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Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site

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Sago

Sago production, from a cottage industry to an enterprise

A cottage industry is one of the contributors to the economy, be it at a small or large scale, this is one of the conventional methods to earn a source of income which is still practiced to this day. This industry centres on the creating and providing of products and services from home where those produced are normally not mass-produced thus creating a unique product or service.

Before the discovery of oil, cottage industry was one of the main economic generators in Brunei Darussalam. The cottage industry involving those residing at the famous water village or fondly known as Kampung Ayer and on land comprised of cloth weaving; brass work; silverwork; songkok-making; and many more. One that continues to strive to this day is production of sago.

With abundance flora and fauna, luscious green forests and beautiful coral reefs, it is only natural to enjoy the produce of these natural resources, while still protecting it from exploitation or mismanaged.

Sago in Brunei Darussalam is yielded from a type of palm tree locally known as Rumbia which usually grow at swamp forest area. The famous form of sago produced in Brunei's cottage industry is Ambulong, white in colour and quite synonym in the list of local delicacies.

Seeing its potential as a source of revenue, a number of entrepreneurs have set up their respective business focusing on production of Ambulong. This was further emphasised with production of sago listed as one of the projects under the 'One Village, One Product' campaign by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

One of the well-known producers of sago in the country is Perusahaan Sagu Kampung Ukong. Located in Tutong District, the business was established more than 30 years ago. It is the sole producer of sago in the district. Managed by Awang Yali, the business was originally established by his father.

The workshop for the production of the sago is built not far from his residence and equipped with machinery and other items required for the process.

Kuripit Sago.

Process of producing Sago or Ambulong



Rumbia's trunk.



Today's production using modern machinery and technology.

The process of sago production begins with lodging the Rumbia tree from the forest. The tree will be towed out from the forest and put on a heavy vehicle for transportation to the workshop.

The Rumbia's trunk will then be skinned and cut into small pieces about one metre in length. These small pieces will then be inserted into an extraction machine. The purpose of this extract the liquid from the trunks which will then be collected and later mixed with water for cleansing. The cleansing process may consume time as it will go through more than once before carefully labelled as clean.

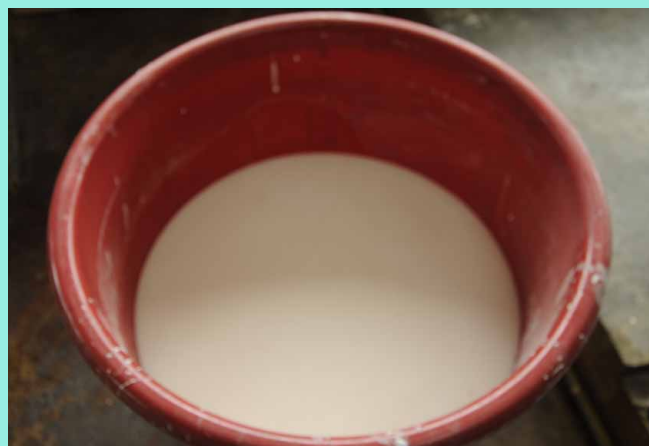
"For the first stage mixing, usually we use the water taken from nearby river. From second and onwards then we will use tap water," said one of the workers at the workshop.

After few rounds of mixing with and replacing the water, the liquid form of sago will then be placed in a large basin and left to solidified. The remaining water will be removed manually.

Each basin can produce around 70 to 100 kilogrammes of Ambulong. The process of producing Ambulong takes about four-day to complete.

When compared to the olden days where most of the process work involved were carried out manually, today's production are much easier and simpler with the help of modern machinery and technology. Not only it reduced the amount of physical work but it has shortened the number of days involved.

The production is carried out once a week or four to five times per month. Each production will usually involve four trunks of Rumbia trees. The four trunks will produce about 14 to 15 basins of liquid sago.



Sago or Ambulong.



Packed

The sago or Ambulong is later packed in different sizes according to weight. The packaging is usually 500 gram, one kilogram and two kilogrammes. The prices are ranged from \$0.80 to \$3.00 depending on weight.

Their products are sold widely at various department stores and market. Customers also will come and purchase directly from them especially those buying in bulk. If stored properly especially in cool places, the sago has a shelf-life up to two months.

One of the challenges faced by this industry is finding the main raw material that is the Rumbia tree as the tree usually grows in swamp forest area.

