



The refinery flames dance against the night sky.

That is your first Bintulu moment. This strange, beautiful collision of industry and jungle coast that somehow just works. By day, you are at Tanjung Batu Beach with coconut water, watching fishermen work while offshore rigs dot the horizon. The markets smell like dried fish and wild ferns, vendors shouting in languages you cannot place. Taman Tumbina sprawls across hills overlooking everything - the sea, the town, the whole contradictory glory of it.

Bintulu earns its living from oil and gas, but it gives you sunsets, pristine parks, and food stalls where locals actually eat. Real. Gritty. Surprisingly unforgettable.

Bintulu sits on the central Sarawak coast, a port city that grew almost overnight from a modest fishing settlement into one of the country's most significant energy hubs after natural gas was discovered offshore in the 1970s. The infrastructure arrived fast - pipelines, processing plants, the vast PETRONAS Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) complex that today ranks among the largest liquefied natural gas facilities in the world.

And yet, for all that industrial momentum, the rainforest simply refused to retreat. It presses in from every direction, reminding the town who was here first.



Coffee, Beach and Everything in Between

Wander through the old town centre on a weekday morning and you will find Bintulu at its most unguarded. Trawlers unloading their catch, children cycling between coffee shops, aunties bargaining over baskets of river prawns. Nothing is carefully staged for visiting cameras.

The coffee shops along Jalan Masjid serve *kopi-o* (black coffee) so thick and dark it demands your full attention, paired with *roti canai* that arrives folded like a love letter. Sit long enough and someone will strike up a conversation - about the price of petrol, the last football match, the best stall for *mee kolo* (dry-tossed egg noodles with minced meat).

Take a short detour to Tua Pek Kong Temple, a Taoist shrine that has faced the Kemena River well over a century. It is one of the most carefully tended buildings in Bintulu, and entirely worth ten minutes of your morning.

When the morning loosens, follow the road to Tanjung Batu Beach, five kilometres from the town centre and a world away from it. Children run between food stalls, kite strings tangle in the sea breeze, and offshore rigs sit on the horizon like punctuation marks. Order a coconut, find a patch of shade, and watch the South China Sea do very little in the most satisfying way possible.



In this spread,
Glides along a mirror-still rainforest river on a traditional longboat; an ornate Chinese temple rises in intricate tiers reflecting the town's deep-rooted heritage; a tranquil riverside scene unfolds on calm brown waters fringed with nipah palms; layered local coffee or tea hint at Sarawak's enduring kopitiam culture; a bustling hawker spread of noodles and local favourites celebrates everyday flavours;

Into the Green

The rainforest in Bintulu does not require a long drive or a park permit. The Jungle Trekking Taman Tumbina trail begins four kilometres from the town centre, a 2.7-kilometre loop through lowland dipterocarp forest, rich in birdlife, and the trail unmarked by any tourist agenda.

For those with energy to spare, Bukit Nyabau extends the experience further. The trail climbs through the same forest before opening onto a waterfall tucked into the hillside, cool, largely unvisited, and worth stopping for. From there, a final push up concrete steps leads to a lookout tower at the summit. The view justifies every one of them: South China Sea on one side, Bintulu's industrial skyline on the other, the gas flares visible even in daylight. Two worlds, one horizon.

Morning Markets to Midnight Grills

Bintulu's food culture deserves a separate journey in itself. The town sits at the confluence of Iban, Melanau, Malay, and Chinese culinary traditions, and the results of that long, unplanned collaboration are remarkable. *Umai* - the Melanau raw fish salad dressed in lime, shallots, and chilli is best eaten at a table where you can see the river the fish came from. *Manok pansoh*, chicken slow-cooked in bamboo over open flame, carries a faint smokiness that no kitchen appliance will ever replicate.

Begin your food explorations at Pasar Tamu and Pasar Utama, the twin markets that sit side by side along the riverfront, both sheltered beneath distinctive cone-shaped roofs modelled after the traditional Melanau *terendak* hat. Pasar Tamu is the place for



jungle produce, and dried goods, that tells the story of the coastline.

Pasar Utama goes further - a sprawling wet and dry market with a hawker floor above where bowls of *Sarawak laksa* (spiced coconut noodle soup), and *pulut panggang* (grilled glutinous rice parcel wrapped in banana leaf) arrive at prices and taste that will make you want to stay for a second serving.

When evening comes, the *Pasar Malam* (night market) along Kampung Dagang road lights up with over a hundred stalls - grilled seafood, satay, traditional Malay sweets - the smoke rising into warm Bornean air.

Order more than you think you need. Share it.

