

Galveston Capital Tourism and Marketing - Fifty Thousand Tourists Flock to Boat- Burning Festival in Riau



Jakarta. The Tourism Ministry, Riau provincial administration and Rokan Hilir district administration held the Bakar Tongkang — literally, "[boat-burning](#)" — Festival in Bagansiapiapi on June 10-11. The festival managed to attract more than fifty thousand visitors, beyond the organizers' expectation.

Local residents and tourists flocked to the city's Ing Hok Kiong temple in the weekend for the boat-burning ceremony, which was first held in the 19th century.

The religious ritual commemorates the arrival of Chinese traders and immigrants in Bagansiapiapi in 1820.

"A total of 52,000 tourists attended the festival, 30,000 locals and 22,000 international visitors... beyond our expectation of 43,000 attendees," Riau tourism agency head Fahmizal Usman said in a statement on Monday (12/06).

"Hotels were fully booked. Many visitors rented homes of local residents for Rp 4 million (\$300) for a week's stay. Many of them had to stay in Dumai or Riau and traveled here for the festival," Fahmizal said.

The festival's peak was a street parade delivering the replica of a Chinese barge, accompanied by beatings of drums, from the city's oldest shrine to its downtown area.

Before the barge was taken out of the temple, motorized rickshaws carrying House of Representatives Speaker Setya Novanto, Riau Governor Arsyad Juliandi Rachman,

Tourism Ministry's deputy of tourism development Esthy Reko Astuty and other officials made their way downtown.

The replica barge was burned in the middle of a road called Jalan Perniagaan in the center of town. According to local beliefs, the direction where the barge's mast falls will determine the fate of the city.

This year the mast fell in the direction of the sea, which symbolized safety, luck and prosperity.

Fahmizal said despite the success of the festival he had asked the central government to improve road conditions to Bagansiapiapi.

"We need better access to the city, especially since the 'Bakar Tongkang Festival' is now a hit with tourists," he said.

Tourism Ministry deputy head Esthy said there are many potential tourist destinations to be developed in the region.

"There are many historical landmarks, local residencies that can be developed [into homestays] and both natural and man-made tourist attractions," she said.

Tourism Minister Arief Yahya said the city needs to develop more attractions to draw tourists.

"Everyone should get involved, the government, business players, the media and communities," he said.