

Study of the Potential of Historical Sites and Tourist Destinations in the Vietnamese Village on Galang Island in Supporting Regional

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Abstract

This study aims to trace the history of Galang Island, located in the Riau Islands Province, Indonesia, and once served as a shelter for refugees from Vietnam. From 1979 to 1996, the area known as Kampung Vietnam became a pivotal point in the history of international refugee management in Indonesia. For more than ten years, around 250,000 Vietnamese refugees lived in this area seeking safety from conflict and political instability in their country. Their presence influenced unique social interactions and cultural dynamics, both among the refugees and with the local community. Through this study, it is hoped that deeper insights can be gained into the social and cultural influences of the refugee community, as well as identifying steps to preserve the historical sites that are now part of the human heritage on Galang Island.

Introduction

Galang Island, located south of Batam Island and part of the Riau Islands, was chosen by the Indonesian government to be used as a shelter for refugees from Vietnam. Between 1975 and 1979, the island served as a temporary place for those fleeing tension and political unrest in Vietnam. The refugees lived here while awaiting the process of being resettled to a third country that was willing to accept them as permanent residents. To meet the basic needs of the refugees, the Indonesian government established a number of barracks, each of which could accommodate around a hundred people (Ali et al., 2016; Missbach & Adiputera, 2021; Tan, 2016). In addition, various basic facilities such as electricity and other public facilities were provided to support their daily lives. In 1975, there were around 966 refugees living in this shelter. In 1979, the Indonesian government began to gradually relocate the refugees, starting with moving around 10,000 refugees from Bintan Island to Galang Island. In addition to functioning as a shelter, Galang Island also serves as a coordination center where representatives of host countries work together with UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) in managing the shelter process. The selection of Galang Island as a shelter was based on several strategic considerations. In terms of geography, the island is located about 50 kilometers south of Tanjung Pinang and has an area of more than 175 square kilometers. Its coastal area mostly consists of sandy beaches, while some of the land is covered with mangrove forests. In terms of depth, the waters around the island range from 10 to 12 meters at high tide, making it a strategic location in terms of sea access and logistics. Its location close to neighboring countries such as Singapore and Malaysia also helps the effectiveness of regional cooperation in handling the influx of refugees. Therefore, Galang Island was designated as a temporary shelter for refugees from Vietnam, while awaiting the process of being transferred to a third country that is willing to accept them as permanent residents.



Figure 1. Galang Island

Source: Google Maps 2025

Literature Review

Historical background of the Vietnamese Camp on Galang Island

After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the Southeast Asian region, including Indonesia, experienced a large influx of refugees from Indochinese countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. These refugees fled from changes in government in their homelands, especially due to the new communist regime. They were referred to as boat refugees, (Boat People) because the majority of them left their home countries in small boats that were unsafe to sail, thus posing a high risk of drowning, starvation, pirate attacks, and various diseases (UNHCR, 2000). This humanitarian crisis triggered a global response, including Indonesia's active participation in assisting refugees based on the principles of humanity and international cooperation. As a follow-up to the increasing number of refugees coming to Indonesia, the government in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) established the Vietnamese Refugee Camp on Galang Island in 1979. Galang Island was chosen because of its remote but strategic location. The island is located in the Riau Islands and is quite far from settlements, so it is considered suitable for maintaining social order in the surrounding community (Effendy, 2015; Lenhart, 2001; Carruthers, 2018; Narotama, 2022). The existence of the refugee camp on the island is also part of the regional framework set out in the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), a multilateral agreement to address the Indochinese refugee crisis discussed at the International Conference in Geneva in 1989. During its operation from 1979 to 1996, Galang Camp has accommodated more than 250,000 refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia. The refugees undergo a registration, screening, and training process before being sent to third countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and several European countries that are willing to accept them. The camp provides complete facilities such as hospitals, schools, places of worship, UNHCR offices, and a semi-autonomous administration system run by the refugee community itself (Wandeto, 2014; Anomat Ali, 2017; Chung, 2011).

