Exploring Bintan Island Through Travel Photography

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ABSTRACT

Travel photography is not merely about documenting spaces and events, but also representing the experiences, culture, and social interactions of a region. This creative research explores Bintan Island through a travel photography approach, presenting natural landscapes, coastal communities, and cultural and spiritual dimensions. The methods applied include preparation, exploration, experimentation, and completion stages. Data was collected through observation and interviews, while the creative process was based on basic photography theory, feature photography, documentation, photo stories, ethnography, and human interest. The resulting work consists of five photographs in three categories: natural landscapes, portraits of social interactions, and local culture. Technically, slow speed and stop action techniques, wide-angle lenses, exposure settings, and GND and CPL filters were used for tonal balance. The results confirm that travel photography can be a narrative medium that captures visual beauty as well as social dynamics, landscape changes, and the spiritual values of coastal communities.

Keywords: Travel Photography, Bintan Island, Landscape, Human Interest, Visual Documentation.

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INTRODUCTION

Travel photography is a branch of photography that focuses on documenting experiences of space, time, and culture. Unlike photojournalism, which emphasizes actuality and straight news, travel photography is more feature-oriented and reflective. Rita Gani (2013:197) explains that travel photography is imagery that expresses feelings about time and place, as well as depicting the landscape, society, and culture of a region without specific geographical boundaries. Thus, travel photography does not merely present events, but builds a visual narrative about a person's experiences outside their home environment.

Conceptually, photography can be grouped into three major areas, namely commercial photography, journalistic photography, and fine-art photography. From this grouping, various genres have developed, such as landscape photography, documentary photography, architectural photography, still life photography, and travel photography. In the context of contemporary visual culture, travel photography has become increasingly popular as traveling activities have increased in society. Trips to mountains, beaches,

islands, and cultural sites are now almost always accompanied by documentation using DSLR cameras, smartphones, or other digital devices. This documentation generally records landscapes, social interactions, and local cultures.

Bintan Island, the largest island in the Riau Islands Province, which was inaugurated in 2004 with Tanjung Pinang as its capital, has significant marine and historical tourism potential. Its strategic location, about 50 miles south of Singapore, makes tourism one of the main contributors to the regional economy. The existence of Trikora Beach with its granite formations, Penyengat Island, the relics of the Johor Sultanate, Avalokitesvara Temple, and the mangrove forest area demonstrate the richness of the landscape and culture that has the potential to be represented visually.

Based on this context, this research aims to explore Bintan Island through a travel photography approach. Exploration is understood as a process of discovery to gain new understanding and experiences of a space. Thus, the work entitled "Exploring Bintan Island in Travel Photography" not only serves as visual documentation but also as a narrative representation of the landscape, social reality, and cultural identity of Bintan Island.

METHOD

In the process of creating this work, the author used several theories as basic references. In accordance with the form of creation of his works, namely photography, the author used basic photography theory as the foundation for the creative process, along with other basic rules that would become the discipline of creation.

1. Photography

Photography was originally created from painting or drawing using light as a medium. "Photography (from English: photography, which comes from the Greek words photos: light and grafo: to paint/write)" (Burhanuddin, 2014: 2). In general terms, photography refers to the process or method of producing images or photos of an object by recording the reflection of light that hits the object on a light-sensitive medium. The most popular tool for capturing light is a camera. Without light, no photos can be made. The principle of photography is to focus light with the help of refraction so that it can burn the light-capturing medium. A medium that has been burned with the right amount of light intensity will produce an image identical to the light entering the refracting medium (hereinafter referred to as the lens). To produce the right light intensity to produce an image, a measuring device called a light meter is used. After obtaining the right exposure, a photographer can adjust the light intensity by changing the combination of ISO/ASA (ISO speed), aperture, and shutter speed. The combination of ISO, aperture, and speed is called exposure. In digital photography, where film is not used, the film speed that was originally used has evolved into digital ISO (Newhall, 2005: 5). (Soeprapto Soedjono, 2006:50)

