



Betwixt Ocean and Forest

Balikpapan is known to the world primarily for its oil fields. What many don't know though is that this East Kalimantan city is one of the cleanest in Indonesia. Wahyuni Kamah enjoyed the best that Balikpapan has to offer.

Dikepung Laut, Dipagari Hutan

Dunia mengenal Balikpapan sebagai ladang minyak. Banyak yang tidak tahu bahwa ia juga merupakan salah satu kota terbersih di Indonesia. Wahyuni Kamah menikmati sebagian tawaran terbaiknya.

A Wahyuni Kamah **V** Vebri Adrian



Panoramic view of Balikpapan | Panorama kota Balikpapan.



Bandar Balikpapan, the city's main shopping and eating complex | Bandar Balikpapan, kawasan jajan dan belanja utama.



From the window of the airplane, as it made its descent, the storage tanks of the refinery dazzled under the sunshine, as if to welcome visitors. A bit further on, a number of oil tankers could be seen forming a queue in the ocean. And way down below, Sepinggan Airport hove into view, lying right on the edge of the Makassar Strait.

This is Balikpapan, one of Indonesia's oil capitals, along with Dumai in Riau. The city lies on the coast of East Kalimantan and is not merely the headquarters of Pertamina (the national oil company) and a place

from which the State-Owned Enterprise manages one of the biggest oil-refinery complexes in the Indonesian archipelago, but is also a base of operations in Indonesia for some of the world's top oil companies, such as Total SA (France) and Chevron (USA). It is from this city that Total handles the operations of platforms lying in the Mahakam Delta, while Chevron manages several oil wells in the Makassar Strait. Besides these, several oil-related drilling and construction companies, such as BakerHughes, Schlumberger and Halliburton, have also set up shop in town.



change, as well as filling the pockets of some and keeping the economy moving. So what can one find to enjoy in an oil city such as this?

I left Sepinggan Airport and headed for the city centre. That afternoon, the sky was clear and blue and the air hot and humid. Before entering the city, I was greeted by the offices of companies managing the heavy equipment used by extractive industries and rows of buildings in front of which massive trucks were parked. Located on the coast, Balikpapan serves as the central landing place for all kinds of heavy equipment before it is then sent on to the interior of Kalimantan.

The streets here are clean and have no litter blowing down them. Government offices, shopping complexes, bus stops and the city's main bus station, are all clean and well kept. Balikpapan's streets are divided by central green verges and are shaded by leafy trees. Although not exactly wide, pavements for pedestrians have also been built on both sides of the street, something of rarity in Indonesia. It is no wonder then that over the last 20 years, Balikpapan has won no less than

15 Adipura trophies (nine of them consecutively), an award from the government in recognition of cities which have succeeded in keeping themselves clean.

On Jalan Sudirman, the main street of Balikpapan, the local government has also constructed a special bicycle lane, another rare phenomenon in Indonesia. A number of traffic lights operate on solar energy here and all of the city's pedestrian crossings proudly display noticeboards which state that the safety of those crossing the street at that point is protected by law. In Balikpapan, motorists have got used to slowing down or stopping when entering a zebra-crossing zone.

Balikpapan started life as a settlement for Bugis fishermen. At the end of the nineteenth century, a Dutch company first discovered oil in this then remote village. Since then, Kampung Bugis has grown into a busy oil city. Thousands of workers arrived from Java, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara and Maluku, and turned Balikpapan into one of the first multi-ethnic communities of that era.

