

5th Edition - May 2023

## Sustainability Stories of the Lives We Touched

# The Nurturers of Nature: Integrating Tourism into Conservation

**Batu Hitam Waterfall**  
Nangatayap, Ketapang

Enveloped by the cool, soothing song of water cascading down a stairlike slope, two teenage girls are bantering quietly in the creek. Their voice never rises above the blanket of forest sounds around them. Up above, some unseen birds burst into impromptu chirps, adding a trifle of tune to the lull of the woods. The girls play in the little creek just a few metres down from the waterfall, waist-deep in its crystalline stream. Boulders big and small stand on both sides of the creek, guiding its flow. Their misted surfaces glisten in the pale afternoon light.



On most days, visitors to Batu Hitam Waterfall—whose name refers to the black rocks straddling the water—are greeted with such a pristine scene. Upon arriving at the open-air parking, one can already hear the rumbling of water. The waterfall stands just a few steps away, right behind a hand-painted signboard welcoming visitors to the site.

“It never gets too crowded on the weekdays,” says Sony Martinus, a local villager who is also our guide. The main spot of the waterfall is easily accessible through a set of stairs, and that is where people tend to hang out, like those two girls. More intrepid visitors can cross the bamboo bridge right above the waterfall, and venture further in. There is a footpath to follow upriver, taking them closer to the headwaters, deeper into the forest. They can then have a picnic on a glade between the trees, or on any of the wide, flattish boulders right by the river.

**“This is what locals love to do, when they need to take a break,” explains Sony. “They come here when it’s quiet, so they can have all this,”—Sony motioned to the stream and the trees—“to themselves.”**



During some weekends and public holidays, however, the story unfolds differently. People from outside of the neighbouring villages flock the scene in droves. Some even come from as far as the district town of Ketapang, driving more than 100 km of smooth and potholed roads, on asphalt and dirt tracks. “The parking lot will be full of cars, and you’ll see throngs of daytrippers taking a dip in the creek,” Sony paints the scene. “But there’s space for everyone.”



*Batu Hitam Waterfall's entrance*

The hilly region of Nanga Tayap is home to some large waterfalls, including Batu Hitam, which was only set up properly as a tourist destination in 2021. The recent influx of weekenders to Batu Hitam speaks of the success of the local Village forest management unit’s (LPHD) efforts to bring it to public attention. At the same time, they are working to preserve the ecological value of the surrounding forest through numerous programmes under the social forestry initiative partnership with Bumitama.

Sony, who is a member of the LPHD committee of Simpang Tiga Sembelangaan, is working with his fellow villagers to improve Batu Hitam’s facilities and expand the cultivation of fruit trees nearby. Since 2021, the committee has received assistance from Bumitama to develop this site and others in the vast forest of Gunung Tarak. Aligned with its corporate social responsibility strategy, Bumitama helps with funding for the tourist facilities and provides training and technical assistance to Simpang Tiga Sembelangaan’s other social forestry programmes.

“The important thing,” Sony asserts, “is for us in the village to keep working together. We want to make Batu Hitam a popular attraction, and at the same time make our forest more beneficial to all.” His group is looking at integrating a microhydro power plant to further tap the creek’s potentials, and has plans to set up more tourist facilities, like chairs and picnic platforms, further upriver. “With the support from Bumitama, we can go further.”



Sony Martinus, member of LPHD Simpang Tiga Sembelangaan



Aerial view of Batu Hitam Waterfall with the surrounding forests