2. Photographic Message

Regarding messages, this messenger's view is supported by Roland Barthes (1915-1980). In "The Photographic Message" (1961), he states that a photograph is a

message formed by the source of emission, the transmission channel, and the point of reception. The structure of a photograph is not an isolated structure, because it is always in communication with other structures, namely written text—titles, captions, articles that always accompany photographs. Thus, the overall message is formed by different cooperations. (Seno Gumira Ajidarma, 2016:27)

3. Feature Photography

Feature photos are photos whose themes are more lighthearted and entertaining, requiring no deep thought on the part of the reader to digest them (Rita Gani, 2013:105). The main strength of Feature Photos is the impression they create. They stick in the mind because they influence emotions and give readers space for journalistic photos in a connotative way. Unlike Spot Photos, Feature Photos that emphasize Human Interest do not easily become stale. They can be published some time after the event has occurred (Taufan Wijaya, 2014:74).

4. Documentary Photography

Documentary photography is similar to a movie synopsis, which is a photo that tells a story to people who did not witness an event using the medium of photography. This is because documentary photography is the collection of evidence about an event. The added value of documentary photography in the future (Atok Sugiarto, 2014:118).

5. Photo Story

Photo stories or storytelling photos emphasize the completeness of the story and details. Storytelling photos are usually a series of photos, an arrangement of photos with a completely different approach between one photo and another, but still within the same context. Photo stories at the international level are more diverse. The forms of presentation of storytelling photos are descriptive, narrative, and photo essays.
a. Descriptive

Photographers usually present things that are interesting from their point of view. Photo stories presented in this style are compilations of their observations. A characteristic of this type of photo story is that the sequence of photos can be changed or reversed without changing the content of the story.
b. Narrative

These photo stories have a specific theme and depiction of a situation or structure. A characteristic of narrative photo stories is that they have a plot and markers that cannot be changed arbitrarily.
c. Photo Essay

A photo story with a specific perspective concerning a question or series of arguments. It can also be an analysis. The characteristic of a photo essay is that it uses more text and the collection of photos is divided into blocks. (Taufan Wijaya, 2014:76)

6. Ethnography

Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. Ethnographic research involves learning about the world of people who have learned to see, hear, speak, and act in different ways. This is the essence of ethnography: to discover the hidden principles of other ways of life. (James P. Spradley, 2007:3:4)

7. Human Interest Photography

Human Interest Photography is a type of photography that displays the humanity of the photographer. This type of photography conveys emotional messages. It relates to human interaction with the surrounding environment, which can be objects, nature, stars, or people. (Wilsen Way, 2014:3)

8. Travel Photography

One of the interesting things about traveling is capturing various events around us with a camera. In addition to being a memento and authentic proof of having traveled to a place, photos are also often used as a means of showing off in public spaces. There are many things that can become photo subjects during a tourist trip, especially if the atmosphere and environment of the tourist destination are different from our daily lives (Rita Gani, 2013:198).

Travel photography requires deep observation and exploration as a form of photographic art. The following are the stages of creating a photographic work, "Exploring Bintan Island in Travel Photography."

1. Preparation

At this stage, the artist conducts observations, collects data and information, and searches for references in books, magazines, and the internet.

2. Exploration Methods

Data collection necessary for creating photographic works includes observation and interviews. This is done so that the artist can learn more about Bintan Island.

3. Experimentation

Experimentation is carried out during shooting and processing in Photoshop software and in the creation of the work.

4. Completion

The completion stage is the final stage of the creative process, namely, the exhibition. During the exhibition, the artist displayed thirty-five photographic works at the ISI Padangpanjang gallery, consisting of ten 40x60 works and twenty-seven 40x30 works, all printed on glossy paper and framed, in order to meet the graduation requirements. These works will be examined, evaluated, and deemed suitable for a final assignment for a Bachelor's degree in photography by the curator, supervisor, and examiner.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
RESEARCH RESULT

The works are presented in the form of photographs accompanied by brief descriptions of each piece. All photographs were taken on Bintan Island using slow speed and stop action techniques in the context of travel photography.

The works are divided into three main categories, namely: (1) landscapes and natural areas of Bintan Island, (2) portraits of the community and social interactions, and (3) representations of local culture.

