

## **DEVELOPMENT OF BIAK'S WAR TOURISM (PENGEMBANGAN WISATA PERANG BIAK)**

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### **Abstract**

The Battle of Biak that took place from 27 May to 17 August 1944 between the United States Army and the Japanese army left the area of Biak in the Province of Papua with abundant remnants of war, including bones of war casualties. Thousands of lives were lost from both the United States and the Japanese. Some years after the battle, the area became an international destination for war tourism, with visitors mainly originated from Japan. Tourists commonly visited the battle zone for pilgrimage purposes and commemoration of the loved ones losing their lives in the battle. Some came to Biak to repatriate the remnants of their fathers or grandfathers. Following this flow of tourists, Biak started flourishing as indicated by direct national and international flights and luxurious hotels to develop tourism. However, as time went by, Biak war tourism began to decline as pilgrimage trips to the area became rare. As a result, international flight discontinued, luxurious hotels stopped operating, with sad stories from the looting of war remnants from the historical site. An exploratory survey on Biak's war tourism has been undertaken, which suggested that Biak still has the potentials to be developed as a distinguished world's war tourism destination. Further research for Biak's war tourism development or even dark tourism/thanatourism is required to identify the aspects that need to be addressed for such purpose.

**Keywords:** war tourism, city tourism, post-war tourism, remnants of war, the battle of Biak, pilgrimage tourism. dark tourism, thanatourism, Biak war trail, Pacific war trail

### **Abstrak**

Pertempuran Biak yang berlangsung dari 27 Mei hingga 17 Agustus 1944 antara Angkatan Darat Amerika Serikat dan Tentara Jepang meninggalkan wilayah Biak di Provinsi Papua dengan sisa-sisa perang yang melimpah, termasuk tulang-belulang korban perang. Ribuan nyawa hilang baik dari Amerika Serikat maupun Jepang. Beberapa tahun setelah pertempuran, daerah tersebut menjadi tujuan wisata perang internasional, dengan pengunjung yang terutama berasal dari Jepang. Wisatawan biasanya mengunjungi zona pertempuran untuk tujuan ziarah dan memperingati orang yang dicintai yang kehilangan nyawa dalam pertempuran. Ada yang datang ke Biak untuk memulangkan sisa-sisa ayah atau kakeknya. Mengikuti arus wisatawan, Biak mulai tumbuh subur yang ditunjukkan dengan penerbangan langsung nasional dan internasional serta hotel-hotel mewah untuk mengembangkan pariwisata. Namun seiring berjalannya waktu, wisata perang Biak mulai merosot seiring dengan semakin jarangnyanya perjalanan ziarah ke daerah tersebut. Akibatnya, penerbangan internasional dihentikan, hotel-hotel mewah berhenti beroperasi, dengan cerita duka dari penjarahan sisa-sisa perang dari kawasan bersejarah itu. Survei eksplorasi wisata perang Biak telah dilakukan, yang menunjukkan bahwa Biak masih memiliki potensi untuk dikembangkan sebagai tujuan wisata perang dunia yang terkemuka. Penelitian lebih lanjut untuk pengembangan wisata perang Biak atau bahkan wisata gelap/thanatourism diperlukan untuk mengidentifikasi aspek-aspek yang perlu ditangani untuk tujuan tersebut.

**Kata kunci:** wisata perang, wisata kota, wisata pasca perang, sisa-sisa perang, perang biak, wisata ziarah. wisata gelap, thanatourism, jejak perang Biak, jejak perang Pasifik

## **INTRODUCTION**

Biak is a rental area located in Papua Province in the Republic of Indonesia. The island of Biak lies in Cendrawasih bay and is part of the Pacific Ocean. Biak became familiar with the international world for its historical Biak Battle from 27 May to 17 August 1944. The battle of Biak was part of the so-called New Guinea campaign of World War II that fought between the United States Army and the Japanese army. It was part of General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific command's offensive drive to clear New Guinea in preparation for an invasion of the Philippines (Battle of Biak, n.d).

