



A glimpse of

BINTULU

There's something disarming about Bintulu. This coastal town in central Sarawak may be known more for its energy industries than for tourism. It does not come dressed to impress, and that is exactly its charm.

What stands out about Bintulu is not a monument or a landmark. It is the quiet presence of culture in daily life. The town is home to many of Sarawak's indigenous communities, including Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, and Orang Ulu. Traditions here are not performed or packaged, they are simply part of how people live. As a visitor, you may only catch glimpses, but even those small moments give a sense of how deeply connected people are to their roots.

Spend a little time in Bintulu and you will start to notice the details. Locals catching the breeze by the beach. Markets buzzing before sunrise. A stretch of forest just outside town that feels like a world away. No fuss, no filter. Just everyday Bintulu.

Similajau National Park

Just 30 kilometres north of town, Similajau National Park stretches along the coast, a quiet stunner that often flies under the radar. The park's heath and Dipterocarp forests, two distinct landscapes, support a wide range of wildlife like macaques, civet cats, and Sarawak Langur, one of the rarest primates in the world. Hornbills, Sarawak's iconic bird, make frequent appearances overhead, while estuarine crocodiles are sometimes seen near the riverbanks. Offshore, you might even spot Irrawaddy dolphins gliding through the water.

Whether you are up for a 10-kilometre trek or a short, family-friendly loop, the trails are well-marked and easy to follow. You can go solo or join a guided hike from the park headquarters, where local rangers are always happy to share their knowledge. A river boat ride offers a different kind of thrill, especially if you manage to catch a glimpse of a crocodile or the prehistoric horseshoe crab resting in the shallows.



In this spread,
a golden sunset over Bintulu's beach, the lush greenery of Similajau National Park, the striking Tropical Pitcher Plant, and a glimpse of a majestic Orangutan.



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Pantai Tanjung Batu

As the sun dips, head to Pantai Tanjung Batu, a beach beloved by locals. Families gather for evening picnics. A handful of stalls dot the beachfront, perfect for a quick snack or cold coconut juice in hand as you watch the waves roll in. It is a laid-back, lived-in kind of place, just right for catching the sunset.

Local markets

No visit to Bintulu is complete without a stop at Pasar Tamu and Pasar Utama.

Wander through early in the morning, and you will find everything from jungle ferns (*midin*), fresh seafood and rare horseshoe crabs, often cooked in savoury sauce by street vendors who will greet you with a friendly smile.

The smells are intoxicating - ginger, lemongrass, dried shrimp, and the people even more so. This is where you really get to know Sarawak, through its flavours and its people.

Flavours of Bintulu

Sarawakian cuisine is hearty, full of flavour, and shaped by the land and rivers. In Bintulu, you will find smoked fish, sago-based dishes, and wild vegetables that locals still forage. Try *umai*, a Melanau dish made with raw marinated fish, or *dabai*, Sarawak's version of olives, best eaten with rice and a splash of soy sauce.

For a taste of it all, head to the Bintulu Night Market. As the night falls, the town comes alive with the smell of sizzling *satay*, smoky grilled fish, and rows of colourful *kuih* (desert). Whether you are here for the food or the atmosphere, this is where Bintulu shows you what it is all about. It is busy, it is loud, and it is real.



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In this spread,
the vibrant scene of Pasar Tamu, a bounty of fresh seafood and wild vegetables, a snapshot of Tanjung Batu Beach, the distinctive floating house at Baku Jetty, and a tranquil river at Batu Jetty.

Off the beaten track

For travellers willing to venture further inland, visiting an Iban longhouse in Belaga offers a deeper glimpse into Sarawak's indigenous heritage. Getting there is part of the adventure, travelling upriver by traditional Dayak boat through dense jungle, surrounded by nothing but the sounds of nature.

Within the longhouse, tradition is carried in the small, everyday details. Some of the elderly women still bear intricate tattoos, traditionally hand-tapped with bamboo. They carry traces of strength and tradition. Men craft *parang* (machetes) with techniques passed down through generations, while vibrant beadwork made by local women adds colour and character to the homes. Guests are welcomed with *tuak* (rice wine) and invited to sit on woven mats as hosts share tales of ancestral wisdom, forest spirits, and a deep respect for the land that shapes their daily life.



Floating Stay

A few hours' drive east of Bintulu lies one of the largest man-made lakes in Southeast Asia. It was formed by the Bakun hydroelectric dam, which now powers much of Sarawak. Almost the size of Singapore, it offers a quiet detour into nature.

Here, floating wooden houses known as *jelatang*, once built by fishermen, offer rustic stay right on the water. These simple homes rest gently on the lake, surrounded by jungle and silence.

Mornings are calm. You wake up to birdsong and stillness of the lake. With help of local hosts, visitors can explore jungle trails, learn about native plants and wildlife thriving in this remote part of Sarawak.

Why Bintulu?

Because it is unexpected. Because it is not polished for tourists. Because it breathes with authenticity.

Bintulu does not need big sights or bold claims. What it offers is simple. Space, nature, and a glimpse of everyday life in Sarawak, just as it is.



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