The first book of its kind on the Batam-Riau region, sleepy backwaters which have a rare significance in world history.

BATAM AND THE RIAU ISLANDS
Editor: Leonard Lueras
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BATAM and the Riau Islands• is the sixth in a se•ries• of 'coffee-table' books• produced by Leonard• Lueras, noted• author of Surfing Indonesia, and the Yayasan Bali Purnati focused on aspects of Indonesia often overlooked by tourists and residents alike. The first three in the series were portraits of Sanur, Kuta and Ubud, but more recently Lueras has moved beyond Bali. This is no bad thing. I've learned a lot from his other two books in the series about Yogyakarta and even Jakarta which I have written about extensively for nine years.

A bulky hardback, Batam... could well have benefited from having been published as a pair. One is of interest to business folk and Singaporeans wishing to enjoy whatever modern benefits are offered on Batam and Bintan, whilst the other sheds light on a few of the other 3,200 islands which make up the Province, sleepy backwaters which have a rare significance in world history.

In recent years, few non-Indonesians have visited any of the islands which make up the Riau Archipelago which faces Malaysia and Singapore, whereas Batam, and to a lesser extent Bintan, which are described as "some of the most developed and affluent parts of Indonesia", are familiar to many.

Indeed, such is the vastness of this country that in my 24-plus years here, I have only had a cursory glance at Batam whilst en route to Singapore by ferry, and I didn't like what I saw.

Many of the photographs depict "Batam's penchant for colorful structures". In her essay 'Batam Today', Jan Russell writes: "Batam is building, building, building. Throughout, the earth has been torn up, left raw and exposed in every shade from pastel peach to russet red, to make way for colorful rukos (shophouses), flimsy as film sets, or close-knit worker housing such as one that is elegantly titled, with no apparent irony, the Family Dream Home."

To this reviewer, these rows of rukos were seemingly inspired by Legoland or Disneyland. The satellite towns of Jakarta are littered with similar eyesores.

The final chapter, 'A Batam Pioneer', is an account of the achievements of Pak Kris Taenar Wiluan in developing the Citramas Group from a pipe-processing firm employing 40 people in 1983 to an international group now employing 4,000 people in 20 countries with revenues "exceeding US$1 billion".

He could not have managed this without political backing, and the chapter entitled 'Batam's "Father"' is most illuminating, as it is an interview conducted by Lueras with former Indonesian

President Bacharrudin Habibie. He tells how the then General Suharto used Batam as his headquarters during the Konfrontasi between Indonesia and Malaya (1963-1966), because he could see across to Singapore, then part of Malaya. He observed the movement of shipping and said, "My goodness, this is a very strategic place."

Chris Holm's essay, 'Batam Means Business', chronicles the foundation in 1971 of the Batam Industrial Development Authority (BIDA) by the astonishingly corrupt Ibnu Sutowo. In March 1979, B.J. Habibie took the helm of BIDA and from the outset he envisaged Batam developing a synergy with Singapore and Malaysia, whilst using Singapore's development as an example "to motivate [my] people".

Talking about the situation on Batam now, Pak Habibie said, "Now they are not consistent with their planning. They do what they want."

As always?

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THE first essay, 'Origins', is by the late David Jardine, former book reviewer of this parish, who has written from a historian's perspective with his expected objective and detailed insight.

Since the early stages of human migration the Riau islands, and in particular Lingga (the group of islands furthest from the coast of Sumatra) have been "at the swing point of the Straits of Malacca, the Java Sea and the South China Sea" and have for many centuries been "of the greatest significance."

The first migration of note was of the Malayoid people, originally from the northwestern part of Yunnan in China. Later proto-Malays were seafaring people, probably from coastal Borneo, who expanded into Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia as a result of trading and seafaring activities. Their gene pool mixed with other races, mainly Thai, Arab and Chinese, who "perhaps needless to say", brought their religions and cultures, remnants of which remain to this day.