By the time the 12,000 troops of the United States Army landed in Biak on May 27, 1944, Biak had been occupied by the Japanese army with some of 11,800 soldiers who used caves in the island as a system of natural defences were considered as brilliantly effective (Johnson, 2017). It took 80 days for the United States army to defeat the Japanese in long, exhausting and frustrating battles. The United States got the victory. Even 500 Americans army got killed, 2,400 wounded, and 1,000 were incapacitated by disease. The Japanese lost 6,100 lives, with 450 captured, an unknown number wounded and missing (Johnson, 2017). Remnants of war and remains of fallen soldiers scattered in the war zone up to the next several years. The Binsari cave—or knows as the Japanese cave—is the largest cave defence system where the Japanese maintained their resistance strategy. The one heavily attacked using TNT explosive by the Unites States Army resulted in massive casualties on the Japanese side. In respect of the Japanese fallen soldiers, in 1956, some pilgrims from japan erected a tombstone at the cave's mouth as a sign of the cave as a mass cemetery. The cave is believed to have still remnants and remains of bodies left unearthed.

Following the individual post-war exploration of the cave's cave, the Binsari cave remnants were officially recovered by the local government in 1980. The unearthing of the war zone led to the discovery of thousands of human bones, ammunition, cutlery, pistols, long-barreled shotgun, grenades, helmets, canteens, dog-tags and later on, it was very common that the local

people found various items from massive to small relics and remnants of war in the island such as jeeps, aeroplanes, tanks, portable dynamos, personal belongings and supplies. The remnants of war and body remains have become objects of interest. Foreign pilgrims or tourists were predominantly bereaved families of the fallen soldiers—mostly Japanese. They were sons, grandchildren, nephews, nieces and relatives of the soldiers killed on the island during the Biak war. Not only were they there for pilgrimage, but they also erected a war monument, cremated the body remains or repatriated the bones to Japan.

A visit to a war zone can be considered as an act of tourism. Urry & Larson (2011), as quoted by Elliott & Milne (2019), define tourism as a temporary "departure," both physically and metaphorically, from one's everyday surroundings and practices which commonly involves movement through spaces to new places or places, and a period of stay there. Tourists visit the war zone can be well understood. Studies on tourism view this as post-war tourism. For the tourists, post-war tourist destination functions as landscape remembrance that refers to tourists' integration and education about the events that transpired during the recent conflict (Wise, 2012). Landscape remembrance forms reflections of war by envisioning the past as sometimes the landscapes are left untouched. Wise (2012) further argues that scenes conveying war-torn landscapes allow future travelers to reminisce past imaginations of a particular place.

War-tourism also refers to 'dark tourism'. Foote (2003), as quoted by Wise (2012), stated that dark tourism features tragic events firsthand, which involve the significance of constructed monuments, places with stories or manifested memorials as part of the narrative.

Current visits to Biak from year to year have not actually been very impressive in foreign visitors. In 2017, for instance, Biak recorded 56,2433 visitors, and only 968 of them were foreign tourists (Kebijakan Pembangunan Pemerintah Kabupaten Biak Numfor, n.d). Foreign tourists mainly visit Biak for its historical war sites. No established data was available on when Biak postwar tourism started to flourish. However, the Dutch KLM airline made Biak as their

stopover for their Amsterdam-Bangkok-Manila-Biak-Sydney route in 1955 and another KLM route of Amsterdam-Tokyo-Biak, and later Garuda Indonesia's Jakarta-Denpasar-Biak- Honolulu-Los Angeles flight and the construction and operation of a four-star hotel in Biak in 1994 suggested that there was a period of time that Biak tourism reached its promising peak.

The global economic crisis in 1998 also affected Biak tourism. Tourist visits declined sharply; big hotels stopped operating and international flights discontinued; meanwhile, some Biak war remnants, which are the invaluable heritage of war zones, have been looted and sold as iron scraps by some irresponsible people. No comprehensive data is available regarding the number of tourist visits to the war zone area in Biak. A journal by Rumpaidus et al. (2019) even revealed that the Biak World War II Monument got an average visit of 300 tourists and the Binsari cave got 350 tourists a month. In 2017, the Binsari cave received 97 foreign tourists who were passengers of the MR Europe cruise (Kandipi, 2017). No information about the origins of tourists has been available.

