One of the possible explanations for this springs from the Malay word *riuh,* meaning 'festive in a noisy way' – alluding to the many ships and traders coming to port. Another refers to the Portuguese word *rio* for 'river'. A new settlement by the name of **Kota Tua** developed on the western bank of ***Sungai Terusan*** or 'canal/passage river'. When looking at a map of Bintan, one will notice that this so-called 'river' in fact cuts across the land to reach Bintan Bay north of the estuary. This is because part of the 'river' was in fact a canal dug by the Malays to escape a Portuguese siege (the river is also known as *Sungai Ular* or 'Snake River'). According to Prof. Miksic's survey, the site of Kota Tua seems to have been rather important and could provide interesting findings if properly searched. Many remnants are found scattered thereabouts, among them ceramic fragments, tin coins, as well as building foundations. Across the estuary, the hill known today as **Tanjung Pinang Hill** played a defensive role, a role it would retain for many centuries.

6 7 8 9

The main square of Dutch Malacca was later graced by the British with a memorial to Queen Victoria

Ming dynasty
round box
17th century
8cm diameter

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Thus far, the most interesting traces of this phase of Bintan's history have been found underwater. In 1984, a professional treasure hunter by the name of Michael Hatcher managed to locate the wreck of the ***Geldermasen***, a Dutch ship known to have sunk south-east of Bintan in 1752 with a valuable cargo of gold, silk, lacquerware, porcelain, spices and tea. In the process, Hatcher also located another wreck on the same reef, that of a Chinese vessel dating from circa 1620, with an important cargo of blue and white Ming porcelain on board. Some 160,000 pieces of porcelain and 126 gold ingots were brought up from the Dutch wreck – this came to be known as the Nanking Cargo. Another 60,000 pieces were taken from the Chinese wreck. All goods were surreptitiously taken to Singapore and later flown to Amsterdam to be auctioned by Christie's. The Nanking Cargo sold for 15 million US dollars and the cargo from the Chinese wreck for around 3 million US dollars. The event attracted a great deal of attention and publicity. Only then did the Indonesian authorities realise what had taken place – in short, the country had been plundered. Prior to this event, no regulations existed concerning marine wrecks. A committee was quickly set up under the direction of the Ministry for Sea Exploration. In 1985, the Panitia Nasional was put in charge of issuing permits for the exploration and subsequent exploitation of any wreck found within the limits of Indonesian territory.

Qing dynasty plates
top
18th century
18cm diameter
bottom
19th century
12cm diameter

Unfortunately, the purpose of this committee would seem to be mainly commercial and no steps yet have been taken to enforce even a basic archeological survey prior to recovery work. If anything, the task of serious archeologists is made more difficult than before due to the paperwork now involved, while 'accidental' discoveries continue to leak past the authority's attention. The most frequent scenario is one in which fishermen make an initial discovery. They may notice an unusually high number of fish in one location (fishes use shipwrecks as breeding and feeding grounds), or they may even bring porcelain plates to the surface in their nets. Since the enforcement of the new regulations, a few more shipwreck discoveries have been officially reported in the archipelago. In the late 1980's the **Pulau Buaya wreck**, northwest of Lingga, revealed an important cargo of over 31,000 pieces of southern Song ceramics (1127-1279 CE). The origin of the ship could not be established as no in-situ archeological research was done. Song ceramics are usually highly valuable. To avoid too sharp a price drop due to oversupply, most of these antiques were stored in a warehouse on Batam where they are now said to be in a neglected state. The earliest confirmed Chinese shipwreck discovered in Indonesian waters dates from the late 14th century. Strangely, no Portuguese vessel has yet been found in Riau despite the fact that this region has been one of the most heavily travelled since the beginning of maritime trade. Considering the treacherous waters, the strong currents between the islands and the somewhat approximate marine charts of the time, there are certainly many more treasures lying beneath the waters of this archipelago. The latest discovery, done again by Michael Hatcher, was the wreck of the *Tek Sing*, a Chinese vessel sunk in 1822 on its way to Palembang. The 350,000 ceramic pieces were auctioned in 2000 and fetched 10 million US dollars.

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top
Ming dynasty celadon vase
15th century - 9cm diameter
centre
Qing dynasty square box
19th century - 8/5/4cm
bottom
Pot from the Tek Sing Cargo
19th century - 14cm diameter

Southern Song dynasty bowl
from the Pulau Buaya wreck
10th to 13th century - 15cm diameter

Tang dynasty plates
encased in marine concretion
around 10th century

The monument to Raja Haji Fisabillilah in Tanjung Pinang

The Prosperous Trading Port And The Bugis

The Princess And The Phoenix

Bintan – Kota Piring Fort – 1804.

From the window of her bedroom, Princess Raja Hamidah looks out at the hills across the river and dreams. In the distance, surrounded by the vegetal exuberance of the jungle, stands Kota Roboh, the Bintan palace of the man she is soon to marry. This is where she will spend her first night as the Sultan's wife, before following him to Lingga, the seat of his court. She has yet to meet him. Being of royal blood, she knew from a young age that she would have little say in the choice of the man she would marry. Indeed, her union with Sultan Mahmud III was conceived as a way to mend the relationship between their respective families. For all this, the Sultan seemed to care for her. A few weeks earlier, while enjoying a last moment with her childhood friends in the Istana Kaca Puri, she had received from him a pendant in the shape of a phoenix and with it a note which said: "Gold and riches will come in their own due time. Meanwhile please receive this humble gift as a token of my ever-lasting love." Shortly after, she left the palace of leisure located upriver to prepare for the wedding in Kota Piring, her family's stronghold. What sort of life awaited her away from the warmth of her family? She only hoped that it would be in the image of the ever-resurrecting bird that she held tightly in her hand.

Phoenix pendant of tin alloy, found in the ruins of Kota Piring

The overall romantic tone of this introduction to the Bugis era in Bintan is largely speculative. But the phoenix exists. The publisher of the present book purchased it in the early 1990's from locals who lived within the ruins of ***Kota Piring*** (Plate Fort), at the apex of the bay where Tanjung Pinang stands. The crumbling masonry was then still presenting some of the ceramic plates that decorated the fort and gave rise to its name. As for the wedding of Raja Hamidah and Sultan Mahmud, it was conceived as a way to solve (or at least alleviate) the difficult relationship that existed between the aristocratic Malay and Bugis families who had shared power in Bintan for almost a century. This wedding marked a turning point in Bintan's history because, the Sultan presented Pulau Indera Sakti as a wedding gift to the Bugis family. To members of the royal families, the small island off the coast was known by its ancient Sanskrit name. To the commoners it carried the name *penyengat* after the wasps found in profusion around the fresh water wells the island was famous for. These wells made Penyengat a well-known stopover on the trading routes as the ships could easily call there to replenish their provision of fresh water. In 1806, it assumed an even more important role when Raja Jaafar, the brother of Hamidah, moved the siege of the Bugis government there. The island then acquired the name **Pulau Penyengat Indera Sakti**. The Sultan, however, was already residing in Lingga, where his successors would remain until 1900. The stage was then set for the last chapter in the history of the Johor and Riau sultanates. But how did a Bugis family come to occupy such a powerful role in the Malay world to begin with?

The Little King, The Bugis And The Chinese Migrants

In 1699, the childless Sultan Mahmud Shah II was assassinated in Kota Tinggi, capital of the Johor sultanate. This event is remembered in Bintan through a legend that still prevents superstitious inhabitants of this island who are descendants of the *Laksamana Bintan* (the Bintan Admiral) from visiting Kota Tinggi . The story goes that the Laksamana Bintan had left his pregnant wife to live in the Sultan's court while he went fighting pirates at sea. One day, on seeing a man carrying a *nangka* (jack fruit), she felt the urge to have a piece of it. The *nangka* came from the Sultan's orchard, and as such could only be eaten by him, but the man agreed to extract a small piece of flesh from a rotten portion of the fruit and closed the husk as if nothing had happened. Unfortunately, upon opening the fruit, the Sultan did notice the missing piece and his Bendahara insisted that giving the leftovers of a fruit to the Sultan was a crime of the worst kind. Giving in to the Bendahara's insistence, the Sultan ordered for the belly of the lady to be opened and the piece of *nangka* taken back. This of course resulted in the death the woman and her baby, who was said to be found with the piece of *nangka* in his mouth. Upon hearing the story, the Laksamana Bintan went into a rage and confronted the Sultan in the mosque. The Sultan, fatally wounded in the ensuing fight, cursed the people of Bintan for seven generations with his dying breath, saying that should they come to Johor they would die vomiting blood. The Laksamana, wounded by the Sultan's *keris*, returned to Bintan where he too passed away shortly after.

Nangka or 'jack fruit'

There are different versions of this legend, all with surprising twists to the *nangka* story-line. One has it that Megat Sri Rama, the husband of the deceased lady, lived for four years in agony when back in Bintan with grass growing out of the wound on his foot. An even stranger one sees the Sultan killing his own wife, who is then avenged by her father. While the Sultan was prepared for burial, it was seen that his penis was erect and one of his concubines was ordered to lie on him to satisfy his last breath of life. From this union a boy was born who, according to legend, was to later play an important role. Whichever way the story is told, its imprint remains deep on popular imagination, and the fact remains that the Sultan's death signalled a decisive turning point in regional history. Sultan Mahmud Shah II was the last direct descendant of the original Malacca royal line. His death signified the end of an era and the birth of yet another kingdom, the Riau-Lingga sultanate, which included Pahang, Johor, Riau and the **Natuna islands**. Modern historians rather credit a version of this regicide that involves the plotting of the Bendahara and other aristocrats. The reputedly depraved and sadistic Sultan paid little attention to his kingly duties. Piratical raids had increased dramatically and the kingdom was in such dire need of leadership that the nobles eventually felt impelled to act. Thus, on 3 September 1699, Bendahara Paduka Raja became Sultan Abdu'l-Jalil Shah and in June 1709, the kingdom's capital was moved to Bintan.

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The new dynasty at first proved quite successful at reviving the entrepot on the Riau River. But the murder of a king was looked upon as a most hideous crime in Malay tradition, especially as he was of the Palembang-Malacca line, and the new Sultan never met with the approbation of the *Orang Laut* population. This was to have disastrous consequences when in 1717 a pretender claiming to be a natural son of Sultan Mahmud Shah II – some even said the offspring of the Sultan's strange last union – came to power in **Siak** in Sumatra. Taking the name Raja Kecil or 'Little King', he won the allegiance of the Orang Laut who trusted that he was the direct heir of the legendary power transmitted by descent since Alexander the Great. With their support, Raja Kecil captured the capital on the Riau River. Abdu'l Jalil fled to Kuala Pahang on the peninsula where he was killed in 1718 on Raja Kecil's orders. It is within the context of this dramatic situation that the Bugis made a grand and decisive entry in Johor-Riau history. The Bugis, originally from Sulawesi, are renowned for being skilled ship builders and fierce warriors, in short the most feared adventurers of the Java Sea. Their earliest recorded presence in Bintan is known through a tombstone found in the village of Seitimun on the northern bank of the Riau River. The oval stone, typical of Bugis graves, is engraved with a *jawi* inscription, an Islamic date corresponding to 1587, and a name, Kelana Jaya Putra. According to local belief, he was one of the first Bugis adventurers to come to Bintan. The Bugis exodus of the late 17th century had seen many of them settle in Selangor

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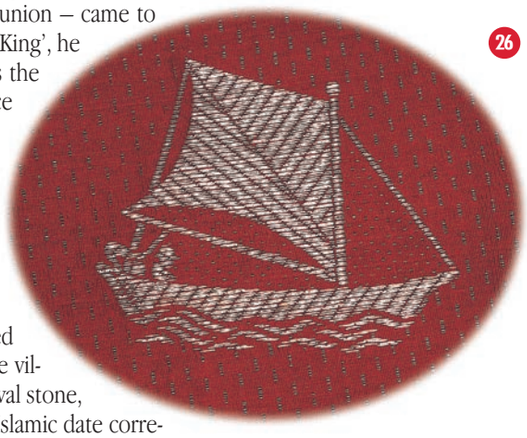


A pinisi motif on an early 20th century Bugis songket

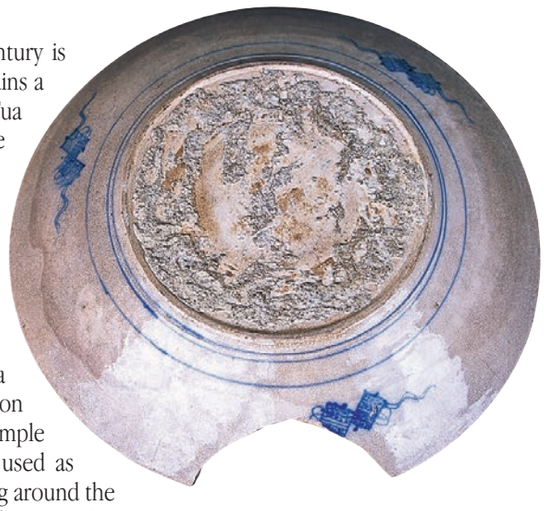
on the peninsula. The circumstances of their presence in Riau is again the subject of a controversy. If one is to believe the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (a pro-Bugis chronicle written in the 19th century), in 1721 Raja Sulaiman, a son of Abdu'l Jalil, recruited five Bugis brothers to force Raja Kecil out of the Riau River. This literary work emphasises the rescue of the Malay king by the Bugis. However, the historians Barbara and Leonard Andaya, in their authoritative work *History of Malaysia,* describe this version of events as a 'later Bugis justifying myth'. According to their research, Raja Kecil, wary of the Bugis power, attacked them in a number of sea battles, which he eventually lost. After their victory, the Bugis took charge in Riau and chose to install Sulaiman as Sultan in order to be accepted by the local population.

The crumbling walls of Kota Piring

In any case, Raja Kecil's defeat resulted in a new government and five lineages, which not only lay at the heart of the Malay-Bugis conflict, but also lead to the modern day nobility of some Malaysian states. Sulaiman was installed as Sultan, with the title *Yang Dipertuan Besar* or *Yamtuan Besar* (Great Ruler), while his elder brothers held the lesser offices of Bendahara and Temenggong because they were born before their father had become Sultan. Both lineages later developed respectively into the present Malaysian royal houses of Pahang and Johor. Two of the Bugis brothers married sisters of Sulaiman and shared the title of *Yang Dipertuan Muda* or *Yamtuan Muda* (Junior Ruler), alternately between the two families. Daeng Marewa, the oldest brother, became the 1st Yamtuan Muda. His nephew, Raja Lumu, became the first Sultan of Selangor in 1766. Although the negotiations apparently left a good chunk of the power in Malay hands, the Sultan and his family held in fact honorary titles and the Yamtuan Muda truly controlled the state.

By 1728, peace and prosperity had returned to Bintan. The Bugis had capitalised on the tradition of a maritime state that had dominated the Strait since Srivijaya. Under their rule Bintan experienced its golden era. To many private merchants their port was an attractive alternative to Dutch Malacca and the good management of the trade made their entrepot a success. Sungai Riau must have been a glorious sight at that time with dozens of Chinese junks, Bugis *pinisi* and western schooners anchored side by side along the river. The wide range of goods available had no equivalent in the region. The population, estimated at between fifty to ninety thousand people, made Bintan the regional capital. Not even Malacca could compete with this growing economic and political power that seemed bent on re-enacting Srivijaya's glorious past. As for Singapura, it lay sleeping beyond the realms of history following the disastrous attack by the Acehnese on the Johor sultanate and its capital, Batu Sawar, in 1613.

Decorative plate from the walls of Kota Piring



The back of a Kota Piring decorative plate with traces of mortar

Strangely, although Bintan's wealth in the 18th century is clearly recorded, the exact location of the port remains a mystery. According to Prof. Miksic's survey, Kota Tua was abandoned and another site appears to have developed on the eastern bank of Sungei Ular. There he located the remnants of two substantial structures that may have been the much-talked about entrepots. The ruins of Kota Piring, however, are easily visited. According to local oral history, Raja Haji Fisabilillah built this centre of the Bugis government in 1777. The Chinese porcelain plates embedded in the mortar of the defensive walls of Kota Piring were a form of architectural adornment common around Southeast Asia at that time, still seen for example on Wat Arun in Bangkok. Ruined and crumbling, used as foundations for the houses of the Malay families living around the compound, today the walls of Kota Piring are but a disintegrating memory of one of the grandest moments of Bintan's history.

Vestiges of everyday life in the Bugis fort can still be found around Kota Piring

The Kota Piring palace marks the beginning of a lineage of Bugis rulers, who from then on became an integral part of the local history. The **graves** of the first two rulers, Yamtuan Muda Daeng Marewah and Yamtuan Muda Daeng Celak, are located further up the estuary, next to the location of **Istana Kaca Puri**, the Bugis leisure palace. From there, if one is adventurous enough, a one- kilometre walk through the thick jungle leads to the ruins of **Kota Roboh**, the Sultan's palace in the hinterland. In addition to the fort on Tanjung Pinang Hill, more fortifications were built on the islands of Penyengat and **Bayan**. The main remnant of this era, still relevant to modern-day Tanjung Pinang, is **Kampung Bugis**, a village on the northern bank of the estuary. Its present population remains largely of Bugis descent, although it now includes many other Indonesian ethnic groups. This period of Bugis rule also marked the arrival of another ethnic group that came and stayed, the Chinese who began to settle in **Senggarang**, at the mouth of the estuary.

12 13 14 15 16

An important facet of the Bugis era in Bintan, and one that was to have a lasting effect on the local population, was the introduction of a large rural Chinese community. Chinese merchants had settled in the trading ports of the region long before, marrying local women and giving rise, for example, to the Baba Nonya culture in Malacca. In the 1730s, new types of Chinese activities appeared: mining and agriculture. The exploitation of tin ore on the Malay Peninsula brought about an important change by progressively taking further inland the human presence which had until then been mostly limited to the coast. This resulted in the creation of largely Chinese urban centres such as today's Ipoh. Meanwhile, according to Carl Trocki in

his book *Prince of Pirates*, the earliest recorded instance of a settlement of Chinese agriculturists in the Malay world seems to have taken place in Bintan. Faced with a serious manpower shortage, the 2nd Yamtuan Muda decided to bring in Chinese workers to answer the growing demand for the cultivation of gambier. They arrived en masse and by the 1780s as many as 10,000 Chinese were living in Bintan. But the changes brought about by the commercial cultivation of this woody climber of the Rubiaceae family – going by the scientific name of *Uncaria Gambir* – would not be limited to the human presence on Bintan. The extensive culture of gambier was also to have a lasting negative impact on the ecosystem.

The sticky paste extracted from a crushed gambier leaf

An extract from the gambier leaves was originally used as an astringent and flavouring agent for chewing betel nut and for this reason, the indigenous plant has long been cultivated in small plantations throughout Southeast Asia. When it was discovered that the extract could be prepared to produce a powerful leather-tanning agent, its cultivation was extended to large plantations in order to satisfy a growing demand. The extraction process required that the shredded leaves be boiled repeatedly in iron pans in order to concentrate the catechu-tannic acid solution that resulted in a brown paste called *gambir*. Thus, not only did the plant use large areas of land for its cultivation, but it also needed a significant quantity of cheap fuel to make it remunerative. The plantations were therefore located at forest edges where they would systematically deplete the wood supply, then move on to new grounds. In the process, acres and acres of primary forest were cleared, never to reappear. It is said that within 40 years, gambier plantations had devastated the island of Singapore. This first onslaught on Bintan's environment was further aggravated in the 1960's with an important migration of people from Flores, who were initially attracted by the promise of riches in Malaysia. Finding themselves stuck in Bintan due to the *Konfrontasi*, they resorted to an anarchic form of slash and burn cultivation to sustain themselves. What remained of the forest was finally over-exploited in the 1970's to answer the demand for timber in nearby developing Singapore, thus resulting in the bush cover now found in many parts of the island where the original rain forest once stood.

A gambier plant

top of next page
An abandoned pan used to boil the gambir solution

It is strange to think that something which had such decisive consequences on the life and times of a place is by now almost completely vanished from its environment. In fact, it took a great deal of time and commitment on the part of the publishers of this book to finally locate a few surviving gambier plants in the garden of a local farmer. His backyard also contained the crumbling masonry of what had been the stove, as well as a few rusty giant gambier pans. It is said that one of Bintan's largest gambier plantations was located in the area that today contains the reservoir which provides the hotels in Lagoi with water. And just off the road leading to Club Med, the remaining structures of what had once been an important processing centre were still visible at the time of the resort's construction. The harsh tropical climate and the relentlessly encroaching jungle have since taken those remnants into oblivion.

Raja Haji And The Seeds Of Independence

The changes brought to Riau by the Bugis were manifold and the people who found their life the most upset certainly were the Orang Laut who had sided with Raja Kecil. With the Bugis taking over the role of maritime experts and defenders of the kingdom, the Orang Laut began to lose the prestige they had enjoyed since the days of Srivijaya and never recovered it. In order to consolidate their position, the Bugis made treaty after treaty with the Malays. The earlier treaty, signed on 4 October 1722 when Sulaiman was installed, stipulated that "Sultan Sulaiman is established in authority over the Kingdom of Johor and Pahang… accordingly there is contracted by the Sultan of Johor a bond of sincere friendship with the Bugis princes which shall never be broken by them, their children, or their children's children". But despite such protestations of brotherly love, the feud ran deep and at times resulted in open confrontation. In 1756, the Malays allied with the Dutch in an attempt to hold their status against the encroaching newcomers. The Bugis reacted promptly by raiding Malacca in 1757. The Dutch too became increasingly concerned with the growing power of the Bugis in Riau, who had gone on to gain a virtual monopoly over the tin trade in the Strait. They were also actively engaged in opium trading with the English, and to top it all, had started producing their own armaments with the help of Chinese, Indian and Arabian craftsmen. Not only were the Bugis not respecting the Dutch monopoly treaties, they were also becoming openly menacing and successful!

A bas-relief at the base of the Raja Haji monument recalls the charisma of the Bugis leader

In 1777, Riau came under the rule of Raja Haji, the 4th Yamtuan Muda, one of the most romantic figures of his time. A renowned warrior and charismatic leader, he soon began to have an impact on regional politics. In 1780, the Dutch signed a treaty with Raja Haji in which they agreed to share the proceeds from foreign vessels captured in Riau waters. However, by 1782 a dispute arose over a cargo of 1,154 chests of opium seized by a French corsair, Mathurin Barbaron, from the British ship *Betsy* anchored off Pulau Bayan. When the Dutch denied Raja Haji his share of the bounty, he tore up the signed agreement. Following this incident, he called upon his brother Raja Lumu, Sultan of Selangor, and resorted to raids in the Strait of Malacca. Therein lies the origins of his rebellion against the Dutch. Nonetheless, Raja Haji can be regarded, to some extent, as one of the forerunners of the fight for independence that rocked the country some 150 years later.

1 His memory is kept alive in Riau with a majestic **monument** located on Tanjung Pinang's waterfront, indeed the main landmark of the regional capital. This monument commemorates a major naval fight and failed attempt by the Dutch to stem the rebellion that took place on 6 January 1784 in the bay of Tanjung Pinang. Empowered by this first victory, Raja Haji grew more daring and retaliated by laying siege to Malacca. This cost him his life. On 19 June, he was hit by a musket ball while fighting the newly-arrived Dutch reinforcements. Legend has it that he fell with a dagger in one hand and a Muslim treatise, *The Guide to Grace*, in the other. The posthumous title *Fisabillilah* ,which means 'martyr', was given to him after this dramatic death. On 10 October, the Dutch launched a decisive attack on Kota Piring and drove the Bugis out of Riau. The Dutch built a fort in Tanjung Pinang, and for the first time stationed a battalion on the island. They also made a new treaty with the Malays which brought Johor-Riau under Dutch suzerainty and banished the Yamtuan Muda. By 1787, however, dissatisfied with the conditions of the treaty imposed on them, the Malays called upon a group of
27 Illanun pirates from the **Sulu Archipelago** to help drive out the Dutch resident. The raid was successful, but realising that the Dutch would come back in force, the Sultan left for Lingga with 2000 people, the Bendahara for Pahang with 1000 people and others for Trengganu. Most Malays left, except for Engku Muda, the Temenggong's son who styled himself as Sultan of Riau, albeit for a rather short-lived reign. As foreseen, the Dutch soon returned and he too left in exile.

A Chinese kongsi clan house on Jalan Temiang in Tanjung Pinang

The ensuing times were rather difficult as the world was swept by the winds of change. America was becoming independent from Britain, while Australia was colonised. France, engulfed by a revolution, had plunged Europe into war. Closer to Bintan, Siam and Burma too were at war. Thus the normal flow of trade had almost dried up. The Bugis and Malay forces had scattered around the archipelago, many of them becoming pirates and the structures of power had completely broken down. In fact, the only people who remained in Bintan throughout this catastrophic period were the Chinese who, for almost ten years, enjoyed a form of near independence! Again, according to Carl Trocki, this is probably the time when the Chinese were able to organise themselves into a cohesive unit, becoming another autonomous force competing with the Malays, the Bugis and the Europeans. To protect themselves against pirate attacks, they became militarily self-sufficient. The Dutch Resident and his small garrison could certainly not exert much influence over a Chinese colony of 10,000 men. Mostly dependent on the outside world for their food, the Chinese took over the production of gambier, trading it for Javanese rice.

Due to the poor quality of Bintan's soil, wet rice cultivation never developed extensively on the island and Bintan therefore always remained dependent on imports for its staplefood supply. Gambier, much in demand in China, could easily be exchanged for Javanese or Siamese rice and assured Bintan of a rice supply under full local control throughout the 18th century. Gambier brought wealth to everyone, to the Bugis and Malay owners through the trade and plantations, and to the Chinese through their hard work. It would be of even greater importance to Singapore and the new Johor Sultanate in the 19th century. By the early 19th century, the cultivation of gambier in Riau had become a purely Chinese affair, an experience the Chinese built upon when the Sultan of Johor called on migrants to develop the plantations in his state. In many ways these years thus seem to have been the germinal period that saw the formation of powerful local clan societies which later played such a decisive role in the development of the Chinese communities in Malaya. These societies would be readily active when the modern port of Singapore, founded by Raffles, began drawing migrants from China by the thousands.

The role of gambier in Bintan's history is remembered in a street sign using both Roman and Jawi (Arab Melayu) characters

The Raja Haji Fisabillilah monument,
a landmark on Tanjung Pinang's seafront boulevard

Penyengat And The Mighty Pen

The Return Of The Bugis And The Final Parting

By 1795, life in Bintan was a little more settled, although prosperity hadn't truly returned. In Europe, the French revolutionary armies had overrun the Netherlands. The Dutch government in exile, in order to avoid French control of their overseas bases, had handed Malacca to the British on condition that it would be returned to them once the war was over. The British had come into the picture at about the same time as the Dutch. While originally less involved than their rivals in local politics, the British presence was about to become instrumental in changing the course of history in more ways than one .

