

Bali's Mangroves Offer Welcome Escape

Wahyuni Kamah went for a stroll at the island's Mangrove Information Center in Tahura

“I remember planting the saplings of these mangrove trees,” Ni Ketut Susilarini said when she saw the tall mangroves at the Mangrove Information Center. “We planted them in this area every day for about one week, together with other school children and boy scout groups in Sanur as well as some school children from Japan.”

“We were on the news,” she added, remembering fondly her junior high school year in 1992.

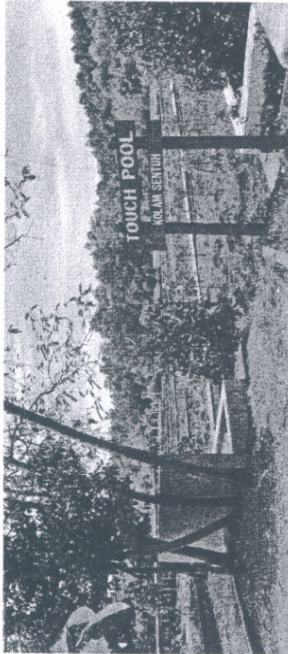
At that time, the Indonesian government was working with the Japanese government to plant the mangrove saplings in a 189-hectare area of Taman Hutan Raya Ngurah Rai (Tahura), which was formerly known as Hutan Prapat Benoa.

The location of the 1,375-hectare mangrove forest in Tahura stretches from Sanur to Tanjung Benoa in the south of Bali. When Japan funded the establishment of the Mangrove Information Center in 2001 in the mangrove forest, facilities for ecotourism were also developed, with the Center opening officially in 2003 for mangrove research and conservation. Visitors can enter the area and enjoy taking a stroll amid the lush mangrove forest on a 1.9-kilometer wooden walkway.

The mangrove trail is an alternative



It is not only a safe haven for diverse coastal animals, but also functions as a lung and a barrier for seawater intrusion and even guards against tsunamis



Being in the middle of this forest, it is easy to forget that Sanur actually ranks among the busiest parts of Bali. It is quiet, and at times there is nothing but the sound of the fish dabbling in the water. The forest is also home to animals such as monitor lizards, water snakes, crabs and birds, which are easy to spot.

The watching tower is fascinating, with a view of the entire mangrove forest. Other than a welcome escape from the hustle and bustle of Bali, the mangrove forest has also become a popular spot for pre-wedding photography. On a day with clear, blue sky, the view is excellent, with abundant green mangroves covering the waters on both sides of the walkway.

Despite the tranquility, the facility unfortunately lacks proper maintenance. The walkway looks like it hasn't been taken care of since its 2001 construction. Not all trails are provided with rails on both of sides for the sake of safety protection. There also aren't any signs of directions along the trail. Some huts have been marked with graffiti by

destination in south Bali to visit. The entrance gate on Jalan Bypass Ngurah Rai in Suwang, Sanur, is a bit hidden but most taxi drivers know the location by now.

A domestic tourist pays Rp 5,000 per ticket (40 cents), while foreign tourists pay Rp 50,000. The two traditional *warungs* by the parking lot give the impression that this is something different from the usual tourist spots in Bali. There are ponds for the seedling nursery outside the trail area.

Mangroves are plants that grow in intertidal zones of coastal areas. The special characteristic of mangrove trees are their above-ground roots. At the Information Center, visitors can spot about 18 species of true mangroves and 15 species of mangrove associates.

Visiting the mangrove forest in the Center is refreshing for both visual pleasure and ambience. Despite the sunny heat along the trail one isn't really exposed to the sun because the wooden walkways which lead visitors to the open water in Tanjung Benoa are shaded by the towering mangrove trees.



More than 18 species of true mangroves and 15 species of mangrove associates at Tahura, and they shade the 1.9-kilometer walking path. JC Photos/Wahyuni Kamah

irresponsible visitors.

And although it is not as severe as in other parts of Indonesia, there was also some scattered trash along the way.

In June, Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo planted mangrove saplings at Tahura, appointed by the Artha Graha Peduli foundation as an ambassador for Bali's mangrove conservation.

Nevertheless, Tahura is not free of threats. Last year, the Bali provincial government approved a permit for a private company to build tourist facilities such as hotels, a marine recreational area and a restaurant in the exploitation block of Tahura. This was made possible because the area of forest that would be allowed to be cleared was expanded from 400 to 700 hectares.

But the mangrove forest is an investment for the future of Bali.

It is not only a safe haven for diverse coastal animals, but also functions as a lung, an oxygen generator, for Bali and a barrier for seawater intrusion and even guards against tsunamis.