

MIKE SMITH WENT OFF THE GRID WHERE HE LINGERED A LITTLE LONGER IN LINGGA, INDONESIA MEETING THE LOCAL PEOPLE, WITNESSING A SEA GYPSY WEDDING AND EXPERIENCING LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE.

like getting off the beaten track and going where few tourists have been before. I visited three islands in The Lingga Islands Regency where yachters were participating in the 'Wonderful Sail to Indonesia 2018', witnessed a rare mass sea gypsy wedding and got to explore islands which get less than 1,000 visitors a year, despite being less than four hours by ferry from Batam or Bintan.

WONDERFUL SAIL

From Singapore I took a ferry to Batam Centre, changed to Punggur Ferry Terminal and headed to Penuba one of the Lingga Islands via Dabo Island.

Penuba was one of the many ports of call for yachters in the multi month 'Wonderful Sail to Indonesia 2018'. There were 13 yachts at anchor as we arrived at Penuba where the usual mode of transport is by row boat with a standing oarsman. Our accommodation was in

very basic home-stays, some had a very small room with a fan and shared toilets. I was lucky to get a room with air-con and my own squat toilet and bucket shower. Alcohol was unavailable in the village, but the food was good.

SEA GYPSY WEDDING

It was great to meet the yachters, some of whom had been at sea for more than 10 years, but what was absolutely amazing was that Penuba had

LINGGA'S LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE



co-ordinated an extremely rare mass wedding of sea gypsies to coincide with the event.

Soon after 8:30am the next morning a flotilla of sea gypsies comprising four small boats each containing a bride and groom and larger boats with family and friends left Dabo in their wedding finery for the short crossing to Penuba, arriving soon after at the local jetty where a percussion band and dancers welcomed them.

A WARM RECEPTION

The brides paraded from the jetty to the nearby town square reception area and took their seats, the grooms soon joining them. They would remain there dressed to the nines in traditional outfits in the stifling heat for the next few hours.

Guests, including the head of Lingga Tourism Office Raja Fahrurrazi, were offered betel nuts as a gesture of welcome. Silat dancers blessed the brides and grooms with a ceremonial dance. An Iman solemnised the wedding as sea gypsies have converted from paganism to Muslim in Lingga. Lunch, speeches, music and dances followed and finally the Governor of the Riau





Islands, Nurdin Basirun, from Batam greeted the wedding couples and gave them monetary gifts.

THANKS MUCH

The party continued with members of the public joining in the dancing, offering their monetary gifts and in return receiving an appreciation of thanks; a boiled egg and cake in an embroidered bag.

The whole town was involved in the celebrations with festive food being served and crowds looking on from the pavements.

TO LINGGA ISLAND

Once the festivities had ended in the late afternoon, we left for Lingga Island and Daik the capital of the Lingga Regency. Lingga gets its name from the profile of Mount Daik which is shaped like the Hindu lingam, a phallic symbol.

Our first port of call was at the charming Resun Waterfall where Winny sportingly posed for photos in the crystal clear water before we retired to our simple hotel which did have a proper toilet and shower and a café opposite with a small stock of beer - luxury indeed!

THE SAGA OF SAGO

Sago was first introduced to Lingga by Sultan Sulaiman Badrul Alam 11 in the late 19th Century because rice growing wasn't successful. Our morning tour took us through fishing villages and kampongs to Melukap where a goat was helping itself to sago from a cut tree trunk. Exploring the small village, we found a lovely small cottage industry producing raw sago by soaking, grating and peeling the sago tree trunk before processing.

The raw sago is transported in sacks to the drying factory where it is washed, dried on wood fire heated cement stones before packaging and distribution for Indonesian and Singapore markets.