One striking example of the British influence on Malay history can be found in the story of the publication of the *Sejarah Melayu*. This literary work, initiated in Malacca in the 15th century, had an original Arabic title, the *Sulalat al-Salatin*, which translates as 'Genealogy of Kings'. It was re-written and added to many times in the course of history. The first known recension, upon which the brilliant orientalist John Leyden based his translation, was transcribed on paper in Johor in 1612. Leyden's translation was published in 1821 with a preface by Stamford Raffles and a new title, the *Sejarah Melayu* or 'Malay Annals', which then began to be used by the Malays as well. Throughout the 19th century, British administrators and members of the academic fraternity collected most of the data upon which subsequent studies of the Malay world were based. Some academics have thus begun expressing the idea that the overall image of the Malay world as we know it today may be largely influenced by a colonialist view somewhat biased by exoticism.

left
After prayer at the Royal Mosque, Penyengat

British sway over the region was also to have a very decisive impact in bringing about the re-emergence of Singapore as a trading port. The British already had a free port in **Penang** since 1786, and now with Malacca under their control, they no longer needed Bintan's port. They summoned Sultan Mahmud III who lived in Lingga and handed Bintan back to him. Sultan Mahmud III first transferred the administration of the territory to Engku Muda who had returned to Bintan with other Malay aristocrats, but this attempt to revive the Riau entrepot never really took off. The British presence also annulled the Dutch ban on the Bugis Yamtuan Muda and thus Raja Ali, 5th Yamtuan Muda, sailed to Lingga to press for his restoration. It is this crisis that was resolved with the wedding of Raja Hamidah, a daughter of Raja Haji, to Mahmud III. A few years later, Raja Jaafar, the 6th Yamtuan Muda, moved the seat of his government to Penyengat and although his political importance had by then dwindled to almost nothing, the island developed as a centre of the Malay world for the whole of the next century. This miniature island would also assume an important role in the course of events that led to the eventual severing of the Riau Archipelago from the Johor kingdom on the peninsula.

Penyengat from Tanjung Pinang

The Vienna Treaty in 1818 marked the end of the Napoleonic wars and the Dutch return to Malacca, in the wake of which Raja Jaafar allowed the Dutch to re-occupy Riau with a garrison. Major William Farquhar, the British Resident of Malacca during the Napoleonic period, favoured Karimun as an alternative for a British base in the Malacca Strait. Sir Stamford Raffles intuitively opted for the romantic tradition associated with Singapore, the ancient Temasek. Hydrographic surveys concluded that Singapore would be a better choice. In December 1818, Farquhar made a trip to Penyengat to initiate the contacts with the Yamtua Muda. On 29 January 1819, Farquhar and Raffles landed at the mouth of the Singapore River where they met with Temenggong Tun Abdul Rahman.

The island was free of Dutch settlement and used as a gathering place for the Temenggong's pirate squadrons. It was also beginning to attract Chinese agriculturists who had planted gambier near the Temenggong's village. The situation was made a little complicated by the fact that under Dutch surveillance, the Malay authorities in Lingga would not be able to convey any rights to the British over Singapore. Raffles was not a man to let anything stand in his way and thus the ongoing dynastic crisis within the Malay and Bugis factions was yet again to be exploited by a foreign power to its own advantage.

The statue of Sir Stamford Raffles on the banks of the Singapore River

This particular dynastic dispute began with Sultan Mahmud III who had two sons, neither of whom by a royal wife. When he passed away in 1812, some say poisoned, his oldest son, Tengku Husain, was in Pahang getting married to the sister of the Bendahara. As the Sultan had failed to observe the Malay custom of naming his successor during his lifetime, this left the way open for the Bugis faction to take full advantage of another custom which prescribed that the new Sultan had to be chosen before the dead ruler's burial. The second son, Abdu'r-Rahman, a gentle character born of a Bugis mother and mostly concerned with religious life, was promptly crowned Sultan by the Bugis, who favoured him over his half-brother Tengku Husain, who was born of a Malay mother. Although the British had acknowledged this dynastic manipulation at the time of their presence in Malacca, this now posed something of an obstacle in gaining recognition of their claim to Singapore. Raffles solved this problem by simply going back on the earlier British position and installing Husain as Sultan of Singapore!

This manipulation was made possible due to the fact that Raja Hamidah had kept in her possession the *nobat,* the ancient orchestra, and the other regalia objects, called *alat alat kerajaan* (the tools of kingship). Since the solemn beat of the drum of sovereignty had not been heard when Abdu'r-Rahman ascended the throne, the ceremony had not been fully enacted. In January, Farquhar went again to Penyengat to try and obtain the regalia from Raja Hamidah, but she refused to part with it. On 1 February 1819, Tengku Husain left Riau secretly, and sailed to Singapore where he was installed as Sultan on the sixth of the same month, albeit without the regalia! Another attempt was made by Tengku Husain's son a year later to bring over Raja Hamidah and the coveted orchestra, but the Yamtuan Muda's men stopped him at the last minute. Eventually, the regalia was seized by force by the Dutch in 1822 and used to fully install Tengku Abdu'r-Rahman as Sultan of Lingga-Riau.

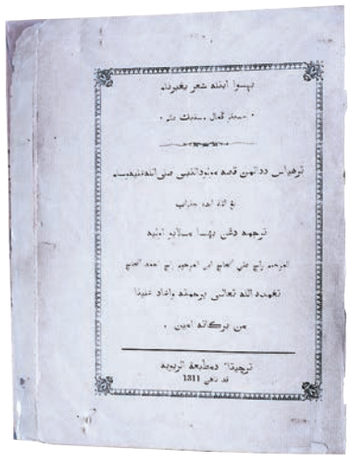
Nonetheless, the position assumed by Tengku Husain as Sultan of Singapore gave the British the rights they needed to assert their claim to Singapore in accordance with European international law. This *de-facto* division of the Sultanate of Riau-Johor, that later resulted in a Johor-Pahang branch and a Riau-Lingga branch, was the consequence of a most pragmatic approach to politics. This division was enforced upon all the parties concerned in 1824 through the Treaty of London in which Britain and Holland agreed on a demarcation line that put the Malay Peninsula and Singapore under British influence and the Riau Archipelago together with the rest of today Indonesia under Dutch rule. This dividing line continued to be followed by the newly-born Malayan and Indonesian nations even after they had shaken off the colonial mantle in the 20th century.

Raja Ali Haji And The Rusydiyah Klab

One of the Gurindam Duabelas poems inscribed on the walls of Raja Hamidah's tomb

By 1825 the involvement of European powers had taken the form of straightforward colonialism. In Indonesia, the Dutch government controlled most aspects of the country's life, and both the Sultan and the Yamtuan Muda were left with hardly more than honorific titles. This loss of political power was balanced by an unprecedented surge in intellectual life in the local community. Finally freed from spending their energy in an endless power struggle both within and without their community, the aristocrats of Riau turned their attention towards more cultured subjects. The feud between the Malays and the Bugis still ran deep beneath the surface, but at least peace reigned and with it came prosperity. With British support, the leading Bugis and Malay families of Penyengat invested their wealth in

building projects in Singapore and with the profits Penyengat developed as a gracious centre of living for the court life of the Yamtuan Mudas. Things followed a similar pattern in Lingga where the sultans managed to build a new wealth by organising the exploitation of tin mines in the neighbouring island of **Singkep**. By the time the Yamtuan Muda came to settle in Penyengat, the European powers had played such a decisive role in the region that the political importance of his government had dwindled to almost nothing. However, what Penyengat's inhabitants couldn't accomplish by the sword, they accomplished by the pen, and despite living on a tiny spot on the map of today's Indonesia, they contributed significantly to the intellectual life of the yet unborn nation. In 1828 Raja Haji Ahmad and his son Raja Ali Haji went on the pilgrimage to Mecca. This signalled a renewal of interest in Islam and a commitment to the teachings of great Muslim scholars of the time who began visiting the island. Since they could no longer physically fight the Dutch, the local noblemen chose to express their pride by better defining their cultural identity. They first collected foreign books and soon started composing their own texts.



Printed edition of Syair Sinar Gemala Mustika Alam by Raja Ali Haji, dated 1890

On a par with his grandfather Raja Haji – the 18th century Bugis hero – Raja Ali Haji is the leading figure of 19th century Riau. The most remarkable aspect of his legacy is that for the first time, local history and culture were recorded from an indigenous point of view, using western intellectual tools such as chronological and methodical organisation. The *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (Precious Gift), written together with his father, stands as the most useful reference book available on the history of Bugis presence in Riau. The work for which he is best known in Riau is the *Gurindam Duabelas*, a treaty of moral guidance in the form of 12 short poems of Islamic inspiration. The recitation of this text, accompanied by music on the occasion of important celebrations, remains an integral part of official ceremonies in Bintan. His most seminal work, however, is the first monolingual Malay grammar written in 1851 to preserve 'correct' Malay language. Following the publication of some of his poems in Batavia's literary papers in the early 1850's, Raja Ali Haji's reputation as a scholar attracted the attention of the Dutch authorities, whose aim since the late 1820's was to define a standard form of Malay to use in their administration. When in 1855 Hermann von de Wall was assigned the task of compiling data for a Malay grammar and dictionary, he knew whom to contact. In 1857, he sailed to Penyengat and with the help of Raja Ali Haji, made a thorough study of the tongue spoken there. Thus Riau, for long considered the cultural heir of Malacca's grandeur, contributed the language that became the medium of instruction in indigenous schools. This move was later much regretted by the Dutch authorities when it proved instrumental in shaping the independence movement that chose Malay as a national language and renamed it 'Indonesian'. The first phase of the standardisation process was concluded at the turn of the 20th century by C.A. van Ophuijsen, who also made the trip to Penyengat, albeit after Raja Ali Haji's death in 1873. Von de Wall's friendship inspired Raja Ali Haji to compose the first encyclopaedia of Malay culture, which unfortunately was never completed.

A copy of al-Imam published in Singapore circa 1907

A lithographic printing press was set up on Penyengat in 1856 and was first used to print a chart with astrological calculations, the *Saat Musytari* (Auspicious Times). In 1857 Raja Ali Haji also used the press to print a first edition of his treatise on Malay grammar, the *Bustanul Katibin* (Garden of Writers). His wish for a typographic printing press was fulfilled posthumously when the newly inaugurated Sultan in Lingga obtained such a press at the end of the 1880's, which was moved to Penyengat by the beginning of the 1890's. The crispness of the typographic editions greatly boosted the image of the modernist state that the local intellectuals were aiming to achieve. By the turn of the century, the press became a decisive tool for the **Rusydiyah Klab**, a cultural association bringing together prominent members of the Riau court circle who intended to take part in the debates about the reformist movement in the Islamic world. For 18 years the printing house named Mathba Atul Riauyah continued to print books and pamphlets. They were initially concerned more with law, poetry, religious affairs and history, however, as time went by, the works became overtly concerned with the situation of the Malays under colonial rule. The expression of such preoccupations reached an apex in July 1906 with the publication of a monthly periodical in Singapore to which Penyengat's rajas actively contributed, both as publishers and writers. Titled *al-Imam* (The Leader), and modelled on the Egyptian paper *al - Manar* (The Lighthouse), for two years this publication conveyed the voice of Malay desires and grievances. With it, the Rusydiyah Klab began to reach a regional audience who could identify with their search for a contemporary indigenous culture. When the Dutch Government finally liquidated the Riau-Lingga kingdom in 1911, the equipment of the printing house was immediately confiscated. The legacy of the Rusydiyah Klab, nevertheless, continued for a long time, notably with the help of the Singaporean Al-Ahmadiah Press, which was run by relatives of Raja Ali Haji up until the 1980's.

In 1905, the position of Yang Dipertuan Muda was even more blatantly suppressed by yet another treaty that further eroded the power of the Sultan. The resistance against the Dutch presence then took the form of a little-known attempt at gaining Japanese support for the Malay and Bugis cause. In the 19th century, Riau's nobility had looked towards the Middle East and in particular the all-powerful Ottoman sultan in Istanbul, as a source of possible help against foreign domination. The idea of a pan-Asian Islamic power united under his guidance to fight the *kafir* or 'infidel forces' was then actively promoted across the Muslim world. But a new model of possible Asian predominance emerged in May 1905, following Japan's sensational victory over a western power in the Russo-Japanese War. From Cairo to Batavia, Japan was suddenly seen as an Asian country that had successfully answered the Western challenge whilst keeping its identity intact. It fostered the growing belief that Japan was strong enough to oust the Dutch from their entrenched position in Riau. When the rumour arose, possibly from India, that Japan was about to embrace Islam, the vision of a brotherhood between *orang timur* (eastern people) carried the wildest hope for a decisive overturning of the situation. With the active support of Riau nobility, by then already exiled in Singapore, Raja Khalid Hitam, a son of Raja Ali Haji, left for Tokyo a first time in October 1912. He was to deliver a petition asking for the Emperor's intervention so that Riau could be placed under Japanese rule and the Sultan restored to his former position. Although the idea of a greater regional Japanese involvement had many supporters in Tokyo, this first journey achieved very little. A second journey in December 1913 was to prove simply disastrous. In March 1914, after a brief stay in a hospital, Raja Khalid Hitam died, succumbing to the bitter cold of Tokyo's winter. According to Riau's Malays, however, he was puportedly poisoned by the Dutch consul in Tokyo.

Entrance gate to Penyengat Royal Mosque

Prior to this untimely death, the final blow to the Malay kingdom had come in 1911 in the form of an enforced contract which simply abolished all rights and powers of the Sultan and his officials, reducing them to the status of mere civil servants of the Dutch colonial administration. Threatened with extradition if they refused to comply with the clauses of this tough document, Sultan Abdul Rahman and his followers chose to abandon Riau and take refuge in Singapore. When told that the Dutch would confiscate all treasures and properties owned by officials who had left the kingdom, they asked their subjects to destroy anything that could be taken over by the Dutch. Although the order was faithfully obeyed, a few buildings were partially spared, among them the mosque and the royal tombs which were left untouched. In 1983 the preservation and restoration of those historical remains was undertaken by the **Yayasan Indera Sakti**, an institute established under the guidance of Raja Hamzah by a few individuals bent on preserving the local cultural heritage. Thanks to their perseverance, today, it is on this island that one can see the most interesting traces of that long and troubled history.

3

Miniature Grandeur And Romantic Ruins

Modern day Penyengat is one of the best preserved secrets of Southeast Asia. This romantic little island, whose paths are paved with history, lies less than two hours away by ferry from modern Singapore, and just a stone's throw away from bustling Tanjung Pinang. One of the beauties of Penyengat is the absence of cars, and given that the island is so tiny (2,500m by 750m), one wonders what use they would be anyway. Here, everyday life continues to follow the age-old rhythm of previous centuries and the only means of motorised transportation is a peculiar form of local rickshaw with a fancy wooden canopy over the passenger seat that seems straight out of a story book. About 2,000 people live on Penyengat, many of whom trace their ancestry back to the Bugis-Malay nobility. Despite their prestigious lineage, daily fishing activities remain the livelihood of a large part of the population and traditional Malay wooden houses built on stilts grace the seashore. Inland, the *kampung* are filled with flowers, music and gentle laughter. Scattered amidst the lush tropical greenery, the remains of the last phase of the Malay kingdom cast a spell of bygone splendour over this

Penyengat's Royal Mosque can be visited between prayer times

peaceful preserve. A walk around Penyengat can take as little as one hour or as long as a full day depending on how interested one is in evoking the past. This journey into a distant era begins with the little boats commuting between Tanjung Pinang and the island, decorated with brightly painted wooden sculptures of traditional Malay motifs. Seen from afar, the distinctive silhouette of the **Royal Mosque** standing amidst a bouquet of coconut trees gives a foretaste of the royal atmosphere found on the island.

4

Although relatively small in terms of size – only 20m by 18m – the mosque is indeed great in terms of its religious significance which has bestowed Penyengat with the role of a local pilgrimage destination for Muslims in the region. Its importance on a national level is such that personalities from the Jakarta government on official visits to Riau will not fail to pray and meditate there. The mosque was established on the 1st of Syawal 1249 Hiriyah (1832 CE) and completed in 1844 at the request of Raja Abdul Rahman, the 7th Yamtuan Muda. The structure is circumscribed by four towers for the call to prayer and crowned by thirteen cupolas some rectangular, some octogonal. It is painted in a combination of green to symbolise Islam and yellow, the colour of Malay royalty. The interior features a Javanese influence with four huge pillars supporting the cupolas. In the entrance, a magnificent cabinet decorated with Arabic calligraphy on the doors holds many rare Islamic books from India, Cairo, Mecca and Medina. The treasure of the mosque is a beautiful 17th century Koran displayed in a glass case and lighted by a glass chandelier. Worth noticing also is the carved *mimbar* or 'pulpit' in the main chamber. One of the building's architectural particularities is that the structure of the domes and the towers were reinforced by incorporating the whites of thousands of bird eggs to the concrete. Obviously a point of focus in the life of the little island, the mosque sees local people gather for prayers through the day. But the scene outside has evolved with the times. Souvenir shops and food stalls now welcome the visitors who are requested to dress modestly with long trousers or long skirt, covered arms and remove their shoes before entering the building.

The plaza outside the Royal Mosque

The shuttle boats connecting Penyengat to Tanjung Pinang

M. Nur Samat, one of the four petugas jaga, or keeper, of the mosque, with the 17th century Koran

5 Another structure that awakens the royal past is the nearby **palace of Raja Ali Marhum Kantor**, which was the first building with modern amenities on Penyengat. The words *marhum kantor* mean 'he who died in an office'. They were attached to his name after his death as he was the first ruler to have a modern office. A few elements were saved from complete destruction and restoration work undertaken in the 1980's. Again, the rather small dimensions of the main building are counterbalanced by a stately appearance that befitted the rank of its occupants. It is interesting to note that the royal toilets located on the ground floor of one of the two large towers framing the centre room were given a rather preponderant location. This is because they were the first Malay example of modern utilities. The southern entrance has a splendid split gate decorated with leafy motives; a climb up the guard tower on the eastern entrance will give an overall view of the complex.

Raja Ali Marhum Kantor's palace

6 The **house of Tengku Bilik** is a delightful surprise awaiting the visitor at the end of a path shaded by coconut trees leading to the southern beach. This is where the island's 19th century inhabitants lived, facing the open sea, before being requested by the Dutch to move to the northern coast in order to better keep an eye on them. Tengku Bilik was the sister of the last Sultan of Riau-Lingga. The word *bilik* means 'room' and she was given this name because she seldom left her bedroom. The elegant mansion, complete with wrought-iron decoration above the main gate, is characteristic of the taste of Malay nobility toward the end of the 19th century. This building, in use until the 1940's, had the good fortune to be renovated thoroughly in the 1990's.

Tengku Bilik's house

7 A similarly pleasant architectural scene, although left in a much more neglected state, is the **house of Raja Ali Haji** known as *Taman Pantai* or 'Beach Garden'. The learned man had indeed a taste for culture and beauty and the romantic aspect of the ruined columns of the veranda overlooking the nearby sea certainly pays respect to his memory. In the early 20th century, the mansion was the residence of Raja Haji Abdullah, grandson of the famous writer. A painter, sculptor and writer fluent in Arabic, Raja Haji Abdullah had studied in Mecca, Istanbul and Paris and served as a judge in the local religious court. He is still remembered to this day for his mastery of magic that manifested in a skull that could predict events and a pen that could write by itself. *Taman Pantai* was also the birthplace of Raja Aisyah Sulaiman, another grandchild of Raja Ali Haji. Although not the only woman writer in Penyengat, she is most well known for a body of works showing an early awareness of women's condition in a patriarchal society. A devout Muslim, she was also adamant on claiming the right for women's independence. Those concerns are expressed through the voice of her heroine in the largely autobiographical novel *Hikayat Syamsul Anwar*, usually acknowledged as her best work. She was married to Raja Khalid Hitam who passed away in Tokyo in 1914 while trying to get support from the Japanese emperor in his fight against Dutch rule.

The veranda of Raja Ali Haji's house

Trousers
Daik 19th century
cotton and gold thread

Bracelet
Sumatra 19th century
filigree and granulation work in gold

Pillow end
Riau 19th century
repousse silver

Box
Riau 19th century
repousse silver and gold

3 tampak bantal
or 'pillow ends'
Riau 19th century
silver and gold
threads on silk

Kerongsan or 'lady brooch'
Riau 19th century
gold-plated silver with Ceylon stones

background
Curtain hook
Riau 19th century
silver

Betel nut cutter
Sumatra 19th century
brass and gold

Belt buckle
Daik 19th century
silver and gold

Ikat woven shirt
Daik 19th century
silk

Tea pot
Siak 19th century
brass and silver

Tobacco box
Riau 19th century
repousse gold

Trousers
Daik 19th century
cotton and gold thread

Belt buckle
Siak 19th century
gold, ruby and diamonds

The bathing pavilion

Historically relevant, although less evocative, are the walls of the **court physician's residence** not far from the mosque. Lastly, two exquisite little buildings of whitewashed stone, left almost intact on the northern coast, pay testimony to the refinement of Penyengat's architecture. The **bathing pavilion** is still used as such by the local population and a late afternoon visit offers the evocative sight of lively groups of young people congregating for their daily ablutions while exchanging the latest gossip. The **ammunition depot** at the foothill of its fortress is the sole survivor of four such buildings in the island.

8

9

10

right
The gun powder magazine

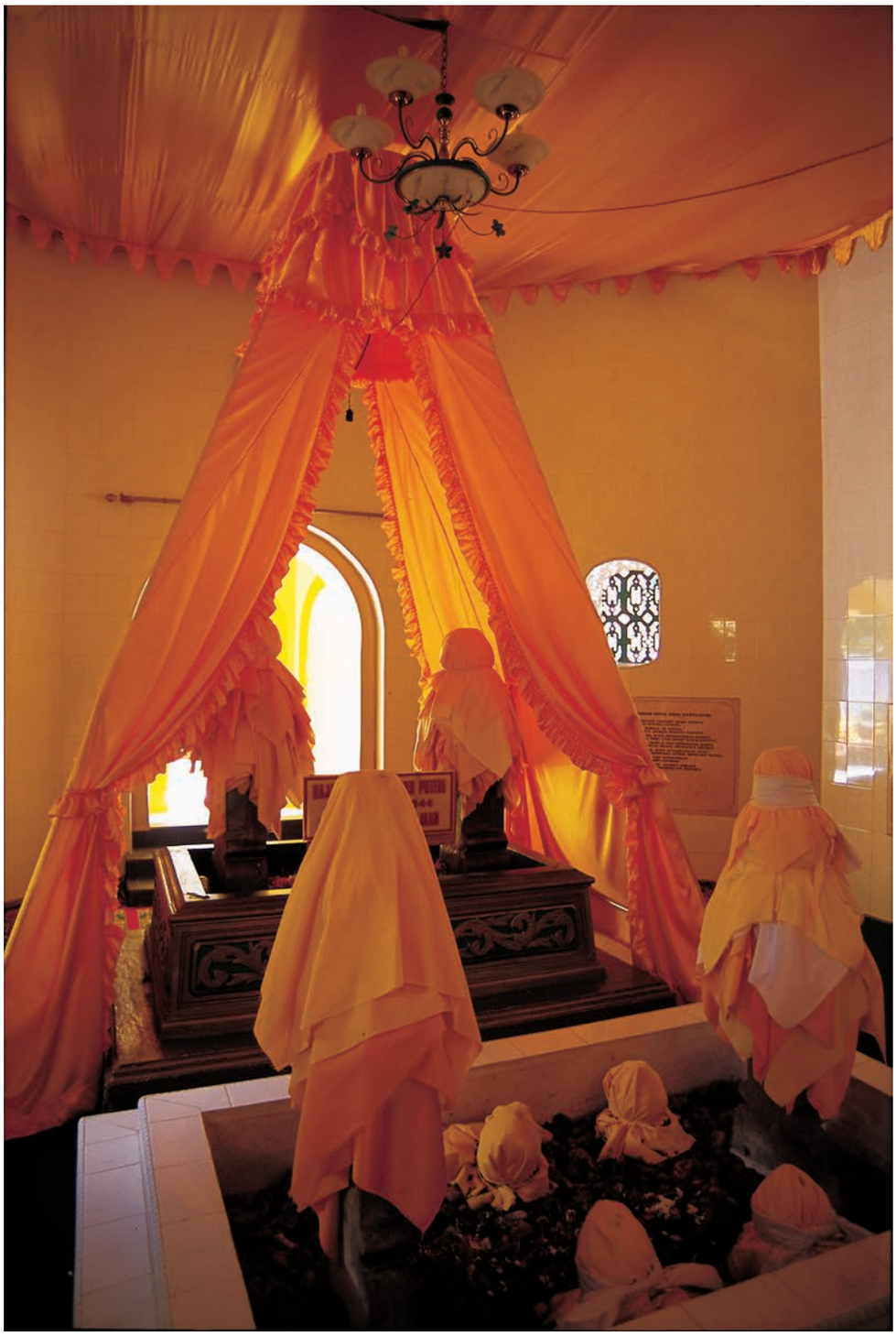
Four gravesites in Penyengat remain to this day the objects of fervent devotion. The largest and most visited is that of Engku Puteri, or Raja Hamidah, the name by which we already know her. The complex also contains the sepulchres of a few notables, among them Raja Ali Haji whose famous *Gurindam Duabelas* verses are inscribed on the walls of **Engku Puteri's grave**. The elaborate building decorated with curtains of yellow satin exudes a powerful mystical atmosphere. The pieces of yellow cloth tied by pilgrims over the headstone of Raja Hamidah's tomb are the sign of a belief that it is considered *keramat* (miracle-working). Raja Hamidah, who died in Penyengat in July 1844, was indeed a rather powerful woman in her lifetime. In some ways, she could even be regarded as a successor of the legendary Bintan Queen, Wan Seri Beni, which perhaps explains why people still come to her to ask for help or make a wish. She was particularly influential in the area of customs and traditions and played an important role in the dynastic crisis that was put to good use by Raffles when founding Singapore. Raja Hamidah had only one child from her husband Sultan Mahmud III, a baby girl who passed away shortly after her birth. It is interesting to note that when she came to live on Penyengat after her husband's death, she chose a Chinese girl by the name of Tan Teck Sing as her adopted daughter and later, the construction of her grave was financed by wealthy Chinese men. There was in fact a *kampung cina* (Chinese village) on Penyengat until the 1910's, the sign of a friendly cohabitation between the Malay-Bugis and Chinese communities.

