

# SAVOURING THE SECRET TREASURES OF BINTAN

MIKE SMITH RETURNED TO BINTAN AFTER A 20-YEAR BREAK, STAYED TWO NIGHTS AT BINTAN LAGOON RESORT AND A FURTHER TWO DAYS EXPLORING THE ISLAND.



**B**intan Lagoon Resort offers spacious accommodation, excellent food, a lovely beach and two golf courses. Bintan, outside the resort, surprised me with its sea gypsy village, kampongs, kelongs, mangroves and a rather unusual temple with 500 life-sized Chinese stone statues.

## THE RESORT

Bintan Lagoon Resort, Bintan's largest resort, is only one hour by ferry from Singapore's Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal. The ferry conveniently delivers you directly to the resort's own terminal – right on the property.

I was introduced to Gerald Hendrick, General Manager of the resort, on the ferry. He was most proud of “the people who work at the resort with passion and love what they do” and saw the

“long, clean beach with fine sand a major asset.”

## BE CHILL OR BE ACTIVE

There are two swimming pools for those who like to take a dip and cool off. The beach is a big draw too, whether it be for chilling out or activities such as volleyball and ATV driving or water sports including kayaking and jet skiing.

The resort boasts two mature, challenging championship golf courses. In addition to your playing partner and caddy expect to see monkeys, monitor lizards, kingfishers and

eagles. There are an incredible 14 food outlets to suit all tastes and budgets. I enjoyed the rijstafel, a Dutch word meaning “rice table”, an elaborate meal which was beautifully presented, with host Selena at the fine dining Nelayan Restaurant on my first evening.

## AFTER THE RAIN

After lunch on my second day there was a very heavy downpour. Once the rain cleared a spectacular rainbow appeared that lasted for almost an hour, giving superb photo opportunities.

With host Iris, leaving the amazing Bintan Resorts complex for the local Bintan Island experience was like moving to another planet. Bintan is surprisingly big and rural, two and a half times the size of Singapore, with a population of almost 400,000.

## SEA GYPSY VILLAGE

The sea gypsies or orang laut of Panglong Village were traditionally nomadic, living on their boats, but now live in a government constructed village for a more stable life. I loved the friendly village where people still earn their living from the sea,



make their own boats, mend their nets and live in harmony; a mosque and church stand side by side.

Driving along the coast I was surprised to see dozens of free floating kelong, offshore platforms made of wood for fishing and fish farming. By late morning the sky was almost black giving a good excuse for an extended lunch at Teluk Bakau Bay View Seafood Restaurant. This simple restaurant serves beautifully fresh fish, prawns, remis (a type of clam) and the iconic gong gong or edible sea snail at very affordable prices.





### MORNING MARKET

I like wet markets and Tanjung Pinang morning market got to all my senses, particularly vision and smell, with fresh meat, fish, fruit and vegetables and dried fish and pungent spices.

Senggarang Village, a Chinese settlement on an island a few minutes boat ride from Tanjung Pinang market, was our next port of call. It reminded me of Kukup in Malaysia twenty years ago before it got developed. The houses are on stilts and at low tide you can observe crabs, mud skippers and snakes in the mud.

One of the more interesting sights is a temple engulfed by the roots of an old banyan tree as in Angkor Wat.

### STONE STATUES

We enjoyed nasi padang at Sederhana Restaurant. Many small dishes of food were placed on our table. We chose what we wanted and only paid for the plates we tasted.

Then it was off to Vihara Ksitigarbha Bodhisattv (500 Lohan Temple) one of Bintan's secret treasures. Entering the grounds of the Buddhist temple, set on a hill, we came face to face with 500 life size lohan religious stone statues with bizarre physical and facial expressions, representing people who have followed a noble path and decided upon death not to be reborn into any world. A hire car is the only practical way to get there.

### IMAGINATION HOUSE

Our final visit of the day was to Lagoi Bay and Rumah Imaji (Imagination House) for some trick art and photography. It was a good job we were inside as thick, black clouds threatened to unleash a storm. Indeed the rain came and we were confined to our luxury tents at the unusual glamping resort The Canopi within Bintan Resorts.

The next morning the sun shone and we took a Mangrove Discovery Boat Tour seeing several yellow banded mangrove snakes relaxing above our heads!





**NIRWANA GARDENS**

My four nights in Bintan were rapidly coming to a close, but my final lunch was a classic! steamed crab, chilli crab, sambal kangkong, steamed garoupa, fried rice and more at Nirwana Gardens Kelong Seafood Restaurant. We selected our live seafood from a tank and then signed our crab shells after the meal for the wall display.



From the restaurant to the Bintan Resorts Ferry terminal is only a few minutes. After a short ferry ride back to Singapore I was soon on my way home. Thanks to Selena and Iris and staff of Bintan Lagoon Resort and Bintan Resorts for a very enjoyable trip. It certainly won't be 20 years before I next return to Bintan. ❖



*Pocket Guide*



**TRIP SPONSORS**  
**Bintan Lagoon Resort:** [www.bintanlagoon.com](http://www.bintanlagoon.com)  
**Bintan Resorts -** <https://bintan-resorts.com>

**HOTEL**  
**Bintan Resorts - The Canopi:** [thecanopi.com](http://thecanopi.com)

**FERRY TO BINTAN LAGOON RESORT**  
**Mozaic Ferry Lines:** [www.ferryful.com](http://www.ferryful.com)

**FERRY BINTAN RESORTS TO SINGAPORE**  
**Bintan Resorts Ferry** [www.brf.com.sg](http://www.brf.com.sg)