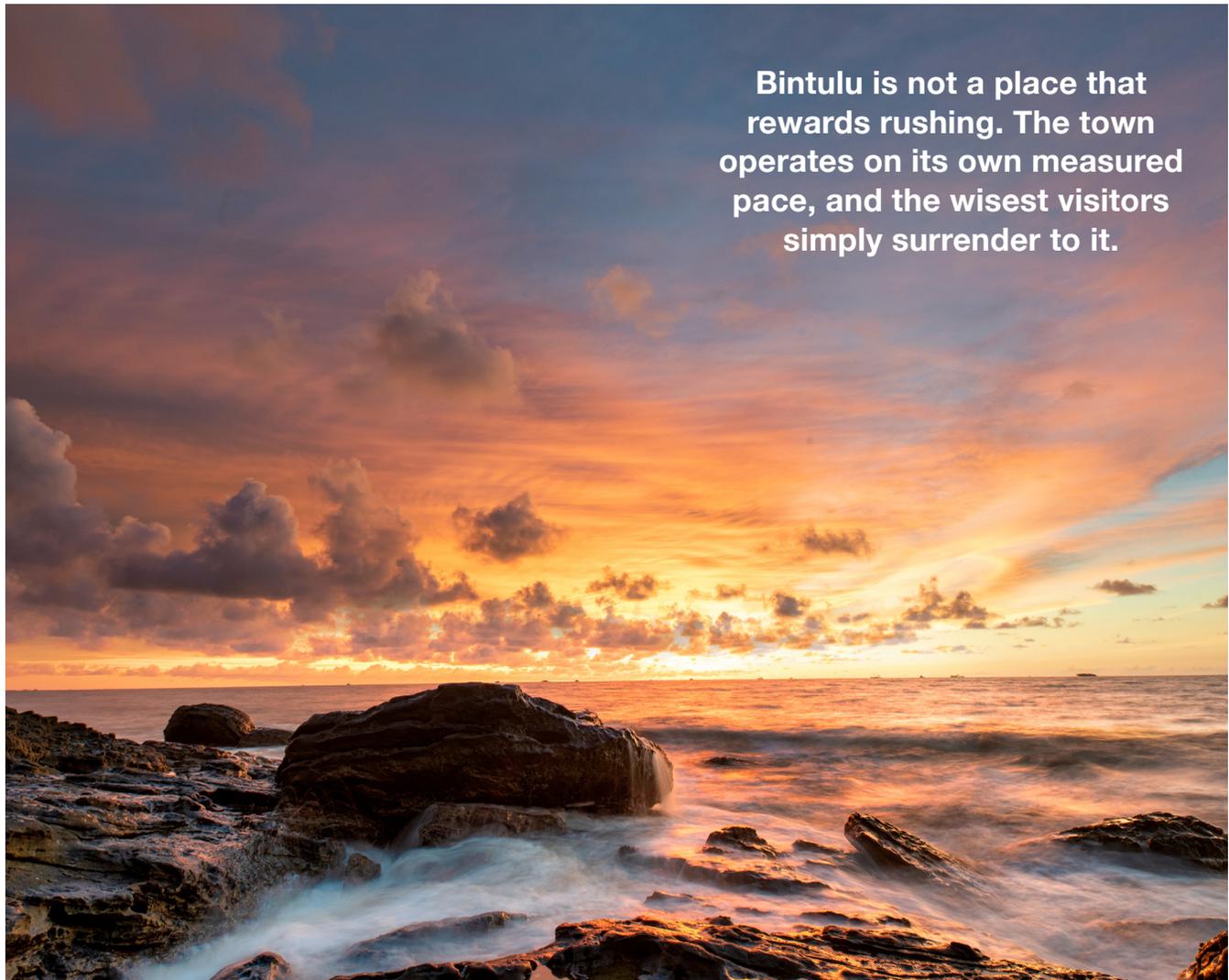


Staying and Slowing Down

Bintulu is not a place that rewards rushing. The town operates on its own measured pace, and the wisest visitors simply surrender to it. Mornings belong to the market and the waterfront. Afternoons, when the equatorial heat reaches its full authority, are best spent in the shade of Taman Tumbina, its botanical gardens and animal enclosures a world away from the jungle trail next door.

Evenings bring the breeze off the South China Sea and that extraordinary industrial sunset and the distant flicker of gas flares on the horizon.

In this spread,
the town's night market; the cheerful Taman Tumbina - Bintulu's beloved green sanctuary; close-ups of beloved local dishes spotlight Bintulu's rich culinary tapestry; and coastal golden sunset on the horizon.



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Come Without an Itinerary

Bintulu will not overwhelm you with itself. There are no heritage trails with illustrated maps, no curated experiences designed to smooth away the rough edges. What it offers instead is something rarer.

The refinery flames are still dancing when you leave. You will find yourself thinking about them on the flight home.

 Fly with Batik Air to Bintulu, Sarawak 4 times a week

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Shannim Mohd Sa'ad is an adventurous traveller with a deep appreciation for diverse cultures and off-the-beaten-path destinations. Along her journeys, she enjoys riding motocross, Muay Thai training, and snowboarding. Writing is her passion, compelling to share her unique experiences. Follow her on Instagram @epicadventuress and her blog epicadventuress.com