11

Raja Haji's grave

The **cemetery** at the top of the eastern hill commands an impressive view over the whole region, an obvious choice for the final resting place of the local Bugis hero Raja Haji Fisabillilah. After his death his remains were at first buried in Malacca for many years. The Dutch allowed them back in Riau on the condition that his grave would not become a pilgrimage site. He was then buried alongside the grave of a revered Muslim scholar, Habib Syah, so both could then be visited without provoking suspicion. Worth noticing within the same complex is a typical 18th century Bugis grave in which the stones take the shape of large eggs.

12



The mystical atmosphere of Raja Hamidah's grave

Public transport in Penyengat

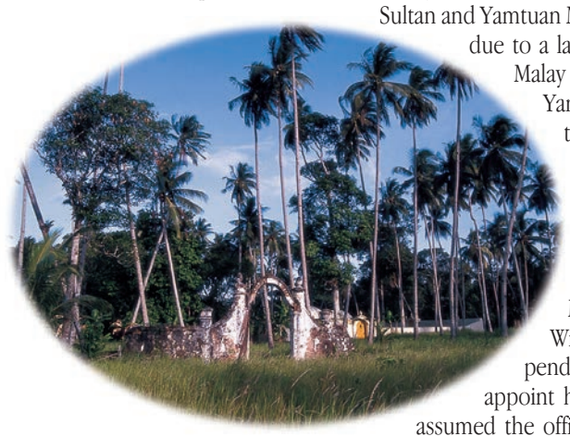
The courtyard in Raja Jaafar's graveyard complex

13

The **graveyard complex** next to Tengku Bilik's house is most interesting from an architectural point of view. Before entering the complex, one passes by a pond that was used by devotees to cleanse before prayers. The elegance of the building focuses around an inner courtyard formed by pillars decorated with embossed carvings and supporting a string of square domes. They cover the ambulatory that circles the courtyard where the grave lies. Raja Jaafar was the 6th Yamtuan Muda and his tenure of government, from 1806 to 1832, was one of the most difficult times for Riau marked as it was by the contest for regional supremacy between Dutch and British powers. The mausoleum also contains the sepulchre of Raja Ali Marhum Kantor who ruled from 1844 to 1857.

14

There is nothing left of the nearby **palace of Sultan Abdul Rahman Muazamsyah** save for a gate that marked the entrance to the compound and a courtyard used by the village's primary school. It is said that this palace was very similar in style to the government building built by the Dutch in Tanjung Pinang and now used as part of the Regent's residence. The last Sultan of Riau occupied a very special role in Riau history when he became the only ruler to attach both Sultan and Yamtuan Muda titles to his name. This unusual situation naturally came about due to a last dynasty crisis. Abdul Rahman was the son of Tengku Fatima, a Malay princess of royal blood, and of the Bugis Raja Muhamad Yusuf, 10th Yamtuan Muda. In 1883, he was chosen by the 9th Yamtuan Muda and the Dutch to succeed Sultan Sulaiman. His mother Tengku Fatimah first ruled on his behalf for two years before Abdul Rahman ascended the throne in 1885. The move of course incensed pure Malay royals eligible to rule and it was even put to good use by Temenggong Abu Bakar in **Johor Bahru**. In his opinion, the Temenggong lineage was becoming the most direct descent of the Malay kings given that the new Sultan of Riau was of mixed descent. With British support, Abu Bakar was inaugurated as Sultan of the independant state of Johor on 1 July 1886. In 1899, Abdul Rahman refused to appoint his brother as Yamtuan Muda when their father passed away and assumed the office himself. In 1903, under Dutch pressure, the Sultan moved to Penyengat where for the final eight years, the kingdom was once more known as Riau-Lingga. Following in the footsteps of his grandfather Sultan Mahmud – deposed by the Dutch in 1857 – Abdul Rahman too tried to act independently of Dutch authority. But the prestige of the legendary kingdom was fast disintegrating. In 1905, the Yamtuan Muda title was officially abolished by the Dutch. After a final confrontation concerning the control of the revenue from the tin mines in Singkep, the Sultan refused to sign away his kingdom and left Riau-Lingga in 1911 to die in Singapore in 1930. To pure Malays, the end of the Sultanate was due to the fact that he wasn't legitimate and had not respected the 1722 contract between Bugis and Malays.



The entrance gate to Sultan Abdul Rahman's palace

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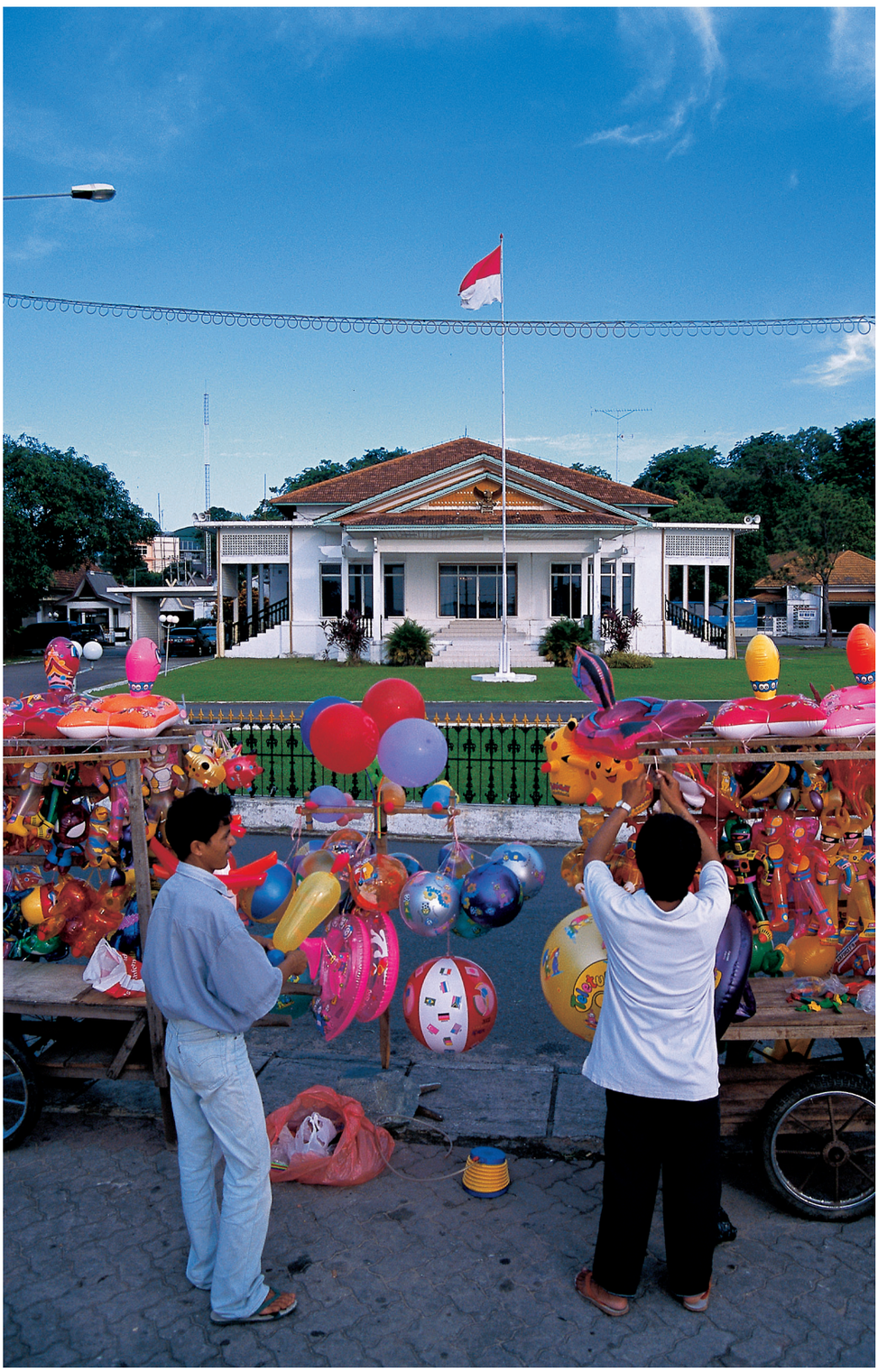
15

The **grave of Raja Abdul Rahman** is located on the western hill, behind the mosque he commissioned. It is surrounded by walls decorated with embedded porcelain, as were the walls of the Bugis fort Kota Piring. This grave is passed by on the way to the fortresses that occupy the top of **Bukit Penggawa**. They were built to protect the access to the Bugis centre of government in Kota Piring when rising tensions between the Kingdom of Riau and the Dutch Company led to full-blown war in 1782-1784. Little is left of the architecture except for the defence trenches that surrounded the forts. Most of the 90 pieces of cannons were shipped to Singapore in 1930 and sold as scrap iron by the Dutch government. In the 1980's, some cannons, left around the government buildings in Tanjung Pinang, were brought back to the fortresses and displayed pointing out at sea. A few others were laid around Raja Haji's monument. They remain today, innocuous silent witnesses of the tumultuous history of a vanished kingdom.

Silent cannon on Bukit Penggawa

16

Penyengat was famous for its fresh water wells



The Gedung Daerah, former Dutch governor's building, was also used as the Governor's office from 1958 to 1960 when the seat of the Indonesian Riau province was located in Tanjung Pinang. Today it is used for official functions as part of the Regent's residence.

Tanjung Pinang And Urban Growth

Colonial Vestiges And Colourful Temples

While Bugis and Malays were lavishly beautifying their abodes on the island of Penyengat, construction works around the Riau River's estuary were giving birth to the contemporary town. The official establishment of the Dutch government in Tanjung Pinang (Cape of Areca Palms) took place on 17 June 1785 under the command of Jacob Pieter van Braam with a garrison of 200 men. The same year, David Ruhde, the first Dutch Resident, took office in a thatch-roofed building on Pulau Bayan (Parrot Island) in the middle of the estuary. Such were the foundations of the settlement upon which the Dutch built when they returned in 1818. Even after 1911, when Bintan became a full-fledged colony, they never embarked on any major construction project that would benefit the port's activity. On the contrary, the establishment of a Customs and Excise office in 1820 brought a sharp decrease in the volume of trade, to the benefit of Singapore. The customs office was eventually closed in 1828, thus bringing to an end the role of Tanjung Pinang as a major trading port. Indeed, the Dutch presence in Riau all the while had a military purpose to ensure the control of maritime routes under constant threat of piratical attacks. In fact, many of the confrontations between Dutch and Malay-Bugis governments resulted from this unlawful activity, the existence of which remains a problem to this day in Riau. The agreements between the respective authorities stipulated that the Malays were to keep the archipelago's sea robbers in check. The gangs of marauders, however, were often secretly at the service of the very persons who were supposed to control them. In 1836, one of the Dutch attempts to enforce their authority on this matter was a decree that requested every native boat to hold a sailing permit issued by the Dutch office in Tanjung Pinang. Needless to say, this proved utterly unsuccessful.

A colonial house on Tanjung Pinang Hill

The authoritative nature of the Dutch presence resulted in little social exchange with the local population. Their cultural influence found itself mostly restricted to architecture, with the introduction of classical European style along with the use of concrete, and music, when violin and clarinet replaced *rebab* and *serunai*. A faint sense of the colonial era lingers on the hill overlooking the town centre, although the impression of a bygone picturesque way of life may not grab the visitor the way it does elsewhere in the region. Yet, if one takes the time to look around and call upon the past, something along the roads of Tanjung Pinang Hill conjures up memories of the expatriate tropical lifestyle of old. The Dutch presence was centred around a naval base on nearby **Bukit Batu Hitam**, now the regional command centre of the Indonesian Navy. With it came the facilities that sustained the everyday life of such a community – housing estates, schools, post office, churches, hospital and entertainment club. Those buildings were taken over by the Indonesian government and given a new lease of life – as in the case of the entertainment club on top of the hill, now a tourist hotel. Next to it, the former **Navy Hospital** still functions as the main hospital for the entire archipelago. Across the road from the ferry terminal, the stately **Gubernemen Building,** built in 1830, has been renamed *Gedung Daerah* and is used as the Regent's residence. The *Gereja Salib* (Church of the Cross), the oldest church in Tanjung Pinang, is locally known as ***Gereja Ayam*** (Church of the Rooster), due to the weathercock crowning its bell tower. Up the hill, the **Catholic church**, built in 1932, presents an interesting example of Art Deco architecture.

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A grave in Jalan Kamboja cemetery

The most evocative place to visit is the dilapidated **colonial graveyard** on Jalan Kamboja which was used until the mid-20th century. There, jutting out of the long grass, a few remaining neo-classical tombstones stand as reminders of the adventurous life of foreign seafarers and residents who passed away in the archipelago. Dutch names are in the majority, but British, French and Germans are also buried here. Bintan, due to the lack of facilities and the very humid climate, was far from being a prestigious posting. The dates inscribed on the graves generally show death occurring at a relatively early age. If Dutch civil servants had to fulfil their duty, one can only wonder at the reasons behind the presence of other European nationals who came of their own accord and eventually settled here. Their earlier presence is still apparent in Tanjung Pinang today in the names of a few local residents of third or fourth generation European descent.

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This is not the only Christian cemetery in Bintan. With 30,000 people, the Christian community today represents 7.5% of the local population. The early churches were built of wood; the first concrete church, the Gereja Ayam, was built in 1883. The Protestant faith was first to reach Bintan with the Dutch, followed by Catholicism, which would seem to have arrived with a migration of Chinese from Penang. In the 1960's, migrants from Flores – including a large number of Catholics — arrived with a view to working in Malaysia. Unable to do so, they then settled in rural areas of the islands (particularly Berakit) where they built their churches. Similarly, the mostly Protestant Bataks who came in the 1970's also built their own churches in Tanjung Pinang, because their services are conducted in Batak language. *Orang Laut* form a large part of the local converts. This departure from their original culture was initiated in 1965 when, following the alleged communist coup d'etat, people in Indonesia were more or less forced to profess one of the five recognised faiths – Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestantism and Catholicism. As the *Orang Laut* enjoyed eating pork and opposed circumcision, they mostly gravitated towards Christianity. Priests and pastors now refer to their respective Indonesian bishops, although they were originally attached to the Singapore diocese and worked as missionaries across the whole archipelago. Father Rolf Reichenbach, who first reached Bintan in 1960, formerly administrated a parish of some 260,000 square kilometres (an area almost as large as Germany!). Together with the other resident priest in Tanjung Pinang, it took two years to complete the full round of visits to every church in the parish.

Gereja Ayam or Church of the Rooster

Pulau Bayan from Tanjung Pinang Hill

If one draws a parallel with the ethnic groups of nearby Singapore, one will notice the absence of the Indian community in Bintan. Although some Indian migrants were present at an early stage in Tanjung Pinang's history, most moved to Singapore in the 1960's when the emerging independent nations defined their new borders. Today, besides a few Indian hawkers selling *roti pratas* (a form of Indian bread/pancake eaten with spicy curry) in downtown coffee shops, and some others selling cloth in the market area, their presence is vaguely remembered around the **Al-Hikmah Mosque**, the Great Mosque of Tanjung Pinang, the focal point of religious life for 80% of the island's population. It was built in 1968 at the foot of Tanjung Pinang Hill, on the site of an old wooden mosque on stilts that was called *Masjid Keling*, 'Keling' being the name given to the Indian community then residing in the surrounding *kampung*.

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For the most part, Tanjung Pinang's urban growth has been due to the expanding Chinese population, which continued to increase throughout the 19th century. By 1910, almost 60% of the population was Chinese, divided between two large groups of Teochew and Hokkien and a few smaller groups – Hakka, Cantonese and Hailam. The Teochews came in large numbers primarily to work on the gambier plantations. Towards the end of the 19th century they were replaced by an influx of Hokkiens from nearby Singapore, who progressively grasped the economic leadership with their trading activity. Still, the image of a solely urban and wealthy Chinese merchant community should be reconsidered in today's Bintan. Although this can be seen as true in the streets of the bustling regional capital, a visit to the depths of the countryside will reveal an important Chinese rural community whose living conditions are on a par with those of the poorest Malays.

The entrance to the Vihara Bahtra Sasana temple

Chinese social life was organised around the leading figure of the *kapitan* (captain). The title, although prestigious, also bore the mark of colonial power since it came with the recognition by Dutch authorities of one's position as a group leader. Together with his lieutenants and headmen, whom the *kapitan* appointed, a loose and autonomous system was formed that fulfilled the day to day needs for leadership. This structure was also paralleled by the usual congregation in clan associations or *kongsi*, according to dialect group, surname group or village of origin, which provided minimal welfare to the less affluent members. Teochews with the surname Tan formed by far the largest group. Social status was granted through financial participation in communal projects. The initial focus was on the building of temples but later widened to include secular structures. The opening of the Tuan Pun School in Tanjung Pinang in 1910 marked a turning point in the development of the community by providing the local Chinese with education in their own language. The school was closed in 1965 in the wake of the social uprising that then shook the whole nation, but the temples are still here, home to the timeless spirit of the Middle Kingdom.

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One of these temples, the **Vihara Bahtra Sasana**, is located right in the heart of town, opposite the clock tower that stands at the end of Jalan Merdeka, the main thoroughfare. With 12% of the population, the Buddhist community in Bintan is the second largest religious group. Many Chinese temples in Tanjung Pinang present a front room dedicated to Taoist deities and a back hall dedicated to Buddhist deities. The Taoist temples, which originally bore a Chinese name, came under the influence of Mahayana Buddhist monks from Singapore in the 1980's. These monks brought in new statues and gave new Buddhist names to the temples, while also preserving the ancestral form of worship. Such is the case in the Vihara Bahtra Sasana, where the front hall is dedicated to the Taoist sea goddess Ma Su, while the back hall is dedicated to the popular Goddess of Mercy, Kuan Yin. The temple, now inhabited by five residing monks, was built in the early 1820s, at a time when the local Chinese community had already become wealthier. The elaborate wooden architecture of the temple's front hall is possibly the best example of Chinese architecture in Tanjung Pinang.

The statue of Kuan Yin in the Vihara Bahtra Sasana

One of the alleyways connecting the Senggarang houses built on stilts over the water

The most ancient temples are found in Senggarang, also known as *Kampung Cina* (Chinese Village). As in the case of Penyengat, life there follows a much more relaxed pace. Most of the village takes the form of a maze of walkways connecting the stilt houses built over the water, an environment of suspended streets offering all the facilities necessary to daily life. Coffee shops, tailors, markets, even a billiard and computer games hall – the walk along Senggarang's boardwalks reveals many surprises as one follows the gentle rhythm of the waves below the wooden planks. A strong sense of community pervades the place. The houses are built one next to another with windows and doors left open to facilitate the circulation of the cooling sea breeze. This also allows visitors to catch glimpses of family life and their ancestors' altars, often the focal point of the living room.

A family home in Senggarang

One can cross the river by catching a motor boat on **Pelantar II**, a pier at the end of Jalan Pasar, near another Chinese temple, the **Cetiya Bodhi Sasana**. Despite its recent and uninspiring architecture, this temple is worth a visit for the atmospheric display of statues surrounded by the busy scenery of the river and a beautiful statue of Xuan Tian Shang-di, ruler of the North Pole star, to whom the temple is dedicated. The temple hosts the main Taoist religious festival in Tanjung Pinang. It is held on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, as part of *Duan Wu Jie*, the 'Dumpling Festival', a mid-year celebration for Chinese families all over the world. The ritual in the form of offerings to the sea's deities is completed by a local variation tinted by a Malay custom. Yellow rice is first thrown into the sea along with five kinds of nuts, only then followed by the traditional Chinese dumplings. The festivities are concluded by a dragon boat race.

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Senggarang's first historical sight is one of Bintan's most unusual buildings: the ruins of a two-storey house whose crumbling walls are suspended in mid-air, held by the roots of a banyan tree. The altar in the house now known as the **Banyan Tree Temple** is the object of fervent devotion by locals and visitors alike, but the nature of the temple is at first rather mysterious. Unlike most Chinese temples, one cannot see any specific deity in it, save for two funeral tablets displayed on the main altar. The story behind this rather singular setting is an interesting example of folk belief in the making. According to local oral history, in the 19th century the house was the stronghold of a group of gangsters whose 13 members were sworn to each other as gang brothers. The building was abandoned by the turn of the century but people retained the memory of its first function and didn't venture too close to it. However, by the mid-20th century, the embrace of the tree and the architecture that evolved over the years had resulted in rather awe-inspiring scenery. Time too had partly erased the memory of the earlier nature of the place. People felt compelled to take care of the few remains left in the house, among which were two funeral tablets.

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The embrace of the banyan tree

far right
The funeral tablets in the Banyan Tree Temple

The statue of Xuan Tian Shang-di in the Cetya Bodhi Sasana Temple

The entrance to the Ma Su Temple in the Vihara Dharma Sasana

They began to pay respect to the spirit of the place that had taken the form of such a powerful tree. Some of the wishes expressed by the earliest worshippers must have been answered generously, for the place grew into a popular destination for Chinese in the region. In 1988 a wealthy Chinese man from Medan had a new structure erected beneath the ruins. And thus a temple was born. This temple now holds a yearly festival on 15 April and a special religious ceremony on 31 August when the altar is brought out of the building.

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Facing the entrance of the estuary, the three temples forming the **Vihara Dharma Sasana** complex are regarded as the most important of the island by the Chinese population. The oldest tablet found in the temple T'ien-hou Sheng Miao at the centre of the complex is dated 1811, but considering the earlier settlement of the community, the founding of this temple probably goes back further in time. Dedicated to Ma Su, the Goddess of the South Sea, this is the largest of the three and the most interesting architecturally. The large open halls supported by lacquered columns are laid around a courtyard decorated with a tank containing live turtles and a stucco tiger leaping off the wall. The temple to the right is dedicated to Yu Huang Shang-di, the Jade Emperor and supreme deity of Taoism.

The statue of Ma Su in the Vihara Dharma Sasana temple complex

Both deities were popular with the migrants who never failed to come and thank them for a safe journey upon their arrival in Bintan, or to invoke their protection when preparing to journey back home. The smaller temple to the left is dedicated to Toa Pek Kong, the Earth God of Chinese pioneers who also represents good luck and to whom it is most appropriate to make offerings before building a house. The surrounding gardens were given a colourful twist in the late 20th century with a number of large and brightly painted concrete sculptures, similar in style to those found in the Tiger Balm Gardens in Singapore.

The garden of the Vihara Dharma Sasana

The temple dedicated to Yu Huang Shang-di in the Vihara Dharma Sasana

The relationship between the Chinese communities on the islands of Singapore and Bintan naturally go way beyond the similarity found in those colourful garden sculptures. As in the case of the Malay community, many Chinese families share relatives on both islands and the social relationship is often fostered by business contacts as well. The exchange of goods and resources is done through a network favouring family and clan ties. Students from Bintan go to the neighbouring island state for their higher grade education with the help of their Singaporeans relatives. Singaporean professing the Buddhist or Taoist faith will not fail to visit Senggarang's temples which are known to be among the most ancient in the region. Despite the two nations' respective independence, the ties remain strong and many.

There is yet one more Chinese temple in Tanjung Pinang that deserves a visit, although it entails the renting of a boat for a couple of hours. After crossing the busy estuary where boats of all sizes evoke Bintan's prestigious past, one finally reaches the serenity of the remote Sungai Ular. Winding its way upstream, the boat travels along the river surrounded by thick mysterious mangrove. Possibly, an encounter with a fisherman on his *sampan* will bring a bright smile to this journey into wilderness. Finally, one reaches a jetty and the roof of a temple can be seen jutting out of the vegetation on the hill above. The **Ang Nio Temple** is rather small and its remote location lends it a deep sense of tranquillity. It is dedicated to Kuan Yin and thought to be over 200 years old, possibly the oldest temple in Bintan. The most interesting feature to be seen here is a collection of fine murals retracing the torments of wrongdoers in hell.

Frescoes of the Ang Nio Temple

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Country Towns And Modern Activities

The first half of the 20th century brought major changes to Bintan with the apparition of new urban settlements. Up until the 1920s, the present site of **Tanjung Uban** on Bintan's north-west coast was still mainly swampland. In the early 1930's, this location, conveniently closer to Singapore than Tanjung Pinang, was selected as the site for a petroleum storage terminal first operated by the Dutch oil company, and then by Stanvac Oil Company. Tanjung Uban quickly sprang up around the oil terminal and by the 1940s, a few entrepreneurial Chinese storeowners were operating a successful mini-entrepot exporting rubber and importing rice. The town experienced another boom during the Second World War when it became a place of refuge for many people who had fled their homes in Singapore in anticipation of the Japanese occupation.

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Today, the town retains a special timeless quality and a specific charm all of its own. Although the town centre boasts only three streets, laid out in a U-shape by the seaside, it obviously functions as a commodity centre for the eastern part of the island. A few factors lend Tanjung Uban a sense of prosperity, while leaving its tranquil way of life relatively untouched. The oil terminal has been operated by the national oil company Pertamina since 1970. The Indonesian administration is well represented with important immigration and customs offices servicing the ferry terminals and harbours located on the northern coast of Bintan. There are also an Indonesian naval base, a coast guard base and a marine academy whose cheerful crowd of handsome young officers throng the streets in their spotless white uniforms every morning and afternoon. The **Bintan Inti Industrial Estate**, which holds International Port of Call status, is located in Lobam, a few kilometres away. The running of the industrial complex is based on a cooperation agreement between Singapore's Sembawang Corporation, the Salim group of companies and the Riau administration. The factory activities focus on electronics assembly, plastic moulding and garment manufacturing. Lastly, the beach resorts in **Lagoi** also benefit the local economy. The many *kampung* on the outskirts of town form the serene backdrop to a relaxed way of life. At sunset, the waterfront walkway basks in a golden glow and Tanjung Uban assumes a surprisingly romantic visage. Later in the evening, the night market effortlessly combines a wonderful atmospheric setting with native gastronomy. Stalls and restaurants spill their tables and chairs across a terrace built over the water to serve delicious fresh seafood.

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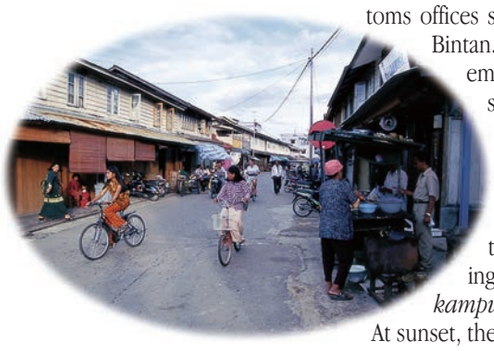

The main street of Tanjung Uban

The town of **Kijang** on Bintan's eastern coast presents a contrasting image. The name of the town is associated with the island's second highest summit, **Gunung Kijang**, which boasts a towering altitude of 211 metres! The topography of the district is defined by a compact group of islands separated from the shoreline by a narrow arm of water. Cut from the open sea, the town spreads over an uneven terrain of little hills and valleys. This enclosed topography is counterbalanced by activities that open Bintan to the world and turn Kijang into one of the major ports of the archipelago.

