

# BORNEO



23 September, 2015

First class: Sir, I see that you are wearing a sign that says 'Workers of the World Unite'. Would you and the workette like a complimentary champagne before takeoff?

In the first class compartment on the way to Seoul the flight attendant makes your bed as you put on your pyjamas in the expansive lavatory. Dinner was served earlier with table cloths and real silverware. Caviar, cognac, good wines are on offer at all times. When you awoke in the morning and pushed a button to raise your chair up, you immediately heard 'Would you like a coffee, sir?' This is all very trying on my socialist morals.

Then there is Semporna. This town is in Borneo on the coast. It is a little like a sewage treatment plant that broke down. This is where we landed after flying over the rainbow. The streets are clogged with cars that are barely moving and the smells are very bad. But the people are nice. They deserve better. It has taken 3 days of luxury to get here.



In the morning we take a motor launch for about 45 minutes to Mabul Island in the ocean. The sea seems quite shallow and tips of seaweed can be seen poking above the water. We stay at Big John's place. There are gypsies here who are born and raised on boats. They fish flounder, skate and crab that they sell to the hotels. One of these boats had the shell of a huge horseshoe crab that must have been 50 centimetres across.



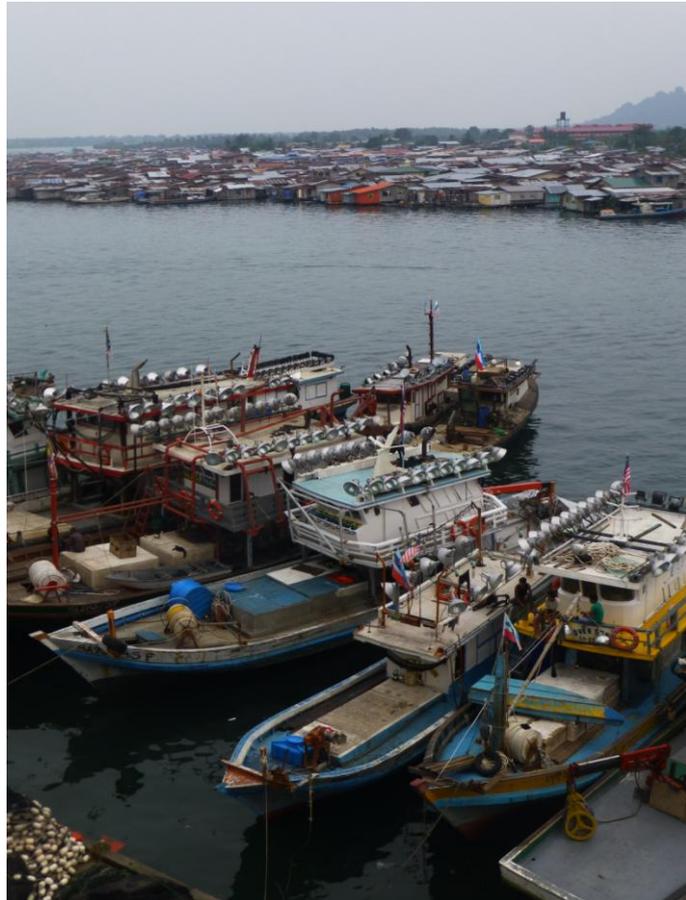
Dateline Mabul: Big news. While snorkelling around the island we came across a large turtle (app 100 kg). Karin and I swam alongside it for 5 minutes as it leisurely paddled through the water. At last it dived and disappeared in the deep. We took a snorkelling trip with 15 Chinese people – mostly girls. They look like they are 14 years old, but are actually university graduates in their mid-twenties. One girl happily told us that in China they are not allowed to use Facebook. I told her that that was not a big tragedy. They are allowed to join chat forums so this kind of confuses me. So, you can have Goofy but not Donald

Duck? I assume it is just a demonstration of power by the authorities.

We have now seen several turtles. They are completely harmless and slow. One of the Chinese girls has an underwater picture of herself on top of a turtle the size of a queen-sized bed.

Curiously, breakfast, lunch and dinner seem to be the same food in Malaysia.

Yesterday we came back to Semporna and we changed to a nicer hotel. In fact it couldn't be better. From the fourth floor we overlook the docks with lots of activity: fishing boats unloading, dive boats trying to squeeze out, piles of fishing nets, ferry boats unloading, skinny cats, fish being sorted. Then on the other side of the channel a flotilla of hundreds of houses built 50 cm above the water. Some houses are held up on 2x4s. Fancier houses have 6x6s. As one travels in the ocean you come across houses standing alone in the water 10km from land (where real estate is cheaper). It is a very shallow sea in southern Borneo.