All works were produced in 2017 and printed in two sizes, namely 30 × 45 cm and 40 × 60 cm, before being presented in the form of displays and exhibitions.

1. Sunset on Gurindam Island 2017

Work 1
Sunset on Gurindam Island 2017

This photo is themed Exploring Bintan Island in Travel Photography and is part of a photo series. The title of the twenty-seventh work is Sunset on Gurindam Island. Gurindam Island is another name for Bintan Island. One of the best places to enjoy the sunset on Gurindam Island is Junjung Beach. We can enjoy the sunset from atop the granite rocks. Not only can we see the sunset over the granite rocks, but we can also see the savanna grasslands located on the hill next to Junjung Beach.

2. My House and My Vehicle 2017

Work 2
My House and My Vehicle 2017

The photo My House and My Vehicle is a photo of the Laut tribe, also known as the Orang Laut, an ethnic group living in the seas of the Riau Islands, one of which is on Bintan Island. The Orang Laut were once pirates, but played an important role in the Sriwijaya Kingdom, the Malacca Sultanate, and the Johor Sultanate. They guarded the straits, drove away pirates, and guided traders to the ports of the kingdoms. The Sea Nomads live in groups on boats called Kajang and lead a nomadic lifestyle. The Kajang serves as both their home and their mode of transportation. A single Kajang can accommodate a family of five to six people.

3.   Bhiksu 2017

Work 3
Bhiksu 2017

Bhiksu is part of a travel photography series that explores the spiritual and cultural dimensions of Bintan Island. The term bhiksu refers to men who have been ordained into Buddhist monastic life and undergo spiritual discipline in a monastery or temple. In this context, bhiksu is not only understood as a Buddhist religious leader, but also as a symbol of tranquility, self-control, and inner journey.

Visually, this work depicts a monk walking in a Chinese-Buddhist style architectural complex, with the main building placed right in the center of the frame. The architectural symmetry reinforces the monumental and sacred impression, while the presence of human figures on a smaller scale creates a contrast between the grandeur of the spiritual space and the simplicity of individuals practicing their religion.

4.   Not Pyramids 2017

Work 4
Not Pyramids 2017

Not a Pyramid is part of a travel photography series that explores the unique landscapes of Bintan Island. Visually, this photograph depicts sand dunes resembling pyramids in the middle of a barren expanse of land. However, as the title suggests, these formations are not ancient architectural structures, but rather the result of industrial activity, namely the disposal of bauxite mining waste in Busung Village, Tanjungpinang. This work presents a visual paradox between the beauty of form and the ecological reality behind it. The towering sand mounds form geometric silhouettes reminiscent of Egyptian pyramids, evoking an exotic and monumental impression. However, behind this aesthetic lies a narrative of natural resource exploitation and landscape transformation due to mining activities.

5. Rezeki Air Surut 2017

Work 5
Rezeki Air Surut (Blessings of the Receding Tide)

The beaches on Bintan Island have quite extreme tidal characteristics, where when the tide recedes, the coastline can retreat a considerable distance. This natural phenomenon opens up a wide and shallow coastal area, creating space for activities for the communities living nearby. Residents take advantage of these conditions to gather marine products such as fish, squid, octopus, conch, crab, and other coastal organisms.

The activity of gathering seafood during low tide is not merely a commercial economic activity, but part of the subsistence practices of coastal communities. The catch is generally not sold, but consumed by the community to meet their family's food needs. This shows the close relationship between the community and the natural cycle, where the rhythm of the tides determines the timing and pattern of daily activities.

DISCUSSION
1. Work 1

The work Senja di Pulau Gurindam (Sunset on Gurindam Island) was created using a Tokina 12-24mm wide-angle lens at a focal length of 14mm. The choice of a 14mm focal length provides a wide field of view that is able to capture the entire landscape, from the granite elements in the foreground to the horizon in the background. In landscape photography, the use of a wide lens not only serves to expand the field of view, but also strengthens the perspective and creates a sense of depth

perception. The perspective distortion produced at close range is actually used to enlarge the scale of the rocks in the foreground so that they appear monumental and visually dominant.