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A toko mas or goldsmith shop in Tanjung Uban

Quiet at sunset, Tanjung Uban's boardwalk gets busy at night with a variety of food and drink stalls

Monument to bauxite mining in Kijang

For a long time, Bintan was also unique to the Indonesian nation in that its ground contains bauxite ore of a sufficiently high content to lend itself to exploitation. In 1936 the Nederlands Indische Bauxiet Exploitatie Maatschappij, or NIBEM, came into operation, exploiting open pit mines and sending the production to the Netherlands. Later operated by the Indonesian national mining company, Aneka Tambang, Bintan's annual bauxite production peaked at the turn of the 21st century with an annual volume of over one million tons, most of which was exported to Japan, Korea and China. Resources however are expected to be depleted by 2004 by which time Tayan Bauxite Mine in West Kalimantan will take over as the only such mine in Indonesia.

The port facilities developed for shipping the ore were also put to good use in the 1970s when fast-developing Singapore started to require large quantities of sand and gravel. This demand also led to the opening of Kijang's important granite quarry. Just as the legend of Sang Nila Utama sees Bintan occupying a seminal role in the foundation of ancient Singapura, one could say that Singapore's modern rising skyline also rests upon Bintan and other Riau islands as many of its sky-scrapers are formed from the archipelago's own earth.

Sand quarry in Bintan's hinterland

Many other quarries of either granite or sand are exploited throughout Bintan, often with disastrous results on the local environment. Large quantities of these materials have been exported to feed the expansion of land reclamation in Singapore which has brought forth Changi Airport, East Coast Park, Tuas and Jurong Island. Many quarries use Kijang's facilities for export, making it Bintan's leading port in terms of export volume and second in terms of value. Tanjung Uban with its oil and gas terminal is second in volume and first for value, while Tanjung Pinang only comes third in both categories. The larger passenger ships commuting between Jakarta and Bintan also use Kijang's deep-water channel, thus making Kijang the port of entry for sea travellers from other Indonesian provinces.

Bintan Bukit Batu And The Consequences Of World War II

World War II reached Bintan on 21 February 1942. The Japanese, seen as liberators from European colonial power, were at first generally welcomed in most parts of Indonesia. A direct consequence of Raja Khalid Hitam's visit to Tokyo to seek support against the Dutch was to make this state of affairs even more blatant in Bintan. According to Penyengat's oral history, a Japanese officer arrived on the island with a photograph of Raja Khalid Hitam and claimed he had personally known him. Penyengat's nobles thus thought that their hope for the long-awaited support from the Japanese was finally coming true. With the help of the nobility's influence, the Japanese enrolled over 600 voluntary youths from the archipelago to form a local army corps known as *Gyu Tai* or 'Army Corps of the Islands' who were given full military training and Japanese uniform. Their mission was to closely assist the Japanese army in maintaining law and order within *Bintan To,* the Japanese name for the Riau islands military district, which was under the control of *Syonan To* (Singapore).

Passenger ship from Jakarta in Kijang's deep water harbour

If things remained relatively peaceful in Penyengat and Tanjung Pinang, the situation proved more difficult in Bintan's hinterland where hundreds of young men found themselves enrolled as *romusya*, the Japanese name given to 'forced labourers'. A lasting contribution of this group was the opening of the road linking Tanjung Pinang to Tanjung Uban. The proper surfacing of this dirt track, along with the road to Kijang opened by the Dutch in the 1920's, progressively took place in the 1950's after independence. Only by the 1970's, would Bintan's inland transportation system finally supersede the sea routes which had seen boats of all sizes plying the water around the island until then.

The Bintan Bukit Batu festival draws people from all around the region to consult Wan Empok's spirit through the intermediary of Pak Atan, seen here seated on her grave

The Japanese occupation was also to have an incidental consequence in the birth of a modern-day Malay festival. The young men from Bintan Bukit Batu enrolled for forced labour must have proved to be rather good workers as a group of them was sent to Thailand to work on the construction of a railway line. Their anxious parents turned to Wan Seri Beni and her companions for help, assured that their compassion for their children would reach beyond their legendary realm to the real world. The local population prayed for the safe return of their young men on the *keramat* graves, and promised to hold an annual ceremony of offerings should all their youths return alive. Their wish was fulfilled and every year since then, on the 27th of Rajab of the Islamic calendar (the anniversary of the Ascension of the Prophet), a rather colourful affair brings a surge of life and activity to their usually tranquil village. People from all over the archipelago gather here in their best attire for this festival, which has acquired a solid reputation as being the right time to make requests and for working miracles in difficult situations. Offerings of hard-boiled eggs tinted with red dye are decorated with bright paper flowers and shimmering ribbons are laid over the ground of the grave complex, forming a vivid mosaic. Participants' requests are communicated to the residing spirits with the help of the local wise men, according to whom Wan Empok, one of the three sisters, is the easiest to contact. Islamic prayers are whispered over bottles of water that serve to bring something of the power of this ceremony back home. The occasion also fulfils a social function as distant relatives take this opportunity to catch up on the latest family news.

Eggs tinted with red dye and yellow rice are a Malay tradition found in other ceremonies such as weddings or circumcisions

The gathering is concluded after a couple of hours with a group prayer and the offerings taken back to be shared with friends. At first sight, the resplendent offerings and other aspects of the event present striking similarities to certain Balinese ceremonies. Indeed, one shouldn't forget that for more than 1,000 years, India's Hindu influence remained dominant throughout the Malay world before it became overtly Muslim in the 15th century. This fact is best perceived in the presence of a large body of vocabulary with a sanskrit origin used in daily conversations. While early Malay language had highly precise terms to describe physical actions, it is thought that most terms expressing feelings and abstract ideas were borrowed from sanskrit. The later addition of loan words of Arabic and European origins completed this early body of vocabulary. Aspects of the Hindu influence still survive in many rituals of Malay culture, for example in parts of the marriage ceremony, the burning of frankincense during spiritual gatherings and in various state ceremonies of the Malaysian sultanates. The Malays have also preserved many of their animistic beliefs in spirits of the soil and the jungle. The Bintan Bukit Batu festival presents a vivid illustration of the on-going evolution of folk culture, beliefs and religions. It also reveals just how deep the heritage of Srivijaya runs in the soul of today's Riau Malay society.

Prayer during the Bintan Bukit Batu festival

Modern Politics And Leaking Borders

On 17 August 1945, two days after the surrender of the Japanese emperor, Sukarno proclaimed Indonesia's independence. The news officially reached Tanjung Pinang only one week later, and chaos reigned over the following weeks. The Japanese, having received orders to wait for the arrival of the Allied forces and maintain the status quo, had liberated the Dutch prisoners on the island, who raised the Dutch flag over official buildings. The Chinese, who saw an opportunity to claim their rights, began raising the Kuomintang's flag over their houses, while some Malay youths managed to take down Dutch flags and create an improvised Indonesian flag by tearing away the blue stripe. All over Indonesia serious fighting continued between the newly born Indonesian Republican Army and Dutch forces, hell-bent on reclaiming their colonial possessions. On 27 December 1949, the Netherlands officially transferred sovereignty to the federal Indonesian state A ceremony in Tanjung Pinang saw Colonel Trebels and Major M. Akil Prawiradiredja officiate as representatives of their respective central governments. Riau's administration remained under the local control of a 'Riau Board' until 18 March 1950, when the archipelago was finally fully integrated into the Republic of Indonesia as part of the Central Sumatra province. Tanjung Pinang then experienced a new period of development as the capital of the regency with the creation of numerous government offices.

The Indonesian state symbols on the Gedung Daerah: the Garuda, the Pancasila shield and the 'Unity in Diversity' motto

In 1958, the whole of Riau, comprising both the mainland area on Sumatra and the archipelago, was accorded the status of a province independent of central Sumatra. Tanjung Pinang was then briefly the capital of this entire new province. This prestigious role was later transferred in 1960 to **Pekanbaru** on mainland Sumatra. The latest event in Bintan's administrative history took place at the turn of the 21st century, in the wake of the political upheaval experienced nationwide, when, with an increasing autonomy accorded to the provinces, a local parliament was elected in 1999. However, the archipelago's status as a fully-fledged province separated from mainland Riau still remains to be implemented.

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In the early 1960's, the presence of militias with a strong communist connection on **Trikora beach** put Bintan once more at the core of regional history. These militias were part of the *Konfrontasi* movement, initiated by the then all-powerful president Sukarno. The *Konfrontasi,* or 'confrontation', meant to preserve Indonesian interests against the formation of Malaysia which was about to include **Sabah** and **Sarawak** in British Borneo. The definition of national borders became a highly sensitive subject and led to mounting tension between the emerging independent nations. Singapore, which until the London Treaty had been historically linked to Riau, was also poised to gain independence. Artillery guns were positioned along the beaches of Lagoi, pointing at Singapore – ironically, these have since been replaced by luxury resorts, managed by the neighbouring island-state! Trikora too bears the souvenir of this era since the name itself is the contraction of *Tiga Komando Rakyat* or 'Three People's Commandos'.

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top
The Riau rupiah
bottom
The Indonesian rupiah

An important consequence of this period resulted in a drastic change in the movement of local people about the archipelago. Prior to *Konfrontasi*, population movements in the region had always been very fluid. This situation was perfectly reflected in the fact that Singaporean monetary bank notes were widely used throughout the Riau islands until the early 1960's, so much so that the Riau Rupiah – aligned to the Singaporean currency – was created as a currency meant to remove any trace of this foreign influence in Indonesia. People lived with the concept of an open sea and the freedom to travel at their whim between the countless islands. All this changed with the implementation of strict

control over the existing borders. Passports became compulsory almost overnight. People who happened to be away from home at the time suddenly found themselves separated from the rest of their families. The individual stories of those who suffered the consequences of this sudden change are dramatic and many. It is certainly the memory of the existing situation prior to this turn of events that can best explain the thriving smuggling activity that supports Bintan's buoyant black market economy.

The point is that people in Bintan, to a lesser or greater degree, remain piratical at heart. Mostly not in a dangerous way, but to them, bypassing the law is merely part of life. In the past, valuable goods supposedly controlled by the Dutch, would 'leak' out into the world from Riau. Today, due to the heavy taxes imposed by Jakarta on imported goods, the maze of little islands that form the archipelago is the perfect ground for goods to 'leak' in from nearby Singapore. This has long proved a major headache for customs authorities who can hardly fight what remains a time-honoured way of life. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was said that every second TV and video player in Indonesia had transited through Tanjung Pinang. The Dutch had built an important customs office in Karimun, the island controlling the north-west entrance of the Singapore Strait. This customs office remains to this day Indonesia's second largest, with several hundreds officers in residence who have to control among other things the smuggling of natural commodities such as tin, timber or sand to Singapore.

Kapal kayu on Sungai Riau

In the past, the backbone of this thriving smuggling industry was a sturdy type of cargo boat, known locally as *kapal kayu* (wooden ship). Officially, these boats operated an inter-island trade, taking fish, charcoal and other insular commodities to Singapore and returning with consumer products such as second-hand furniture and electric appliances. The best ships were reputed to come from the shipyards of **Bagansiapiapi** in Sumatra, Riau, or Selat Panjang – another little town on the island of Tebingtinggi. Both towns enjoy direct access to Sumatra's hinterland and a regular supply of meranti wood, a tropical wood of medium grade used in boat construction. An unusual aspect of these boats is that they were propelled at an average speed of 12 knots by second-hand British truck engines adapted with a seawater cooling system. One had to truly be in the know to gain access to the complex network of caches and secret compartments built within the inner structure of the hulls. A few of them can still be seen on Sungai Riau.

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The fluidity of the boundaries of the Riau Archipelago found a rather moving illustration in the late 1970's with the advent of a massive migration of Vietnamese people fleeing their country, a phenomenon better known as the 'Boat People'. The arduous living conditions in their homeland and the promise of riches in the West launched thousands of Vietnamese on a perilous journey across the South China Sea. The Natuna and Anambas groups of islands at the northern tip of the Riau archipelago were often the first lands that their frail crafts, overloaded with people, would meet after crossing the high seas. These islands being under the jurisdiction of Tanjung Pinang's administration, the fugitives became the responsibility of the Indonesian government who had no choice but to accommodate them.

Makeshift camps were set up on Bintan and the neighbouring islands and with the constant flow of new arrivals these rapidly grew into little towns. At its peak, the number of refugees sojourning in the archipelago reached 40,000. The island of **Galang**, south of Batam, housed up to 12,000 people at one time. Paradoxically, although this was naturally upsetting to the local equilibrium, it also significantly benefitted the economy. Humanitarian organisations from around the world, faced with the necessity of organising the migration of thousands of people towards their eventual countries of destination, came to set up offices in Tanjung Pinang. Concomitantly, oil companies operating in the Natuna islands also began using Tanjung Pinang as a regional logistics base. Modern hotels were hastily built to accommodate this sudden influx of foreign visitors. These circumstances lasted until the mid-eighties, by which time a concerted change in policy seriously reduced this migration. Most of the remaining refugees were sent back to Vietnam and the 'Boat People' phenomenon naturally came to an end. The oil companies moved their operations to **Batam**, but Tanjung Pinang retained the hotels that had changed its skyline. They are now hosts to a teaming nightlife that attracts crowds of middle-aged male Singaporeans.

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The Riau Holidays is one of the hotels built in the early 1980's

Professional and amateur windsurfers gather every year in January at Mana Mana Beach Club for the Amslam. This competition is part of the Asian Windsurfing Tour and receives worldwide TV coverage.

Sandy Beaches And Holiday Makers

The Sacred Tree And The Return Of The Lancang Kuning

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In February 2000 the monsoon happened to be exceptionally strong with powerful winds pushing the waves far higher than usual and forceful currents moving large batches of sand considerable distances. One particular day, in the midst of this singular meteorological activity, news came that the *Lancang Kuning* had reappeared on the beach of **Mana Mana**. The alleged presence of Sri Tri Buana's craft in Nirwana Gardens Resort quickly sent waves of excitement around the island. In no time at all, the news had reached Tanjung Pinang, from where people rushed to the beach in droves. Complete families on small motorbikes with three or four children hugging one another for dear life, crowded chartered buses, cars, bicycles; no matter what the means of transportation, one had to get there and catch a glimpse of the legendary vessel.

The object that stirred such widespread excitement and commotion was the hull of a *prahu*, the bow of which had surfaced from the sand in the wake of a powerful tide. It stood about one metre out of the sand. The hull could be seen disappearing into the ground. What made the sudden apparition of this otherwise rather ordinary craft so exciting was its position, close to a tree upon which local legend had bestowed the honour of having been used by Sri Tri Buana to secure his vessel. Former residents of the *kampung* that had previously occupied this part of the beach assured the onlookers that this bow and hull re-appeared every 15 years or so and that, according to their ancestors, they were indeed the magical traces of the Heavenly King. Strangely enough, attempts at pruning the tree were regularly followed by bizarre occurrences, so much so that the resort's expatriate managers had come to accept the fact that it was better left alone.

The beach of Mana Mana, now devoted to fun and games

That year, even Raja Hamzah, the learned man dedicated to preserving Penyengat's past, came to see the supposedly miraculous apparition. He insisted that according to the *Sejarah Melayu*, Sri Tri Buana had arrived in Bintan Bay on the other side of the island and that this *prahu* could hardly be his. However, nothing would divert the popular fervour. People simply wanted to see the memory of the legendary king become a reality and they clung to this belief. Some disrespectful individuals even tried to tear shards off the bow. But the tide was rising fast and the wreck soon disappeared once again beneath the waves. By low tide the next day the *prahu* had completely vanished! People tried to dig deep where the wreck had been only the day before, but to no avail. Clearly, the sea couldn't have moved such huge quantities of sand so as to raise the ground level by over one metre there while leaving other parts of the beach untouched. On the other hand, the wreck had been sunk too deeply into the ground to have been simply washed away by the waves. However hard it was to believe, it was as if the prahu had simply vanished … yet the memory of Sri Tri Buana remained, deeply etched in the souls of his descendants. And even though tourism has brought radical changes to the beaches, the memory of Sri Tri Buana still manifests itself in a very telling way.

The Growth Triangle And Pristine Shores

In the late 1980's, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta agreed to embark on a long-term project agreement termed 'the growth triangle'. The basic idea was to link Singapore, Johor and Riau with a mutually benefiting economic development plan. More clearly, to combine the cheaper work force of some and the financial resources of others. This so-called 'triangle' was in fact nothing more than the resuscitation of the original economical and geographical boundaries of a region that had been robbed of its natural coherence by the intervention of colonialist powers. By combining the first two letters of Singapore, Johore and Riau into Sijori, the abridged name of the project aptly evoked some of the ancient kingdoms that had ruled the region in the distant past.

The neighbouring island of Batam took the bulk of the industrial investment from Singapore in the form of a complex called Batamindo Industrial Park. The partners consisted mainly of the powerful Salim group from Jakarta and several large Singapore government-linked companies. This collaboration became the catalyst to annulling many of the regulatory barriers imposed by Jakarta, which had hitherto severely hindered Riau's chances of prosperity. Major foreign investors in Singapore moved part of their operations to the new complex and people from all over Indonesia came looking for job opportunities unheard of elsewhere in the country. From only 6,000 souls in the late sixties, Batam's population figure had swelled to over half a million by the late 1990s.

Crystal clear waters on Bintan's seashore

Plans for Bintan were of another kind. Following a survey sponsored by the World Bank in the 1980s, Bintan's northern coast was designated a possible alternative to Bali in Indonesia's tourist market. The north coast of the island offered acres of untouched land and kilometres of pristine sandy beaches, while nearby Singapore received thousands of tourists every day looking for an exotic tropical beach – a perfect match for developing a beach resort destination envisioned as potentially one of the world's largest. On 28 August 1990, Indonesia's Minister for Trade and Industry, Bapak Radius Prawiro, and Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister, BG (NS) Lee Hsien Loong, signed an Agreement of Economic Cooperation. Behind them stood none other than the respective heads of state, Indonesia's President Soeharto and Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. This agreement provided the framework for the development of Bintan Resorts in Lagoi and the Bintan Inti Industrial Estate in Lobam. The projects marked a milestone in the relationship between the two countries. The interest expressed at the highest levels of both governments did not abate and ministers or heads of state have always officiated at subsequent ceremonies.

At first called P.T. Bintan Resort Corporation, the name of the joint venture has since been changed to PT Bintan Resort Cakrawala to better reflect the identity of the majority shareholder, an Indonesian consortium comprising P.T. Suakajaya Indowahana, the Salim Group, the Riau Administration and the Indonesian Navy Foundation. The 40% owned by the Singaporean consortium is divided between diverse government-linked companies and financial institutions. The project's management, which aims at developing 23,000 hectares at an estimated cost of S$3.5 billion, was handed to Bintan Resort Management Pte Ltd, now Island Leisure (International) Pte Ltd, in October 1990 with the mission to conceive sustainable resorts giving special attention to environmental planning. The groundbreaking ceremony of Bintan Beach International Resort (Bintan Resorts) took place on 1 March 1991. From then on progress was swift.

Most importantly, Bintan's northern shore needed a transportation system to open it up to the world tourist market. The first direct connection with Singapore took place on 19 July 1994 when *M.V. Indera Bupala*, one of the two high-speed catamarans named after Queen Wan Seri Beni's ministers, arrived at the **Bandar Bentan Telani Ferry Terminal**. The new building, bearing the name of the legendary figure, received its first foreign visitors in October of that year for the opening of the laid-back Mana Mana Beach Club.

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The azure pool of Nirwana Resort Hotel

Mayang Sari Beach Resort is located within Nirwana Gardens

Bintan Lagoon Resort

The beach bungalows of the **Mayang Sari Beach Resort** opened in March 1995 and in November of the same year, Singapore's Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal began operating. Next came the **Banyan Tree Bintan Resort** whose first guests celebrated Christmas in its luxurious villas with private jacuzzis and walked the greens of Bintan's first golf course.

The following two years saw the opening of another three resorts offering the latest in tropical lifestyle facilities. On 18 June 1996, the opening of the **Bintan Lagoon Golf & Beach Resort** was combined with the official grand opening of Bintan Resorts with President Soeharto of Indonesia and Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore officiating. In October 1997, the famous **Club Med** added Bintan to its list of destinations around the world. These new facilities opened together with the nearby **Ria Bintan Golf Club** that put Bintan on the map of the international golfing scene. The mid-market Sol Elite Bintan (now **Nirwana Resort Hotel**) joined Mana Mana and Mayang Sari on the beaches of Nirwana Gardens. The opening in June 2000 of the **Angsana Resort and Spa Bintan**, a resort devoted to spa treatments, reflected the latest trend in integrated resort facilities. On 22 November 2000, Bintan Resorts welcomed the one millionth visitor since its grand opening. Azure pools, manicured golf courses and blooming gardens had come to adorn the original exotic wilderness. Gracious living and relaxed elegance had become the way of life. The romance of Bintan lives on, albeit to the beat of the 21st century World Village.

Club Med Ria Bintan

Golf, Seasports, Food, Spas... And Shopping!

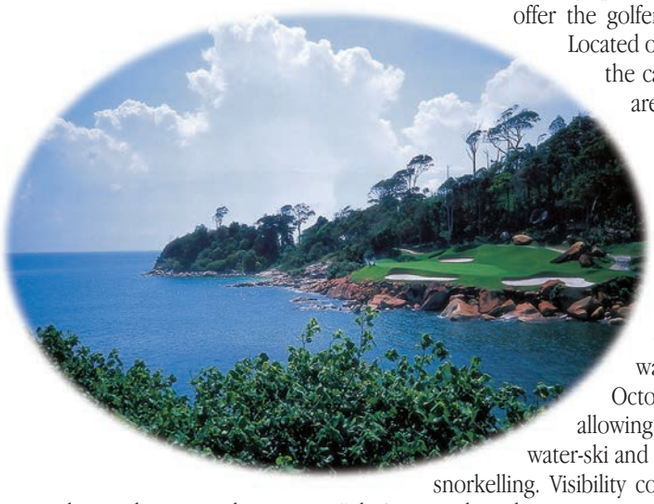
One might wonder at Queen Wan Seri Beni's reaction to the tremendous changes that have taken place on her beloved island at the end of the 20th century. What would surprise her most? The luxurious hotels and the villas overlooking the sea? The holidaymakers playing in the waves along the sun-drenched beaches? Or maybe the electric buggies smoothly moving across the greens of the golf courses? This last option could well be the most likely, for it bears a surreal touch that epitomises the changes shaping the world we now live in. Golf courses are a key element upon which rest the attraction of Bintan Resorts in the tourist market and they have been accorded a good part of the land's use in the original planning. Through them, large sections of the north coast have been entirely remodelled, changing the landscape in a most decisive way. With no less than four golf courses of international calibre located within ten minutes

Gary Player's Ocean Course in Ria Bintan, hole #10

drive of each other, Bintan certainly is in a league of its own when it comes to golfing. Each course was given a distinctive touch through a selective location and the design of a prestigious golfer. Ria Bintan's 18-hole Ocean Course and 9-hole Forest Course were designed by Gary Player, whilst Bintan Lagoon boasts two 18-hole courses designed by Jack Nicklaus (Seaview) and Ian Baker-Finch (Jungle) respectively. Last but not least is the flatter but equally challenging Banyan Tree Course, designed by Greg Norman.

Jack Nicklaus' Seaview Course in Bintan Lagoon hole #12

The most scenic course is probably Ria Bintan, which is beginning to gain world-wide recognition. There, Gary Player designed 27 holes comprising the Ocean Course, four holes of which hug the ruggedly beautiful coastline, and the Forest Course, which offers deep incursions into the mysteries of the tropical forest. Both courses make extensive use of the dramatic environment as an integral part of the challenges awaiting the golfer, inviting him or her to feel at one with nature. Most characteristic of Gary Player's design philosophy are the signature holes 8 and 9, which offer the golfer the ultimate tests of strategy and skills. Located on two outcrops separated by the sea below, the cascading rocks upon which the greens rest are a uniquely distinctive feature of the holes.



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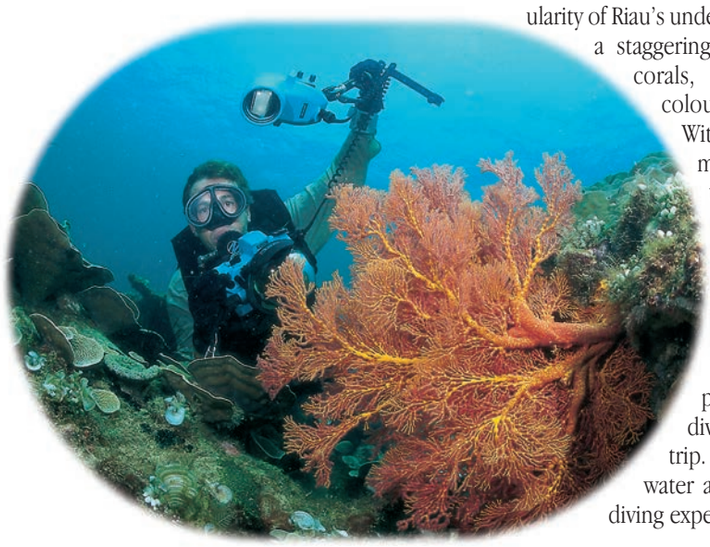
Hole # 9 Ocean Course in Ria Bintan

While some things change, others don't. The practice of seasports in Bintan is still dependent on the natural rhythm of the monsoon seasons just as the sailing ships of past centuries were for their journeys. As in the days of old, two prevailing periods dictate the conditions for the form of water sport one can practice. April to October is a time of calmer water allowing the safest practice of jet-ski, water-ski and sailing, as well as diving and snorkelling. Visibility conditions are at their best during these months, even in July-August when the monsoon winds blowing from south-west aren't felt too strongly on the north coast of Bintan. Coral reefs are easily accessible from the hotels which offer diving equipment on rental along with training courses. Bintan's shallow waters – seldom more than 15 metres deep – can be a good training ground for beginners, but there is plenty to see for experienced divers as well. If the spotting of occasional dolphins, blue-spotted rays and giant cuttlefish cannot be guaranteed, Bintan nevertheless hosts an abundance of small, colourful life forms. A particularity of Riau's underwater world is a staggering variety of fan corals, along with colourful flatworms. With a depth of 35 metres, **Berakit** on the north-eastern tip of the island is the deepest and best dive spot in Bintan, although strong currents make it off-limits to the inexperienced. The island of **Mapor** to the east of Bintan offers a pristine environment and excellent dive spots: a full day is required for this trip. A few wrecks from WW II lying under water are another possibility for a thrilling diving experience around Bintan.