For Perusahaan Sagu Kampung Ukong, they usually get raw material from swamp forest area in Kampung Kiudang, Tutong District. If the tree coincidentally grows on someone's land, they will purchase it at \$20.00 per trunk.



Packed Ambulong sold at Kianggeh Market.

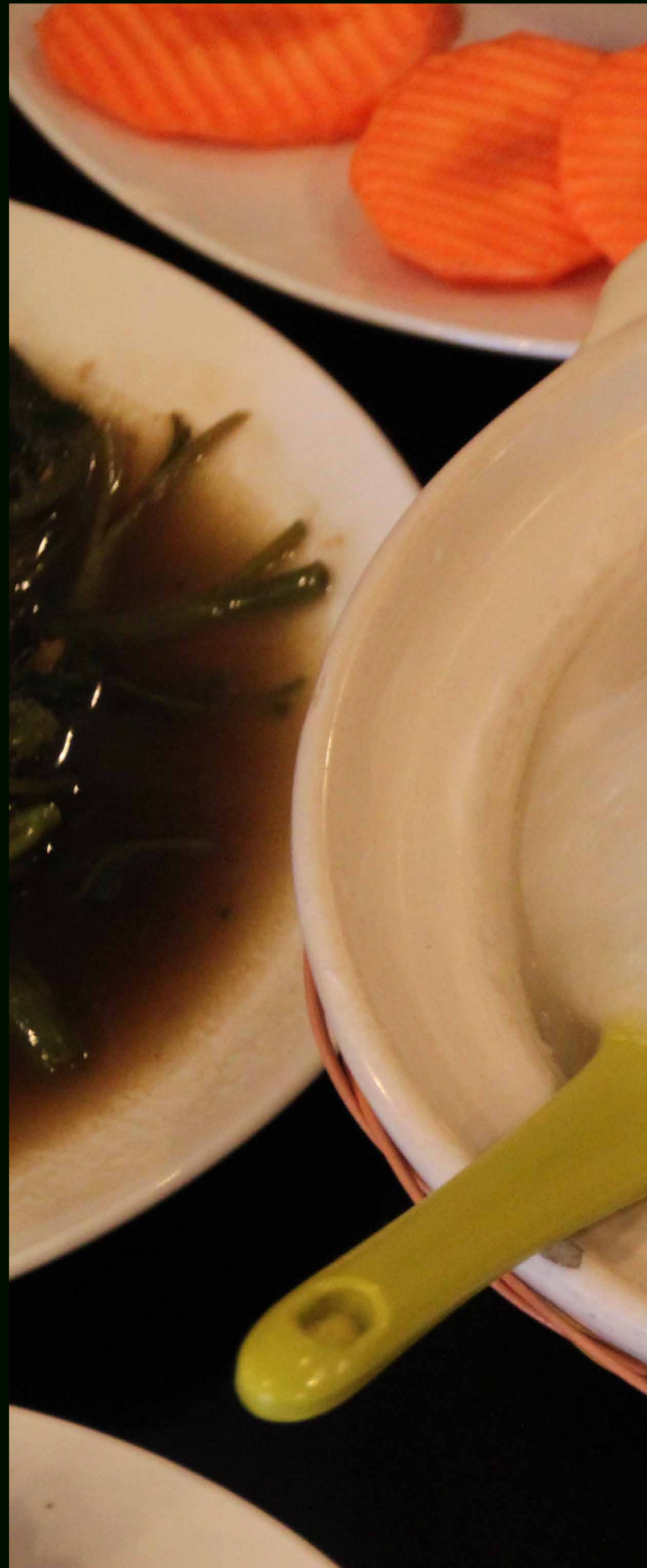
Ambuyat

One of the famous end products of sago or Ambulong is Ambuyat. Ambuyat is made by mixing Ambulong with hot water and stirred thoroughly. It then transforms into Ambuyat which is gluey and tasteless by itself.

Ambuyat is eaten using *candas*, a kind of v-shaped chopstick. The Ambuyat is rolled with *candas* and dipped in a sauce usually *tempoyak* (durian paste) or *jeruk binjai* (pickle made of a local fruit known as *binjai*). Do not chew the ambuyat as it can be directly swallow as it has soft texture. Ambuyat is also eaten with variety of side dishes such as *ikan rebus* (boiled fish), *lalap daging* (smoked beef) and vegetables like *kangkung* (spinach) dan *paku pakis* (fern).