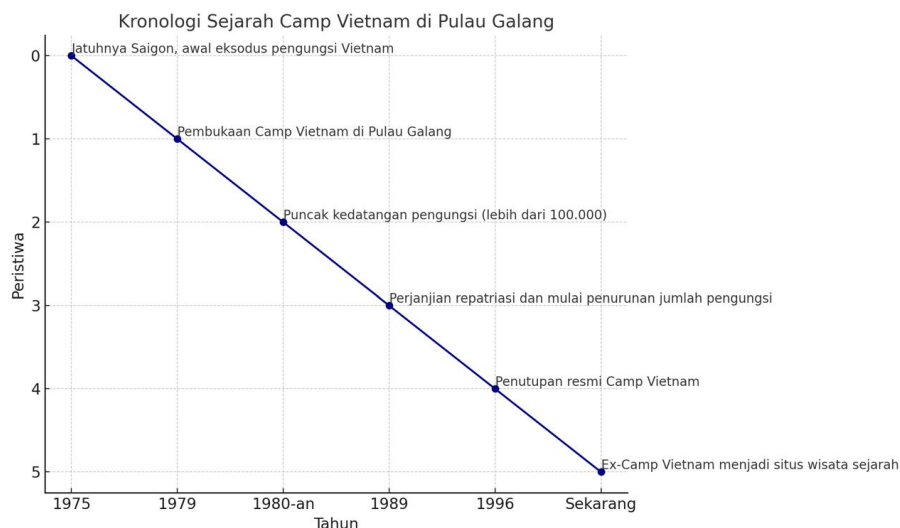


Figure 2. Chronology Diagram

Source: UNHCR and historical literature 2025

The presence of the Vietnamese Camp on Galang Island shows Indonesia's commitment to the principles of humanity and international solidarity, even though Indonesia at that time was not a party to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol. However, through a pragmatic approach and multilateral cooperation, Indonesia played an active role in handling the regional refugee crisis, which also strengthened Indonesia's diplomatic position in the international arena (Sukma, 1995; Adiputera & Missbach, 2021; Baskara, 2024). Some historical relics in the Vietnamese camp on Galang Island include: Galang refugee camp which used to have barracks for Vietnamese refugees, places of worship such as the Quan Am Tu Temple and the Catholic Church, Ngha Trang Cemetery, and various other facilities that were used by refugees. The Vietnamese Refugee Camp on Galang Island is a historical place that reflects the role of the Indonesian state in accommodating refugees due to the conflict in Vietnam. This location holds many historical relics from that period, such as barracks, places of worship, hospitals, and monuments, which are still preserved to this day.



Figure 3. Barracks and settlements

Source: Kompas / Reinhard Simanjuntak

The existence of these sites makes the area a historical tourist destination that attracts the attention of both domestic and international tourists. Every visitor who comes to this Vietnam Camp can witness firsthand the traces of the lives of refugees in the past. The atmosphere that still reflects its original conditions presents an educational and emotional experience, as if taking tourists back to the time when refugees lived their lives in exile. This potential is what makes this area worthy of further development as a history and humanity-based tourism.

Cultural and Historical Heritage as a Tourist Attraction

The official closure of the Vietnamese Refugee Camp on Galang Island in 1996 marked the end of one of the most important chapters in the Indo-China refugee crisis. The closure of the camp coincided with the increasing political stability in Vietnam, as well as the success of the voluntary repatriation policy promoted by international institutions. After the official closure of the camp, the area was developed into the Vietnam Camp Historical Tourism Park, which now serves as a place for education and historical reflection on Galang Island. This site is not only a witness to a significant humanitarian event, but also reflects Indonesia's contribution to humanitarian diplomacy at the global level. Within the framework of national development, tourism areas have an important and crucial role in improving the economy. Since the enactment of Law Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism, this sector in Indonesia has experienced rapid progress. The law not only regulates the economic aspects of tourism, but also highlights the importance of culture, society, and the environment as the main foundations for sustainable tourism development. The existence of historical sites such as the Vietnam Camp on Galang Island shows how historical heritage can be utilized for educational and economic purposes in a balanced manner.

The tourism sector is one of the most strategic areas of activity in supporting national economic development. This sector is planned as one of the sources of state revenue that is quite strong and also has the potential to absorb labor and encourage investment. To develop this sector, the government is working hard to formulate plans and various policies that support the progress of this sector. One of the important policies in tourism development is to explore and inventory existing tourist attractions to attract tourists, both domestic and international. This development cannot be separated from efforts to create a positive image through the management of tourist attractions, the provision of adequate public facilities, and support for tourism infrastructure and good access. Therefore, to develop a tourist destination, a mature strategy is needed so that the available potential can be utilized optimally. Batam City is one of the popular tourist destinations in Indonesia, with various tourism potentials it has. One of the main attractions of this city is the historical tour of the Vietnam Camp, because Batam was once a witness to the history of a transit place for Vietnamese refugees in the past. The Riau Islands Province, which includes Batam City, is located in a very strategic geographical position. Directly bordering several countries in Southeast Asia, this province also has a tropical climate that supports the diversity of tourism potential. which is almost 95% (Ninety Five percent) is ocean and consists of many small islands. Because of its geographical location, this Archipelago Province can be said to be a tourism showcase in Indonesia (Kepri Statistics 2016). Sedarmayanti, M.Pd., APU stated in her book Culture and Tourism Industry that tourism is everything related to tourism, including tourism entrepreneurs and tourist attractions. historical and cultural tourism is in second place after nature tourism in its development focus. In the Riau Islands Province (Kepri), there is a site that is included in cultural tourism but is not well known, namely Kampung Vietnam. so that this historical tourism destination continues to develop and promotional efforts are further enhanced so that it becomes a historical tourism destination that has its own appeal to be visited by tourists. According to

Timothy and Boyd (2003), cultural heritage has an important role in tourism development because it can create educational value, identity, and cross-cultural understanding.

