

Adventures at sea on Sangihe Island

MANADO, North Sulawesi (JP). Since Merpati Airlines has suspended its flights between Manado and Tahuna from July of this year, visiting Tahuna on Sangihe Island in North Sulawesi now requires a trip by sea. There are only two choices to visit this island of nutmeg and cloves: by ferry or by jet boat, both of which serve the Manado-Tahuna route three times a week.

I was eager to visit this most northern archipelago of Indonesia and see its landscape and meet the locals. I thought it would be exciting. Sangihe is one of three main islands in the Sangihe-Talaud archipelago, the other two being Karakelang, the biggest, and Siau. There are 77 neighboring islands but only 47 of them are inhabited.

On the day we wanted to travel there was no jet boat leaving from Manado. We decided to take the ferry which, unfortunately for us, ran out of business class tickets and had only deck seats left.

The name of the ferry that we were going to take to Tahuna reminded me of Columbus' ship the *Santa Maria*. I didn't think it would be a nightmare to travel on this ferry. However, the nightmare began as soon as I boarded in Manado Harbor.

Manado Harbor was busy in the afternoon. There were a lot of people. All passengers of the *Santa Maria* had to cross the crowded one-meter-wide wooden

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platform to reach the ship. This platform was filled with vendors, young and old passengers and porters carrying large heavy sacks on their shoulders. I had to simultaneously watch my step so as to not fall into the sea while keeping an eye on the porter who carried our bags. It was truly chaotic. I was shocked when I first boarded this small ship. As vendors noisily hawked their goods, some passengers rolled out their mattresses for a rest.

For Rp 23,000, the price of a one-way economy ticket serving Manado-Tahuna, each passenger receives a bed with a hard mattress and *nasi bungkus* (take-away rice). The bunk beds were all occupied by passengers — women, men, babies and children mixed together.

There were no spaces at all on the deck because there were many boxes and big sacks scattered around. My friend compared the deck on this ship to a slave ship — an apt description considering the number of people on board.

On deck, the situation was much like that of the traditional market until the ferry left for Tahuna and the vendors left the ship. "Beep, beep ..." the signals sounded at 6 p.m. as the ferry left Manado Harbor. In the basement,

the odor of people's perspiration mixed with the aroma of ripe durians. The smell from the toilet added to the sickening odor.

The ferry is the only available transportation for people who regularly commute between Manado and Tahuna. Most passengers are used to this mode of transportation. All the passengers were from Sangihe, or Sangir, and most were vendors. Their merchandise, such as different kinds of fruits, vegetables, and snacks, were strewn about the basement. Those passengers who did not get beds slept outside the room together with their belongings and merchandise. They did not seem to mind.

People stared curiously at us. Their first question was "What are you going to do in Tahuna?" because they thought there was nothing special there compared to the Bunaken Sea Garden in Manado.

It is recommended that anyone who suffers from seasickness take antinausea tablets before boarding this ferry. Six hours after leaving Manado, the sea was rough and it easily stirred up the contents of your stomach or made you quite dizzy. The waves shook the ferry for three hours and for newcomers like me it was really a nightmare. Thanks to the antinausea tablets, I was sleeping as the rough waves shook the ferry.

At about six in the morning,

the *Santa Maria* finally arrived in Tahuna. The nightmare was abruptly over when I stood in Tahuna Harbor. The mix of the fresh morning sea air cooled our nerves after 12 hours of sitting, standing and sleeping on the ferry. The harbor was small. There were three other ferries which were docked as we arrived. The landscape of Tahuna by the harbor was stunning. The hill bordering the harbor was adorned with compact rows of coconut trees.

Everyone seems to know each other in this small town of 24,000. Thus, it is obvious if you have newly arrived. As a newcomer, unfortunately, you will be given different prices, especially if you are a tourist.

People in Tahuna call the minibus a taxi. The taxi driver took us to the hotel which we found in the tourist guidebook. At six in the morning, life had not begun yet in this small clean town. The road to the connecting town in the capital of Sangihe-Talaud Islands is good and the landscape of Tahuna is unique. Half of the town is surrounded by rocky, planted hills. Coconut trees and cloves are the main trees along the road in Tahuna. Most zinc-roofed houses that we passed by are decent but all look neat.

Unfortunately, this town is not prepared to accommodate either local or foreign tourists. Hotel Nasional for example, does not

serve their guests well despite its rating in the guidebook as the best hotel in town. The hotel attendants do not dress properly to welcome guests. They responded to guests' requests very slowly and served guests with strange faces. There are a few restaurants where you can enjoy good food after a long trip from Manado.

The facilities on this island are basic. However, the view of the sea, its unique landscape and the typical hot seashore climate are impressive. The heat in the afternoon is intense on this island where people speak in the Sangir dialect. You can really enjoy the sea, the heat and the landscape. It is a fascinating place.