Other than Ambuyat, sago is also made into famous traditional delicacies. Kuripit and Kubal are among the traditional delicacies that are produced from sago. Compared to Kubal, Kuripit can be easily found in the market. Kuripit is favourable among food-producer as the shelf-life of this product is quite long (few months).

Cottage industry in Brunei is here to stay. With the assistance and guidance from the Government of His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam to ensure its sustainability, the cottage industry remains intact with great efforts to preserve it as part of the culture and tradition of Brunei and at the same time, develop it into one of the contributors to the local economy.






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Sago Biskut is one of the products from Sago. Its delicious taste makes the biscuits local favourite especially during festive times like Hari Raya celebration.

Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site

A precious historical site.....

Brunei Darussalam and its unexpected treasures

Brunei Darussalam is situated on the north-west coast of the Island of Borneo where historical findings suggest that the Brunei Kingdom began more than 1,500 years ago, pre-dating Islam. With a total land area of 5,765 square kilometres, the nation houses unexpected treasures comprising of varieties of natural beauties and historical sites.

Among the well-known sites are the Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Mosque – one of the most beautiful mosques in Asia; Tasek Merimbun Heritage Park – one of ASEAN's National Heritage Sites; and the Ulu Temburong National Park - rich with unspoiled flora and fauna.

Most of the tourist attraction areas in the nation like recreational parks and historical and cultural sites are categorised either under the forest reserves or gazetted under specific acts.

The Government of His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam through various agencies such as the Department of Brunei Museums under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports play an important role in maintaining, conserving and protecting these treasures; at the same time assist to promote in creating awareness among the members of the public; and as a possible tourist site.

An interview with Dayang Hajah Norlita binti Haji Ahmad, Archaeologist Officer at Department of Brunei Museums revealed that there are currently 19 monuments, four sites and 13 tombs gazetted in Brunei Darussalam.

She further added that, there are various criteria or a checklist for the respective monuments, sites or tombs to be gazetted. The decision is made by a board known as Museum Board chaired by the Permanent Secretary. The board has seven stakeholders from five government agencies and two private personnel.

Among the criteria's are the respective monuments, sites or tombs must be in existence for 50 years above and has a historical, economic or cultural potential.

The Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Mosque in the capital, Kota Batu site, Limau Manis River site, Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site and Coal Mines Site in Muara are amongst the monuments and site that have been gazetted.

Brunei Today for this edition will introduce one of the gazetted historic sites with economic related history to the country that is Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site.

Brief history of rubber industry in Brunei

The history of rubber industry in Asia begun in 1870s when the British decided to introduce rubber planting in their tropical possessions such as India and Malaya.

In the first half of the 20th century, rubber was Brunei's chief agricultural crop and most important cash crop; and one of the largest employers along with the British Malayan Petroleum Company Limited (BMPC), the cutch industry and the government. At this stage, rubber industry became an important part of the economy in Southeast Asia including Brunei.

Meanwhile in Brunei, rubber seedlings were first introduced in 1908.

Due to the invention of modern motor car in the 1890s, more and more rubber plantations opened in Brunei.

Large rubber estates were mainly owned by European companies which included the Brunei Estates Limited; the Liverpool (Brunei) Para Rubber Estate Limited; and the British (Borneo) Rubber and Land Company.

At that time, there were two important estates near Brunei Town; the Kumbang Pasang Estate and the Gadong Estate.

In the early years of the industry, Temburong District was the highest producer but in 1919, it was replaced by Brunei District where Brunei first exported rubber to Britain and United States in 1914.

Initially, the employees were local, however by 1930; foreign workers were brought at to work in the 300-hectare rubber plantation.

The government, in 1933 established an Agricultural Station in Kilanas to assist the development of rubber plantations.

In mid 1930s, the introduction of a new smoke rubber production technique increased the quality of rubber produced led to an increase in rubber prices.

The highest quantity of rubber production was recorded in 1950s (2,558 tonnes) but later, rubber production began to decline.



The Manager Office.

Labu Estate is located in Temburong District, the second largest district out of the nation's four districts. Temburong District can be reached within 40-45 minutes boat ride from the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan or by land crossing neighbouring country, Limbang District of Sarawak, Malaysia.

Meanwhile, Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site is situated 16 km from Bangar Town and 112 km from Bandar Seri Begawan.

