

# Bintan courts tourists with new facilities

**Island aiming for 1 million foreign visitors by 2015 with new airport and 'resort city'**

**Nilanjana Sengupta**  
In Bintan (Indonesia)

A new airport, a new "resort city", seaside villas, a marina for yachts, and more nightlife entertainment outlets.

Bintan Island is aiming to treble the number of foreign visitors to a million people in the next four years with these new facilities, officials said yesterday.

The 300,000 international tourists who visited Bintan last year were mostly from Singapore, Korea and Japan. By 2015, Bintan expects to see one million overseas tourists as it lures some of the 17 million expected in Singapore in that year, officials say.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who was in Bintan yesterday, said the Indonesian island needs to develop its own unique identity to boost tourism.

"Currently we hear people saying, 'Come to Singapore and later on you may visit Bintan.' One day we want to say, 'Visit Bintan where you will find many gems and unique things. After that, you may visit Singapore,'" he said.

Bintan is located to the south-east of Singapore, 55 minutes away by ferry. And 75 per cent of foreign tourists last year arrived in these ferries. Domestic tourists mainly use the Tanjung Pinang airport, which is 90 minutes away by car from the main beachfront hotels run by Bintan Resorts, a subsidiary of Singapore-listed Gallant Ventures.

Dr Yudhoyono granted permission for a new airport to be built at the Lobam industrial area, 35 minutes away from Bintan Resorts. Gallant Ventures would be involved in

constructing the airport that could welcome Boeing 737s and Airbus 320s. Land is available to allow even bigger aircraft to fly in, officials say.

Mr Asad Shiraz, marketing director of Bintan Resorts, told The Sunday Times that the planned airport will cater to domestic chartered flights, private jets and the cargo needs of the industrial estate.

Bintan Resorts manages five independently owned beach resorts, four designer golf courses and other recreational facilities in northern Bintan. Construction of more resorts is expected to start under its Lagoi Bay development project.

Dr Yudhoyono named a new "resort city" to be built by Malaysia's Landmark Berhad in the area. Estimated to cost \$425 million, Persona Lagoi Bintan will house a luxury hotel, villas, a lagoon, marina and amenities for entertainment, retail and nightlife outlets.