The aperture setting at f/22 demonstrates the application of the deep depth of field principle, where almost the entire image field from the foreground to the background is in sharp focus. A small aperture such as f/22 is commonly used in landscape photography to preserve overall detail. In addition, this small aperture also helps create a starburst effect on the sun's light source when it is at a certain angle, although this effect appears subtle in this work.Next, the management of learning by lectures. The result showed that students agreed that the delivery of material is done directly during the meeting rather than just sending some links. This is shown that implementation of online learning will run better if there is direct interaction between lecture and students. The similar finding from Sun, et.al. (2022) the findings demonstrated that interaction between educators and students not only have a beneficial effect on learning outcomes, but also have an impact on learning outcomes through the mediating effects of psychological environment and learning engagement. Then, the result also showed that some students also experienced slight problems with internet network connectivity. The similar findings from (Adnan, 2020) revealed that internet connectivity, financial, and the lack of interaction with teachers were some problems faced by students' in online learning.

A shutter speed of 0.8 seconds indicates the use of slow speed (long exposure) techniques. In the context of coastal landscapes, slow exposure allows the movement of seawater to be captured smoothly, producing a smooth texture that contrasts with the hard structure of granite rocks. This effect enhances the aesthetic dimension while creating a calm and contemplative atmosphere. Technically, this technique requires the use of a tripod to maintain camera stability and prevent unwanted motion blur on static elements.

ISO 100 was chosen to maintain optimal image quality with minimal noise. In relatively bright twilight conditions, the use of low ISO also helps to preserve dynamic range and detail in the highlight and shadow areas.

The use of Soft 0.3, 0.6, and 0.9 GND (Graduated Neutral Density) filters is a technical strategy to control the extreme contrast difference between the bright sky and the darker foreground. The GND filter works by reducing the light intensity in the upper part of the frame (sky area), resulting in a more balanced exposure without causing overexposure in the highlights. The selection of the "soft" type indicates a smooth gradation transition between light and dark areas, in line with the relatively flat character of the sea horizon.

The use of a CPL (Circular Polarizer) filter has two main functions in this work. First, the CPL helps reduce excessive reflections on the water surface so that the details of the seabed can be seen more clearly. Second, the CPL increases the color saturation of the sky and enhances the contrast of the clouds, making the color gradation of the

sunset appear richer and more dramatic. Optically, this filter works by blocking polarized light caused by reflections, resulting in more intense and clearer colors.

The combination of technical settings a 14mm wide lens, f/22 aperture, 0.8-second shutter speed, ISO 100, and the use of GND and CPL demonstrates mature technical control in landscape photography. This approach aims not only to achieve exposure balance but also to build aesthetic qualities such as spatial depth, the softness of water textures, and the richness of sunset tones. Thus, the technical aspects of this work serve to support the visual narrative of the tranquility and beauty of Bintan Island as a marine tourism destination.

2. Work 2

My work My House and My Vehicle is a photo story that represents the lives of coastal communities. Unlike my previous landscape works, which focused on exploring natural spaces, this work presents a social dimension through the daily activities of communities that use boats as a means of transportation in coastal areas

The photos were taken using a Tokina 12–24mm wide lens at a focal length of 16mm. The wide angle allows the artist to capture the entire spatial context, including the boats, human subjects, wooden structures in the background, and the expanse of sea and sky. The wide lens in photo stories serves to strengthen the sense of presence, as if the viewer is in the same space as the subjects.

The composition places the boat as the dominant element in the middle ground, with a diagonal line formed by the oars and the boat's hull. This diagonal line creates visual dynamics and gives the impression of movement. The negative space in the form of the vast sky at the top provides visual balance while emphasizing the open coastal environment. The f/9 aperture setting shows a medium aperture choice that provides optimal sharpness on the main subject while maintaining background detail. In documentary photography or photo stories, the balance between the subject and the environmental context is very important, so the depth of field is not made too narrow.

A shutter speed of 1/250 second was chosen to freeze the natural movement of the boat and the subject's activity. This shutter speed is fast enough to avoid motion blur, especially in daylight conditions in open water areas. ISO 125 was used to keep the image quality clean with minimal noise, while maintaining natural color tones. Overall, the combination of f/9, 1/250, and ISO 125 produces a stable and natural exposure, in line with the character of travel photography, which tends to maintain visual reality without excessive manipulation.