Historical sites such as the Vietnam Camp have tremendous potential to become heritage-focused tourism destinations, emphasizing the experience of history, culture, and past heritage. In the context of Indonesia, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (2022) suggests that the development of historical tourism must pay attention to aspects of preservation, local community involvement, and digital innovation to increase the attractiveness of the destination.

Management of Historical Sites

Historical site management methods include physical preservation, enrichment of historical stories, and improvement of tourism infrastructure and services (UNESCO, 2019; Khater, 2025; Al-hagla, 2010; Jassim et al., 2025; Nag & Mishra, 2025). Ineffective management can result in a decline in historical value and loss of collective memory. Therefore, sustainable, participatory and education-based management is essential (Rusdi, 2018; Zhiyenbayeva et al., 2022; Sholeh et al., 2025). On Galang Island, the management of the Vietnamese Camp still experiences difficulties related to building preservation, historical documentation, and limited human resources.

Previous Studies

Several previous studies have emphasized the potential and challenges faced by the Vietnam Camp. Yuliana (2020) in the Journal of Cultural Tourism revealed that the lack of promotion is one of the main obstacles to the development of this area. Isnaeni (2020) emphasized the importance of physical preservation and historical narratives as key elements in a sustainable tourism strategy. On the other hand, research by Pratama (2021) recommends site digitization as an effective strategy to reach the younger generation and foreign tourists. These findings have a significant impact on designing a development strategy that uses the TOWS Matrix.

Methods

This research begins with an observation of the current condition of the Vietnam Camp as a historical site with high humanitarian value. However, its management is inadequate as a historical tourist attraction. Therefore, a strategic analysis is needed to determine an appropriate development direction. The initial step was to identify internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) that influence the development of the Vietnam Camp. Data were collected through literature review, observation, and interviews.

Data collection

Data collection was carried out by conducting direct visits to the research location. In addition, data was also obtained from literature studies and electronic media related to the research topic. The visit to the location aims to ensure that the data collected is in line with the research objectives, using literature as information support so that the data is relevant. The review was carried out directly at the Vietnam Camp on Galang Island to better understand the management strategy in research related to the development of historical tourism destinations there. The strategy for developing the potential of historical tourism objects in the Vietnam Camp is expected to broaden insight into how the management strategy for existing historical tourism heritage has a positive impact on tourism in Indonesia. With this innovation, it is hoped that the next generation of Indonesian tourism can develop and advance this sector so that one day Indonesian tourism can compete at the global level. For the Vietnam Camp managers, this research is expected to be input or in efforts to develop the tourist attraction area.

Data analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the SWOT method based on a literature review and information obtained by the researcher. Meanwhile, with a qualitative descriptive approach, the method of data collection is intended so that it can be processed comprehensively and effectively. The SWOT analysis was obtained from information that had been collected through direct observation. In this case, the researcher processed the information using the TOWS Matrix to find an efficient method of increasing strengths, exploring opportunities, and reducing risks and weaknesses when developing the Camp Vietnam tourist location as a major attraction for local and international visitors. With the SWOT analysis, it is hoped that it can provide a view of Camp Vietnam as a cultural heritage tourism destination and see its impact on the surrounding community, as well as how the surrounding community can take advantage of these opportunities. According to Nurjannah and Mashuri (2020), SWOT analysis is the process of identifying various factors in a structured way to formulate a strategy. This method is known historically and has been used by leaders to provide a brief overview of the strategic situation of an organization. This analysis is based on the assumption that an effective strategy is born from a good "fit" between organizational resources (strengths and weaknesses) and external conditions (opportunities and threats). A good fit can maximize an organization's strengths and opportunities and reduce its weaknesses and threats if implemented correctly.

Results and Discussion

Qualitative Descriptive

Qualitative Descriptive describes how significant Camp Vietnam is as a historical tourism destination on Galang Island, supported by easy access to the entrance road. This method collects information through exploration, literature studies, discussions, and observations to provide an in-depth explanation of the topic discussed. In this context, Camp Vietnam should be developed intensively to increase regional income and the welfare of the local community, considering that Batam directly borders neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. It is important to strengthen cooperation with the private sector and tourism agents who have overseas promotion networks, so that the benefits can be felt by the community and government. The use of popular social media platforms is also very useful in disseminating fast information about the sustainable Camp Vietnam. Related to qualitative descriptive, documentation in the form of images is taken to demonstrate conditions in the field. Infrastructure development is one step that can create an appropriate atmosphere for tourism development (Y. F. Sidabutar et al., 2023).

