

The welcoming waters (top) surrounding the islands; a tropical paradise (below) close to Jakarta



Peaceful coral atoll havens, rich in history and marine life, are a mere two hours from Jakarta's hubbub. **Colin Miller** takes a journey through the Thousand Islands

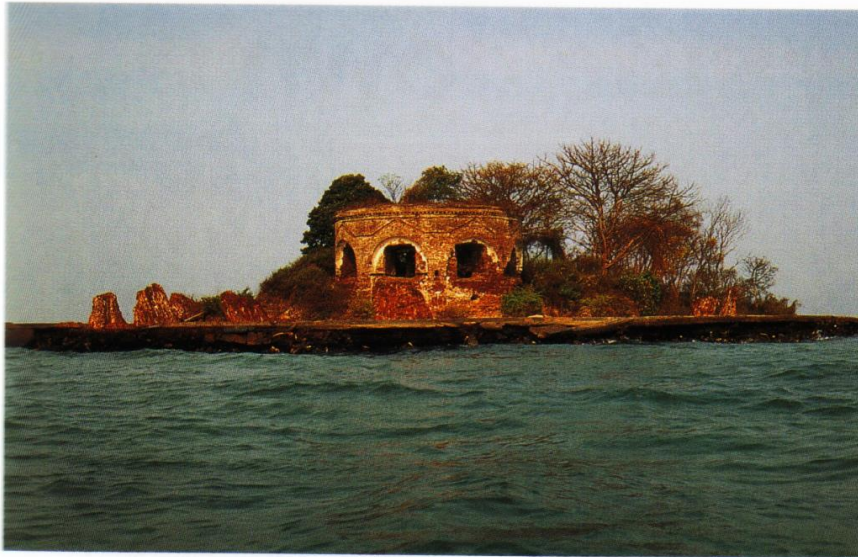
We set out to the Thousand Islands (Pulau Seribu) in Jakarta Bay to escape the hustle and bustle of Jakarta. This charming "getaway"—which despite its name consists of fewer than 200 coral atolls—dots the Java Sea north of the city. Tourism is now the islands' biggest industry, but it wasn't always like that.

Back in the Dutch colonial days the islands were vital to the smooth running of a profitable empire, servicing supply ships from Holland so they were seaworthy for the return journey. As a result, the closest islands to Jakarta all have histories as shipyards, prisons and graveyards.

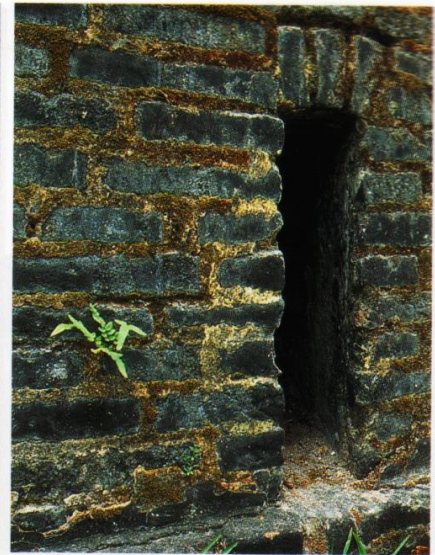
The most important of these inner islands was Pulau Onrust, used for more than two centuries as a shipyard.

The activity on this small island was so intense that in 1755 as many as 2000 people lived and worked there servicing primarily the Dutch East Indiamen.

As testimony to the work of the shipwrights of the island, Captain James Cook stated, after the overhaul of his ship *HMS Endeavour* in 1771: "I don't believe that there is a marine yard in the world where work is done with more alertness." Unfortunately for the Dutch an alert member of



Pulau Kelor, "skull island" (above); one of the islands' many ruins (above right)



Cook's expedition, botanist Joseph Banks, observed that the island, "...seems to be so ill-defended that a 60-gun ship would blow it up without a possibility of failing..." Whether the British Admiralty noted this and subsequently destroyed the Onrust shipyard three times in the first decade of the 1800s is not known but it might bear some investigation.

As a result of this thoroughness there are no buildings from pre-1800s left standing on Onrust, but their red brick foundations can be seen on the shoreline of much of the island.

The most tangible evidence of the pre-1800 past are the gravestones on the northern shore of the island. The gravestone of Maria van de Velde (1693–1721), though the granite details of her short life have been wearied by

time, provides a clue to the long Dutch usage of the island and the short life expectancies of the times.

On Pulau Kahyangan, once connected to Onrust by bridge, two cannon bear witness to the corrosion of the centuries. Other writers have recorded in years gone by as many as four cannon on the island complete with six cannon-balls each. Now a single cannon-ball is the only ammunition for the remaining two cannon. The disappearance of the rest of the island's defences, one can only guess, is perhaps because of high prices for scrap iron and antique weapons.

On Pulau Bidadari, across a narrow strait from Kahyangan, the ruins

of a round fort are being overgrown slowly by trees, the roots of which clasp the mortar between the bricks. From the fort the island's prize asset can be seen: a breeding pair of White Bellied Sea Eagles. Look for their nest in the tallest tree on the island and wait for these huge birds to appear over the tree-tops, hovering on the wind.

Pulau Kelor, seen a kilometre off the northern shore of Bidadari, has a similar ruined fort easily glimpsed from a passing boat. It is difficult to get local boat owners to stop and let you off for a walk as the island is believed to be haunted and well it might be, considering the uncanny "skull island" look of its fort. G

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National Marine Park

The increase in the number of people seeking a retreat from the city has meant a possible threat to the flora and fauna of these coral atolls. The Forestry Department with the help of the World Wildlife Fund For Nature, declared Pulau Seribu a National Marine Park in 1982.

Gosong Rengat, Pulau Penjaliran Timur, Pulau Penjaliran Barat and Pulau Peteloran have been established as sanctuary zones to provide protection for nesting and feeding hawksbill and green turtles.

Closer to Jakarta, Pulau Belanda is a coral sanctuary established to provide an undisturbed environment for

the many reef species that inhabit Pulau Seribu.

Resort and fishing villages have been limited to the intensive-use zone. This area provides for the management of tourism-related activities while protecting surrounding reefs and habitats. The well-known resort islands of Sepa, Putri, Kotok, Matahari, Pelangi and Papa Theo are all within the intensive-use zone.

While the resort islands are far offshore from Jakarta on the map, they only take two hours to reach in speed-boats. There is plenty of scope for those hoping to walk on a beach.

It is still possible to find an island



Groupers are a common sight for divers in the Pulau Seribu Marine Park

where the jungle threatens to overgrow the beach huts, where the food emphasises the catch of the day and nightly entertainment is limited.

Fishing, sailing and other water sports are available for the active. Those who snorkel in the clear water can see clownfish swimming among the stinging tentacles of their host, the sea anemone.—CM