In a world that's ever thirsty for oil, discovering sources of this black gold is like stumbling across buried treasure. Companies, both local and foreign, were unsurprisingly keen to suck up this natural bounty and in 1922, the Netherlands opened Balikpapan's first oil refinery. To this day the refinery, which is almost a century old now, is still sturdy and is now operating under the Pertamina flag. The closeness of the relationship between Balikpapan and the oil that it sits on is im-

How to get there

Garuda Indonesia serves the Jakarta-Balikpapan route 56 times a week. Taxis and rental cars are the best options for getting around the city. There are lots of hotels in Balikpapan, ranging from the simple to top-class stopovers such as the **Novotel Balikpapan** (novotel.com), **Le Grandeur Balikpapan** (www.legrandeurhotels.com), and the **Aston Balikpapan Hotel & Residence** (www.aston-international.com). If you want to take a look at the orangutans and honey bears, visit Samboja Lestari, a conservation area which offers accommodation at its **Samboja Lodge** (www.sambojalodge.com).

Like a magnet, these major companies draw in workers, experts and foreign guests. These giants also attract other kinds of secondary business however, such as financial services, trading and transportation companies and property dealers. With so many offices of foreign companies being based here, Balikpapan has grown into an international city, complete with five-star hotels, top-class resorts and deluxe residential areas.

The wheel of fiscal fortune spins quickly in this thriving city, generating profit, tax and foreign ex-

OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS, BALIKPAPAN HAS WON NO LESS THAN 15 ADIPURA TROPHIES (NINE OF THEM CONSECUTIVELY).



Money from oil changed the face of what used to be a Bugis fishing settlement | Uang dari minyak telah mengubah kota yang awalnya tempat permukiman nelayan Bugis ini.





mortalised in the fact that the anniversary of the city's founding is based on the date that a Dutch company first drilled for oil in this location: February 10, 1897.

However, investment that depletes natural resources cannot last forever. The timber industry, which once fuelled growth in Balikpapan, has faded quickly and traces of the dominance of timber are nowadays hard to find in the city. Coal mining and plantations are still thriving, however in order to continue their accelerated growth, these two business sectors need large areas of land for development. As a consequence, this city, which covers a large 50,000-hectare area (Jakarta covers 67,000 hectares in comparison), gets by with a population of only 620,000, or just one-twentieth of the population of Jakarta.

With such a sparse population, mobility and open spaces are not serious issues for Balikpapanites. Every evening, people gather at the small Bekapai Park on Jalan Sudirman. Some come just to chat, hang out or to take advantage of the free Wi-Fi internet connection. Others come to eat and just behind the park, a large number of street vendors sell various kinds of food, including *soto*, *sate*, *gado-gado* (vegetable salad with a peanut-sauce dressing), fried snacks and mixed fruits with ice. This place has never lacked for visitors all eager to mingle together in fact.

If you can't find a suitable choice of food down in Bekapai Park, make your way to the nearby Bandar Balikpapan. This area of restaurants and cafés sits right on the shoreline, just behind Jalan Sudirman's *ruko* (two-in-one shop-house) complex.

As a city hemmed in by the sea, it's no surprise to find that Balikpapan relies on its beaches as a main tourist attraction. To the east and south, the city is bordered by the Makassar Strait, while to the west lies the Balikpapan Strait. The beaches to the south are generally closed to swimmers, however people are welcome to bathe on the eastern shore, which slopes more gradually. Lamaru and Manggar Beaches, about 22 kilometres from the city centre, are local favourites.

Having had enough of walking along the beach, I embarked on a Balikpapan souvenir hunt. At the Kebun Sayur Market I found all sort of ornaments made from stone, as well as traditional Kalimantan batik and even ingredients for traditional medicines.

Besides its beach and its clean and tidy city, Balikpapan also offers forest tours, the like of which are hard to find in other Indonesian cities. Aside from the Wain River Protected Forest, visitors can enjoy Wana Wisata, the Bangkirai Mountain Forest and the Samboja Lestari Forest in the District of Kutai Kartanegara, which lies around two hours from Balikpapan.

In the evening I headed for Samboja Lestari, accompanied by some friends from the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOSF). Samboja Lestari is a former mining area that has now been reforested. These days, Samboja



Forest is used to treat sick orangutans and animals confiscated from poachers by the Natural Resources Conservation Board, who then allow them to recuperate before releasing them back into the wild. When I arrived, besides eight orangutans, Samboja was also treating 48 honey bears, which have been a protected species in Indonesia since 1993 and which are the city of Balikpapan's mascot.