This work not only displays visual objects, but also conveys a narrative about the lives of the coastal communities of Bintan Island. The presence of several figures in one boat adults, children, and pets creates layers of stories about mobility, family relationships, and dependence on aquatic spaces. The elements of a traditional boat with a simple roof show the community's adaptation to the marine environment. The wooden structure in the background reinforces the geographical context as a coastal area or settlement on the water. In a travel photography approach, this representation builds a

sense of place, which is the identity of a space that is determined not only by the landscape but also by human activities.

The colors that appear in this work tend to be natural and not too contrasting, reinforcing the documentary feel. The horizontal lines of the sea and sky provide visual stability, while the diagonal lines of the oars and boat add a sense of movement. This work shows how travel photography can transcend its aesthetic function to become a medium for cultural documentation. This photo captures an everyday moment without dramatization, resulting in an authentic impression. This approach is in line with the character of feature photography in travel photography, which emphasizes experience and social reality over the actuality of events.

3. **Work 3**

Shooting with a Nikon wide lens in the 12–16 mm range (focal length 12 mm). A focal length of 12 mm falls into the ultra-wide category, producing a very wide angle of view. In architectural photography, the use of an ultra-wide lens serves to capture the entire structure of a building in a single frame without having to take too much distance. In terms of perspective, a 12 mm lens creates a slight distortion effect on vertical lines, especially on the sides of the building. However, in this context, the distortion actually reinforces the monumental and majestic impression. The relatively low angle of shooting adds to the impression of dominance and visual power of the building over the surrounding space.

The composition of this photo relies heavily on the principles of symmetry and leading lines. The stairs and stone walls that form a diagonal line direct the viewer's attention to the gate in the center of the frame. The human figure walking right in the center of the composition serves as both a focal point and an element of scale comparison. The presence of this figure provides a sense of scale, making the building appear more monumental. The strong symmetry of the building creates visual balance. In architectural photography, symmetrical compositions are often used.

The f/9 aperture setting provides a medium aperture choice that produces optimal sharpness on the main subject while maintaining detail in the foreground and background. In outdoor architectural photography, this aperture is sufficient to maintain depth of field without sacrificing the optical quality of the lens. A shutter speed of 1/200 second was chosen to freeze the movement of the walking human subject, so that details remain sharp without motion blur. ISO 250 was used as exposure compensation to maintain balanced exposure in fairly bright but high-contrast daylight conditions.

The use of a 0.3 Soft GND filter serves to reduce the intensity of light in the brighter parts of the sky compared to the building area. This filter helps balance the dynamic range between highlights (sky and clouds) and shadows (stone structures). The "soft" gradation characteristic was chosen to ensure a smooth light transition, especially since the horizon line is not completely flat and there are towering building structures. Aesthetically, this photo shows a combination of monumental architectural elements and the presence of humans as symbols of spiritual or cultural activities. The human

figure in the center of the composition not only serves as a visual element but also as a narrative of a journey depicting the interaction between individuals and symbolic spaces. The blue sky with dramatic clouds provides a contrasting backdrop to the colors of the stone and building ornaments. The contrast between warm and cool colors creates visual depth while enriching the texture.

This work does not merely document the building, but presents an experience of space that has historical, cultural, and spiritual value. The controlled technical approach through the use of a wide lens, medium aperture, stable shutter speed, and GND filter shows that the technical aspects are directed to support the visual narrative of the grandeur and identity of the place.

4. **Work 4**

The photograph of Bukan Piramida was taken using a Tokina 12-24 mm wide lens at a focal length of 12 mm, aperture f/9, shutter speed 1/400 second, and ISO 100. The choice of a 12 mm focal length provides a very wide angle of view (ultra wide), which enhances the impression of space and scale of the landscape. The perspective distortion produced by the wide lens also helped to emphasize the contours of the sand dunes, making them appear more monumental and dramatic.