There is a certain etiquette when eating food from a banana leaf. If you are finished eating and enjoyed the food, you fold the leaf toward yourself. If you did not like the food you fold the leaf away from you. We learnt this from Simon and Tisha in Lahad Datu. They served the most delicious meal of fried mackerel, eggplant crisps, sweet-potato curry in evaporated milk, mixed vegetables with long snake beans, cucumber yogurt, lime pickle and peppers. Dessert was a banana in rice paper wrapping deep fried served with vanilla ice cream. All served on a banana leaf.

Danum Valley: We stay at a research station on the banks of the Segama river. Here we go for hikes – sometimes with guides but often alone as we become more familiar with the territory. In the late afternoon we went alone on the ‘coffin trail’ where we heard orangutans had been sighted. We waited quietly in hopes that they would appear. A hornbill flew overhead with the heavy beating of its wings. Far off we heard a tree fall in the forest. I had given up and started down the trail. Karin still stared up into the tree tops and the stillness of the approaching night. Then there came a rustling that grew louder and louder. With a thunderous crash a limb fell in front of Karin as she raced down the path toward me with wild eyes. The stillness returned. It was just a jungle thing. A jungle shrug.

Night was coming on and we had a ways to go so we started back. As we crossed a clearing that was 50 metres across we saw, silhouetted against the evening sky, a flying squirrel whose flight covered the entire expanse. It kept an almost horizontal path and landed 20 metres up on another tall tree.

Evenings are very pleasant at the research station with people from all over the world. We compare notes of our adventures and our histories over dinner and coffee. One of the more interesting careers is Katie – a 23 year old English girl with a bubbly personality who has discovered she can make a living as a belly dancer. She worked in the Middle East before her present job in Singapore. She outrageously says that nature is really not her thing at all. We are all quite jealous because she has twice had close contact with the orangutans and even has a picture of a baby orangutan “waving” to her.

Another enjoyable couple were Josh (American) and Eva (Polish). They have been traveling a lot and had many stories to tell. Josh told how on an Indian train a drink seller came through announcing ‘Chinese coffee’. Josh brightened on hearing this welcome change to the usual only to discover that the man was saying ‘*chinescafe*’ in a nasal twang. It was chai + Nescafe coffee again.



Walker Lantern Fly



12 cm seed from tree



Leech – reaching out hungrily

After dinner we returned to our chalet. There was a large moth flitting about eating all the bugs that buzzed around our porch light. I didn't know that moths were carnivores! They are like butterflies that have gone over to the dark side.

We saw 2 interesting insects – A phyto beetle which looked like a mini horseshoe crab with a tail of plates. Also a Walker lantern fly with a bright blue proboscis.

There are not so many people here now. There is just an American and 2 Dutch girls. The girls didn't know there were leeches in the rain forest. They couldn't understand why they had spots on their legs. We told them the gross fact that the spots were where the parasites had sucked blood. The girls seem to have no fixed plans or knowledge about where they are.

There is a charming innocence in that, but they have to pay for it in leeches. I said this to them and now they refer to themselves as the ‘innocent Dutch girls’.



Phyto beetle

Traveling back to Lahad Datu we looked for a bee's nest that was some 50 meters up in the top of a tree. It was some 6 ft across. Though we had seen it on the way in, we didn't find it in order to photograph on the way out. These honey bees are the largest in the world and they make their nest in a particular tree which is slick and white, 60 meters tall and without branches except at the very top. This provides the bees protection against all but the Sun Bear.



Caterpillars on tree

We saw wild pigs and for the first time a large male one. We stopped the car when we came across the carcass of a monitor lizard. Everyone stared or poked it. It was about 1.4 meter in length. It was a solemn moment. Finally we see a magnificent animal and its dead!



Birds: We saw black and red broad bills. The woodpecker and tarantula will share the same hole in a tree. There are not enough holes for everyone so friends must share. However if the woodpecker finds a hole with a tarantula already in it, it will not enter. We can only speculate why that is the case. Is it fear or feelings of superiority? I have personally always felt that tarantulas were of the 'untouchable' caste.

We travelled north with the innocent Dutch girls, Yvonne De Jong and Miranda Wesstein. They are both born in 1990 and are both 1.80 m tall and have been friends since high school.