From the main road, the Samboja Lestari complex can be reached on foot via a meandering dirt path that is somewhat slippery when it rains. After a 15-minute walk, we finally arrived at Samboja Lodge, a sanctuary that sits in the middle of this 2,000-hectare forest. The lodge is managed by BOSF.

Samboja Lodge, with its 22 hotel-standard rooms, is a mostly wooden construction. In the morning, when I opened my window, I was delighted to hear all manner of birdsong drifting from the tree canopies. Samboja Lodge has two suites at the top of its tower, which can be reached by an open flight of stairs made of steel netting. From the tower, I was met with a splendid panoramic view of the forest's crown of treetops.

Orangutans are the main attraction at Samboja Lestari | Orangutan adalah daya tarik utama di Samboja Lestari.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bukit Bangkirai, Balikpapan ecotourism site | Bukit Bangkirai, kawasan ekowisata di Balikpapan.

DALAM 20 TAHUN TERAKHIR, BALIKPAPAN MERAHAI 15 TROFI ADIPURA (SEMBILAN DI ANTARANYA DIDAPAT BERTURUT-TURUT).

Dari jendela pesawat, tangki-tangki kilang tampak berpendar tertimpa sinar matahari, seolah mengucapkan selamat datang kepada para pelancong. Agak ke tengah laut, sejumlah kapal tanker berjajar menunggu antrean. Dan di bawah sana, Bandar Udara Sepinggan terbaring lurus, persis di bibir Selat Makassar.

Inilah Balikpapan, salah satu “ibukota” industri minyak Indonesia, selain Dumai di Riau. Kota di tepi pantai Kalimantan Timur ini bukan hanya menjadi markas Pertamina yang mengelola salah satu kompleks *refinery* terbesar di Nusantara, tetapi juga basis operasi perusahaan minyak kelas dunia, seperti Total SA. (Prancis) dan Chevron (Amerika Serikat), di Indonesia. Dari kota inilah, Total mengendalikan operasi sejumlah anjungan di Delta Mahakam, sedangkan Chevron mengelola sumur-sumur minyak di Selat Makasar.

Selain itu, terdapat pula sejumlah perusahaan pengeboran dan konstruksi tambang minyak seperti BakerHughes, Schlumberger, dan Halliburton.

Bagaikan magnet, perusahaan-perusahaan kakap tersebut menyedot pekerja, tenaga ahli, dan tamu-tamu asing. Para raksasa ini juga mendatangkan berbagai sektor usaha lain seperti jasa keuangan, perdagangan, transportasi dan properti. Dengan begitu banyak kantor perusahaan asing yang bercokol di dalamnya, Balikpapan berkembang menjadi kota internasional, lengkap dengan hotel-hotel bintang lima, restoran kelas atas, dan kawasan permukiman mewah.

Uang berputar kencang, menjadi profit, pajak, dan devisa, serta mengisi kantong sejumlah orang dan menggerakkan perekonomian. Apa yang bisa kita nikmati dari kota minyak seperti ini?

— **Saya meninggalkan Bandara Sepinggan menuju pusat kota.** Siang itu langit begitu biru dan cerah. Udara lembap dan panas. Sebelum memasuki kota, kita akan disambut kantor-kantor perusahaan pengelola alat berat pertambangan dan deretan gudang berisi truk-truk besar. Berada di tepi laut, Balikpapan berperan sebagai pusat pendaratan berbagai peralatan berat, sebelum dikirim ke pedalaman Kalimantan Timur.