Arabs, who traded with the Romans, and Chinese of the Chou Dynasty established a sea route some 200 years before the Christian era (BCE). As Jill Gocher writes in her essay 'Royal Riau', one reason for the strategic importance of the Riau islands is that "the two annual monsoons that hit this area allowed traders from India, Arabia and China to converge here to stay for each respective monsoon before heading homeward laden with the precious commodities of the other side. They left Riau with Chinese silks and porcelains, spices from the Spice Islands, textiles from India, and timbers, gold, gems and other exotic treasures from Borneo."

David Jardine writes of the Buddhist state of Sriwijaya which, from the 7th century CE, "was pre-eminent in the region and exacted tribute from far and wide [and] attracted the devout from as far away as China to study in its schools and temples."

But not all was peace and love. The seafarer Fa-Hsien made the journey from China to India in 413-414 and reported that "the waters of Southeast Asia are full of pirates", the many islands of Riau and Lingga "providing a multitude of bolt-holes to which one could escape with plunder",

as they have done continuously to this day. Once the Europeans arrived to fight over the spice trade, the Bugis of South Sulawesi became such major players in piracy that English children are still taught to "beware of the Bogey Man."

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BUT what of now?

Gilles Massot writes of the "motley crowd" that makes up 'The Riau Mosaic', which now includes the remnants of the Vietnamese boat people who were originally housed on Galang island by the Indonesian government.

Steve Kell's focus is on Tanjung Pinang, capital of Riau Islands province, and Bintan, the largest of the Riau islands. He wandered among the villages, explored beaches and neighboring islands occupied by single families and interacted with "lots of friendly people". He did not explore the northern part of Bintan as "approximately 20 years ago the Indonesian government leased much of it to Singaporean business interests, and it has since been turned into a luxury resort...where prices for goods and services are quoted in Singapore dollars."

Evan Jones is a pioneer explorer of the islands, paddling by canoe "in a silent and deserted wilderness of mangroves and coastlines intersected by an occasional black sand beach." However, as he points out, tourism has declined partly due to "government policies which make travel to Indonesia difficult.'

Through the many fine photographs and much of the writing, one rediscovers that thanks to its location Indonesia is, and always has been, one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. If for that reason alone, we should be grateful to Leonard Lueras for the reminder.

But one thought does not go away: where is the foreword from the Ministry of Tourism?

An original

A LITTLE more than a year ago we were saddened by the unexpected passing of our most prolific contributor, David Jardine. In memory of David and his sterling work for Tempo English we would like to showcase just one example of his unique work as it appears in Batam and the Riau Islands, apparently his final published essay. From the chapter 'Origins':

"Geography is destiny, manifestly so, if in times before mass communications and air travel you lived on remote islands such as, for example, the Seychelles far, far out in the middle of an ocean your contact with the wider world would have been both sporadic and minimal. If in those times you lived on a group of islands so strategically placed as the Riau and Lingga at the swing point of the Straits of Malacca, the Java Sea and the South China Sea the chances of interaction with travelers, itinerant merchants and other adventurers would have been that much greater.

And so it has been throughout history. The Riau and Lingga have in their own way had a seriously important, though not necessarily high-profile role to play. Their position athwart the

routes of early human migration, trade routes from early in the Christian era (AD) and, as we shall see, lanes of militarized naval movement is of the greatest significance.

This story brings together a whole variety of human groups, Malays, Chinese, Arabs, Indians, Japanese, Europeans and others who criss-crossed the Southeast Asia region for various purposes.

Which of them were "foreigners"? It really does depend on what you mean by the term. If, as the French historian of Southeast Asia Paul Munoz says in his Early Malay Kingdoms of the Indonesian Archipelago and Malay Peninsula the peninsula itself was not peopled until the last millennium BC then by very definition the first incomers at that time were all "foreign"...

*Terry Collins is the co-author of Culture Shock! Jakarta and writes the Jakartass blog.

By Terry Collins*
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