The mini bus let us off at the Sukau junction. There

was a shack nearby with a wooden bench in front. I suggested we go to the café and see if

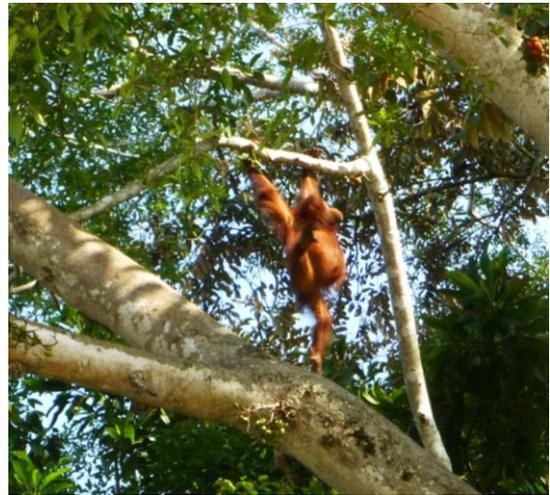


they had a cold coke. Inside were 10 men sitting around gambling with what they called 'dominoes'. The dominoes were made of cardboard. They seemed to be playing for quite large sums considering their circumstances. I asked if I could take a photo and one said 'NO'. Maybe he didn't want his wife to know.

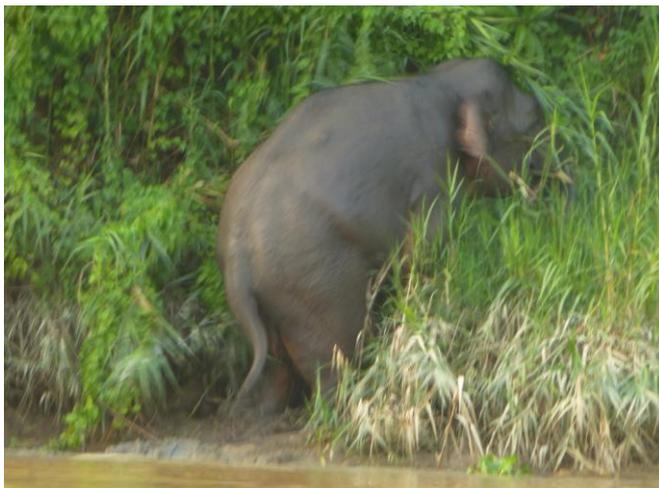
We were able to get cokes! And wandered back to where Karin waited with the bags. Not long after, we were picked up by Hanif and driven to a lodge by the river Kinabatangan. We stayed here from the afternoon until next morning and got in 3 river cruises. Although the country is being covered with palm oil trees, the river has a border of original flora and fauna. The number of animals is impressive. For the first time we saw orangutans (orang = person, hutan =forest)\*.



It was a mother and two babies. They are immensely strong and can swing their heavy bodies effortlessly through the trees. Although an adult is 5 ft tall his arm span is 2 metres and his fingers are 6 cm longer than mine. I am also an adult male but less strong. They seem completely non-aggressive, but you are aware the whole time that they could snap your body like a twig any time. This has a tendency to make you quite polite.



We motored further and saw a pygmy elephant swimming and then climbing out of the river. Apparently they cross the river quite often. On the evening cruise we saw a kingfisher, baby crocodiles, owl, civet cat and a moth that landed on Karin's shoulder.



\* If you want to say hairy yellow person in Malay it is Rambut Orang Itu Berwarna Kuning (hairy person him colour yellow).

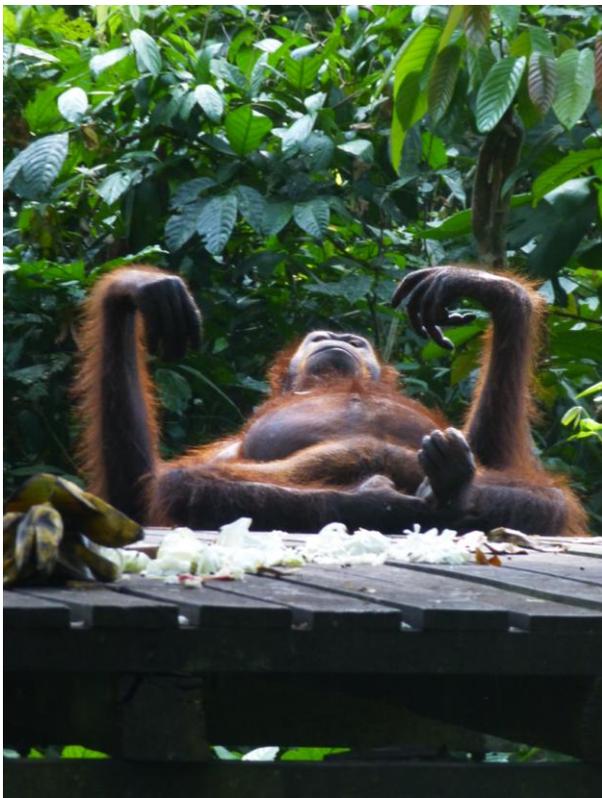


Next morning we took a trip up a tributary where there were lots of macaques with their old faces, otters, colourful birds (drongos, hornbills, racket-tailed drongos, red and black broadbills). Once again on the main river we came across a troop of proboscis monkeys.