There is nothing special in this very slow-moving town. People dry their nutmegs and cloves on the side of the road. There are only a few shops in town. They are like shops in old Jakarta — kiosks made of wood. However, the town is surrounded by a hill planted with coconut trees and it has an attractive and unique appearance. If you want to visit white sandy beaches, you can go to Pantai Pasir Putih in Panauareng. No public cars are available so you have to rent a car. It is best to negotiate the price, which includes a charge for waiting. This beach is located behind the hill that surrounds Tahuna, so to save time you can also rent a boat in the harbor to reach the best beaches.

Most people in Tahuna are devout Christians. However, there are also some Muslims that live in Kampong Islam Tidore. Besides civil servants, most of the population are farmers of nutmeg, coconut and cloves. Sangihe is also popular for its almonds. The native Sangir people are fishermen and they usually raise pigs in their yards.

After knowing the nightmare of taking the ferry, we preferred to take a jet boat back to Manado, which only serves the Manado-Tahuna route. It took us seven hours to get there and the ticket was Rp 170,000. The 100-seat boat is air-conditioned and comfortable. However, as it is smaller than the ferry, passengers can feel the rough sea strongly. Therefore, it is also recommended to take antinausea tablets before traveling.

A scientific to cho

FREISING, Germany (DPA): Gottfried Ziegler is seriously into chocolate. For more than 20 years, Ziegler, a scientist at the Fraunhofer Institute for Process Engineering and Packaging in Freising outside Munich has been doing chocolate-related research.

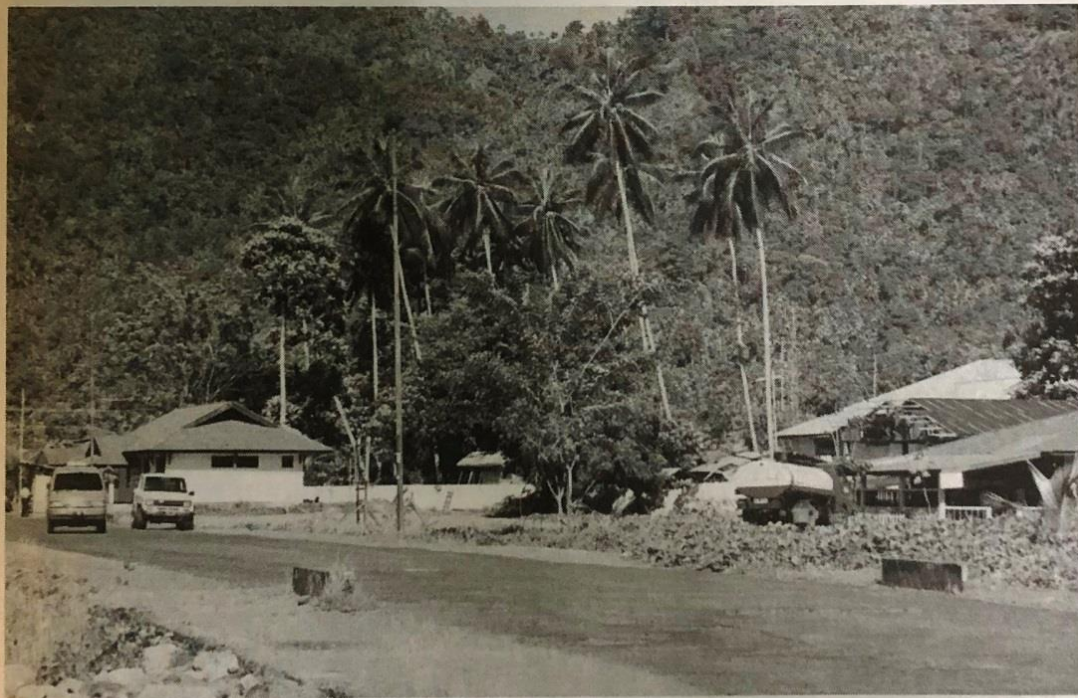
His brief: to investigate how chocolate should taste, to improve machines used to produce chocolate treats, and to determine what sort of packaging is the most appropriate.

"In Germany there are research institutions for every sort of food, and one of the products we investigate here is chocolate," said Ziegler, 54.

Big confectionery firms turn to Ziegler and his six colleagues whenever they encounter problems in the production of sweets or with the storage of their wares.

One of the problems chocolate manufacturers encounter is a gray film that develops in the course of time, Ziegler explained. The film, though completely harmless, does not look very appetizing.

The institute has looked into the problem, and found that manufacturers themselves are to blame. Production of chocolate has been speeded up due to



A glimpse of Tahuna from the harbor, with a view of hills planted with coconut trees behind it (above). Homes by the sea in Tahuna, Sangihe Island (right).