Biak has a huge opportunity to relive and develop Biak war tourism by improving related war tourism potentials and management. This exploratory study was intended to identify such potentials in the Biak War Zone.

## **METHODS**

An exploratory study on Biak's war tourism has been undertaken using a qualitative method that focused on adopting a perspective that tried to determine the underlying potentials of Biak's war tourism, which offered the historical battlefields in the war zone. In the study, some observations were made, including pilgrimage activities and bulks of war remnants—both secured and taken care of or left in situ. The researcher also did some in-depth interviews with the Japanese pilgrims to identify their visit's motives. Some local people serve as curators, caretakers, or keepers of war remnants and descendants of local people who inherit the historical stories of what happened in the area.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Biak War Tourism**

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### **War Remnants**

Apart from bones, skulls and skeletons, the Biak War Zone also has many collections left behind by soldiers from the two armies. They are small, middle-sized and heavy weapons such as pistol, long barrel guns, sword, bayonet, mortars, grenades, bombs and tanks; life support equipment like water canteen, jerry-can, bottles, drums, kettles; vehicles such as jeeps, boats, planes; personal protective equipment such as helmets, clothes and uniforms, dog-tags; and communications and lighting equipment. They are all scattered in the Biak war zones. Some of them have been secured and collected in a makeshift mini-museum organized by a local. Some have been missing or looted, some are still there deep in the ground, while others may still be there in the deep sea or caves.

Yusuf Rumar open is the local me who serves as the caretaker of the Binsari cave. He has been collecting the war relics left by both the Allies and the Japanese troops around and inside the cave, including skeletons and bones, and he is aware that tourists are interested in taking a look at the war remnants. Inspired by Yusuf's determination, in 1980, the Local Authority for Education and Cultural Affairs, conducting a related survey, asked Yusuf to make necessary preservation of the area around his house officially. Yusuf lives in a house on

the left side of the gate to the cave complex. At the terrace to the side of his house are racks full of old drinking bottles and other items. The bottles left by the Japanese troops had been exposed to the sun and rain for years and years; some of them are broken, with holes in them and filled with water. Yusuf has a mini-museum in his guest room. Remnants of the Japanese troops' personal belongings ranging from wristwatches, medicine, pistols, up to samurai sword are neatly kept in two glass cabinets. Photos and posters about wars are posted on the wall. Apart from hunting for the relics of war, Yusuf also bought remnants from iron scavengers. He bought some of the items from local guys at the Old Market in the city center and paid from Rp 150,000 (US\$ 10) to Rp 500,000 (US\$ 34) to recover each of the items. Once Yusuf saw a complete aero plane wreck at an iron scrap market in Biak, he believed a wreck of one of eight aero planes left behind by the American soldiers. The scavenger wanted IDR 7 million (US\$ 473) for the wreck, but Yusuf didn't have enough money at that time. He went back to the scavenger a couple of weeks later to find out who had cut into smaller pieces. Yusuf thought this was not right. He thought there should be efforts for reservation. With regards to preservation of the Biak war remnants, Yusuf said:

"I really think the war remnants should be kept safe. They must be collected for their historical value and become the possession of this land. It is so sad they many people found war remnant items and sold them as iron scraps. They also used active ammunition that they found for blast fishing"

Yusuf also has a collection of Japanese troop's bones that he had collected from the Binsari Cave. He kept all the bones in a small hut. Some of the bones have been cremated under the cost of the Japanese troops' family member during their visit to the site. The first cremation was done in 1996 for 75 skeletons. Up to the year 2013, a total of 1,400 skeletons has been cremated. The figure is based on a calculation made by a forensic doctor who was present during each of the cremation events.