Diving expedition around Berakit



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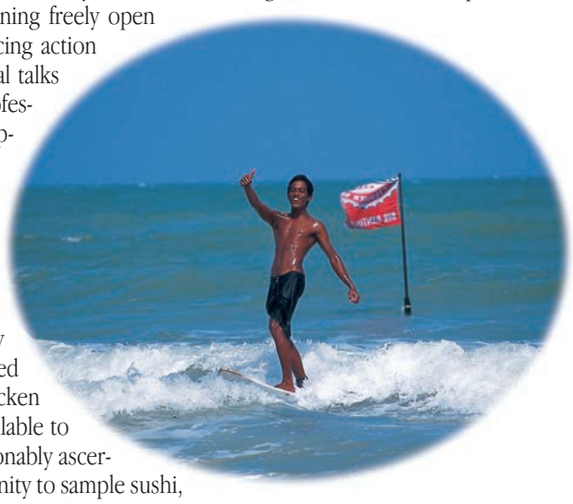
Colourful tropical underwater life

Experienced windsurfers favour the remaining part of the year, especially from December to February, when the north-east monsoon brings waves and swells from the South China Sea, and with it the best conditions for thrilling rides that take them skimming over the water. Although Bintan cannot be called a 'surfer's paradise', this time of the year sees surf big enough for onlookers to occasionally spot the slick silhouettes of surfers riding the ocean meerschaum. The highlight of this cool, windy season is the Amslam, an annual windsurfing event organised by Mana Mana Beach Club. Held for the first time in 1995, the event became part of the Asian Windsurfing Tour in 1998. This international competition begins in Taiwan early December and follows the north-east monsoon winds, first to Kuantan in Malaysia, then on to Bintan in early January, to finish in the Philippines by late January in Borocay and early February in Saipan. Windsurfers come from across the region, as well as Japan, Australia and the USA, and for five days, a colourful crowd brings a sudden surge of life to Bintan's shores. With a field of about 50 racers, Amslam is recorded for television and broadcast to over 250 million households the world over. A most friendly affair, the Amslam gathers amateurs and professionals alike while remaining freely open to visitors who watch the racing action from the beach, attend informal talks given on the beach by visiting professionals on how to use the latest equipment and improve one's technique, or simply mingle with the happy-go-lucky crowd in the evening over a drink or two.



Seasports at Mana Mana Beach Club

Food is another subject that would surprise Queen Wan Seri Beni, in more ways than one. Indonesian cuisine is well represented on the menus of the many restaurants with dishes such as *nasi goreng* (Malay fried rice), *sotong sambal* (chilli squid) *kari ayam* (chicken curry). A large choice of spicy local specialities is available to titillate the palate of visiting guests, but one can reasonably ascertain that Queen Wan Seri Beni never had the opportunity to sample sushi, taco, pizza, although she may have been able to enjoy a *steak au poivre*. Pepper, a spice so invaluable that it could be used as currency, is native to Malabar in southern India. Introduced to Sumatra mainland more than two thousand years ago, its extensive cultivation was developed in the 15th century to answer the ever-growing demand from Europe. This spice was Sumatra's principal export until the 19th century and remains to this day an important crop. In the Riau Archipelago, the southern district of Singkep produces 22 tons of pepper a year. The islands of the Natuna district in the South China Sea are home to clove plantations producing close to 70 tons of the fragrant dried flower buds. Native to a group of small islands in the **Moluccas Archipelago**, eastern Indonesia, cloves were another priceless commodity that attracted traders from around the world since the early days of recorded history. It is interesting to note that this spice, widely used for cooking in India and the Middle East, was of little appeal to the taste buds of the people from its region of origin. Instead, it found a surprising use as a flavouring agent for cigarettes, the famed *kretek*, the sweet aroma of which pervades Indonesian restaurants, bus stations, markets and other public spaces. Thus, with a consumption of 50% of the world's cloves production, Indonesia is now a nett importer of one of the spices it gave to the world.

Fine dining at Baan Aarya Thai restaurant, Nirwana Gardens

The peace and quiet of a private treatment room at Asmara Spa, Nirwana Gardens

Fragrances of the east and aromas of the west go hand in hand on the tables of Bintan Resorts, as if modern gastronomy attempted to recollect the not so distant past when the island stood as a meeting point between those two worlds. A similar association of influences can be found in the spas where both traditional Indonesian beauty secrets and up-to-date beauty salon techniques are combined. Each resort has at least one such spa for guests to be pampered. Massages draw on the local ancient knowledge of the body's energies to achieve a deep state of relaxation. Visitors can also get acquainted with *jamu,* a beauty potion specific to Indonesia, attracting a growing attention from discerning customers. Indonesian *jamu* and massages nicely complement European therapies such as hydro massage baths, seaweed body wraps and moisturising facials.

What would a holiday be without shopping? The souvenirs in the hotel shops come from all over Indonesia and shopping in Bintan Resorts is like doing so in Sumatra, Java, and Bali all at the same time. These shops offer a complete range of souvenirs, from T-shirts to local delicacies, from batiks to paintings and wooden crafts. One should not miss paying a visit to the Wakatobi shops that offer unique designs from the collection 'Made in Bintan'. The original approach of Wakatobi souvenirs combines modern design and indigenous ressources to manufacture ceramics, candles and other homeware articles in a production process that directly benefits the local community. Visitors may like to include a shopping spree in the busy streets of Tanjung Pinang, should they wish to explore other parts of the island, or choose to remain within the resorts area and go to **Pasar Oleh Oleh**. The name translates as 'Souvenir Market', *oleh oleh* being the Malay word used to specifically describe a souvenir given upon returning from a journey. A few local food and beverage outlets contribute to make it a pleasant destination, especially in the evening, by combining shopping and dinner al fresco.

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The C-59 shop at Pasar Oleh Oleh, featuring the famous Indonesian T-shirt brand

Pasar Oleh Oleh isn't just about souvenirs. It also fulfils a cultural mission with a stage where cultural shows are sometimes presented and a Visitor Centre with an interesting display on the life and history of Bintan. A section of this display focuses on the ecosystem of the local mangrove. A first-hand experience of this fascinating ecosystem is provided by the Mangrove Discovery Tour that takes visitors into the depths of this thriving natural environment on the nearby river. On the way to Pasar Oleh Oleh, one can stop at the **Elephant Park** or the **Go-kart Track**, which both offer some form of ride, albeit at very different speeds! The Elephant Park also features several shows through the day that will entertain the young and young at heart. Last but not least, the ATC (Adventure Training Centre) in Bintan Lagoon is a challenging adult playground used by companies for team-building training.

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A friendly welcome at the Elephant Park

Coconut plantation in Trikora

Rural Bintan And Coastal Life

Mangrove And Fragrant Fruits

The original vision of the 'world's largest resort' unfortunately did not materialise, well, at least not yet. With the 1997 Asian Crisis, plans were shelved until more propitious times. Bintan, however, continued to ride the waves and while the economy in the rest of the country almost ground to a standstill, Bintan continued building and developing. There is no doubt that resorts and industries have brought a new-found prosperity to the island, a fact revealed in the rash of concrete houses which are progressively replacing the wooden huts, the increase of motor vehicles on the road and the ongoing sophistication of the shops in Tanjung Pinang. The island's present population, currently around 300,000 inhabitants, has seen drastic changes in its composition, with Javanese, Batak and other ethnic groups now accounting for a large proportion. For example, the number of Balinese employees working in the resorts is such that in 2001 they could build a temple for their ceremonies, a totally new place of worship in modern Bintan which until then had no Hindu temple.

Yet, for the majority of the people, the core of Bintan's economy still revolves around agricultural and fishing activities. Although the economic development of the 19th and 20th centuries has brought its share of ecological disturbances to Bintan as much as anywhere else, the island's original beauty can be encountered in some of its more remote areas. The most isolated *kampung* (villages) have preserved many aspects of a way of life that has existed virtually unchanged since the time of Wan Seri Beni. Indeed, these pockets of timeless beauty could be looked upon as a possible substitute for the missing earliest historical remains.

Metamorphic rocks on Lagoi shore

While the metamorphic rocks found on Gunung Bintan, as well as its shape, attest to a period of volcanic activity, the earth doesn't necessarily reflect the signs of fertility normally associated with volcanic ground. The surface of the island is primarily laterite, a soil formed by decaying rocks weathered by tropical heat and centuries of heavy rain. This process strips the soil of all nutrients, leaving a high content of oxidised iron and alumina that gives a distinct red to yellow rust colour to the earth. Bintan's flourishing environment is due to a typical tropical climate that sustains the growth of exuberant vegetation with an average atmospheric humidity of 85%.

Natural habitats in Bintan are rich and diversified. For most visitors to Lagoi, their first encounter will be with the mangrove seen around the ferry terminal. A world unto itself, the mangrove lives and breathes according to the rhythm of the daily tides. Mangrove line the coastline of Bintan Bay in whose still and shallow waters this peculiar form of ecosystem flourishes. These specially adapted trees are able to make fresh water by filtering the seawater that covers their roots twice daily through special salt glands, while lower, older leaves trap sediments and other elements necessary to their growth. Four different types of trees make up a mangrove forest, each adapting to a different level of salt concentration in the water. The *Avicennia* found on sandy shorelines has the largest salt tolerance. It is also known as Pencil Roots due to its pencil-like breathing

roots that grow above the ground. The *Rhizophora genus* grows in the salt water zone along the coastal tide line and is the most common. Its stilt roots hover above the ground while allowing the free flow of the tide. Specimens of the *Bruguiera*, which can reach up to 30 metres high, grow in a mix of salt and fresh water. Lastly, the *Xylocarpus* or Ribbon Roots is found in predominantly fresh water.

Gunung Bintan overlooking Bintan Bay

Wild, apparently impenetrable and upon first encounter seemingly hostile to human activity, this environment offers a wealth of natural resources. These are put to good use by the local inhabitants who are experts at manoeuvring their *jongkong* – slim dug-out canoes – around the bends of this green labyrinth. Homes, boats, fishing traps and daily meals all come from the mangrove. The waters yield fish and shrimp in profusion. The wood, particularly strong, dense and resistant to aquatic borers, is used in many ways for marine-related activities. It also produces a high quality charcoal, which unfortunately tends to result in over-exploitation of the mangrove for commercial purposes. Many plants find a use in local medicine, the most useful and tastiest being the *Nipah* palm. The fruit is pickled and eaten as sweet meat whilst the sap contains sugar and can be fermented into 'nipah wine'. As for the leaves, they can be woven to make almost everything for constructing a house, from mats to walls and roofs. Honey and wax are also major mangrove products. Bees love the indigenous flowers that pervade the air with a heavenly fragrance, in stark contrast to the muddy aspect of the water. Animals thriving in such a rich environment are naturally plentiful. The most common sights include macaque and silver leaf-monkeys, monitor lizards, snakes and all kinds of bird life. The mangrove of Bintan, and indeed of the whole region, are important at a broader level to the planet's ecosystem as a bunkering zone for birds migrating between Siberia and Australia.

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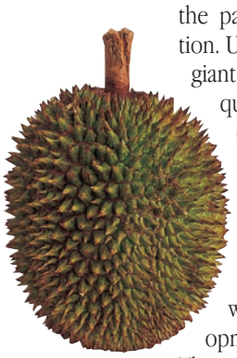
Deep in the mangrove

The slopes of Gunung Bintan are covered with thick primary jungle, yet another environment shared by the past and present local population. Unfortunately few remain of the giant trees valued for their high quality wood, such as the *Shorea* or the much sought-after *Palaquium* which produces the resin 'gutta-percha'. This resin found a very wide range of uses in the 19th century and its insulating properties were instrumental in the development of submarine telegraphy. The inhabitants of the small village of Mat Saleh, south of Gunung Bintan, know their forest well, and above all know where the fruit trees are. Every year, during the fruiting season that lasts from August to November, a large percentage of the male population leaves home and family to move deep into the forest. Here they will reap the best harvest while living in

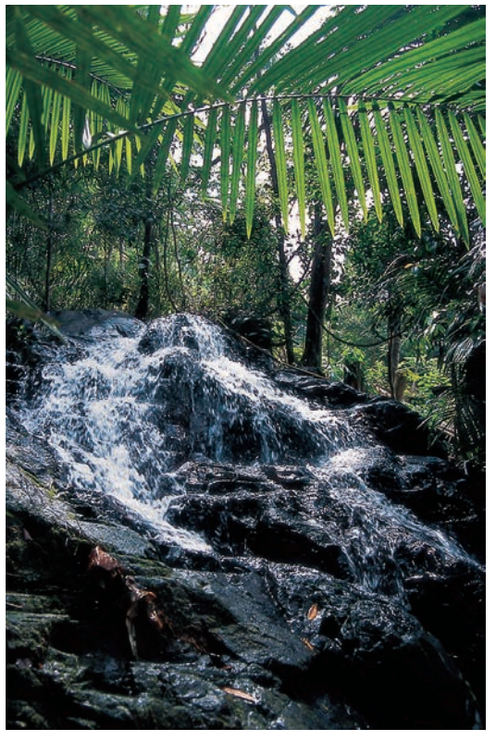


Durians from Gunung Bintan are considered to be the best

little makeshift huts. Of all harvests, the pungent and spiky durian – known as the King of Fruits – is the most valuable. The fragrant jack-fruit is another favourite with the Asian palate. Much more pleasing to foreign taste buds are the hairy-jacketed sweet rambutans, the delicate lemony flesh of the mangosteens and the tasty *duku.* Seasonal mangoes and soursops are harvested in village orchards which also produce bananas, papayas, pineapples and guavas all year round.

Taking the fruit harvest to the market

The various villages at the foot of Gunung Bintan are the starting point of jungle treks that lead the adventurous visitor to the top of the mountain. One should seek guidance from the locals, as the walk can be quite strenuous and hazardous due to slippery ground. The climb follows a rather steep path that winds its way through exuberant vegetation and a staggering array of palms. The arrival on the summit is a bit of an anticlimax as the view is restricted to a narrow opening overlooking Bintan Bay between the trees encircling the top area. Legends surrounding the mountain are plenty and one of them forbids access to the second hump that crowns the mountain as it is reserved for the residing spirit. The local population also keeps the memory of a small lake that existed at the top. The eroded flank of the mountain gave way in the 1970's, resulting in an inundation of the village down below. On the way back, one can cool down in a small waterfall on the mountain's southern side. Watch out for a rainbow irradiating the sprinkling water, a sign that Queen Wan Seri Beni has come to bathe as well. And if you are lucky, you will meet with shy deer, wild boar and porcupine, to name but a few of the forty species of Bintan's forest dwelling mammals. Lastly, special mention should be made of the peat swamplands and the tannin-rich freshwater that give a tea-like hue to the creeks around the island; home to a variety of endemic freshwater fish species. An ecological survey conducted in the early 1990's discovered three species of fish that were new to science.



Waterfall on the slope of Gunung Bintan

Breezy Coconut Palms And Other Plantations

In the village of Berakit on the north-eastern cape of the island and along the beaches of Trikora, another tree essential to the tropical way of life dominates the landscape: the coconut palm. The best view of this part of Bintan is to be had from the top of the Berakit lighthouse which was built by the Dutch in 1928. It takes some courage to climb the lighthouse's 30 metres open stepladder, but once one has made it to the top, a breath-taking view embraces almost the entirety of Bintan's northern and eastern coasts. One can then admire miles of luxuriant coconut palm plantations stretching to the horizon, an ocean of palms undulating in the breeze, shimmering like the nearby expanse of the South China Sea. Seen from ground level, vegetal waves of coconut tree form a lace-like overhead vaulted roof, supported by slim and dynamic silhouettes of silvery trunks, lined up like pillars in a cathedral. There is indeed something almost sacred about the coconut tree.

One of nature's greatest gifts to man, the coconut palm provides food, shelter, medicine, music and more. Indeed every part of the tree is usable. Flesh and milk from the fruit complement the entire spectrum of Asian gastronomy, from spicy hot curries to smooth desserts. The wood and palm leaves are used in construction; the husk makes a convenient fuel and the coir (the fibre that makes up the husk) is made into ropes and mats.

Harvesting coconuts is a demanding job

The nutshells form such obvious ready-made containers that specific Malay words describe how much a coconut scoop will hold. The nutshell also makes resonant backing for musical instruments as well as elegant combs or buttons. The oil extracted from the copra – the dried form of the white flesh – is almost as versatile as the tree itself. One of the earliest forms of cosmetics, it is applied to soften and nourish the skin. The fragrance of coconut oil is characteristic of sunscreen lotions and in today's society, synonymous with summer holidays.

Processing the copra in Kawal

The symbols associated with such a life-giving tree are of course many and it has naturally found its way into the rituals and ceremonies of tropical traditions. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the coconut is the nut's ability to cross entire seas and germinate on distant shores. Coconut palms are naturally very vigorous and can easily proliferate on their own. Although they are more fertile by the seaside, man has taken them inland, where generations of agriculturists have turned the species into a blissful expression of natural abundance. The tree begins to fruit in its fifth year, reaches its best towards its thirtieth and under favourable conditions can remain fruitful for over ninety years. The fruit comes to maturity through a rather slow growth process. At five to six months old, it reaches its full size and only then does the flesh begin to form. A period of two to three months follows during which the water of the green coconut may be drunk while the flesh remains soft. The fruit is at its most ripened stage when nine to ten months old, the husk then becomes dry and dark brown and the hardened flesh is used for copra and cooking. The nuts may fall from the tree of their own accord, but most of the time they are harvested, a rather physically demanding chore on such a high tree. In Sumatra and Malaysia, monkeys are trained to do the job. In Bintan, men who also prune and clean the trees in the process specialise in this task, in return for a share of the harvest.

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The best salak or snake fruit orchards are located near Tanjung Uban

Besides the orchards mentioned earlier, farming also includes the cultivation of green vegetables, maize, sweet potatoes and peanuts, while the tilling of wet rice is restricted to a few areas where conditions allow. The largest vegetable yield by far is that of cassava or tapioca, a major source of low cost carbohydrate in the tropics. Over the last years of the 20th century, a new form of farming activity began to develop significantly in answer to the demand created by the opening of a pineapple juice processing plant near Tanjung Pinang. The hardy herbaceous plant, characterised by its long, stiff, sword-shaped leaves, accommodates itself rather well to the overall poor quality of the soil, so much so that fast developing plantations bring yet another aspect of change to Bintan's landscape. The largest **pineapple plantation**, which is open to visitors, occupies 4,000 hectares, employs 300 people and produces 200 tonnes of pineapple every week. This yield is processed locally as fruit juice, or exported as fresh fruit. Another recent addition to Bintan's agricultural landscape is a sprawling **palm oil plantation** in Kijang's countryside.

Young pineapple plant

Plantations have always represented a sizeable aspect of Bintan's rural activity. During the 18th and 19th centuries, gambier remained the only crop of importance that Bintan ever produced. By the turn of the 20th century, gambier had been replaced by rubber trees. When the vulcanisation process of rubber was discovered in 1839, the properties of latex, originally known only to the South American Indians, found a much wider range of usage. The sudden increase in demand opened the possibilities of a huge market. The tree was successfully acclimatised in the Singapore Botanical Gardens in 1877 from seeds which arrived there via Kew Gardens in London. After a few attempts, local seedlings were finally produced in 1881. Within a decade, the rubber tree had become ubiquitous to Southeast Asia and so it was in Bintan. The high prices commended by the new commodity brought a sudden new wealth to Tanjung Pinang, where by

Tapping the sap of the rubber tree

the end of the 1910's the first cars could be spotted in the streets, along with a a wide choice of other imported goods in the shops. According to a local saying, this dream-like period saw people 'wash their hands with lemon-scented water and roll their cigarettes with bank notes'. It lasted until 1929 when prices collapsed worldwide. Prices picked up again in 1935 when the gloom of the Great Depression lifted, and in order to control prices, in 1937 the Dutch government implemented a system of coupons that restricted the amount of rubber to be sold by a producer in relation to the number of trees growing on his land. For two years, the coupons themselves became a commodity, traded for cash by small landowners as soon as they were issued. Today, the extent of rubber tree cultivation on Bintan has been dramatically reduced, but a limited amount of latex continues to be produced locally as a cottage industry. Tapping must be done in the early morning when the flow of latex is at its highest. Special knives are used to cut a notch of the proper depth and angle into the tree bark from which the milky, sticky sap drips into a cup where it is left to harden before collection. Bintan's only rubber processing plant is located in Kijang where the lumps of raw rubber are first repeatedly shredded and washed. This stage of the process is characterised by a rather acrid smell that contrasts sharply with the latter part of the process when the rubber is dried in giant ovens in which it takes on a golden colour and develops a sweeter smell. The crumbs are then compacted in the form of bricks, ready for export. The relatively small production of 1,000 tons per month is sold through a network of international buyers based in Singapore.

right
Crumb rubber processing

Fishing Nets And Savoury Souvenirs

The serenity of Berakit on Bintan's east coast is best experienced in the late afternoon when the coconut palms, stretching their shadows across the beach, seem to be aiming for the sea. The luxuriant greenery lit by the warmth of the setting sun then takes on an amazingly vivid hue. The sounds of children playing at the doorstep of their family house might add an innocent touch to this serene setting. The prevailing calm would seem to signify the end of the day's work, but for many people, this is in fact just the beginning. The coconut orchards sustain half of the village economy and amount to one third of Bintan's yearly coconut production of 3,000 tons. The other source of livelihood is found offshore beyond Trikora beach.

Ikan bilis, boiled in sea water on the kelong, are brought back to shore in the morning to be dried in the sun

To truly appreciate the extent of local fishing activities one should go there at night when the glow of countless bright lights scattered across the darkness will not fail to puzzle the visitor. The lights are the baits used to attract a bounty of fish to the *kelong* – the fishing rigs found around the shallow and sheltered waters of the Malay world. Traditional *kelong* are built on stilts of about 15 metres long piled into the seabed. The modern version is a floating platform that can travel to different fishing grounds and be taken to safe water during the monsoon season when this form of fishing stops. The most prominent feature of a *kelong* is the little hut that serves as shelter for the men and their equipment. The net is lowered into the water through a void at the centre of the platform. On a good night, the catch might bring around 100kg of seafood. One of the main catches of this form of fishing are the tiny anchovies or *ikan bilis* that will be laid out to dry in the sun around the houses on shore. Deep-fried and possibly seasoned with chilli and sugar, they are served as a crispy side dish, a favourite among Malay delicacies. Bintan's shores also host a wealth of typical scenes related to coastal fishing. At night, the rather peculiar *serampang* fisherman uses a frontal lamp to attract prawns which he catches one by one by using a long stick ending with a fork. Crabs are caught with the *bubu,* a form of trap lowered into the water with a string and left to lie flat on the seabed. Another form of *bubu* in the form of a cage is also used to catch coral fishes. The *sondong* is a triangular net used in shallow waters and pushed over a sandy seabed.

Kelong at dusk

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Sondong fisherman

A figure of paramount importance in Riau's economy is the *tauke*, or towkay, which means 'boss' in Hokkien. The *tauke* is found throughout the archipelago, right down to the smaller islands where his thrift and business acumen often position him as the main connection between the remote Malay settlements and the outside world. The house of a *tauke*, although built on stilts by the shore, as most houses in the archipelago are, can be easily spotted upon arriving in one of the small villages as it is always the biggest and the most affluent, often painted in bright colours. It also usually has the best boats moored outside. The front room is used as a shop selling everything and anything, from rice to spare parts, medicines to footwear, fishing gear to canned food – in short all things essential to staying alive and well on a remote island. An important function of the *tauke* is that of village banker. He hands out food and other essentials on credit when there is no fish to be caught, and lends capital for important purchases such as a new boat or to finance new business opportunities that arise. Generally the owner of at least a few fishing boats himself, he also buys the daily catch from other people in the village and arranges for its transportation to a wholesale market. This requires large quantities of ice and the daily services of ice factories, which are naturally owned by the most affluent *tauke*.

Tauke house with attached jetty


R 26 No 2259

The fishing fleet in Kawal

Unloading the catch of the night in Kawal

One can catch a good insight into the local fishing industry in the little town of Kawal on Bintan's east coast. **Kawal**'s port uses a river estuary as a deep-water channel. There, on either side of the bridge that spans the river, a cluster of wooden barracks along the banks marks the respective territories of the two resident *tauke*. They operate around 40 boats between them, assisted by an equivalent number of captains. Both captains and crew hail from all over Indonesia, mixing Buton and Bugis from Sulawesi, Javanese and a majority of Malays from the surrounding archipelago. The original Malay approach to fishing had an unassuming ecological attitude. Their motto was 'the sea is our garden', by which they meant that one should take from the sea only the resources needed for oneself and no more. The introduction of a totally different concept based on capitalism at the hands of shrewd and hard-working Chinese entrepreneurs found many of the Malays unable to compete on grounds so alien to their understanding of life. The changing economic reality left some of them with hardly any choice but to work for the *tauke*.

Fishing boats usually carry eight to nine men who go to sea for a period of two to seven days. The fishing technique in Kawal uses the gill net, locally known as *jaring*, which catches larger, mid-depth fish. Once a night, a net of about 1,500 metres is laid at a depth of 12 metres and left drifting for four to five hours before being pulled back on board. The catch of *tongkol* (eastern little tuna), *tenggiri* (barracuda), *bawal* (pomfret) and *selar* (mackerel) can reach up to three tonnes per trip. The cargo of iceboxes filled to the rim is unloaded in the morning as the boat reaches the depot. The men then take a day off, usually spent playing endless games of dominoes in the local coffee shop, and leave the next morning for a new trip. This rhythm is interrupted every three weeks by a period of ten days at the time of full moon during which time no fishing takes place because fish are then able to see the net. The days on land are spent looking after the boat, repairing the nets, and for those with a family, taking care of their loved ones. Another longer break takes place during the north-east monsoon from December to February.

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Playing dominoes in a Kawal coffee shop

High-sea fishing is centred in Kijang and Tanjung Pinang, where deeper waters allow larger boats to operate. One can see many of these large fishing boats while crossing the estuary from Tanjung Pinang to Senggarang. Someone a little familiar with the fishing scene around Southeast Asia might recognise among them a type of boat more usually found in Thailand and Vietnam. The reason behind their presence here is simple, many of these boats have been confiscated from Thai and Vietnamese fishermen caught illegally fishing in Indonesian waters. The confiscated craft are then sold to Indonesian operators.

opposite
The fish market in Tanjung Pinang

Fishing boats in Tanjung Pinang harbour

There are only three resident fishing *tauke* in Tanjung Pinang, yet they operate over 130 boats between them. Kijang gathers over 20 smaller operators. These boats use a different fishing technique known as *pukat ikan*, in which a giant

purse-like net is dragged at lower levels over the seabed to catch fish of a smaller size. These boats go further out to sea than the boats in Kawal and the trips last one to two weeks. Of the overall annual harvest of 12,000 tons of fish, 60% goes to be sold in Singapore and Tanjung Pinang, while the remaining 40% is sent for processing in a plant on **Pulau Moro**.

