



Hidden Gems of the Mahakam Wetlands
Middle Mahakam
ECOTOURISM



General Profile

Mahakam River has a length of about 980 Km with an area of 7,710,000 Ha and is the life supporting system for the local community and biodiversity. For this ecotourism trip we would like to introduce the Middle Mahakam Area (MMA), which covers two districts: Kutai Barat and Kutai Kartanegara as well as 7 sub-districts totaling a total population of 127,000 people. In the MMA, besides the Mahakam River, there are also five major rivers, three large lakes, namely Lake Semayang (13,000 Ha), Lake Melintang (11,000 Ha), Lake Jempang (15,000 Ha) as well as swamps and peat areas.



The majority of the people who live in the MMA work as fishermen and rely on the natural fish resources. Fish commodities commonly sold include carp, tilapia, cyprinid, catfish, snakehead, gourami, etc. The impact on the natural conditions is very important to sustain the community's economy, with the preservation of areas such as swamps and river border forests providing space for fish to spawn. In addition, it is also important for the sustainability of animals, especially for pesut because fish is the main prey for pesut. In addition to fishermen, the community also usually farms by planting corn or rice paddies that they plant on the edge of the river at low tide. The community does not need fertilizers because the soil on the edge of rivers and dry swamps is very fertile.

The local people living in the MMA are mostly ethnic Malayu Kutai, Banjar, Bugis, Javanese and Dayak. Ethnic Kutai have lived in the area since at least ancient Hindu times (4th century) and can be called indigenous. There are also villages mixed with relatively new settlers (100 years old) from South Kalimantan (Banjar) and a smaller minority of Javanese and Bugis migrants. The Kutai tribe is a Malay tribe native to East Kalimantan, which originally inhabited the coastal areas of East Kalimantan.



In the past there was the oldest Hindu Kingdom in Indonesia, namely Kutai Martadipura with king Mulawarman, where evidence of former relics of the Kutai Kingdom can still be found in Muara Kaman such as the yupa inscription and a long block-shaped stone called Lesong Batu. Then the Kutai Kartanegara Kingdom conquered this oldest kingdom, and changed its name to the Kutai Kartanegara Ing Martadipura kingdom.

Mahakam Wildlife

There is a rare river dolphin, which is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, and the proud mascot of East Kalimantan Province with the local name Pesut Mahakam or the Latin name *Orcaella brevirostris*. Under 2010 Pesut Mahakam was more commonly found in West Kutai regency, to be precise, Muara Pahu, but after that year until now in 2022 Pesut Mahakam is recorded to be 98% found in Kutai Kartanegara regency. Unfortunately, the area that should be home to the Mahakam pesut has several threats including: the conversion of freshwater and peat swamp marsh (forests) to large-scale palm oil plantations that cause the loss of spawning areas; chemical pollution and plastic waste waste; underwater noise pollution from large coal barges that causes disruption of migration of pesut; deaths caused by entanglements in fishermen's gill nets, fish poison and boat strikes; while food sources are also reduced due to unsustainable fishing gear. The population of Pesut is now 67-74 in Mahakam with 98% of the population being in this MMA.



RASI Conservation Foundation has been trying to reverse the situation in collaboration with local communities from 27 villages who agreed to protect pesut habitat and fish sources and finally through a Ministerial Decree number 49 in 2022, the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries established a conservation area in the waters upstream of Mahakam Kutai Kartanegara Regency (KKP) with a total area of 42,667.99 Ha. The area is spread across four sub-districts, namely Kota Bangun, Muara Muntai, Muara Kaman, Muara Wis. As a buffer zone, currently RASI together with the Kutai Kartanegara regency government and 33 villages in it, are also trying to realize an Important Ecosystem Area in the MMA with an area of c. 186,000 ha and c.45,000 ha (forest) peat.



MMA is a habitat for a minimum of 300 species of birds, 147 species of fish, 24 species of mammals (5 species of primates), 27 species of reptiles and 300 species of trees among which 30 species of fully protected or limited protection status. In the conservation areas there are 36 species fully or limitedly protected and 29 species belonging to the Near Threatened to Critically Endangered category on the IUCN Red List. Through ecotourism activities, people can get the opportunity to engage in alternative, economic activities other than fisheries. With this high biodiversity, the five sub-districts that are targeted by ecotourism have their own objects of interests. In addition to introducing nature, people can also show the characteristics of existing cultures.

Ecotourism Villages Potential



PELA

Pela Village, Kota Bangun District, managed to enter in the top 50 best tourist villages of Indonesia and won the third place in the National Tourism Village Institution category through the Indonesian Tourism Village Anugrah (ADWI) event. The ecotourism potential offered in Pela village is quite diverse and the journey starts from Kota Bangun by boat to Pela village. If you are lucky, you will see the rare pesut Mahakam dolphins because this route is indeed a favorite habitat for pesut. In addition, tourists can visit the Pela museum which contains information related to the Mahakam river, traditional fishing gear and culture, and fish preserved as material for education.