Jalanan tampak bersih, tanpa sampah. Kantor-kantor pemerintah, kompleks pertokoan, halte tempat pemberhentian bus, bahkan terminal juga resik dan terawat. Dua ruas jalan yang dipisahkan jalur hijau, teduh oleh pepohonan yang rindang. Meskipun tak cukup lapang, jalur khusus pejalan kaki dibangun di kedua sisi jalan. Tak mengherankan jika dalam 20 tahun terakhir, Balikpapan meraih 15 trofi Adipura (sembilan di antaranya didapat berturut-turut). Adipura adalah penghargaan dari pemerintah bagi daerah-daerah yang sukses menjaga kebersihan.

Di Jalan Sudirman, jalan utama di Balikpapan, pemerintah daerah membangun jalur khusus pemakai sepeda, fenomena langka untuk standar Indonesia. Sejumlah

lampu lalu lintas beroperasi dengan tenaga surya, juga langka di Indonesia. Di semua tempat penyeberangan dipasang papan pengumuman bahwa keselamatan penyeberang jalan dilindungi Undang-Undang. Di kota ini, para pengendara terbiasa mengerem atau menghentikan kendaraan sebelum memasuki zebra cross, sikap yang tentunya sangat jarang kita saksikan di Jakarta.

Balikpapan bermula sebagai permukiman nelayan Bugis di Kalimantan. Di pengujung abad ke-19, sebuah perusahaan Belanda menemukan sumber minyak bumi pertama di kampung terpencil tersebut. Sejak itu, Kampung Bugis tumbuh jadi kota minyak yang sibuk. Ribuan pekerja berdatangan dari Jawa, Sulawesi, Nusa





Tenggara, juga Maluku, kemudian menjadikan Balikpapan salah satu kawasan multietnis pertama kala itu.

Di bumi yang haus bahan bakar ini, penemuan sumber minyak tak ubahnya penemuan harta karun. Perusahaan-perusahaan lokal dan asing ingin ambil bagian untuk menyedotnya.

Pada 1922, Belanda membangun kilang minyak pertama di Balikpapan. Sampai hari ini, kilang yang berumur hampir satu abad itu masih berdiri gagah dan beroperasi di bawah bendera Pertamina. Dekatnya hubungan Balikpapan dengan minyak diabadikan dalam bentuk peringatan hari jadi kota yang ditetapkan berdasarkan tanggal pertama kali perusahaan

Belanda menancapkan mata bornya di tempat ini: 10 Februari 1897.

Namun investasi yang cenderung menguras sumber daya alam tak bisa bertahan lama. Industri kayu yang pernah menjadi bensin pertumbuhan bagi Balikpapan dengan cepat mengempis. Jejak-jejak kejayaan kayu kini bahkan sulit ditemukan di kota ini. Bisnis batu bara dan perkebunan memang masih berkibar, tapi agar bisa terus melaju, kedua sektor usaha ini memerlukan lahan pengembangan yang tak sedikit. Akibatnya, kota yang luas wilayahnya mencapai 50 ribu hektare ini (Jakarta 67 ribu hektare) hanya “bertahan” dengan jumlah penduduk 620 ribu jiwa atau sekitar



Honey bear, the city of Balikpapan's mascot | Beruang madu, maskot kota Balikpapan.

seperduapuluh populasi Jakarta.

Dengan penduduk yang cukup “lengang”, mobilitas warga dan ruang terbuka seperti tak menjadi persoalan serius bagi Balikpapan. Tiap sore, warga memenuhi Taman Bekapai, sebuah taman kecil di Jalan Sudirman. Ada yang sekadar ngobrol, duduk-duduk, atau memanfaatkan jaringan *wi-fi* gratis untuk koneksi internet. Banyak pula yang datang untuk mengisi perut. Di belakang taman, pada pedagang kaki lima ramai menjajakan aneka kudapan, seperti soto, sate, gado-gado, gorengan, juga es campur. Tiap malam kawasan ini tak pernah sepi pengunjung—sebuah sinyal yang menunjukkan bahwa kota multietnis ini cukup aman.