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The akau or night food market in Tanjung Pinang

While seafood restaurants abound in Bintan, the most entertaining way to experience the local cuisine while soaking in the atmosphere is to visit one of Tanjung Pinang's animated *akau* or 'night markets'. The ***akau*** is usually located in an open ground often used as car park in the day. The sense of conviviality and community is particularly strong here. Stall owners share a common area and facilities such as tables and chairs, while leaving their customers free to choose whatever stall they wish to patronise. Food can be ordered from different stalls, but the final amount is paid in full to the drink stall whose table the customer is using. The owner of the drink stall later hands the amount of the night sales to the respective food stalls. In the general hustle and bustle, the food is served in a very informal way and little attention is paid to what one would call 'service', but the culinary experience can be surprisingly satisfying. One should definitely try the *ikan bakar* or grilled fish, straight from the market to the barbecue and onto the plate, seafood at its freshest and best! Favourite dishes of the *akau* scene include another two barbecued recipes: *otak otak,* the Malay version of the spicy fishcake cooked inside a palm leaf, and *sataу*, the Malay brochettes eaten with a peanut sauce. This dish has become so popular that it is now served in almost any Asian restaurant the world over! Another dish quintessential to the Malay world served throughout the day, from breakfast to supper is the fragrant *nasi lemak,* rice cooked in coconut cream. At its simplest, for a breakfast meal, it is served with an egg, a dried fish or a few *ikan bilis*, a slice of cucumber and lots of chilli! For lunch or dinner, the rice is complemented by a wide choice of dishes that include meat, seafood and vegetables.

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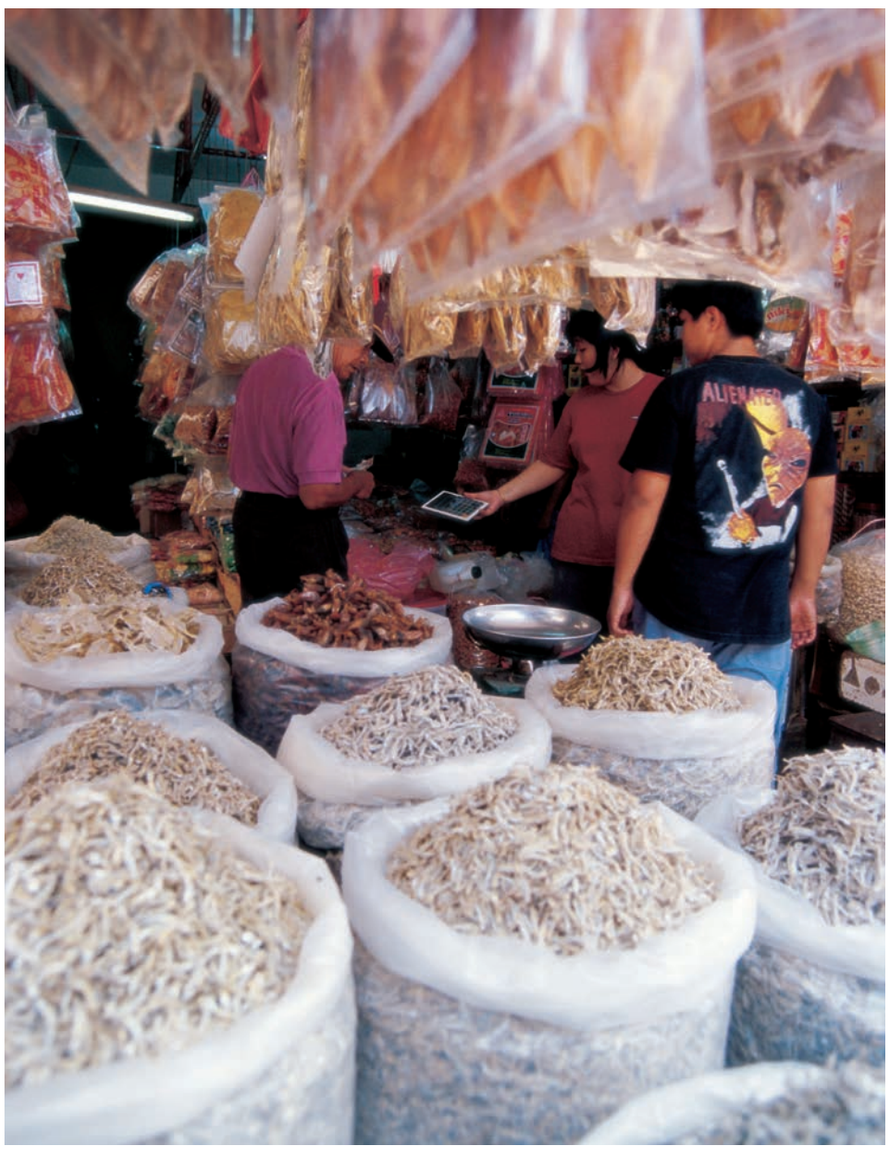
A satay stall in Senggarang

Dried and processed seafood is a popular souvenir item, particularly with Singaporean visitors who return home with bagloads of *ikan bilis* (anchovies), *sotong kering* (dried cuttlefish), dried sea cucumber and fish which cost only a fraction of their price in the affluent city. A relaxing weekend in Tanjung Pinang also provides the opportunity to replenish household provisions of these pungent side-dishes quintessential to a Southeast Asian meal. From that point of view, the main shopping area of Tanjung Pinang has to be Pelantar II, the lane leading to the pier for boarding to Senggarang. It is lined with typical old wooden houses featuring curved corbels supporting the roof edge, said to be reminiscent of a boat hull. According to oral history, the houses were progressively built to replace the boats originally moored alongside Pelantar II. The shops there offer a staggering range of dried specialities, from tiny transparent fries and lovely rosy shrimps, to large oily herrings. The selection of snacks is equally diverse. A typical Indonesian titbit is the *kropok*, a seafood-flavoured cracker. Crispy and sometimes colour-tinted, they can be eaten on their own, or served as a garnish with rice dishes. Other local specialities include thinly-sliced dried bananas and tapioca sold from little carts by street hawkers.

Tapioca and banana crackers



next page
Morning traffic in Pelantar II

Dried seafood shop in Pelantar II with dried cuttlefish hanging and different grades of ikan bilis in the bags


PRENDJAK
MIE TELOR
BM 3187 EF


INDONETA
FISHING NET, TWINE AND ROPE
PRENDJA
DRIED NOODLE

Orang Laut boat in Lingga

The Orang Laut And The Realm Of Magic

Floating Homes And Sea Spirits

The village of Berakit has become home to one of the largest groups of *Orang Laut* or 'sea people' remaining in Bintan. The island's north coast has always been important to them, in particular the area now occupied by the resorts which was formerly where they replenished their provision of fresh water. The *Orang Laut*'s encounter with the modern world and its influences poses a very serious threat to their traditional, nomadic way of life. In former times, some *Orang Laut* were known to have travelled as far as the Thai island of Phuket, where a group of their descendants still live there. But many now choose to become sedentary, an evolution fostered by government projects providing houses and access to schools. The attraction of an education for their children is often the primary reason for the parents' decision to settle down. In the process they receive an identity card and often convert to a more 'established' form of religion such as Christianity or Islam. Some traditions, however, do endure. The *Orang Laut* are still allowed to travel sea routes between Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore without a passport, as long as they do so in a boat fitted with the thatched roof symbolic of their itinerant way of life. One can hardly imagine their frail craft crossing the strait between Bintan and Singapore, only to come face to face with some of the largest tankers in the world. And yet in truth they still do so. In fact, nomadic *Orang Laut* are known to go as far as the northern Riau islands of Anambas and Natuna, crossing the wide open sea to attend a wedding and other important family reunions.

To meet *Orang Laut* families who remain faithful to their ancestral way of life, one must venture deep into the maze of islands scattered south of Bintan. The *Orang Laut* population in Riau is estimated at between 3,000 to 5,000, only half of whom would still be nomadic. They navigate through the archipelago in small groups under the leadership of an elder, using their remarkable knowledge of currents, tides, winds and stars to interact with their natural environment. These aboriginal people trace their origins to the dugong, a marine mammal that inhabits shallow, tropical waters throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Dugongs can grow up to three metres in length and are often called 'sea cows' due to the fact that they feed on plants. Often mistaken for mermaids by early western explorers, these graceful animals are unfortunately under serious threat of extinction due to human impact on their habitat. The original dugong myth was at a later date combined with the myth of a white crocodile of Bugis origin.

The *Orang Laut* livelihood is naturally centred on fishing, thus the compatibility of a young couple about to get married will be judged on their productivity as a fisher-couple. The most unusual aspect of their way of life, however, remains their ability to pack all the necessities of a four to five-member household within the space of a boat hardly more than three metres long. Their few possessions are always very neatly arranged to

Orang Laut settlement in Berakit

Nomadic Orang Laut occasionally stop for a few weeks to work in a charcoal kiln like here in Lingga and make some cash income to complement the natural ressources from the sea

Orang Laut grandmother in Berakit settlement. Women in the Orang Laut community are said to be swimming shortly before giving birth and as soon as they can after it. This would seem to result in a rather easy birth process which they are reputed for.

maximise the limited space under the thatched roof that occupies the centre of the boat. The back of the boat is turned into a kitchen with a clay brazier fixed to the boat as fireplace, while the front becomes a sort of yard, a spot possibly allocated to the family dog. Babies are conceived, born and raised on board. From their small floating homes, the children learn about the secrets of the sea and adults provide for what is needed there. When an *Orang Laut* can no longer manoeuvre the boat he or she has spent a lifetime on, it is taken in tow by a younger member of the group, allowing the elder to remain there. Only the ultimate voyage will see an *Orang Laut* leave the boat for good. Burial ceremonies finally take them to Mother Earth wrapped in a white shroud.

Orang Laut children with their pet parrots

The rest of society naturally frowns upon a way of life so radically different from 'the norm', yet their maritime science made the *Orang Laut* important to both the Srivijaya and Malacca empires, which elevated them to prestigious positions in their governments. In fact, the *Orang Laut* – the *Melayu Asli* or 'original Malays' – originally played a military role that was later superseded by the Bugis. Despite the dynastic change, the rulers of the Lingga-Riau sultanate still favoured a close relationship with the *Orang Laut* who attended to many of the sultans' personal needs. Records of 19th century court life at Lingga say that the various *suku* or groups of *Orang Laut* fulfilled specific duties such as rowers on the royal vessel or smiths forging the Sultan's weapons. The *suku Bintan* was closest to the Sultan and in charge of the *nobat*, the royal orchestra. With the end of the sultanate in 1911, the *Orang Laut* lost their royal patronage and became the pariahs of the archipelago's population. Some inter-ethnic marriages do take place in remote areas, but these mostly involve Chinese men and *Orang Laut* women. Muslim Malays and *Orang Laut* regard the Chinese as a convenient intermediary between their respective communities, particularly in view of the fact that they both accuse each other of using harmful magic. Malays regard the *Orang Laut* as experts in black magic due to their lack of formal religious practices. On the other hand, the *Orang Laut* maintain that the Malays do the same, despite their religious beliefs. Thus goods that need for some reason to be transferred from one community to the other are judged much less dangerous if they do so by passing through Chinese hands in the process.

Tapa and her baby girl Iani, an Orang Laut family on their home-boat in Lingga

According to one of the most established beliefs, should one offend or harm them in any way, the *Orang Laut* have the ability to curse the offender to such an extent that he or she will then be compelled to follow them and share their lifestyle. Stories abound on how the *Orang Laut* can control natural elements, precipitate storms and still the ocean. Indeed their daily life is regulated with offerings and ceremonies aimed at befriending the spirits of the maritime world to ensure a good catch. The *Orang Laut* themselves admit to possessing the most powerful *ilmu* or 'magic power'. But one may wonder if indeed the derogatory opinion of the *Orang Laut* so widely expressed by the Malays isn't anything else than a reflection of the latter's social predominance.

Magic Rings And Medicine Men

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Even in today's modern world, the Malays remain implicated in the supernatural realm in more ways than one. One of the most evident aspects of this age-old fascination is the large number of stalls selling stone rings along **Jalan Merdeka**, Tanjung Pinang's main street. These big, sometimes oversized, rings are worn mostly by men and are believed to hold powers associated with the quality of the stone. A great deal of attention thus goes into the selection of the right stone. The most highly regarded stones are not the translucent and precious crystals commonly used for jewellery, but rather the opaque type in which veins and textures create evocative shapes lending themselves to magic interpretations and spells. Once purchased, the ring might be taken to a *bomoh* who will imbue the stone with its intended magical power using Muslim incantations.

A sidewalk stall selling rings in Tanjung Pinang

Bomoh are the Malay magicians and may be consulted for reasons as diverse as the cure for an illness, the whereabouts of lost property, or even what the future may hold for a Mecca-bound pilgrim. Although most *bomoh* will rely solely on potions, charms and incantations, as opposed to direct attempts to control supernatural forces, they can be regarded as descendants of the early shamans whose practices originated in northern Asia. If the activities of the *bomoh* are more directly related to his talent as medium or magician, he might then be called a *pawang*, although both terms are easily interchangeable.The Malay magician of olden days would also ensure good takes of fish and abundant crops, control the rain and deal with the many spirits, ghosts and *jin* creating troubles in the world. The Malay world is filled with stories of *hantu* or 'ghosts' and other spirits, seen as nothing more than normal occurrences. Another term commonly used in Indonesia to refer to practitioners dealing with the esoteric domain is the *dukun,* more generally associated with Javanese tradition.

Limes and burning frankincense are important elements of a traditional medication seance performed by a bomoh

Today, the *bomoh*'s most common functions are those of medicine man and medium. *Bomoh* are supposed to start their education by studying the sciences of the *Syariah* (Islamic law), including jurisprudence, monotheism, and Sufism, without which *bomoh* are bound to get entangled in superstition and trickery. Using therapeutic means that are *halal* (lawful) and *tahir* (pure) is essential to maintaining good health for both *bomoh* and patient. More often a man, although sometimes a woman, the *bomoh* normally specialises in an area of medicine for which his or her talent spontaneously manifested. The skills are usually transmitted from grandparents to grandchildren – or at least remain within the close family – with the *bomoh*-to-be called to his or her function through a prophetic dream. The state of trance formerly used to diagnose illness and devise cures is losing popularity and modern *bomoh* often function as mere family generalists relying on herbal medicine and Islamic verses to treat common ailments and diverse mental disorders. Yet the magical propensity in today's Malay urban environment remains evident with some stories concerning unscrupulous *bomoh* who specialise in love potions and charms for congenial relationships – or their opposite! They naturally also provide services for the corresponding ceremonies of exorcism.

The concept upon which rests the Malay notion of physical well-being is the *semangat*, often translated as 'soul' but best rendered as 'life force' or 'essence'. Every human, every animal, every single object is the sheath of a distinct *semangat* and in that sense this 'life force' could well be understood as a universal vital principle sustaining the whole of creation. Personal well-being is thus entirely dependent upon the strength of one's *semangat* which can be damaged or even lost – in which case a *hantu* can easily take possession of the body. Alternatively the *semangat* can also be strengthened or recovered when employing the right treatment.

The action of the *bomoh* will therefore aim at insuring the good condition of the patient's *semangat*, or in the case of black magic, will aim at harming it by using charms over objects belonging to the person to be affected. *Semangat* is believed to be most abundant in hard objects and it thus becomes imperative for humans to be wary of where they throw clipping of hair or parings of nails as these could be used by enemies to harm them with the help of malicious *bomoh*.

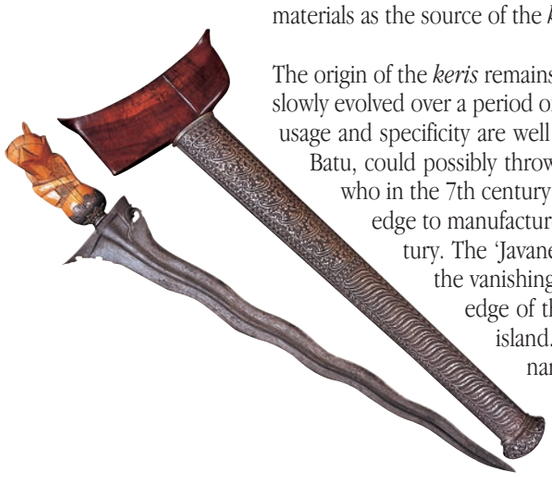
Mystical Blades And Legendary Warriors

19th century keris combining a Bugis blade and a Malay sheath

One object that contains large amounts of *semangat* according to Malay beliefs is the *keris.* The mystical weapon found all around the Indonesian archipelago, in the Malay world, and in the Philippines, is another object that epitomises the enduring belief in paranormal powers. Contrary to a common idea, a *keris* isn't necessarily a wavy dagger. In fact, straight blades abound. What truly defines a *keris* is the asymmetrical widening of the double-edged blade at its base and the techniques used in its forging. The asymmetry of the base is emphasised by a separate piece of metal, the *ganja*, sharp at one end and blunt on the other, through which the tang of the blade comes to fit into the hilt. This *ganja* is often regarded as the specific element that truly characterises a *keris*. Equally important is the spectacular damascene resulting from a forging technique that superimposes alternate layers of steel and meteoric iron containing about three percent nickel. Once finished, the blade is washed in a solution of lime juice and arsenic that blackens the iron whilst leaving the nickel white. This treatment reveals a moire pattern called *pamor* whose intricacy reflects the smith's skill.

19th century keris featuring a Riau Malay floral pattern on the sheath

The mastery of the blacksmiths can create blades as sharp as razors and strong enough to pierce armour. The *keris* could be made even more deadly with a poisoned tip capable of causing almost instant death. In times of war, a man would carry as many as three such weapons on him. Regarded as an integral part of the manly dress code, the *keris* thus played an important role in the courtly intrigues of the Malacca Sultanate. The mystical blade was given a personality of its own and regarded as a friend and a guide by its owner. Legends abound on the supernatural feats performed by *keris* that can make their owner invincible, jump out of their scabbard of their own accord, or kill an opponent by simply being pointed at him.The blade is meant to be fully removed from its sheath only for fighting purpose, as doing so implicates that someone's soul will be taken in any case. Endowed with a protective nature, the *keris* can also cure snakebite, break an evil spell or be secured to the main roof beam to protect a house. Such powerful weapons often use precious metals and stones for their decoration. The styles vary greatly from one region to the other. Malay *keris*, usually characterised by a large rectangular sheath with an inward curve said to imitate the bow of a boat, are generally much more sober and sturdier than their Javanese counterparts. Malay taste favours the natural beauty of the materials as the source of the *keris*'s attractiveness, leaving the power of the blade a hidden secret.



The origin of the *keris* remains rather mysterious to this day. It is thought to have first appeared in Java, and slowly evolved over a period of about 200 years, reaching its final form in the 14th century, by which time its usage and specificity are well recorded. A legend, collected again from Abdul Zaman Atan in Bintan Bukit Batu, could possibly throw new light on the subject. According to Pak Atan, the mysterious 'Javanese', who in the 7th century laid the foundation of the Bintan kingdom, used his powerful esoteric knowledge to manufacture the very first *keris* while embodied in a another incarnation in the 12th century. The 'Javanese', then living in the Kingdom of Majapahit, was approached by the king of the vanishing Kingdom of Srivijaya to create a magical weapon that would carry the knowledge of their civilisation. This request sent him back to Bintan to collect soil from the island. Back in Java, he used this soil to forge the blade of the first *keris*, which he named '*Tamengsari*'. This *keris* was handed to the Srivijaya king who in turn gave it to an early incarnation of Hang Tuah, the quintessential Malay hero. Hang Tuah then left to travel around the archipelago, taking the *Tamengsari* with him to share his life of glorious adventure.

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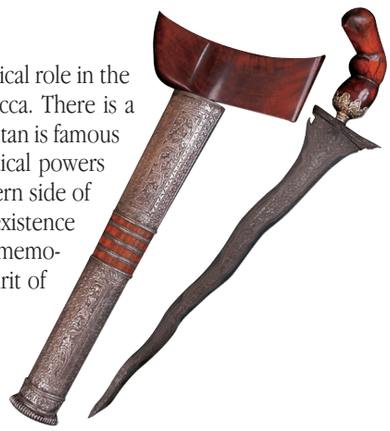
This *keris* became a legendary weapon of the Malay world and later occupied a major symbolical role in the history of the Malacca sultanate. According to legend, it is now buried somewhere in Malacca. There is a theory that gives a possible Riau origin to Hang Tuah. The little island of **Bakung** south of Bintan is famous for seven pools, the *Telaga Tujuh*, where the Malay hero is said to have acquired his mystical powers while meditating at the poolside. Again, according to Pak Atan, there is a grave on the northern side of Gunung Bintan where Hang Tuah would be buried. This doesn't necessarily conflict with the existence of another grave said to be his in Malacca. Malay beliefs do take into account the existence of memorial graves – such as those in Bintan Bukit Batu's historical cemetery – that enshrine the spirit of the deceased as opposed to his or her physical remains.



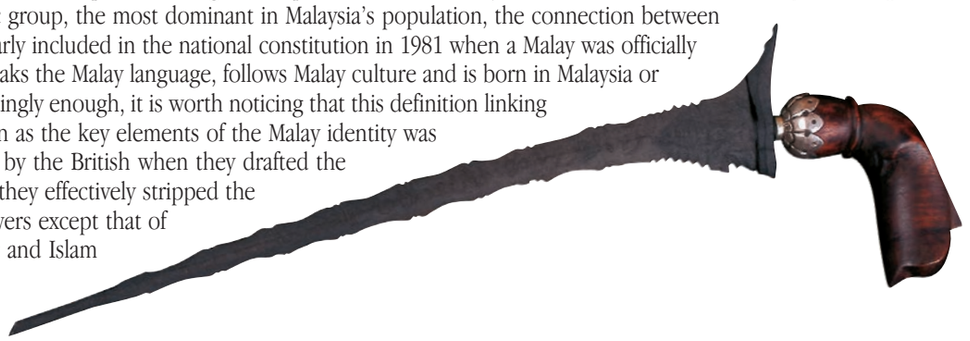
19th century Malay keris from West Coast Malaysia with a Bugis sheath

The deeds that made Hang Tuah a figure of paramount importance in the Malay world are recorded in a book, the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, often regarded as a close second to the *Sejarah Melayu* in Malay literature. *Hang* was a warrior title equivalent to captain, and Hang Tuah the chief of a group of five such warriors of great skill and courage at the service of Sultan Mansur Shah, the 6th King of Malacca. Under the influence of evil-doers, Sultan Mansur Shah came to doubt Hang Tuah's loyalty and ordered him to be executed. The wise Bendhara Tun Perak instead took Hang Tuah to safety in a hidden secret place. The Sultan first made Hang Jebat his *Ketua Panglima* (Captain General) to replace Hang Tuah and handed him the *keris Tamengsari.* But believing his sworn brother to be dead, Hang Jebat soon revolted against the Sultan in the name of justice. With the *keris Tamengsari* now in his possession, Hang Jebat had become invincible and chased the Sultan from the palace. The situation was about to degenerate into an outright civil war when a surprising twist to the story sees Hang Tuah reappear from hiding on learning of Jebat's rebellion. As a proof of his unfaltering loyalty, he offered the Sultan to heal the kingdom by killing his friend.

The fight between the two men is said to have lasted for days. And in between fights they would rest and pray, even taking the opportunity to reminisce about old times. On one occasion, Hang Jebat had the opportunity to conclude the fight to his advantage but couldn't bring himself to kill the friend for whom he had dared to become a renegade. Tuah's nature, however, had always been to carry out the Sultan's orders to the very end. Finally Jebat, disillusioned, admitted that he had no other choice than to allow his friend to fulfil the wish of their master. Tuah without the slightest hesitation thrust his *keris* into Jebat's left breast. But Hang Tuah was a compassionate friend and as soon as his poison-laced *keris* put Hang Jebat into a state of unconsciousness, he applied an antidote on the wound. He later gave Jebat's body to be healed by one of the Sultan's concubines who had become Jebat's lover during the short period he had ascended the throne.

According to the legend, Hang Tuah's words to Jebat just before his friend fell unconscious were: "Forgive me my brother, the people must stand united. It is for the good of the nation". Indeed, the unbending notion of unity seems to characterise the Malay society. This statement may come as a bit of a surprise considering the amount of strife and dissension encountered thus far in Malay history. Nonetheless, Malays like to see themselves as bound by a unity which the individual cannot sever under any circumstances, a unity upon which rests the enduring identity and preservation of the Malay people. This can be perceived in social structures such as the close family bonds, but above all best understood in the way Malays define themselves through their religion. The two are supposedly synonymous: with few exceptions, Malays are Muslim, identified by Arabic names, married by Islamic law and guided by the moral precepts revealed in the Koran. When Suharto's 'New Order' government drafted a new constitution for the Indonesian nation in 1966, atheism was forbidden since it was identified with communism, and all Indonesians were required to profess one of the five sanctioned religions – Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestantism or Catholicism. No mention, however, was made of the ethnic background of the person. Things were quite different in Malaysia. Because of the close cohesion of the Malay ethnic group, the most dominant in Malaysia's population, the connection between Malayness and Islam was clearly included in the national constitution in 1981 when a Malay was officially defined as a Muslim who speaks the Malay language, follows Malay culture and is born in Malaysia or of Malaysian parents. Interestingly enough, it is worth noticing that this definition linking culture, language and religion as the key elements of the Malay identity was first institutionalised in 1874 by the British when they drafted the Treaty of Pangkor, by which they effectively stripped the Sultan of Perak of all his powers except that of administrating Malay matters and Islam in his state.

A rare ceremonial keris buloh or bamboo kris with a blade in the form of a bamboo stick inscribed with a sentence from the first juz of the Koran. The bamboo shape is said to overcome the power of black magic



A quiet Sunday morning in Pelantar II

Enduring Traditions In A Changing World

Colourful Weddings And Little Poems

If at first sight modern technologies have already radically altered the rhythm of island life, a counter-reaction to the howling winds of globalisation has also triggered a return to ancestral values. This trend, expressed by people all around the world in ways reflecting one's own cultural background, in Bintan has taken the form of a reassessment of Malay identity, a tendency further reinforced by the progressive increase of local administrative power accorded by Jakarta. A search for Bintan on the World-Wide Web may elicit 25,000 matching results. Meanwhile, traditional Malay dress has been made compulsory for civil servants on Fridays, and the ancient motto *tak Melayu hilang di bumi*, 'the Malays will never disappear from the earth', is making a comeback as part of the campaign for provincial independence. The rule of native customs or *adat* that regulates most aspects of the Malay way of life is in some ways stronger than ever.