The photograph was taken during the day with the sun relatively high in the sky and partially within the frame. This decision was both conceptual and technical. Conceptually, the harsh daylight produces sharp shadows and high contrast, which reinforces the visual character of the arid, barren, desert-like landscape. Technically, the strong lighting allows for the use of a low ISO (ISO 100) to maintain sharp image quality with minimal noise and preserve the texture details of the sand.

The use of an f/9 aperture aims to achieve a wide depth of field, so that all elements from the foreground to the background remain in focus. This is important in landscape photography to maintain the sharpness of the ground surface details and the overall shape of the sand dunes.

A shutter speed of 1/400 second was used to control exposure due to high light intensity while preventing overexposure, especially since the sun was within the composition. To help balance the contrast between the very bright sky and the darker land areas, a Soft 0.9 GND (Graduated Neutral Density) filter was used. This filter serves to reduce the light intensity in the sky without significantly affecting the lower areas, so that the details of the clouds remain visible and the color gradation of the sky is maintained.

The composition of the sun, which was deliberately included in the frame, creates a flare effect and radial light rays that reinforce the impression of heat and the extremity of the environment. The vehicle tracks in the foreground serve as leading lines that direct the viewer's gaze toward the main subject, namely the two sand dunes that create visual balance in the composition. The technical and aesthetic decisions in this work support the visual concept of a dry, vast, and dramatic landscape, while also reinforcing the atmosphere of being in a desert area.

5. Work 5

The photograph in Karya Rezeki Air Surut was taken using a Tokina 12–24 mm wide lens at a focal length of 24 mm, an aperture of f/11, a shutter speed of 1/400 seconds, and ISO 320. The choice of a 24 mm focal length provides a wide but proportional angle of view, so that the landscape still feels spacious without extreme distortion. This angle of view allowed the artist to showcase the visual relationship between humans, boats, the sky, and water reflections in a harmonious composition.

The f/11 aperture was used to achieve a wide depth of field, keeping elements from the foreground to the background sharp. This is important in landscape and travel photography because every visual element the boat, wooden poles, human figures, and dramatic clouds plays a narrative role in constructing the visual story.

A shutter speed of 1/400 second was used to freeze the movement of the human subject walking on the water, while maintaining the sharpness of the reflections on the relatively calm water surface. ISO 320 was chosen to adjust to the lighting conditions before sunset (golden hour), when the light intensity begins to decrease but still produces warm colors and rich contrasts.

This work uses a backlight approach, with the sun positioned behind the subject. This technique creates a silhouette effect on the human figures and boats, making the details of their shapes more dominant than their textures. The silhouettes create a dramatic and symbolic impression of the fishermen, who are no longer just individuals, but representations of the economic activities of the coastal community of Bintan Island.

The element of reflection on the water surface is the main visual force in the composition. The reflection of the sky and clouds forms a natural symmetry that enriches the spatial dimension. The ripples created by the subject's footsteps create dynamic lines (leading ripples) that direct the eye towards the center of activity.

The work Rezeki Air Surut refers to the natural phenomenon of low tide, which opens up opportunities for coastal communities to gather seafood. Low tide is not only an ecological condition, but also an economic and cultural space. Thus, this work not only displays the beauty of the landscape, but also presents a narrative of life and human dependence on the cycle of nature. As part of the Bintan Island Exploration in Travel Photography series, this work emphasizes that travel photography is not merely documentation of places but also a visual interpretation of the relationship between humans, nature, and daily activities within a specific geographical space.

CONCLUSION

The creation of this work, Exploring Bintan Island in Travel Photography, required several stages in the production process. The first process included preparation, exploration, experimentation, and completion.

From the planning stage to the actual photography, there were many challenges, such as the weather, which was close to westerly winds, meaning that the weather was only good from morning to noon, the sea water was not clear, and it was very difficult to find members of the Sea Tribe. Therefore, the shooting process took quite a long time, so the

artist had to be able to manage his time in order to achieve his goals. He spent three days diving in preparation for underwater photography, but everything failed because the water clarity was poor. When looking for the Sea Tribe, the artist spent hours traveling around the sea to find the tribal chief in order to ask for permission to photograph the tribe.

This photography process, which began with exploration, concept, composition, and maximum preparation to create good and interesting photographs, was not complete without the editing process to perfect the final photographs.

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