With its volume of history and its mass contribution to the local economy, Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site has been gazetted in 2006 under the Antiquities and Treasure Trove Act 1967, revised 1984; 1991; 2002 (Akta Barang-Barang Purbakala dan Harta Terpendam 1967, Edisi Semakan 1984, 2002; Pindaan 1991, 2004) comprising of an area about nine hectares.

The remains of the rubber industry are still largely found in Labu Estate today compared to other sites in the country.

The first rubber trees were planted along the Sungai

Labu area in 1908 by Mr. Abrahamson on 300 hectares of land, which was later known as Labu Estate. The estate was assigned to Brunei (Borneo) Rubber and Land Company Limited under the management of Mr. Jonston.

Since 1910–1911, the planting of rubber continuously developed and became successful but only in 1914, rubber was cultivated in Labu Estate because Brunei's main export item. In 1914, the production reached 5,894 pounce and saw the beginning of rubber product exportation to Britain and the United States.

After several years, the productions started to decline due to various factors such as the fall of rubber prices. In 1968, Brunei (Borneo) Rubber and Land Company Limited were bought back by the Brunei Government and this marked the end of rubber industry era in Brunei.

Now, the Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site is evidence of the relics of the earliest agricultural industry and reminds us of the last remaining commercial farming in this country. To preserve and protect this site is very important for recalling first commercial agricultural industry in Brunei at the beginning of the 20th century.

Preservation and Conservation

With the gazette and developing this site, we will be able to look more closely into the economic activity undertaken by the Brunei society before and as a symbol of survival and initial evidence of the agricultural industry and local job resource.

The Research and Conservation Project for Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site, Phase 1 started on June 12, 2007. Since then, the conservation works on the site began which later followed by reconstruction works on old buildings such wet and dry godowns, generator house, manager office, smokehouse and others.

Other than that, other infrastructure facilities like hut and walkway for public were also built.

The Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site was launched on August 5, 2010 as Open Site Museum for students and public visit. Present to launch the site was the then Acting Temburong District Officer, Awang Haji Afero Eswandy bin Haji Muhammad.

The exhibition features the rubber processing in Labu Estate and describes the role and function of the buildings present around the vicinity.



The relics may look old but it keeps invaluable historical value.





The relics are tagged for record purpose.



Department of Brunei Museums' objectives for this conservation project among others are to:

- Conserve and protect the site and artefact and its equipment from threat of destruction.
- Develop this site as Open Site Museum.
- As centre of learning to student and public.
- As one of tourist attraction which will generate the country's economic income.

Under the Antiquities and Treasure Trove Act, Department of Brunei Museums will conserve the site along with supervising, monitoring and enforcing the act continuously.

The department in cooperation with the village consultative council had organised various awareness programmes like road shows and documentary in its effort to promote awareness among the public and realise its objectives.

The site is significant due to its historical, economic and cultural value; that are:

- Historical Value – evidence of commercial plantation and agriculture activity that contributes to the country's economy.
- Economic Value – tourists can enjoy the surrounding agricultural activity, evidence of Brunei's early agriculture era and source of employment to the locals.
- Cultural and Educational Value – younger generation will be able to see more closely the economic activity that was practised by Brunei society at that time.

Touring the Labu Estate Rubber Industry Site will reminisce the memory of the rubber industry in the country as this estate still possess most of the original equipment and building.

At the site, visitors will find the different buildings used for different purposes. Among the buildings are the original Manager Office, Smoke House, Dry and Wet Godown, Rubber Drying Site, weighting scales and generator.

In the olden days, the Manager Office was used for management of the estate and area for collecting salary. A small well can also be found at the area, it was the source of water for the estate.

Next to the office is the Smoke House, which functioned as fumigation. The purpose of fumigation was to remove fungus and make the rubber last longer.

The Wet Godown was a rubber collection centre and also weighting area. This godown was the area where rubber were mixed with water (thus the name wet godown derived from) and place to whittle rubber.

Later the rubber was brought to Rubber Drying Site, where the thinned rubbers were left hanged to dry. The dry rubbers then brought to Smoke House before sent to Dry Godown for weighed and packed for export.

Other original relics of the rubber industry can also be seen here as the different equipment used in the rubber process like weighing scale, rubber mill machine, mixing pot, and rubber freezing tank.



Pictures above show some of the relics that can be found on the site.

