

Colonial Bengkulu / Benkoelen, worth a visit and much more than that
You want adventure? Go to Bengkulu and experience the good old colonial feeling!
Author Dirk Teeuwen

Most pictures are available on request.
drs.d.teeuwen@gmail.com

Contents

1. Introduction
2. The beach
3. The Chinese quarter after the earthquake of 1916
4. Some monuments: Fort Marlborough and Sukarno's House
5. European cemetery

Account for pictures: see subscripts Picture 1, P.2, etc.
In the text: the words after a slash are the original words or names in Dutch.



P.1 The main gate of Fort Marlborough, Bengkulu 1918

In front: a soldier of the Dutch East-Indian Army stands on guard.

From: Indië, geïllustreerd Weekblad voor Nederland en Koloniën: jrg. 2 april 1918 – april 1919;
Haarlem Holland 1918 p. 654

1. Introduction

Bengkulu / Benkoelen on the southwest coast of very rainy Sumatra is an Indonesian province. The province is small and is sparsely populated, comprising a very mixed ethnic ancestry people (Rejang, Malay, Bugis, Chinese, Singhalese, Arabic and Indo (mixed Indonesian-Chinese-Dutch blood)). The traveller has to pass the Bukit Barisan Mountains and will arrive, at last, at this beautiful and clean colonial diamond, called Bengkulu, capital of the province of the same name. Flight reservations can be arranged to reach Medan in the north of Sumatra from anywhere. Then follows a long, but interesting journey over land to this former Dutch East-Indian outpost. By air Bengkulu is connected with Jakarta. But delay is normal.

Bengkulu is a quiet university town as well as an administrative centre. The town contains a number of historical monuments such as the Bengkulu Museum, Benteng Marlborough / Fort Marlborough, Sukarno's House, Mesjid Jamik - designed by Sukarno, a professional architect, during his exile in Bengkulu - and the European cemetery at Jalan Ditra. Most of Bengkulu is set back from the quiet coast. Only Fort Marlborough and a part of the old town are located at the ocean. In my opinion Fort Marlborough and Sukarno's House, a beautiful Dutch villa, are specially worth a visit. (Text will be continued on page 3.)

©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands



P.2 Sumatra, The outpost, Bengkulu/ Benkoelen, see >> on the picture below
 From > Gelder, W. van: Schoolatlas van Nederlandsch Oost-Indië; Den Haag 1916 no. 6



P.3 The inner court, the main gate at the left, Bengkulu 1998
 Photo Dirk Teeuwen

©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands

In 1685 the British occupied four villages on Sumatra's western coast: Bengkulu, Selebar, Manjuta and Batang Kapas. From Selebar they were ousted by sultan Haji of Banten / Bantam, but the Dutch left them at peace in the other places. Near Bengkulu they first built Fort York. Later, from 1714-1720, north of Fort York a new benteng called Fort Marlborough was erected.

The importance of Bengkulu was caused by the cultivation of pepper and cheap opium. From Bengkulu the British could export their products to the northern part of Java and to Madura / Madoera quite easily and were able to keep an eye on the shipping traffic through the Straits of Sunda between Java and Sumatra.



P.4 Sir Stamford Raffles

See my "Recommendations of books and sites".

Stamford Raffles; London 1897, republished Amsterdam 1999, p. 265 and 266)

Until 1825 Fort Marlborough protected the British interests in this regions. In that year, 1825, Bengkulu was transferred to the Dutch as a consequence of the Anglo - Dutch "Treaty of London", March 17th 1824. Biliton as well was given up to The Netherlands, which, together with the transfer of Bengkulu, was indemnified with the cession of Dutch Singapore, Dutch Malaka (and the greater part of southern Malaysia) as well as the Dutch factories on the Indian continent.

One of the greatest colonial administrators and statesmen of Great Britain was Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781–1826). Raffles, born at sea, was a son of a captain in the West India Trade. When fourteen he was placed as a clerk in the East India House in London. In 1805 the Court of Directors determined on sending him out to to Penang, Malaysia. He had a special talent for languages and an intellectual interest in the Malay world around him.

Nevertheless Raffles belonged to that category Englishmen who first and foremost were Britons and in the second place men. In 1809 he was removed to Malaka and in 1811 he took part in the British military invasion of Dutch Java, where he was appointed as a governor (1811-1815).

In 1816 he arrived in London and finished in 1817 a standard work, the book "History of Java". From 1818 until 1823 he was governor of Bengkulu and a very ambitious one. "The reforms he had instituted in Java were to be attempted in Bencoolen, where, it seemed to him, the British reputation demanded that slavery should cease, discreditable practices be discouraged, and labour be both emancipated from its fetters and made free in its efforts and reward." (From: Boulger, D. C.: The life of Sir

Stamford Raffles; London 1897, republished Amsterdam 1999, p. 265 and 266)

During his term of office in Bengkulu he was a pain in the neck for the Dutch. He tried to support a revolt of the sultan of Palembang against the Dutch in 1819. The Dutch defeated the sultan and imprisoned all his British auxiliary forces. Raffles was more succesful in his attempts to weaken the influence of the Dutch in Malaysia, specially in Singapore and to fight the monopoly positions of the Dutch in the Far East. Raffles succeeded in arranging a treaty between the British government and local native authorities to found a British establishment at Singapore in 1819, while the Malay establishment and their sultans of southern Malaysia as well as their dependencies were, by treaty subordinate to the Dutch and not to the English. The deterrend effect of a Dutch colonial military invasion in Singapore was forseen. But the treaty of 1824 solved most of the problems.