Tourists can also make batik and the results can be taken home as a souvenir. For tourists who want to try other sensations besides enjoying the Semayang river and lake sunset/ sunrise, they can try the river touring package provided by the Pela tourist organization, Pokdarwis using a banana boat. The banana boat travels slowly and is safe for pesut.



For tourists who stay overnight, they may enjoy the entertainment displayed by the young people of Pela village, namely Kutai dances, such as Jepen dance and Kuntau martial arts. If you want to extend your evening at the café on the edge of the Mahakam river, you can watch a documentary related to the history of Pela village in 1974. In this café, you can also use the karaoke facilities owned by Pokdarwis Pela. In the morning, you can walk around or ride a bicycle and see the catch of fishermen who have been fishing in lakes and rivers from dawn or even go out at dawn yourself to collect the fish harvest. The final package that can be an option while visiting Pela village is menjala, this is an activity of catching fish with traditional fishing gear.



KAHALA

Kahala village is located in the center of Kenohan district. The mileage from Pela village using a standard boat takes about an hour and a half depending on the water conditions. The path that tourists will enjoy is Semayang lake and then across the river with tree vegetation that is quite tight local people call the river with many versions, namely the Rebai Kahoy or Beruang river. If the water is low tide, visitors can see many types of birds such as Cranes, Snake Tops, Grouse, Tong Tong Herons, Eagles, King Shrimps, Woodpeckers and many others.



In Kahala village, you can also see the process of making a seraung hat as a typical Kahala souvenir. Seraung hats are not only used for people's daily activities, but there are also very decorative ones with the addition of beads and are suitable as a wall decoration at home. Visitors can also watch the making process. If it is in the moderate water season, tourists can go further to visit the villages of Lamin Pulut and Lamin Telihan where Dayak tribes live. For the riverside area, the two villages have quite dense forests and clean white sand. Another last interesting activity for visitors to try is fish spearing activities if the water levels are receding from high water levels.



MUARA ENGGELAM



The third village that can be your bucket list is Muara Enggelam Village. From Kahala it takes about an hour and a half to Muara Enggelam village by boat. Before entering the village of Muara Enggelam you will see a tree standing tall in the middle of the lake which has the name "Setia Raja", meaning 'loyal to the king'. Then tourists can clearly see the splendor of the gate when entering the village of Muara Enggelam. Muara Enggelam Gate received an award in 2019 from President Joko Widodo defeating 1,456 participants from all over Indonesia.



This village literally stands on lake Melintang and the village community depends entirely on fisheries. Tourists can also feel how the community lives on the water with views of lakes and swamps and residents' boats going back and forth. To explore further, Muara Enggelam village has a tourist attraction, namely the Ketibeh River. The river is a very interesting peat swamp forest with fairly dense trees on the left and right sides of the river.

About an hour down the river, tourists will see many birds and at the time of the monitoring point the tourists can hear a lot of bird sounds. If you go to the ketibeh river area, you need to use a small boat because the river is not too big. Also prepare your best lens so you can capture diverse bird moments. Meanwhile, tourists can enjoy their pre-packaged lunch on the edge of the river by boat, which will be a memorable experience. If staying overnight, tourists can add a trip to explore the peat area while waiting for sunset.



DESA MELINTANG DAN MUARA MUNTAI



Muara Muntai is known for its longest ironwood bridge in Indonesia, but because wood maintenance is quite difficult and wood supply is also increasingly difficult to obtain, part of the wooden road area has begun to be cemented. Another option that can be obtained if you visit Muara Muntai is culinary tours and also observe the daily life of the community.

In addition, in the afternoon tourists can visit Lake Jempang by boat (15 minutes' trip) to see the sunset and the kalang buffalo during the dry season half emerged in the water near the lake and river shores. If the water season recedes, Lake Jempang becomes the center of paradise for migratory birds to migrate and forage.

Heading to Muara Muntai from Muara Enggelam will take about 45 minutes past Lake Melintang and Melintang Village, a village where houses are floating or standing on high pools on the water like in Muara Enggelam. Here, you can pause and stretch your legs near the wooden mosque and walk to the back of the village to the wooden path bridge above the lake, which is a great location for selfi photos.





MUARA WIS



Heading downstream for about 1 hour, tourists can visit Muara Wis Village. In this village, tourists can enjoy the clean atmosphere of the village and wooden roads throughout the village. Tourists can also buy typical souvenirs such as fish chips and also handicrafts that are made by the skillful Pak Suayan. He is quite adept at making various kinds of crafts made of scraps of wood.

Tourists can also visit the Wis Lake Area which is opposite the village of Muara Wis. Using a boat for about 20 minutes tourists can see the vast lake and also small pristine islands with dense trees. This lake is perfect for relaxing while enjoying the wind with a natural atmosphere without any disturbances. In addition, for those who like to fish, this place is very suitable because fish are still quite abundant in the region.