One of the areas of Malay life where traditions are best preserved is the wedding ceremony, a showcase of everything Melayu! One such aspect is the *tepak sirih* or 'betel box' offered together with flowers and fruit by the boy's emissary during the *meminang* ceremony to bring forth the formal request. Although betel is hardly chewed anymore, the object remains an important symbol of wealth, as it was an integral part of the Sultan's paraphernalia. The *antar tanda* sees the exchange of alliances, after which the agreement cannot be cancelled, save for a divine intervention. The *akad nikah* is the confirmation of the marriage by a religious elder. This private ceremony then leads to the much more colourful *tepuk tepung tawar* during which the house is open to guests. Prior to the occasion, decoration work in the bride's family home includes the erection of a stage with elaborate drapes and cushions and a similarly lavish decoration of frills in the room where the bride and groom will spend their first night. On the morning of the big day, the road leading to the house is indicated by a *bunga manggar*, a spiky bouquet of brightly coloured paper suggestive of fireworks. Beautiful costumes made of the brightest brocade include a *keris* for the groom and a shimmering headgear of Sumatran origin for the bride. Seated on the stage, the wedding couple's attendants sprinkle scented water and flowers on visitors. The *bersanding* ceremony sees them feed each other with a handful of rice to mark their mutual involvement for life. They then clap their hands in flour to secure fidelity, prosperity, and many children. The next day, members of both families shower each other in the *mandi mandi* ceremony as a sign of shared happiness, following which the *berambhi* sees the couple leave for the groom's house.

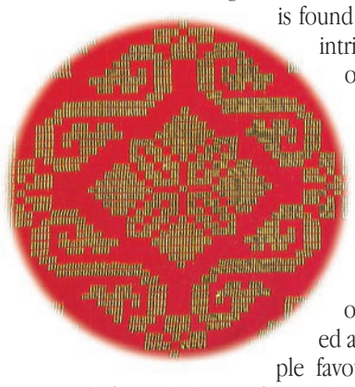
A bunga manggar used in the National Day Parade

From the elaborate headgear of the bride, to food and entertainment, the ceremony unfolds in a succession of tableaux featuring the many aspects of Malay culture. This is seen, for example, in the woodwork and sculptures of the stage that follow a tradition of motifs categorised by names such as *bunga matahari* (sun-flower) or *daun sirih* (betel leaf). It can also be seen in the man's outfit that

Traditional Riau embroidered wedding costumes

Tepak sirih or betel box

preserves the memory of an essential piece of clothing in the days of old: the *tengkolok* or 'headcloth'. Devising elegant new forms of tying their brocade headcloths was a leisure pastime for Malay nobles. The fabrics used are highly stylised, and the Malay world is reputed for its fine and extensive use of gold on batik and in woven textiles. The most sumptuous is the intricate *songket* characterised by a floating flowery design of metallic threads overlaid on a single colour cotton or silk fabric. Men wear it as a sarong over a plain shirt and matching trousers while women use it as wrap-around skirt and shoulder scarf. In Indonesia, the technique is highly developed in the Minangkabau highlands and in Palembang, from where most of the *songket* found in Bintan originate. The only *songket* tradition indigenous to the Riau Archipelago is found in the northern island group of Natuna. A form of fine silk *ikat*, in which the intricate motif is drawn by dyeing the thread prior to weaving, was also developed on Lingga in the 19th century but remained restricted to the usage of the Sultan's court. The form of textile perhaps most representative of the Malay world and Riau in particular is a couched gold embroidery and applique technique that developed with the presence of Islam in the region. This form of tri-dimensional decorative technique was extensively used on elaborate hangings and opulent cushions, often featuring Arabic calligraphy, that became an essential part of ceremonies of the life cycle: circumcisions, weddings and funerals. Textiles are one of the aspects of the Malay society on which the Islamic precepts exerted a decisive influence. The modest dressing code for example favoured a much more important use of clothing than before, whilst motifs were based on geometric and floral patterns with human forms noticeably absent. Bird images, however, remained widely in use even when other realistic creatures disappeared. Often featured in association with floral motifs, birds served as an evocation of the Creator's paradise. The Bugis presence in Bintan later influenced the men's taste for simpler bold geometrical patterns in their dress.



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Songket weaving

19th century curtain holders with applique work

Music is, of course, part of the celebration, although in today's context, an electronic keyboard will often replace the set of traditional musical instruments. Music in Malay society is perceived as an integral part of the social system rather than a form of entertainment to be enjoyed on its own. This is particularly evident, for example, in the importance given to the *nobat* orchestra in Malaysian royal ceremonies. According to the *Sejarah Melayu,* Wan Seri Beni, Queen of Bintan, would have played an essential role in the introduction of this tradition to the Malay world. The *nobat* is closely related in function and composition to the Middle Eastern *tablkhana* and this Arabian origin may be explain by a journey supposedly taken by Wan Seri Beni to that part of the world. Other historical sources credit a Muslim missionary with introducing the usage of such an orchestra in Pasai (now Aceh), Sumatra, from where it would have reached Malacca at the time of Parameswara's wedding.

If the truth concerning the *nobat* remains uncertain, a better-known Riau contribution to Malaysian music was the introduction of the Javanese *gamelan* to the Malay Peninsula in 1811. A small *gamelan* was in use at the Sultan's court in Lingga where it accompanied a court dance known as *joget*. The retinue of dancers and musicians from Lingga travelled to Pahang on the Malay Peninsula on the occasion of the wedding between Tengku Hussain, son of the Lingga-Riau Sultan, and Wan Esah, sister of the Bendahara of Pahang. From there, this music and dance tradition reached the neighbouring court of **Trengganu** by the early 20th century, where the dance took the name *joget gamelan,* while the music known as *gamelan Melayu* eventually evolved to become markedly different to that of its Indonesian origin. Malay musical rules are generally rather loose and the compositions are passed on orally from one generation to the other. Both scales, the eastern pentatonic and the western heptatonic, can be used according to the different musical styles, folk, classical, dance or theatrical. Indigenous drums of various sizes and shapes play a central role, together with gongs made of bronze. The most important drum is the *gendang* which comes in two sizes, the larger called *ibu* (mother) and the smaller *anak* (child).

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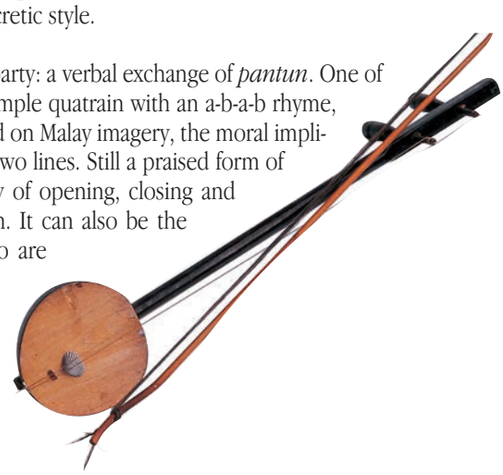
Gambus, a form of Arabian lute

Gendang ibu

Melodies are traditionally developed by the *rebab*. Known as a three strings instrument on the Malay Peninsula, this fiddle has only two in Riau. Aerophones include end-blown flutes, *seruling*, and oboes, *serunai*. Foreign additions to the original set of drums and gongs that primarily emphasised the function of rhythm, include the Arabian lute *gambus*, the Indian harmonium and at a later date the European accordion and violin. Many of these elements are found combined in the *joget*, the most popular social dance form throughout Malaysia that will get the fun going in a wedding celebration. Introduced by the Portuguese in Malacca, the fast-paced rhythmic dance performed by couples was combined with Arabian melodies and the Malay style of singing to result in a perfectly syncretic style.

A last element might add a literary dimension to the party: a verbal exchange of *pantun*. One of the main genres of Malay poetry, the *pantun* is a simple quatrain with an a-b-a-b rhyme, in which the first couplet contains a metaphor based on Malay imagery, the moral implications of which are explicitly developed in the last two lines. Still a praised form of oral expression, the *pantun* remains a rhetorical way of opening, closing and punctuating the important moments of a public function. It can also be the subject of a competition between members of the public who are requested to improvise their responsive verses on the spot.



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A two-stringed Riau rebab

Breaking Fast And Flavoured Rice

While wedding celebrations often involve the participation of a whole neighbourhood, the event that congregates the Malay community at large, and with it the Muslim community worldwide, is the fasting month of Ramadan. Prescribed by the Prophet as one of the annual core events in the life of a good Muslim, Ramadan requires from the faithful the strict observance of other Muslim rules, such as the five daily prayers, and control of one's appetite and other physical urges. The rule thus goes that one shouldn't absorb any liquid or food from sunrise to sunset, and for a whole month the people's life naturally rotates around this dictate. Ramadan follows the lunar calendar and the dates move accordingly every year.

Selection of festive kueh or sweets for breaking the fast

Life generally becomes slower during Ramadan, since the lack of food intake results in lower energy levels. The rhythm of prayers through the day becomes more evident as people place more importance on their religious life. But food abstinence also leads to a friendly and meaningful daily gathering, the *buka puasa*, or 'breaking of the fast'. The evening family meal takes on a special spiritual significance and this is also the time of the year when people will remember to call old friends to *buka puasa* together. Besides this being the main meal of the day, people have another meal at 4 or 5 am before sunrise. During Ramadan, in the late afternoon, a temporary market near the Great Mosque in Tanjung Pinang offers cooked food, desserts and special colourful sweets which are brought home to complete the meals. A surge of activity takes place in the streets before 6 pm that sees people rushing back home in time for the sunset prayer call. Shortly after, radios and televisions broadcast the signal that fast can be broken and the streets suddenly become almost empty.

Hari Raya Puasa marks the end of Ramadan and the celebration definitely stands as the main Malay home festival. *Hari Raya* translates as 'the big day' and preparations for it begin long before with an annual overall house cleaning. Freshly repainted homes are beautified with new decorative items such as curtains and pillows. Special cakes are prepared ahead of time. Essential to one's own self respect, the custom implies a brand new complete outfit, for everyone who can afford it. In order to help with the necessary expenses, employers are expected to give an annual bonus by doubling the monthly salary. This is the major

Group prayer at Al Hikmah Mosque on the morning of Hari Raya

public holiday in Indonesia, with four full days of holiday in a row and many people take this opportunity for an annual trip back home. Buses, trains, planes and boats are fully booked weeks ahead.

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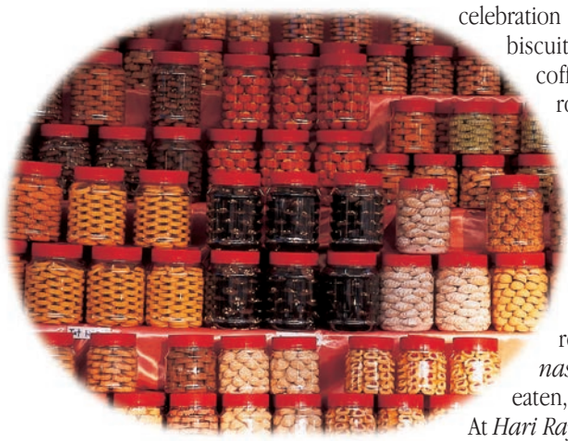
Brand new clothes are a must on Hari Raya

The last night of Ramadan sees a surge of activity in Tanjung Pinang with people coming to the city for their last minute shopping. The streets effervescence is made all the more palpable by a parade of trucks carrying representatives of the city's mosques accompanied by the sound of diverse drums. The 'big day' begins at dawn with a group prayer performed in all neighbourhoods, while a crowd larger than usual congregates in Tanjung Pinang's main mosque in the heart of town. By mid-morning, the rituals are fulfilled and the participants, spiritually cleansed, head for home. After a whole month of fasting the social aspect of *Hari Raya* is naturally a very light-hearted affair and the day is spent visiting friends and relatives. The most obvious aspect of the *Hari Raya* celebration is the grand display of biscuits and sweets on the coffee table in the living room of every Muslim home. The jars will remain there until empty and for a week or more, one cannot visit a Malay home without being asked to *makan kue*, (eat biscuits), a treat often complemented with rose syrup and other soft drinks .



Shopping before Hari Raya includes the purchase of a variety of kueh to be offered to the guests

The food served at *Hari Raya* naturally follows the most traditional recipes. Rice, the staple food quintessential to an Asian meal, is called *nasi* in Malay. The word specifically designates 'cooked rice' ready to be eaten, while *padi* designates the plant and *beras* the uncooked grain. At *Hari Raya* rice is cooked in the form of *ketupat*, a little basket woven out of young coconut leaves in which the rice is cooked to form compact cakes. The *ketupat* is so closely associated with *Hari Raya* that it has become the graphic symbol of the festival, widely featured in advertising and other greeting cards pertaining to the event. A purely decorative version made of colourful ribbons is also used to decorate homes, shops and public offices. On other special occasions such as anniversaries and weddings, rice is served following other recipes that will make the meal different. *Nasi Melaka* is boiled with coconut cream. *Nasi minyak* is boiled with nutmeg and other spices and then fried in beef oil with onion and ginger. Of Indian origin, the *nasi biryani* takes on a yellow colour with turmeric and is served with corn and cashew nuts. For a sweet touch, *nasi sedagang* is steamed with coconut and sugar.

Traditional Malay dishes, clockwise from bottom: ikan asam manis, kari ayam, goreng belada bilis, keropok ikan, nasi minyak, paceri nanas, rendang nangka centre left: rendang daging centre right acar berampah

The most typical Malay meat dish is certainly the *rendang pedas*, a thick spicy sauce with a base of turmeric and coconut milk in which the beef meat is simmered until tender. Other classics include the *kari ayam* or 'chicken curry' and the beef or chicken kurma served in a white watery pepper sauce. Fish dishes in Malay cooking are particularly fragrant when prepared with *garam asam*, the generic name of a distinctive spice mix of galangal, lemongrass, candlenut, chillies, onions, turmeric and shrimp paste with tamarind. Recipes include *ikan asam manis*, a sweet version of the hot-sour dish and *singgang* in which *asam* is combined with garlic and ginger. The most typical vegetable dishes are the pineapple curry, *paceri nanas*, a recipe of jackfruit boiled in coconut cream, and the essential side dish *acar*, a carrot, cucumber and pineapple pickled salad. Beside the biscuits found in any Malay home at the time of *Hari Raya*, other desserts come in the form of small cakes often prepared with a base of coconut or green beans and sweetened with palm sugar. The most famous include *onde onde*, *deram deram*, *penganan talam manis* and *kole kole.*

Lontong, the rice boiled in ketupat, is often served with satay

Forgotten Theatre And New Festivals

One of Bintan's traditions that does need prompt attention and support, if it isn't to be completely forgotten within the next decade, is the theatrical art of *mak yong*. Although the origins and history of *mak yong* are shrouded in mystery, it is generally agreed that it is rooted deeply in animism and shamanism. Indeed the name itself may indicate the antiquity of the art form given that one of the many myths and legends surrounding it concerns Mak Hiang, the ancient mother and spirit of the rice. In Bintan, it is said that *mak yong* came from 'the country of the White Elephant', a name designating the Kingdom of Siam, today's Thailand. The art form moved south at the time of contacts between Malacca and Thailand (1470 – 1500) and took root in **Kelantan**. To this day, the region encompassing this north-eastern Malaysian state and the neighbouring Thai province of **Patani** is known as the heartland of *mak yong*. From there *mak yong* moved to the Malaysian west coast, around the island of Penang, and to the Sultanate of Langkat in eastern Sumatra. According to oral history in Bintan, *mak yong* reached the Riau Archipelago at the turn of the 18th century, where it remained a highly popular form of entertainment until World War II. Most of the information presented in these pages is extracted from a study conducted in the early 1980's by BM. Syamsuddin following a revival of the art form in the 1970's. This revival was initiated by a certain Pak Kalid in **Pulau Mantang** who received a prize from Jakarta's central government in 1977 for his contribution to the nation's cultural life.

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Mak yong mask of Petanda Raja, the king's sheriff

Sadly this revival was short-lived, and today *mak yong* is barely surviving in Pulau Mantang and Kijang, with two groups who cannot even agree on who holds the true tradition! The island of Mantang, half an hour's boat ride away from Kijang, has always been closely associated with *mak yong*. In fact, Syamsuddin stresses in his booklet that if one is to study the names of actors reputed for their skills in the 19th century, they mostly appear to be *Orang Laut* from Mantang. He therefore presents as almost certain that *mak yong* in Riau was developed by the *Orang Laut*, and possibly by the *suku Mantang* or 'Mantang tribe'. Following the official adoption of the theatre troupe by the Sultan in 1722, the actors were asked to give up their nomadic way of life. They then settled on an island which they named after their group, (*mantang* means 'spear', which was originally the *Orang Laut*'s favoured means of fishing). For almost two centuries, *mak yong* was a thriving art form in Bintan and the troupe travelled the region with the financial support of the Sultan, whose royal patronage lasted until the end of the sultanate in 1911. It is said that a performance could only take place with the Sultan's permission. Despite this association to the royal court, *mak yong* in Bintan always remained close to the farmers and fishermen who lived in the villages. Indeed, the local stories and theatrical principles reveal that the Riau *mak yong* became an important means of communication between

Inang Pengasuh

the aristocracy and the commoners, an art form that promoted bonding and cohesion of the society through laughter and distraction. This dimension is particularly evident in the character of Awang Peran or Awang Pengasuh, the jester around whom the action revolves.

Peran, as his title *awang* indicates, is a warrior akin to a knight in western tradition. And indeed, in tune with the traditional knightly figure, Awang Peran's main function is to right the wrongs and protect the people from injustice. However, in contrast to the often dramatic western knight figure, Awang Peran's favoured means of achieving this aim is laughter. With a big tummy and hunched back, his physical appearance obviously is meant to elicit this reaction from the spectators as soon as he arrives on stage wearing a red mask with a jovial expression and a little rounded nose. This clown-like figure presents many similarities with Semar, the ancient tutelary deity of Java, central to Javanese theatre in both puppet and human forms. Just as Semar, Awang Peran appears as a link and messenger between the highest and the lowest levels of humanity. By putting his cunning mind at the service of society, he educates by promoting a message of morality while distracting the people from the hardship of their everyday life.

The other two characters always found in any *mak yong* play are Mak Yong, the queen or princess who often needs to be defended by Awang Peran, and Pak Yong, the king or prince, played by a woman, and often the subject of a wrong-doer's evil influence. Neither Mak Yong nor Pak Yong use a mask, instead they wear lavish costumes befitting their dignity. They also wear the type of long pointed finger nails used by Thai dancers and indeed the combination of Javanese and Thai elements found in the Riau *mak yong* truly reflects the geographical location of the art form. Another aspect representative of this fact is the combination of different languages within a play. While Bahasa Indonesia remains the core language, *Melayu lama* (ancient Malay) and other languages spoken in Bintan (Javanese, Bugis, Chinese dialects, etc.) are the favoured vehicles of expression for improvisation and comic scenes. The use of masks in Bintan's *mak yong* is also said to parallel another form of *topeng mak yong* (masked *mak yong*) called *mak yong laut* or 'sea *mak yong*' found in the northern Malaysian state of Kedah.

right
Awang Pengasuh

Gedombak drum

Among the few other recurrent characters in Riau *mak yong,* one of the most interesting certainly is Inang or Inang Pengasu, a woman's role performed by a man wearing a white smiling mask. Inang's nature evolves through the play; in order to help Awang Peran and depending on his needs, she can become lake, tree, goat, farmer or soldier. Another woman's role this time played by a woman not wearing a mask is Dayang. the queen's woman-in-waiting. A red and black mask with a cruel expression personifies Batok Pembatak, the quintessential ruffian whom Awang Peran never fails to beat. While *mak yong* in Kelantan and Patani developed a more mystical quality and found its way into healing ceremonies, Riau's *mak yong* evolved a profane approach that lends itself more to a comparison with the Italian Comedia Del'Arte. A talent for improvisation is a prerequisite for *mak yong* actors as the unwritten scenario of the seven favourite stories form only a loose canvas set at the beginning of the performance by the *ketua panjak* or 'troupe director'.

There is no attempt at realism and dramatic moments always conclude happily. Characters are caricatured and the spirited acting uses many sound effects to draw laughter from the crowd. Anything and everything can be brought on stage to make noise, from live animals to a barrel from the neighbour's house, while the musical accompaniment, that closely follows the action in mood and tempo, stops only occasionally at the time of plain dialogues developing the story.

Pak Yong or Cik Wang

left
Betara Guru a spiritual teacher and wise man

So much room is given to improvisation that a *mak yong* performance may continue over a period of a few nights in a stretch. As the shadows of the night deepen, the crowd gathers around the lights of an open arena set not far from the seashore. There are no backdrops in a *mak yong* theatre and spectators can follow the action from any side of a mud floor of about seven by eight metres, an informal layout which also allows spectators to move in and out at their own convenience. Some sense of direction prevails with the arrangement of the members of the troupe. The musicians are first to come in and sit on opposite sides of the floor, followed by the actors who make a third side of the square into an informal open backstage by remaining seated there whenever they are not acting. The beginning of the performance is marked by a ceremony called *buka tanah,* or 'opening the earth', in which the *ketua panjak* brings an offering of incense, betel nut, tobacco and a *nipah* cigar. With the fragrant smoke rising, the *ketua panjak*, who directs the play with the beat of his *gendang* drum, starts playing while reciting a prayer asking all surrounding *jin* and nasty spirits to leave and not disturb the performance. The tempo of his drumming slowly increases in gusto and the percussion musicians next to him join-in – another *gendang* drum, two *gedombak* drums and two gongs. This rhythmic line is completed with the metallic beat of two *mong* and one *breng*, more percussion instruments positioned on the opposite side of the stage. Finally, the actors enter to the melodious sound of a *nafiri* or a *serunai*. The traditional opening scene is called *Mak Senik buka kipas Awang* or 'Mak Senik opens the fan of Awang'. In it, Awang Peran first appears to be hiding deep in thought behind his fan. On comes Mak Senik (another name for Mak Yong) who lowers the fan to look at the man's face and opens the dialogue by introducing herself. Awang Peran replies in a like manner. The action then begins to unfold to the beat of diverse typical musical pieces set to fit each of the characters and the mood of the moments such as battles, comic interludes or scene changes. The closing number brings the whole troupe on stage to interpret the song of Cik Milik, a lively canon in the form of a pantun repeated round and round while Batok Pembatak, the nasty character, passes a tin can around, asking for the spectators' contribution in kind.

Pak Halid Kassim, head of the Mak Yong troup in Pulau Mantang

Thus unfolds a traditional Riau *mak yong* representation. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, the last performance of the group on Pulau Mantang took place in 1998. Although the Kijang *mak yong* troupe still occasionally performs, the troupe has lost its gongs and other essential props such as half of Pak Yong's long nails, and its financial situation does not allow the possibility of a prompt replacement. The future of Riau *mak yong* in the 21st century remains to be seen.

Luckily, other traditional performing arts are alive and kicking. One such case is the dance known as *zapin* that reached the Malay world in the 15th century and now enjoys the benefits of a yearly festival entirely dedicated to itself. Of all the Malay types of music and dance, *zapin* is the one most markedly Arabic in origin. Characterised by a four-beat tempo usually lively and upbeat and marked by a kick of the foot and a wave of the opposite hand on the fourth beat, the elegant and fluid movements are meant to replicate the ebb and flow of the tide. Originally performed only by men, the dance is now most often performed by couples teasing and challenging each other. A typical accompanying musical ensemble in Riau includes the Arabian lute *gambus* or a violin, two types of drums and occasionally a singer or two. Bintan's festival gathers performing groups from the whole of the Riau Archipelago and beyond. The costume and dancing style of some groups from the Natuna and Anambas islands, for example, might present some Philippino influence. The Persian origin is much more evident in others, as in the slow tempo of the Penyengat group. The most anticipated display sees the all-man group from Johor come on stage to the resounding cheers of the crowd for a very lively and energetic dance.

Flowing movements characterise zapin

The group from the Anambas islands

Primary school pupils wear the red and white national colours as school uniforms

The *Zapin* Festival is part of the *Laut Festival* (Festival of the Sea), in turn part of the *Bulan Bahasa* (Month of the Language). This yearly event celebrates the anniversary of the choice of Penyengat's *Bahasa Melayu* as Indonesia's national language. On 28 October 1928, a secret meeting of young men (including Sukarno) was held in Jakarta to lay the foundations of the Indonesian Republic. The gathering known as *Sumpah Pemuda* (Oath of the Youth), saw the representatives of the various provinces pledge to respect the unity of the land, its people and its language. For the first time the red and white flag was hoisted, the national anthem sung and the participants agreed that *Bahasa Indonesia*, which had already been the vehicle of education in local schools for many years, should remain the unifying language. The apex of the festival in Tanjung Pinang is a weekend-long celebration that sees dragon boat races in the day and *zapin* dancing in the night. Both events attract participants from around the region, thus making Bintan once again, a centre of the Malay world. Penyengat, of course, also enters the festive mood with diverse symposia, exhibitions and cultural shows reviving the glorious past.

The all-men zapin dance group from Johor

One may consider the colourful and attractive dragon boats featured in these October races as being inspired by the sport practised by the Chinese community in the region. This festival now celebrated in Tanjung Pinang was only initiated in the 1990's, but this assumption on the origin of the race isn't necessarily true. Called *naga* in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, the mythical dragon has been a symbol of underwater spiritual forces from times immemorial. Ancient sources refer to such boat races in Southeast Asia and the Chinese therefore may have actually learned it from the Malays. The long slim canoes used for this type of race are called *lancang* and are powered by a team of twelve athletes. A noticeable difference with the Chinese dragon boat is the absence of a drummer at the front of the Malay craft.

Dragon boats race in Tanjung Pinang Bay

Boat races specific to the Riau Archipelago are held on 17 August for National Day. The *sampan*, which may be of Chinese origin, is a usually a slow and artless boat ubiquitous to Riau's nautical landscape, most often noticeable by the silhouette of a standing rowing boatman, and used to ferry passengers across estuaries and rivers. These crafts acquire a far more glamourous image on that day on the occasion of *sampan* races that see them cheered by spectators along the shore. Much more refined, almost deserving the appellation of 'work of art', are the *jong*. These miniature sailing boats, about four feet in length, are the result of the long interaction between the Malays and their maritime environment. The skill of the craftsman is first displayed in the refined elegance of the woodwork but most of all in the boat's unique ability to glide on the surface of the water, keeping a steady direction, while not being controlled by any human interaction. The crafts, launched away from the shore by their owners and propelled by the wind's action on their large sails, quickly build a momentum that sends them dashing off towards the beach to win the race. The relationship between the craft and its owner is said to have a spiritual dimension which makes it more than a simple hobby, mostly practised by young men. There is no physical means by which the man can control the course of the craft. However, magical words and a form of telepathic control are said to keep the *jong* on the optimum trajectory. The island of Karimun is reputed for the best *jong* races in Riau.