Another relic collector is Alberth Wakum. He has been collecting remnants from the forest and caves in Biak war zone. He has been to almost every place around Biak, hunting for war relics in both easy and difficult places. Around his neck, he has several American and Japanese dog-tags. Here's what Alberth had to say about what he has done:

"It is easy to find items from the Japanese army, such as cutlery, weapons, utensils, and it is hard to find remnants from the US Army. I can easily tell if an item is US army or Japanese army origins. American soldier's helmet, for instance, has a stainless twisted metal along the edge"

Fighter Sukandewi, a diver and relics hunter had his own experience with the remnants of war around Biak:

"When you dive in other places, you see colorful fish and coral reefs. When you snorkel here in Biak, you are floating over active explosives"

Remnants of war in Biak War Zone are abundant, some of them were remain unearthed, but clearly, they have become an integrated part with the remains of the soldier and the memory of dramatic and brutal war itself that adds to the level commemoration as Elliott and Milne (2019) argued that war cemeteries, museums, and commemoration sites become popular places to visit for a range of purpose [...]. Advanced tourism establishments such as the ones in Vietnam have greatly benefitted from the remnants of war and exhibits dedicated to war (Keyes, 2012). Regarding to the Biak war zone, there has been a lack of accounts on American soldier remains, and no known efforts of excavation, cremation or repatriation of fallen American soldier remove has been informed. However, this modern diplomacy has given an insightful understanding about the given circumstance; the US Secretary of Defense Dr Mark T. Esper and Indonesian Minister of Defense Prabowo Subianto on October 23, 2020, signed a Memorandum of Intent to Advance the Defense of Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Agency's efforts to re-start work in Indonesia to recover the remains of U.S. personnel lost in Indonesia during World War II. (Joint Statement Regarding, 2020).

There are still so many related remnants left on the island. It is only wise if the two countries involved in the Biak war—the United States and The Japanese initiated the cleaning of the area from explosive and other hazardous remnants. It is also advisable for the United States to initiate the Peace Monument construction in Owi island as their strategic base during the war.

### **Establishment of Better Concept of Biak war Tourism**

Biak war tourism has the potentials for future development due to its high historical values, as shown by the terrible war in the area and the abundant remnants of war and remains of fallen soldiers. The quality of the war zone with the unique geographical condition and the setting of war that involved caves and beaches is a remarkable asset that can benefit visitors from which visitors may experience a different nuance of tourism. This is well defined by Franklin & Crang, who have the view that touristic culture is more than physical travel as it is also the preparation of those people to see other places as objects of tourism, and the preparation of those people and places to be seen (Franklin & Crang, 2001). War tourism, dark tourism or thanatourism offer a different perspective of vacationing as put by Franklin & Crang (2001), that vacationing is a cultural laboratory where people have been able to experiment with new aspects of identities, their social relations or their interactions with nature and also to use the important culture skills of daydreaming and-mind travelling. According to Löfgren (1999), as quoted by Franklin and Crang (2001), vacation is an arena in which fantasy has become an important social practice. Visitors can learn about how war has shattered a peaceful social life.

Biak people can also be developed Biak Tourism with the spirit of learning on humanities where the economic purpose of the war tourism development is integrated with other social benefits as stated by Taleb Rifai, the president of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that tourism is not only an important economic activity; it is also

about the millions conversations and interaction that take place every day as visitors and host communities come together (Elliott & Milne, 2019). Because of the local people and natural sustainability, it is also important to consider the scale of war tourism development; as Elliott & Milne (2019) argued that tourism management should also focus on the effect of conflicts on tourist numbers or the practical aspects of developing war-related or war-affected sites for future tourism. Legal consideration regulating such a historical value can refer to Law No 11/2010 on Cultural Protection, which dictates that to preserve cultural object sustainability and benefit the community, the development of cultural sites is permitted under strict terms and conditions. (Tahir, n.d.).

Apart from that, what is unique about Biak war tourism as a city tourism destination is that the area consists of a mix of geographical features: beach area, cave area, former airstrips and authentic remnants of war.