Another fishing spot that you can enjoy is the wooden bridge that connects Sebemban village, which is a neighboring village of Muara Wis, and Melintang Village. The bridge can be reached from Sebemban Village using a motorbike in about 10 minutes. If visitors want to walk it is quite possible with a distance of about 7 km. Then visitors can enjoy the bridge that stands over Melintang lake that was just inaugurated in 2019. From the bridge in addition to fishing, relaxing one can take photos of the beauty of nature.



SABINTULUNG

Muara Kaman was the location of the Martadipura kingdom in the 4th century AD and the first and oldest Hindu kingdom in Indonesia founded by its king Mulawarman. One of the historical evidences of the former relics of the Kutai Martadipura kingdom that can still be found in Muara Kaman is a long block-shaped stone called batu lesong.

The distance to Muara Kaman from Samarinda city takes up to about three hours by car. After arriving at the ferry crossing in Tebalai, tourists need to cross using a water taxi ces to get to the center of Muara Kaman district with a distance of about 10 minutes.

Later, visitors can walk around to get to the museum. After the museum visit, you can continue to Sabintulung Village, by renting a boat while passing through the Kedang Rantau River, which has black water because it is connected to swamps. Kedang Rantau River is also an important river for pesut Mahakam, proboscis monkeys and water birds.



Sabintulung Village is quite famous for handicrafts made from purun plants. This plant thrives on peat bogs located in the upstream area of the village. Visitors can participate in the process that is mainly done by women, starting from collecting purun plants using a small boat with a distance of 45 minutes. After the plants are collected, visitors can also observe or participate in the process of cleaning purun plants using sand, drying, sorting and mashing purun and weaving purun into several products that one can take home as souvenirs such as mats, bags, besek (a place to put things or wash rice), bags, hats, to slippers. All of these products can be obtained at relatively affordable prices. In this village, there is also a spring well that never dries and water from it can be drunk directly.



Ecotourism Price Package



1. Car rent Balikpapan – Samarinda	Rp. 450.000
2. Bus Balikpapan-Samarinda (AC)	Rp. 50.000
3. Car rent Samarinda- Kota Bangun	Rp. 700.000
4. Bus Samarinda-Kota Bangun	Rp. 50.000

Pela

1. Boat Kota Bangun Pela	Rp. 400.000
2. Ferry crossing Liang – Sangkuliman (by foot)	Free
3. Ferry crossing Sangkuliman Pela (by foot)	Free
4. Home stay Pela (Breakfast)	Rp. 150.000
5. Meal /person (Lunch/ dinner)	Rp. 35.000
6. Rent Banana Boat	Rp. 200.000
7. Boat trip rent /day	Rp. 750.000
8. Batik Package /person	Rp. 50.000
9. Jepen dance	Rp. 400.000
10. Kuntau martial art 'dance'	Rp. 250.000
11. Cast net fishing /hour	Rp. 100.000
12. Watching documentary Pela village	Rp. 200.000
13. Karaoke in riverfront cafe	Rp. 200.000
14. Visit Pela museum	Free

Kahala

1. Pela – Kahala Longboat return	Rp. 1.400.000
2. Motel Kahala	Rp. 150.000
3. Meal /person (Lunch/ dinner)	Rp. 35.000
4. Orchid visit (Boat)	Rp. 200.000
5. Guide to visit orchid	Rp. 1.000.000
6. Watch grasshat (seraung) making	Free
7. Spear fishing	Rp. 100.000

Muara Muntai

1. Explore Danau Jempang (rent boat)	Rp. 200.000
2. Tingkilan & Jepen (per dancer)	Rp. 50.000
3. Rent motor /hour (fuel not included)	Rp. 100.000

Muara Enggelam

1. Boat Kahala – Enggelam	Rp. 1.200.000
2. Homestay Enggelam /night	Rp. 30.000
3. Meal /person (Lunch/ dinner)	Rp. 35.000
4. Boat river trip to Ketibeh	Rp. 300.000
5. Boat trip to peat swamp	Rp. 200.000

Muara Wis

1. Explore Desa Muara Wis and visit handycraft place	Free
2. Explore Wis lake by boat	Rp. 300.000

Muara Kaman

1. Boat Kota Bangun – Muara Kaman	Rp. 700.000
2. Museum Muara Kaman	Donation
3. Package making purun handycraft /person	Rp. 150.000
4. Joining the process of making purun in the swamp	Rp. 400.000
5. Boat	Rp. 200.000
6. Meal /person (Lunch/ dinner)	Rp. 35.000
7. Look at the souvenirs made in local people houses	Free
8. Rent motor	Rp. 50.000



Tour operator/ Guide info:



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Yayasan Konservasi Rasi

