



The prototype map of the Balik Pulau trail using the children's photographs and illustrations

# CREATING THE BALIK PULAU TRAIL

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Across Asia, there are many small communities – in villages, towns or within cities – that embody a traditional way of life and a priceless legacy of customs and beliefs.

Such communities are desperately vulnerable to the pressures of rapid national development. The young are the most vulnerable of all. These days, most children grow up knowing little of their community's history and taking no pride in it. To many children even their family history is a blank.

Balik Pulau is a small town on the west coast of the island of Penang, Malaysia. The Discover Balik Pulau trail is the outcome of a project called myBALIKpulau – a community-based heritage education programme designed to help young people connect with their community and heritage by discovering, mapping and interpreting their cultural assets.

As well as members of the Balik Pulau community, the project has brought together all kinds of people and organisations including local schools, the District Office, the local library, a

rural internet centre, an artist, a design agency, university students and various heritage organisations.

If the process of creating the trail was to build a life-long bond between the children and the town, the product was the trail itself, which enables visitors to experience firsthand all the things that make Balik Pulau so special.

So the Balik Pulau trail is a journey of discovery for inhabitants and visitors alike. This story traces how it came about.



Traditional Malay timber house in Sg. Rusa, Balik Pulau district



## Year 2005

The project kicked off with a series of three workshops for 20 children aged 11-12 from five different schools in the Balik Pulau district.

To ensure positive and lively interaction between the children, the workshops included plenty of stimulating and imaginative warm-up and team-building activities.

Each workshop equipped the children with a particular skill: first IT, then photography, then research and interview techniques (including mind mapping).

During the workshops, the children produced personal name tags which they wore when conducting interviews and doing research around Balik Pulau. They also designed their own postcards to send to friends and family within the area and further afield.

The workshops were followed by inquiry and documentation sessions that yielded a specific artistic outcome using computer generated prints:

- mySelf, a 3-D photographic sculpture
- myFamily, a wall photographic triptych including a family tree and family history
- myTown, which included photo-essays of 20 sites and activities selected by the children which included historic buildings, trades, food businesses, agriculture, etc., with sketchmaps of the town and rural districts.

These materials were used to create an exhibition showcasing the discoveries the students have made.

## Year 2006

The next stage of the project involved 20 children aged 11-16 from five schools in the Balik Pulau district.

During Phase 1, the children created a Balik Pulau building inventory, identifying the age, type and style of the town's heritage buildings, and what kind activities take place inside them.

They then identified the outstanding heritage values of the 20 sites and trades and conducted in-depth investigations using observation, interviews and hands-on activities; and documented them both in writing and photographs.

A prototype map was then created using the children's photographs and illustrations and finally, a group of students from Universiti Sains Malaysia did a basic, manual cut-and-paste map layout.



Participants undertaking research for the trail




## Years 2007-08

The students from Universiti Sains Malaysia enhanced the map, basing their computerised graphic layout on the ideas generated by the children of Balik Pulau.

Both town and rural versions of the map were developed. The text of the brochure was drafted using the children's research findings. Then a Penang-based graphic design agency laid out the brochure, improving the maps, making them user-friendly.

The town and rural trails were repeatedly field-tested and fine-tuned. In November the brochure was printed and distributed, and was officially launched on 21 December 2008. The team is now making plans to design a bicycle trail brochure.

Discover Balik Pulau is published by Arts-ED, and produced in partnership with the Penang Heritage Trust, Badan Warisan Malaysia, Pusat Internet Desa and KaKi Creative. The first edition is sponsored by DiGi Telecommunication. 



Learning about mind mapping



Learning new IT skills



Learning digital photography



Team building