### **Preservation of Tangible and Intangible Assets of Biak War Zone**

Biak war zone has been home to the Biak Battle remnants and relics; thousands of sand of tons of items used during the war are scattered or buried under the soil. At the same time, the postwar landscape has also naturally created a particular historical value. Both of them come as tangible and intangible heritages to the Biak war zone. Tangible heritage refers in general to all the material traces such as archaeological sites, historical monuments, artefacts, and objects that are significant to a community, a nation, or/and humanity ('material' archaeological and historical elements of heritage). Intangible heritage: practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated with living communities (Hasan, 2014). The term "artefact" comes in both tangible and intangible heritage as the word can mean (1) a usually simple object (such as a tool or ornament) showing human artistry or modification as distinguished from a natural thing, especially an item remaining from a particular period; and (2) Something characteristics

of or resulting from a particular human institution, period, trend or individual (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The fallen soldier remains, wreck of jeeps, airplanes, tanks, mortars, guns, grenades, water containers, helmets or dog-tags discovered in the war zone may be tangible heritage, but when the values of such items are much higher than their intrinsic values, they must be well protected. Looting of such things for the mere economic benefit of looters is a shame, and therefore protection of such invaluable items is a must. They must be there as an authentic witness of war. Visitors unquestionably come to the war site, not for the replica of human bones or war remnants.

Protection of such tangible and intangible heritages in Indonesia can refer to Government Degree No 10/1993 on Explanation of Law no. 5/1992 on Cultural Protection of Object, which confirms reducing, extending, changing, removing and polluting a protected heritage is not allowed (Tahir, n.d.).

Developing Biak war tourism should be integrated with other prevailing tourist attractions such as beaches and cultural attractions (local dances, festival, events, ceremonies, culinary, etc. As Elliott & Milne (2019) argued that in mapping the multiple linkages between war/tourism as a necessary critical intervention in academic and popular tourism discourse, we must not overlook the "natural" interdependence of tourism and peace that international organizations still articulate and the popularity of dark tourism aside, wider cultural imaginaries still hold.

### **Institutionalization of Potential Tourism Objects**

Besides the World War II Monument in Biak and Biak's Regional Government's goodwill to promote Biak war tourism, nothing is strictly run under official and governmental control. Compared to The War Remnants Museum Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City, which is operated under the Vietnamese national government, war remnants "museum" in the Biak war zone is represented by a 'mini' museum organized by the caretaker of the Binsari cave with minimal methods of display and conservation. Many of the remnants are still scattered in Biak island,

and there is a significant probability that some remain somewhere deep in the soil. Such important artefacts need to be under the umbrella of protective and legal force, especially from the government. Preservation and conservation of war remnants in Biak should be well institutionalized for optimum management of the valuable war remnants, which will be an appropriate and decent venue for visitors for learning from history.

Some underwater remnants and wrecks are also in need of attention and handling to preserve, conservation, and protect valuable historical remnants such as the underwater Catalina—airplane--wreck (Tahir, n.d) and, and safety and security of local people from possible active explosive remnants.

### **Creation of Biak War Trail for Tourist Attraction**

The creation of related tourist attraction can be a solution to help promote a particular tourist destination. Because of war track and war remnants, Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea is an excellent example of created tourist attraction. Kokoda Track stretches about 96 km over the rugged Owen Stanley Ranger, from Ower's Corner in Central Province, 50 km east of Port Moresby, to the village of Kokoda in Oro Province in Papua New Guinea. This track was the forbidding terrain on which Australian infantry battled Japanese forces from July to November 1942. (Beaumont, 2016). In 2003 the Kokoda Track Authority (KTA) was created, a statutory body based in Port Moresby but with local governments' representation along the track. Its role was to manage access to the track by trekking companies and to ensure that the benefit of trekking was fed back into local communities through the charging of trekking fees.

The Cambodian government developed the town of Anlong Veng into a theme park devoted to the Khmer Rouge. The brutal regime that murdered around 15 per cent of Cambodian's population from 1975 – 1979 (Burman, 2010), as quoted by Keyes (2012) and Vietnam, used the Cu Chi tunnels in Ho Chi Minh City as a tourist attraction. It is a network of around 125

miles of underground passageways (Keyes, 2012). The tunnels had been used by Viet Cong soldiers as hiding spots during combat and served as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon caches, and living quarters for North Vietnamese fighters.

