

GUERRILLA TOURISM IN ACEH? RUN BY FORMER REBELS



Aceh is an Indonesian special territory, located on the northern tip of the Sumatra Island. The territory is inhabited by approximately four million people and it reportedly has substantial natural resources including oil and gas. Most people, however, know nothing about Aceh economy or nature. On the other hand probably everybody has heard about the Tsunami that hit this region in 2004. The wave has severely damaged the territory but on the other hand, it has perhaps helped to end the almost 30-year civil war in the

region.

The longish conflict that has caused death of approximately 15 000 people was officially ended in 2005 when the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), a separatist group seeking independence for Aceh, signed a peace agreement.

The end of the war has, however, left the former freedom fighters jobless. The reconstruction of the Tsunami damaged region did provide some working opportunities but they have disappeared as the influx of dollars stopped. Those fighters have no useful skills for peace and they are helpless.

This is the point where tourism industry comes in with an idea of “guerilla tours”. Aceh Explorer Adventure Tours is the provider of such tours and it currently employs former rebel fighters as the tour guides. They have a unique set of skills that makes them ideal for the job. They have learned how to survive in the jungle, how to climb mountains. They naturally know where the fighting took place and they may also show the former rebels’ hiding spots.

Aceh may be a luring destination not only for people interested in the fighting but also to those who like extreme hiking. The territory is also home to the endangered Sumatran tiger, hornbills and other unique animals. The region simply has something to offer to tourists and those who go there may also be rewarded by the feeling that they are helping the region’s ailing, war and Tsunami torn economy.

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