A jong ready to take the sea

Another festive date, 6 January, commemorates the anniversary of Raja Haji's victory over the Dutch. The day is marked by a ceremony around the monument on Tanjung Pinang's seafront and a procession animated by local folk groups, among which the most vibrant are the *kompang* drummers. The *kompang* is a traditional frame hand drum of Middle Eastern origin, played in ensembles using an interlocking technique to produce various composite rhythms, sometimes complemented by singing. It is performed in large groups of either men or women dressed in traditional attire, each group or village wearing a single colour. Whether for a public or a private function, one can find at least one kompang group on most occasions of celebration, such as welcoming important guests, weddings or even football matches!

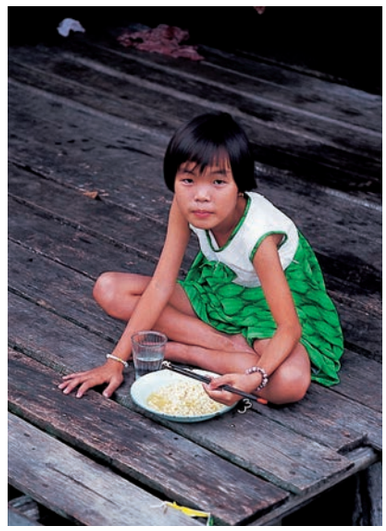
One of Penyengat's kompang groups

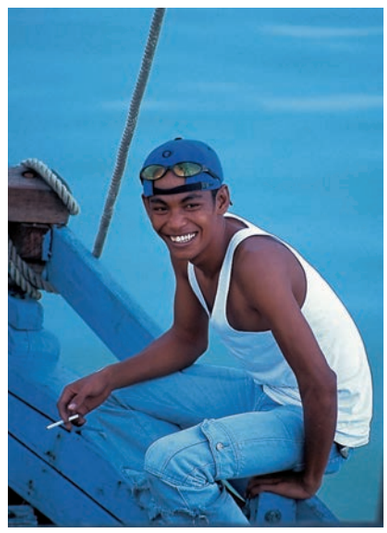
Such occasions can also be marked by a performance of *silat bunga*, or 'flower silat', the gentle form of the traditional Malay martial art. *Silat* originated in the 7th century in Padang on the coast of West Sumatra. From there it developed through the vast mountainous region of North Sumatra as the way of life of warriors whose mystical powers became legendary. The martial form, also known as *pencak silat*, places the emphasis on timing as opposed to speed and muscular strength. The most important strikes are with knees, elbows and the head, as well as short punches and kicks. The beauty and efficiency of *silat* has attracted the attention of martial arts aficionado and it is now practised around the world. Youths in Bintan also practise the martial form meant for fighting in competitions. However, those of a more mature age enjoy the flowery approach in which the potent movements have been refined into a graceful dance.

Practising silat bunga in Raja Ali Marhum Kantor's palace on Penyengat

next pages
Parade along Tanjung Pinang waterfront on Indonesia National Day and faces of Bintan



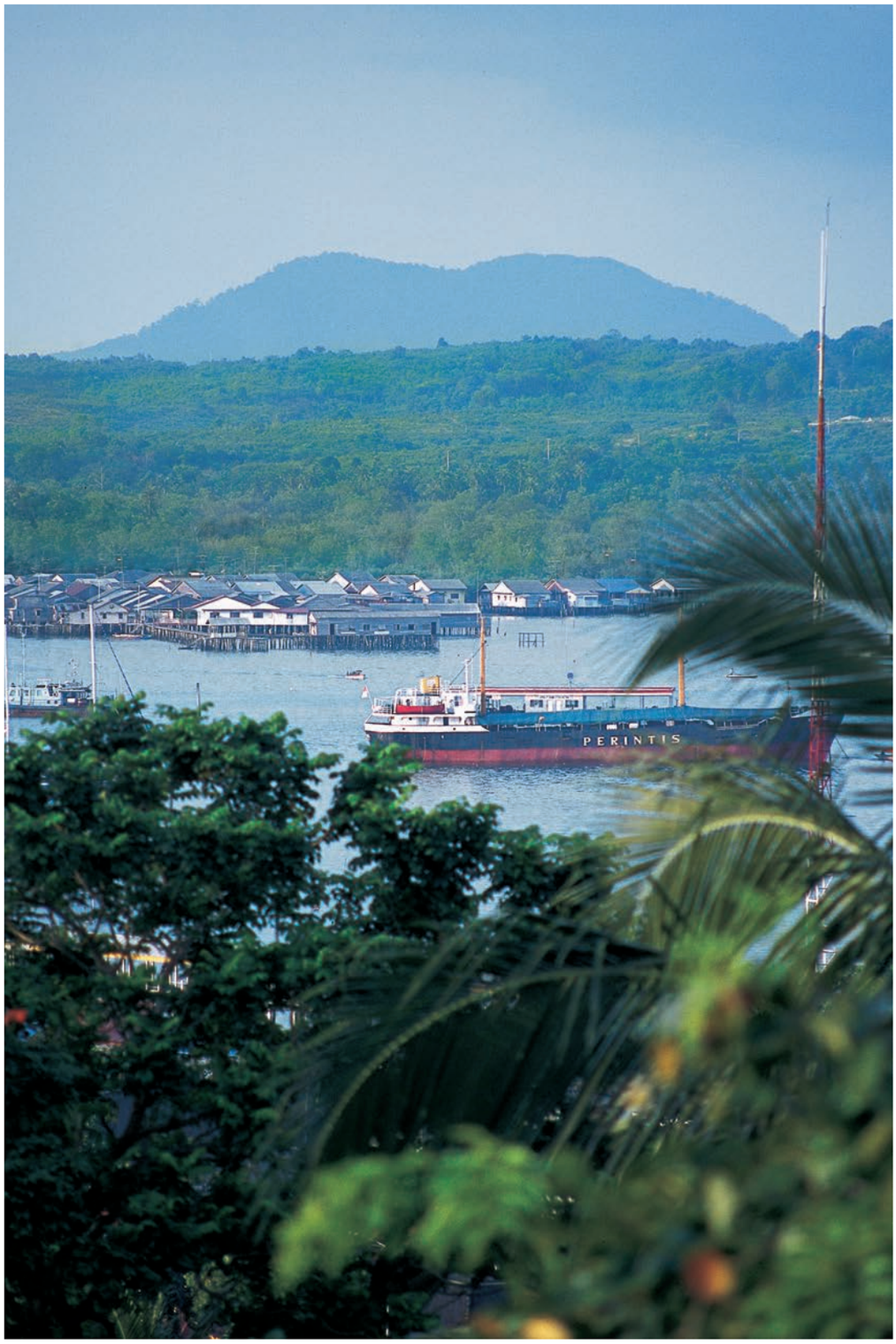



The city, where the ebb and flow of the tides give way to the bustle of commerce...

...and the countryside, where nature's timeless beauty provides a tranquil background to the gentle rhythm of village life.

In Trikora, along the road that hugs Bintan's east coast



Gunung Bintan seen from Tanjung Pinang Hill, with Senggarang in the foreground. The Perintis vessel seen in the port provides cargo and passenger service to the remote Anambas, Natuna and Tambelan islands.

The Old Port And Its Future Destination

Tanjung Pinang – sometime in the early 21st century.

From the window of her room, Siti Nurbaya looks at the expanse of sea and dreams. Far beyond the horizon, in the mountains of Sumatra, lie the paddy fields of her father's farm which she left a few weeks before to embark on the longest journey she had ever undertaken. In the tradition of her Minangkabau land, men have always left their village in search of fortune. The fact that she and a few of her childhood friends, all of them young girls barely in their 20's, have done so is certainly a sign of the changing times. They have come to Bintan in the hope of finding work in the resorts, or maybe in the factories on nearby Batam. A few days ago, her relative in Tanjung Pinang took her to Trikora beach, a popular Sunday outing destination that sees people gather for tasty seafood meals and drink water from young coconuts while enjoying the sea breeze. There she befriended a young man who happened to be from her home district. They laughingly exchanged reminiscences and names from the countryside of their childhood, an enjoyable moment that nonetheless left a little uncertainty in her voice as to why she was here… home felt so far away!

Stepping into the 21st century along with the rest of the Indonesian nation isn't exactly easy for Bintan and its inhabitants. Many adjustments have yet to be implemented in order to meet the new economic and political challenges, a necessity that often triggers complex social consequences. Yet the island pulsates with an eager energy that sees it developing at an unprecedented pace.

Along the inland roads, new constructions and plantations continually bring change to either side of the road. New destinations have appeared on the small islands off Bintan's coast as well. **Pangkil Resort** with its creative 'driftwood palaces' on Pulau Pangkil Kecil is certainly a destination worth the extra 30 minutes powerboat ride from Kijang. The rustic charm of **Batutta Resort**, on Pulau Mapor, lures the seasoned fishermen. On Bintan's east coast, a few resorts scattered along the scenic route that hugs the coastline offer a cheaper alternative to the luxurious hotels on the north coast. The isolated **Loola Resort** may be hard to reach but this makes the tranquillity of its bungalows built over the sea all the more enjoyable. **Bintan Agro Resort** on the road to Trikora offers modern comfort in a hilly environment. Further up the coast, the **Telok Bakau** Seafood Restaurant on stilts serves generous helpings in a very authentic setting. On the northern side of Trikora beach, the beautiful site of Telok Dalam is set to welcome the **Mutiara Beach Resort** ecotourism development project. This will include the Bintan Handicrafts Village or BHV, a showcase of local culture featuring the souvenir collection 'Wakatobi Made in Bintan', and the Cafe Coconut Blue facing the South China Sea.

33 34 35 36 37 38

Loola Resort on Bintan's east coast

Ojek are motorbikes that can be hired as two-wheel taxis. They form an important aspect of Tanjung Pinang's public transport system.

Today, there is undoubtedly still something a little rough about Tanjung Pinang, but this greatly contributes to its charm. Here the wilderness of the outlying islands comes to rub shoulders with the consumerism of nearby Singapore. While walking along Tanjung Pinang's spirited streets one can feel the prosperity of the cosmopolitan entrepot it was and the animation of the regional capital it still is. Chaos is everywhere, in a whirlpool of loading and unloading trucks, roaming motorbikes and blasting sound systems. The shelves of the well-stocked shops are stacked with an improbable mismatch of consumer goods. Closer to the water's edge, the air turns heavily 'fragrant' with the pungent salty aroma of dried seafood sold in bulk from large bags, which pour out into the street from the depths of the small provision shops. Hidden within the network of the tiny alleyways built on stilts over the river mouth, one can guess many untold stories made of night boat trips, secret compartments, and 'fishy' fishermen. The romance of Bintan isn't exactly always flowery, but it is nonetheless vividly picturesque.

From the legendary Kota Segara and Gunung Bintan palace, to the short-lived Istana Kopak, from the elusive Kota Tua and mighty Kota Piring, to the refined court of Penyengat and busy contemporary Tanjung Pinang, Bintan and its ports have continued re-emerging in the flow of history like a sleeping phoenix awakening to its true splendour. Today, it would seem that the island is on the verge of a wave of change, a wave that might once again carry it to a new role of regional influence. What Bintan's next role will be is hard to guess. For example, the long-term consequences of the Free Trade Agreement signed in 2003 between Singapore and the United States, which at the last minute included Bintan and other parts of Riau, are anybody's guess. At the time of writing, details and implications are still being discussed, but it should bring important changes to the island and its capital. Who knows, it may eventually introduce a surprising hi-tech touch to Tanjung Pinang's skyline! Another project that has taken shape on the drawing board of the Regent's office may see a new administrative capital built in the centre of the island, not far from the site of Kota Segara, the legendary town where our story began. Beside the economic implications, this shift would also signify a change of tremendous magnitude in the social landscape of the island by taking the local political power back to where it originated. And for all the parts played by Bintan and its inhabitants in regional history, there is still an aspect of this island's intrinsic nature that has yet to fully develop: that of the meeting point of the trade winds of old, a role traditionally ascribed to Malacca and Singapore. This geographical attribute is paralleled by the role occupied by Bintan in the formation of the Malay culture as we know it.

right
The Ramayana department store in Tanjung Pinang

Sunset in Tanjung Uban

The academic world now mostly agrees that the Malay language derives from Proto-Austronesian, a linguistic group which evolved in Taiwan between 4000 and 3000 BCE from where sea-going agriculturalists spread far and wide. It is estimated that there are today 1000 Austronesian languages currently spoken, from Madagascar to Easter Island in the Pacific. The migration of Austronesian into the Malay world occurred between 2500 and 1500 BCE beginning with the Philippines, followed by Northern Borneo, Sulawesi, Central Java and Eastern Indonesia. Over the next thousand years, Austronesian speakers migrated further to South Borneo, Sumatra, West Java and the Malay Peninsula. By 500 BCE, it is thought that a group of Proto-Malayic languages had evolved in the riverine system of western Borneo, and later gave rise to Malay dialects and some other languages such as Iban and Minangkabau.

This prehistorical linguistic influence followed the north-east monsoon across the South China Sea. A much later movement, this time driven by the south-west monsoon across the Indian Ocean, disseminated the cultures of India and the Middle East to the region. The progressive integration of Austronesian languages and Eastern cultural influences eventually shaped the culture of the Malay world as we know it today. Physically standing at the epicentre of the region occupied by the Malays, the enigmatic silhouette of Gunung Bintan, with one hump looking towards China and the other looking towards India, is a rather thought-provoking and graphic illustration of this fact. Could the story found in the *Malay Annals,* that sees Sri Tri Buana arriving on Bintan to receive the right to rule the Malay world from Wan Seri Beni, be a metaphor for this geographical aspect? Could indeed the enigmatic Gunung be the silent keeper of an untold secret patiently waiting to come to light? If so, it may well hold the words and the melody of the song that will carry the memory of its origin to the sleeping phoenix.

There is yet one more story concerning the Malay world that deserves to be told, although only remotely linked to Bintan. On 28 March 1521, an event of utmost importance in the history of the planet took place somewhere in the southern part of today's Philippines: the young Panglima Awang, after having travelled around the world, met somebody who understood his language well. Panglima Awang had left Malacca in 1512 at the age of about 18, as the slave of Fernao de Magalhaes – otherwise known as Ferdinand Magellan, the Portuguese famous for having initiated the expedition that resulted in the first circumnavigation of the globe. Magellan had probably acquired this Malay slave when he took part in the capture of Malacca in 1511. He named the young Malay man Enrique of Malacca, the name by which he is better known in recorded history. After 3 years in Southeast Asia, Magellan took the young man back with him to Europe. It is said that Enrique, or rather, Awang's verbal exchange with a Sumatran girl staged for the King of Spain in March 1518 greatly influenced Charles I's decision to grant Magellan the funds for his expedition. Magellan's idea was fairly simple: to reach the fabled spices islands by sailing west instead of east. Three years later, another verbal

Deep in the Riau Archipelago

exchange, this time between Awang and the king of an unnamed island near today's Cebu, suddenly drew a physical limit to the world. It was ROUND! For the first time, a man had left his home, travelled straight ahead of himself, and come full circle to a part of the world where his mother tongue was spoken. The new trade route which Magellan had hoped for proved unfeasible as it involved the daunting crossing of the Pacific Ocean – but the world had forever changed.

There is no clear mention of the nature of the language spoken between Panglima Awang and the native king in the chronicle of the voyage written by Antonio Pigafetta, an Italian volunteer who joined Magellan's crew as an independent onlooker. And there are of course many Filipino writers who claim Awang as a compatriot of theirs and the language to be one of the Filipino dialects. Two things, however, allow us to consider the possibility of Awang having been Malay and the language *Bahasa Melayu*. Firstly, the two known mentions of Panglima Awang's origins are Pigafetta's diary and Magellan's last will in which Magellan granted freedom and a substantial sum of money to the man he regarded as a faithful and close companion. Both documents clearly state that Awang was from Sumatra. Secondly, Pigafetta's diary also clearly states that from 18 to 27 March 1521, Magellan's expedition continued meeting natives with whom Awang had no communication other than

through gestures. Finally, on 28 March, "…we saw approaching two long boats, which they call *ballanghai*, full of men, and in the larger was their king seated below an awning made of mats. And, when they came near the captain's ship, the said slave spoke to that king who understood him well." After many days in the Filipino Archipelago and many encounters with laymen with whom verbal communication had proved impossible, only a man of learning such as a king was finally able to understand Panglima Awang. Surely, the language was none other than *Bahasa Melayu*, the lingua franca which had imposed itself as a trading and diplomatic vehicle throughout the region along with Malacca's hegemony.

The story unfortunately ended badly. On 26 April, Magellan was killed while helping the King of Cebu in a war against rebellious natives. Duarte Barbosa, who subsequently assumed the leadership of the Spanish expedition, denied Panglima Awang the rights stated in Magellan's last will and testament. It seems that Awang, devastated and left with no other course, then hatched a plot with the King of Cebu in a bid to secure his freedom. A few days later, he went ashore with a party of Spaniards, supposedly to fetch presents intended for the King of Spain. The party was attacked and only one man managed to flee back to the ships, who, according to Pigafetta, reported that all were dead, except the interpreter. Official Spanish records list Enrique of Malacca as one of the 27 men massacred in that attack. However, considering that Pigafetta's records were written independently from any government, the probability of Panglima Awang being alive remains likely, and with it the possibility of him being the first man to circumnavigate the globe has to be considered. The *Victoria*, one of the two remaining ships of Magellan's expedition, managed to elude the Portuguese and arrived in Spain on 6 September 1522; the first vessel to circumnavigate the globe. Meanwhile, finally free, Awang probably attempted to return to his homeland, Sumatra. Were this the case, the possibility of him crossing the path of his earlier travels in the Malacca Strait and Riau Archipelago during his stay in Malacca with Magellan is a likely alternative. In fact, this could well have happened, as with so many other things, at the foot of Gunung Bintan, where the trade winds meet.

However speculative such conclusions might be, the fact remains that Malay probably was the first language to travel around the world. And with it, the story of Panglima Awang takes on a special significance, especially when considered in the context of the globalisation of the modern world. Although only peripheral to Bintan, that very story also calls upon meaningful connotations if one considers that the first monolingual Malay grammar was written in Penyengat. Indeed, the literary and printing activity of the Penyengat nobles drew the attention of colonial authorities by establishing a written standard of the Malay language then spoken there. Today, with an enormous number of speakers throughout Southeast Asia, *Bahasa Melayu* is said to be among the five most spoken languages in the world. Its study appears to be increasingly popular, together with Malay Studies, as a field of academic research. Raja Haji and Penyengat can then pride themselves on their decisive contribution to a language of remarkable historical importance.

Gunung Bintan seen from Bintan Bay

From the *nobat* of Queen Wan Seri Beni and the founding of Temasek, to the elusive trading port of Sungai Riau, from the first regional Chinese secret societies to the first monolingual Malay grammar and the founding of modern Singapore, Bintan has continually played a pivotal role in the region. In many ways, it is as if this island has the role of an esoteric centre, preserving its secrets to better fulfil its part in the grander scheme of things. From the entrancing sound of the *nobat* to the 'music' of the Malay language, a discreet melody seems to rise from the depths of the jungle covering Gunung Bintan, a melody that charms and almost bewitches those ready to perceive its subtle inflections. A melody subdued and yet so penetrating that it can nonetheless be heard across the centuries, a melody so gentle and yet so powerful that it resonates across the whole region. We can only wish, as a conclusion to this journey in the life and the times of Bintan, that the phoenix will soon awaken to sing its song for the 21st century.

Propelled by an impressive set of three 200 Horse Power engines, the speedboats commuting between Batam and Bintan can carry up to 60 passengers at a time

Chronology

11000 BCE	Formation of the Java Sea
2500 BCE	Migration of members of the Proto-Austronesian linguistic group from Taiwan to Borneo
2000 BCE	Tin from the Malay Peninsula part of Bronze Age trade pattern
500 BCE	Development of the Proto-Malayic languages
1st cent.CE	Natural resources of the Malay world part of the trade pattern between Rome, China and other antique civilisations
5th century	First known settlement in the Bujang Valley on the Malay Peninsula
7th century	Rise of Srivijaya in Sumatra
1025	Fall of Srivijaya to the Indian Kingdom of Chola
late 1290's	Sri Tri Buana comes to Bintan and founds Singapura
1392	Parameswara leaves Palembang and comes to Singapura
around 1400	Parameswara – Iskandar Shah flees from Singapura and founds Malacca
1403	Malacca's alliance with China on the visit of the first Chinese emissary
1435	Sri Maharaja converts to Islam – probable commissioning of the *Sulalat al Salatin*
1460's	Malacca's golden age under Sultan Mansur Shah, Bendhara Tun Perak and Laksamana Hang Tuah
1511	Malacca falls to the Portuguese – Sultan Mahmud Shah finds refuge in Bintan and builds Istana Kopak near Gunung Bintan
1526	Fall of Istana Kopak to the Portuguese
1530	Sultan Mahmud Alauddin moves to the Johor River, and founds the Johor sultanate
1587	Seitimun grave, first trace of a Bugis presence in Bintan
1612	First known recension of the *Sulalat al Salatin* (*Sejarah Melayu*) written in Johor
1613	Acehnese attack on Johor – Singapura slips out of history
1619	The Dutch VOC founds a new headquarters called Batavia (Jakarta) on Java
1641	Fall of Portuguese Malacca to the Dutch with the help of a Johor contingent
1699	Sultan Mahmud Shah II assassinated in Johor – end of the Malacca royal house Sultan Abdu'l Jalil Shah founds the Riau-Lingga Sultanate
1709	Riau-Lingga's capital moved to the Riau River on Bintan
1717	Raja Kecil takes power on the Riau River
1721	Raja Kecil dislodged from Bintan by 5 Bugis brothers Raja Sulaiman installed as Sultan – beginning of the tumultuous Malay-Bugis relationship
1728	Rise of Bintan to its Golden Age under Bugis rule
1730's	Chinese migrants come to Bintan to cultivate gambier
1777	Foundation of the Bugis capital Kota Piring
1784	Raja Haji Fisabilillah beats the Dutch in Bintan but later dies when besieging Malacca. The Dutch chase the Bugis out of Bintan
17 Jun. 1785	Establishment of the Dutch government in Tanjung Pinang
1786	Foundation of Penang by the British

Dutch driven out of Bintan by Illanun pirates Malays flee in exile	**1787**
Chinese virtually independent on Bintan	**1790's**
The Dutch hand Malacca to the British	**1795**
Raja Jaafar moves the Bugis capital to Penyengat Lingga becomes the residence of the Sultan and the capital of the Lingga-Riau Sultanate	**1806**
Vienna Treaty – Dutch return to Malacca First trip of Major Farquhar to Penyengat	**1818**
Farquhar and Raffles land at the Singapore River Tengku Husain becomes Sultan of Singapore	**early 1819**
Publication of the *Sulalat al-Salatin* with the title *Sejarah Melayu*	**1821**
Treaty of London – The Riau Archipelago and Johor are separated	**1824**
Establishment of Dutch colonial rule	**1825**
Raja Ali Haji goes on pilgrimage to Mecca	**1828**
Raja Ali Haji writes his Malay grammar	**1851**
Rubber tree seedlings grown in Singapore	**1881**
Maharaja Abu Bakar 1st Sultan of Johor	**1 Jul. 1886**
Typographic press in Penyengat – Rusydiyah Klab	**around 1900**
Sultan Abdul Rahman moves the capital of the sultanate to Penyengat	**1903**
Position of Yamtua Muda suppressed	**1905**
Sultan Abdul Rahman leaves for exile to Singapore The Riau-Lingga Sultanate is liquidated by the Dutch	**1911**
Sumpah Pemuda (Oath of Youth)	**1928**
Development of Tanjung Uban and Kijang	**1930's**
Beginning of bauxite mining in Kijang	**1936**
The Japanese army reaches Bintan	**21 Feb.1942**
Sukarno proclaims independence	**17 Aug. 1945**
Transfer of sovereignty by the Dutch to the Indonesian government	**27 Dec. 1949**
Tanjung Pinang capital of the new Riau province	**1958**
Transfer of the capital to Pekanbaru, Sumatra	**1960**
Konfrontasi – militias on Trikora Beach	**1965**
Suharto comes to power and initiated the New Order Government	**1966**
'Boat People' from Vietnam reach Riau	**1970's**
Agreement of economic co-operation between Singapore and Indonesia for the development of Bintan and Batam	**28 Aug. 1990**
Ground breaking ceremony of Bintan Resorts	**18 Jun. 1996**
First election of a local parliament The regional autonomy is granted by Jakarta to the provinces and regencies	**1999**

A 1955 Chevrolet BelAir, operating as a local taxi on the route Tanjung Pinang –Tanjung Uban, one of many vintage cars to be seen on Bintan's roads

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1. Raja Haji Fisabillilah Monument
2. Rusydiyah Klab
3. Yayasan Indera Sakti (Pusat Maklumat)
4. Royal Mosque
5. Palace of Raja Ali Marhum Kantor
6. House of Tengku Bilik
7. House of Raja Ali Haji
8. Court Physician's Residence
9. Bathing Pavilion
10. Ammunition Depot
11. Grave of Engku Puteri or Raja Hamidah
12. Grave of Raja Haji Fisabillilah
13. Grave of Raja Jafaar
14. Palace of Sultan Abdul Rahman Muazamsyah
15. Grave of Raja Abdurraman
16. Bukit Penggawa Fort
17. Navy Hospital
18. Gubernemen Building
19. Gereja Ayam
20. Catholic Church
21. Colonial Graveyard
22. Al Hikmah Mosque
23. Vihara Bahtra Sasana Temple
24. Pelantar II
25. Cetiya Bodhi Sasana Temple
26. Mana Mana Beach Club
27. Bandar Bentan Telani Ferry Terminal
28. Mayang Sari Beach Resort
29. Banyan Tree Resort
30. Bintan Lagoon Beach Resort
31. Club Med Ria Bintan
32. Ria Bintan Golf Club
33. Nirwana Resort Hotel
34. Angsana Resort and Spa
35. Pasar Oleh Oleh
36. Elephant Park
37. Go-kart Track
38. Akau (Night Market)
39. Jalan Merdeka
40. Tanjung Pinang Ferry Terminal

1. Palembang - Srivijaya
2. Padang - Minangkabau
3. Tanjung Pura
4. Temasek - Singapore
5. Malacca
6. Kedah
7. Central Java
8. Malayu - Jambi
9. Karimun
10. Banten
11. Pasai
12. Brunei
13. Pahang
14. Kampar
15. Perak
16. Johor River
17. Aceh
18. Kota Tinggi
19. Makassar
20. Selangor
21. Lingga - Daik
22. Batavia - Jakarta
23. *Geldermasen* Wreck
24. Pulau Buaya Wreck
25. Natuna - Anambas
26. Siak
27. Sulu Archipelago
28. Penang
29. Singkep
30. Johor Bahru
31. Pekanbaru
32. Sabah
33. Sarawak
34. Bagansiapiapi
35. Pulau Galang
36. Batam
37. Moluccas Archipelago
38. Pulau Moro
39. Pulau Bakung
40. Trengganu
41. Kelantan
42. Patani - Siam - Thailand

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