Biak has the potential of developing a similarly related tourist destination. The writer has compiled the possible war historical trails that come in two sections: (1) The Japanese Trail that stretches some 66 kilometres which includes the land area where the Japanese took shelter and maintained their resistance during the war, that consists of Mokmer Airport (now Frans Kasiepo airport) – Binsari cave – Inomaki cave – Paray World War II Monument – Lima Kamar cave – Kampung Ruar – Kampung Sunde – Kampung Adibai – Bosnik and Samber; (2) the American trail which include Owi island – Woendi Island – Rasi island – Bosnek – Mandon – Ibdı – Parai – Mokmer – Sboeria – Manoeboboe – Catalina wreck. The American Trail consists of a land area of 50 kilometres and a water area of 110 km, and (3) the combined Japanese and American Trail, which covers a land area of 56 kilometres.

Each of the trails offers a different historical experience atmosphere: the Japanese trail will give visitors an experience through terrain and caves trek. In contrast, the American trail gives the benefit of islands exploration and water trips. The sea war zone offers special diving in water war remnants such as the Catalina plane wreck.

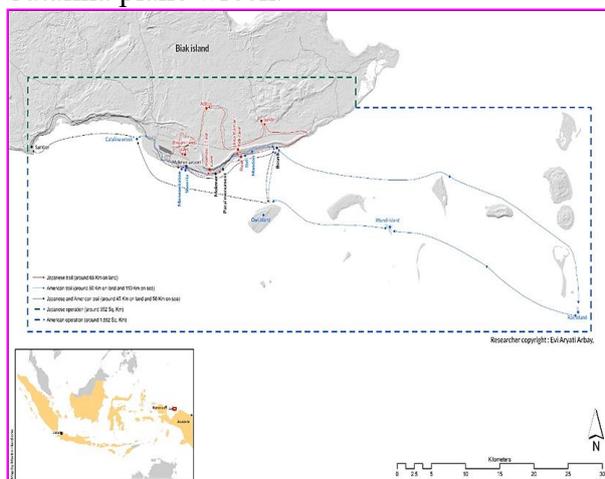


Illustration 1. The Proposed Japanese, American and Combined Japanese-American war trail in Biak

### **Use of Media for Biak War Tourism Introduction and Marketing**

It is a fact that Biak war tourism has not been widely known to the world, even to the people of Indonesia, partly because of its rare coverage in the news. It is believed that tourism is a distinctly modern practice partly because of its dependence on mass media, communication, and transport technologies that allow many people to be mobilized [...] (Elliott & Milne, 2019). It is agreed that in terms of war-related tourism, many of the war-memory studies consider the role of the mass media in framing and popularizing sites, but questions of production at the industry level and audience reception— how audience decode and respond to these media texts, and how media-include tourism practices are affected—are still, typically, under research. (Seaton, 2018) in Elliot & Milne, 2019). It is, therefore, time to aggressively expose Biak war tourism in some media and social media engagement through various types of contents on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram or even Tik-Tok, with an assignment of people with skills of media development.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Biak war tourism—a battlefield of the United States Army versus and the Japanese army in 1944--once flourished with Japanese tourists' visit for pilgrimage. As time went by and due to the effect of the 1998 global economic crises, the Biak war tourism went fading and later on has come to a stagnant point, mostly because of visits to the war zone.

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Biak war tourism is well supported by remnants of war, war historical spots and caves where the Japanese took shelter. Biak war tourism can be developed in the complement of

the existing major beaches attraction potential. A better concept of war tourism management, more sustainable maintenance of war remnants, creation of distinguished related supporting tourist attraction such as Japanese War Trail and American War Trail in Biak, and rigorous introduction of Biak's tourism potentials will lead to the chance of elevating Biak's tourism in a whole.

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