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles died, much too young. Great Britain owes him a lot and more than that. He was very intelligent and a brilliant, somewhat fanatic, opponent of the Dutch in the Far East. Raffles' mother had a Dutch family-name: Lindeman. Great Britain owes him a lot, but he was and is and shall always be the visionary founder of modern Singapore. The community of Singapore honoured him with a statue on the bank of Singapore River. There he is able to overlook his creation.

2. The beach

Bengkulu 1998
www.rendez-vous-batavia.nl



drs (msc) D. Teeuwen
The Netherlands 2007

P.5 A stormy day at the beach, Bengkulu 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen

My wife and I have been spending there a couple of days. We were the only guests of the hotel and we enjoyed a wonderful time. During the afternoon locals joined us at the swimming pool for a swim, a dive and a chat. We felt lost at the pantai-(beach-)esplanade, but a lovely lady, her beautiful baby as well as the refreshments (P.5)made us feel very comfortable.

Bengkulu 1998
www.rendez-vous-batavia.nl



drs (msc) Dirk Teeuwen
The Netherlands 2007

P.6 No, not Treasure Island, but the beach of Bengkulu on a busy day in 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen

©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands



P.7 Pantai / beach of Bengkulu, 1998, a beautiful mother and a beautiful baby of course
Photo Dirk Teeuwen



P.8 The esplanade of Bengkulu in 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen

3. The Chinese quarter after the earthquake of 1916

Earthquakes could happen around Bengkulu many times, such as the following photographs from the olden days will show.

Bengkulu 1916

www.rendez-vous-batavia.nl



drs (msc) D. Teeuwen
The Netherlands 2007

P.9 The Chinese Quarter of Bengkulu / Benkoelen after the earthquake of 1916
From: Indië, geïllustreerd Weekblad voor Nederland en Koloniën: jrg. 2 april 1918 – april 1919;
Haarlem Holland 1918 p. 652

Bengkulu 1916

www.rendez-vous-batavia.nl



drs (msc) D. Teeuwen
The Netherlands 2007

P.10 The Chinese Quarter at Bengkulu, 1918, after reconstruction
From: Indië, geïllustreerd Weekblad voor Nederland en Koloniën: jrg. 2 april 1918 – april 1919;
Haarlem Holland 1918 p. 653

©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands

3. Some monuments: Fort Marlborough and Sukarno's House

Sukarno's house

The first president of Indonesia was brought into exile by the Dutch from 1938 until the arrival of the Japanese in 1942. The Dutch allowed him to spend his time in a luxury villa in Bengkulu. He was not allowed to leave Bengkulu and vicinity, but otherwise Sukarno could do whatever he liked to do.



P.11 Exile in luxury, Sukarno's beautiful Dutch colonial villa, Bengkulu 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen



P.12 Sukarno's bicycle, made in Holland in the Gazelle Factory, Bengkulu 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen

©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands

Fort Marlborough

I said so before! The British founded their Bengkulu in 1685. It was the last territory in the Dutch East-Indies to be held by the British. It was and still is a stronghold with old English gravestones and English inscriptions. Fort Marlborough was the seat of British power in the province of Bengkulu. It replaced a fort called York and was completed in 1720. Restoration found place in 1985. The fort is open to the public.



P. 13 and 14 The southern main gate (see p.1 also) from the outside and from the inside of Benteng Marlborough in 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen



P. 15 The second, northern gate from the inside, Bengkulu 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen
©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands



P.16 The northern gate and a part of the ramparts, Bengkulu 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen



P.17 The southern main gate and another part of the ramparts, Bengkulu 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen

©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands



P.18 Another part of the northern ramparts, Bengkulu 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen



P.19 View from the fort into the old town,
Bengkulu 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen



P.20 The author and his fans
Photo taken by a very nice Bengkulu
lady

©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands

Bengkulu 1998
www.rendez-vous-batavia.nl



drs (msc) D. Teeuwen
The Netherlands 2007

P.21 Modern Bengkulu in 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen

5. European cemetery

Bengkulu 1998
www.rendez-vous-Batavia.nl



drs (msc) D. Teeuwen
The Netherlands 2007

P.22 Protestant church and graveyard (one of my favourite pictures), Bengkulu 1998
Photo Dirk Teeuwen

©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands

Pictures speak for themselves!



P.23 A part of the graveyard
Photo Dirk Teeuwen



drs (msc) D. Teeuwen The Netherlands 07
P.24, P. 25 Dutch Tombstones
Photo's Dirk Teeuwen



End of the article

©2007 drs (msc) D. Teeuwen - Rendez-vous Batavia – The Netherlands