Jika tak menemukan pilihan makanan yang cocok di Taman Bekapai, kita bisa bergeser sedikit ke Bandar Balikpapan. Kawasan restoran dan kafe ini persis berada di bibir laut, tepatnya di balik kompleks ruko Jalan Sudirman. Pengunjung bisa menyantap aneka hidangan *seafood* sembari menikmati embusan angin laut dari Teluk Balikpapan.

Sebagai kota yang dikepung laut, wajar pula jika Balikpapan mengandalkan wisata pantai. Di bagian timur dan selatan, kota ini dipagari Selat Makassar, sedangkan di barat dibatasi oleh Selat Balikpapan. Pantai-pantai di selatan umumnya tertutup untuk berenang, tapi warga dipersilakan mandi di pesisir timur yang lebih landai. Pantai Lamaru dan Pantai Manggar, sekitar 22 kilometer dari pusat kota, merupakan favorit warga.

Puas jalan-jalan di pantai, saya memborong aneka cenderamata khas Balikpapan. Di Pasar Inpres Kebun Sayur—jangan salah, ini bukan pasar sayur-mayur segar—kita dapat menemukan berbagai perhiasan dari batu alam, batik Kalimantan, bahkan ramuan obat tradisional. Kios-kios yang buka dari pukul 10 hingga 18 di pasar ini menawarkan harga yang lebih bersahabat ketimbang toko-toko khusus suvenir di pusat kota.

How to get there

Garuda Indonesia melayani penerbangan Jakarta-Balikpapan pp 56 kali per minggu. Untuk transportasi di dalam kota, taksi atau mobil sewaan adalah opsi terbaik. Ada banyak hotel di Balikpapan, mulai kelas melati hingga premium, contohnya **Novotel Balikpapan** (novotel.com), **Le Grandeur Balikpapan** (www.legrandeurhotels.com), dan **Aston Balikpapan Hotel & Residence** (www.aston-international.com). Jika ingin melihat orangutan dan beruang madu, kunjungi Samboja Lestari, kawasan konservasi yang dilengkapi penginapan bernama **Samboja Lodge** (www.sambojalodge.com).

Selain pantai dan kota yang resik dan teratur, Balikpapan juga menawarkan wisata hutan yang sulit ditemukan di kota lain. Selain Hutan Lindung Sungai Wain, ada pula Wana Wisata, Hutan Bukit Bangkirai, dan Hutan Samboja Lestari di Kabupaten Kutai Kartanegara, sekitar dua jam perjalanan dari Balikpapan.

Sore hari, saya menuju Samboja Lestari ditemani sejumlah kawan dari Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BPSF). Samboja Lestari merupakan kawasan bekas tambang yang dihutankan kembali. Saat ini, Hutan Samboja digunakan untuk merawat orangutan yang sakit atau hasil sitaan Badan Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam. Mereka dirawat, dipulihkan, selanjutnya dilepaskan ke alam liar.

Saat saya datang, selain delapan orangutan, Samboja tengah merawat 48 beruang madu (maskot Kota Balikpapan) yang sejak 1993 telah dinyatakan sebagai hewan yang dilindungi di Indonesia.

Dari jalan raya, kompleks Samboja Lestari harus ditempuh dengan berjalan kaki melalui jalan tanah setapak yang penuh liku dan licin oleh hujan. Setelah 15 menit berjalan kaki, kami sampai di Samboja Lodge, penginapan di tengah hutan seluas 2.000 hektare, yang dikelola oleh BOSF.

Penginapan 22 kamar dengan standar hotel ini menggunakan kayu sebagai bahan utama. Di pagi hari, begitu membuka jendela kamar, saya menikmati kicauan aneka jenis burung yang hinggap di dahan pepohonan yang kanopinya gampang digapai. Samboja Lodge memiliki dua kamar *suite* di puncak menara yang dapat dijangkau melalui anak tangga dari jejaring kawat baja yang terbuka. Dari menara, saya disuguhi panorama puncak-puncak tajuk hutan dan kesejukan angin yang melenakan.