SWOT Analysis

Strength

Vietnam Camp is a historical tourist destination that depicts

Vietnam Camp is a historical tourist destination that depicts the suffering of the community due to armed conflict, where people were forced to seek safety.

World-renowned historical value: Vietnam Camp is a witness to the global history of the refugee crisis, making it special in Southeast Asia.

Preserved cultural heritage: Original buildings, places of worship, hospitals, and relics of refugees still exist.

Emotional and symbolic support: This place holds collective memories

About humanity and peace

Improved access: Road infrastructure to Galang Island has been improved along with development in Batam.

Weakness

Lack of information and promotion about historical tourism Camp Vietnam to local and international communities, one of which is due to the lack of role of the Batam government and community in introducing historical tourist attractions in the Galang Islands, namely Camp Vietnam.

Lack of promotion and information: Many people are not yet aware of the existence and importance of this site.

Limited facilities: There is a lack of supporting facilities such as information centers, decent public toilets, and transportation in the area.

Inadequate site maintenance: Several historical buildings are not well maintained.

Limited human resources: Limited management, with the number of competent tour guides in the field of history still lacking.

Opportunity

Increasing interest in historical and educational tourism: The trend of educational and cultural heritage-based tourism is increasingly in demand by domestic and international tourists.

International cooperation: There is potential for collaboration with humanitarian organizations and related countries (such as Vietnam, the UN, and UNHCR).

Local economic development: There is potential to increase income for local communities through micro-enterprises, tourism services, and culinary.

Digitization of history: There is a possibility to create a virtual museum or interactive application for visitors.

The role of the Batam City Government: with various regulations, the government can develop areas in the city of Batam. However, the strategic conditions of the Batam area and the knowledge of local and foreign communities regarding the historical value of the Vietnamese Camp on Galang Island are still limited.

Threat

Land use change: There is a risk to the preservation of the site if the area is used for purposes unrelated to history.

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Insufficient long-term policy support: Unclear regulations regarding the management and development of historical sites.

Environmental damage and extreme weather: Threats to the physical integrity of buildings due to tropical climate conditions and lack of preservation efforts.

Competition with other tourist attractions: Lack of appeal if not balanced with innovation in promotion and visitor experience.

Increase training for local guides and heritage managers.

Build basic tourism facilities: toilets, information boards, and relaxation areas.

- Establish partnerships with educational institutions for research on history and management.

Matriks TOWS

Strategy: S + O (Strength-Opportunity)

Strategy Content

Develop an educational museum based on historical experience.

Increase international promotion by collaborating with UNHCR and the State of Vietnam.

Develop an educational tourism program involving schools and universities.

Organize an annual humanitarian festival to attract visitors.

Strategy: W + O (Weakness-Opportunity)

Strategy Content

Digitize the site with a virtual tour application.

Improve training for local guides and historical asset managers.

Build basic tourism infrastructure such as toilets, information boards, and relaxation areas.

Establish cooperation with educational institutions for historical research and management.

Strategy: S + T (Strength-Threat)

Strategy Content

Implement regulations for the protection of the site as a national cultural heritage.

Document and store site information to reduce physical risks.

Diversify tourism offerings (culinary, cultural, documentary, educational packages).

Strategy: W + T (Weaknesses-Threats)

Strategy Content

Design a Long-term plan with the local government.

Involve local communities in the preservation and monitoring of the site.

Propose cross-sector funding and local corporate social responsibility.

Create a physical conservation roadmap for historic buildings.

Conclusion

The Vietnamese Camp on Galang Island is a concrete example of regional solidarity and Indonesia's contribution to resolving the global humanitarian crisis. This study highlights the importance of documenting history and preserving sites as a reminder of Indonesia's role in humanitarian diplomacy.

The Vietnamese Camp on Galang Island has been designated by the UN as a cultural heritage area in Batam City, after serving as a shelter for Vietnamese refugees stranded on the island. It is important to formulate an appropriate development strategy for the cultural heritage area by considering the condition of the building, its function, utilizing valuable historical buildings, the surrounding environment, as well as visitor experiences and activities, folklore, and artifacts. Suggestions for local governments and managers are: Implementing the planned strategy in stages, establishing cooperation with various parties, including international ones, and increasing public awareness through education and promotion. With a strategic and

collaborative approach, the Vietnamese Camp can become a prominent historical tourism icon at the national and international levels.

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