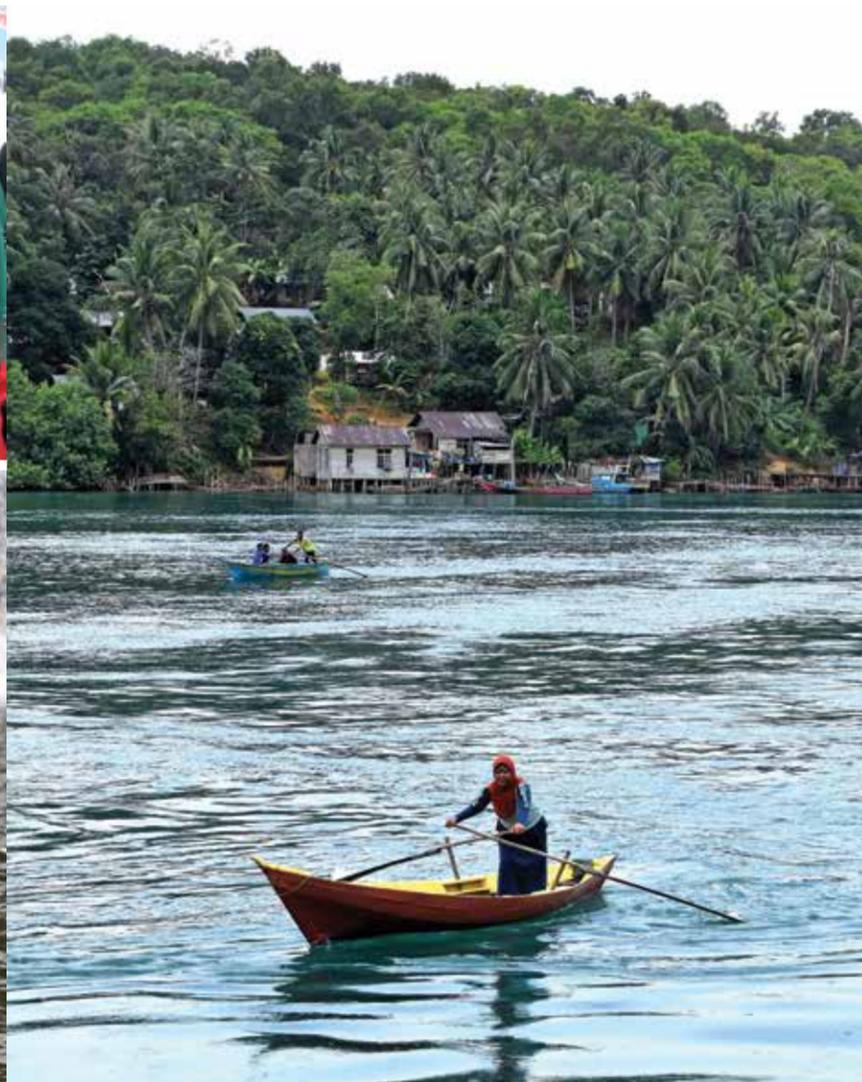
PORT OF TANJUNG BUTON

Our final evening on Lingga Island started at the Port of Tanjung Buton sipping tea, eating tasty snacks and watching the sun go down. A perfect setting in the company of hosts Edi Sustriso and Raja before a seafood and spicy dinner at the excellent, casual Warung Friska Lingga Restaurant.

After a mee rebus breakfast we took the slow boat to Benan Island where 23 yachts had already arrived as part of the 'Wonderful Sail to Indonesia 2018'. The jetty is a great place to hang out and you can get a meal and sit and watch the world sail by, whether it be the school boat run, kids playing, fish drying or fishermen at work.

ROOM WITH A BEACH VIEW

My room was a simple chalet, a short motorbike ride from the jetty, at 'Pantai Benan'. It had a bedroom, en-suite local mandi bathroom,



sofa and TV plus a balcony and inquisitive goats. Benan is a small and friendly village where everyone has time for a smile and chat. Restaurants are available and the food is good, but we opted for self-catering including a delicious BBQ of freshly caught fish. There are boats for hire, kayaking, fishing and snorkelling opportunities and nature trails to follow.

FAST BOAT TO BATAM

There was another welcome party for the yachters with dancers arriving by 'traditional taxi' but it was time for me to head back to Batam on the 'fast boat' which cut the journey in half, but wasn't the most comfortable as it powered through the swell.

I enjoyed my time in the Lingga Islands despite (or indeed because of) the basic nature of the trip and will return, ideally when there is a festival on, or group activities arranged. ♦



Pocket Guide



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