

Gili Trawangan gains more popularity

By Wahyuni Kamah

MATARAM, Lombok (JP): Mentioning the island of Lombok can conjure up fabulous images of Senigigi beach. But there is more to Lombok than just this famous retreat. There is Gili Trawangan, Gili Air and Gili Meno — three tiny islands off the northwest coast of Lombok.

These islands are still a popular destination among foreign tourists, even after the riot that hit Mataram early this year. *Gili* means island in the local Sasak language. Gili Trawangan is the most populated island of the three, and it is the furthest away from Lombok. The beach on this tiny island offers pearl white sand and clear water.

The trip to the island is served by a small ferry from Bangsal harbor in West Lombok. The 45-minute trip costs Rp 2,000 one way. With this ferry you travel along with other locals of Trawangan who use the boat to transport their food and vegetables. The water, especially in the morning, is normally calm. On the way to Trawangan, you can see other islands from a distance. Other transportation to the islands includes a shuttle, which is more comfortable, but of course

costs more. The one-way trip on this boat costs Rp 17,000.

Cidomo (carts pulled by a horse) wait for visitors at the small harbor of Gili Trawangan. They are ready to take you to the hotel for between Rp 5,000 and Rp 10,000, depending on your bargaining skills. Most *cidomo* drivers speak a little English.

Hotels in Trawangan range from cheap ones, starting from Rp 35,000 per room for one night — to luxurious ones, which are mostly situated on the main road by the beach in the east part of the island. It is only a question of money when selecting the hotel you want.

After staying on this island, you can continue your trip to other destinations as there are some tour agencies which offer tours, such as sailing to Sumbawa or Flores, trekking to Mt. Rinjani in Lombok and diving and night diving in the nearby waters.

Facilities on Gili Trawangan range from restaurants, bars and money changers to Internet

cafes and small kiosks selling a variety of useful goods. However, the *wartel* (telecommunications booth) in Trawangan still uses a manual system for billing by timing conversations with a stopwatch.

Despite declining tourism as a result of the January riot in Mataram, people of Gili Trawangan believe that tourists will keep visiting this tiny island, while some new hotels and homestays are under construction.

"The island was only deserted for one week after the riot. We had to evacuate tourists from the island because the Lombok Police asked us to do so. However, after that, the tourists kept coming," said Gafar, the owner of Losmen Aldi. Tourists usually come directly from Bali on a cruise.

"In the peak season from July to August, you cannot find a homestay in the middle range, because all are occupied," Gafar proudly added.

It is not difficult to enjoy the hot coastal climate during the day when you stay on this Bugis people-dominated island. Riding bikes to explore a segment of the island is also pleasant. Bike rentals cost Rp 5,000 per hour.

A road runs around the island, following its coastal line. In the center of Trawangan the road is good but heading to the north is rough and you will have to give it your best to get through the sandy path.

The northern part of Trawangan is not inhabited. You will only find a small wood and a field of grass there.

Not all the beaches along the coast of Trawangan are good for swimming because of the coral reef. Only an area near the harbor is available for swimming and sunbathing. The sun is bright and the water is clear. Some trees are there to provide shade.

Nightlife on Gili Trawangan is fascinating. Tourists and locals mingle on the main road of Trawangan beginning at about 7 p.m. either for having dinner or just taking a walk. The center of Trawangan turns into an entertaining spot at night. The beach where most hotels are situated turns into an open restaurant. You can enjoy the fresh sea air at night while eating by the beach. Fresh fish is offered on tables at the roadside and you can choose any sort of fish you want to eat. Grilled red snappers and other delicious fish should not be

missed. Those who want to party can also visit the local discotheque. Small kiosks selling liquor, such as vodka and whisky, are open only at night. Sounds of laughter and various languages, such as English, German, Dutch, or Swedish, can be heard by the beach.

The locals, particularly young men, seem to enjoy this atmosphere. They sit on the road and say hello to the tourists or make small talk in broken English. The entertainment lasts long into the night and from the distance the twinkling lamps of Mataram can be seen.

Gili Trawangan, a small island near Lombok, is becoming popular as a tourist destination.



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