They are quite large. They also go by the name "orang belanda" (Dutchman) because the Indonesians thought the Dutchmen had such large noses and bellies! I tried and tried to get a good shot of their large noses but without



success. Karin said 'let me try'. She snapped a picture and handed it back 'There you are'. It was the perfect picture. After breakfast we parted ways with the innocent Dutch girls. They were going south and we were going north. We stood on each our side of the road and waited in the sun for transport. They were the lucky ones and only had a 20 min. wait. We, on the other hand, stood in the hot sun for an hour shielding ourselves with an umbrella. Our next stop was Sepilok.



We visited an orangutan rehabilitation sanctuary. The animals seemed to have a lot of fun. One young animal joined the crowd

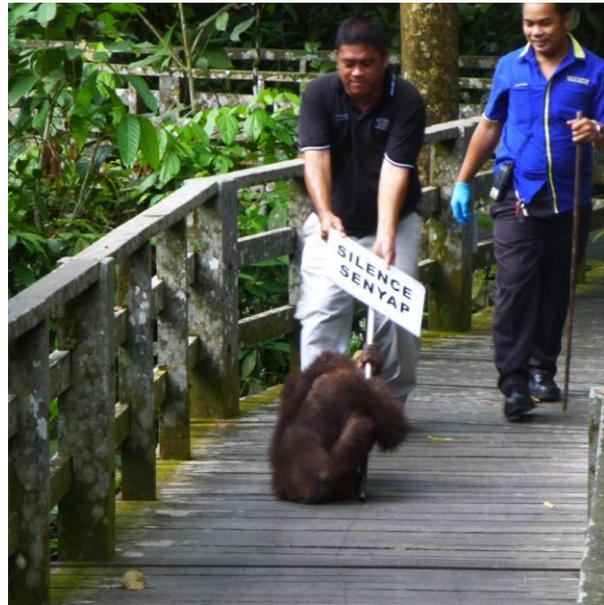


of tourists causing them to run away. Then it grabbed a sign that said 'SILENCE'. A guard grabbed the other end and a tug of war ensued. Finally the

guard dragged the animal away. I think the animal enjoyed the whole episode. He had managed to grab the female guard around the legs, chased the tourists and finally got a free ride off the stage.

On a feeding platform more drama was unfolding as a macaque came to get some fruit and an orangutan swiped at him with a bunch of bananas and then chased him around. Finally the orangutan gave up.

We visited a sanctuary for the Sun Bear (Honey bear). They have a 'rescue team' that tries to find captured bears and other animals. These are brought to the sanctuary and rehabilitated so that they can be released into the wild. I asked the keeper if there was any 'wild' left. There are apparently some small patches, but it is risky for the bears. There are hunters and the Chinese want their gall bladders for 'health' reasons. They have, of course, no value for health. The keeper said 'I'm Chinese. It's sad and I love the bears.'



Salamat. This is the name of an orangutan we saw at Sepilok. At first it seemed a quite young animal by its size. Actually it was a stunted 17 year-old and had no fur, probably suffering from a birth defect. He was a real charmer.

Animals kept in captivity by inexperienced people often suffer from psychological damage. They can be chained and in isolation and in quite bad shape when the Rescue Team find them. One of the guides who took care of the Sun bears said that some of the animals can never again be released into the wild because they are too traumatized. Mistreated animals can become violent. A veterinarian we met told us that an adult orangutan had eviscerated a guard. So these powerful lumbering creatures can be quite dangerous and lose their gentle disposition when mistreated. The parks we have visited seem to provide a secure and concerned environment for the animals.



An interesting thing about the orangutans was how different they appear from one another. One can look like an old Mandarin Chinese and another like an Australopithecus. They will appear like two entirely different species. That is probably true of the other animals as well: the sun bears have a yellow 'V' on their chest, but this can be in the form of a wine glass or a bowl. However we humans are best at face recognition and the Orangutan is easiest for us to distinguish.

We flew back to Kotu Kinabalu and traveled north to the tip of Borneo. The lodge was built by a Russian couple who are scientists. They give access to their laboratory to scientists of any discipline (a good thing to remember).

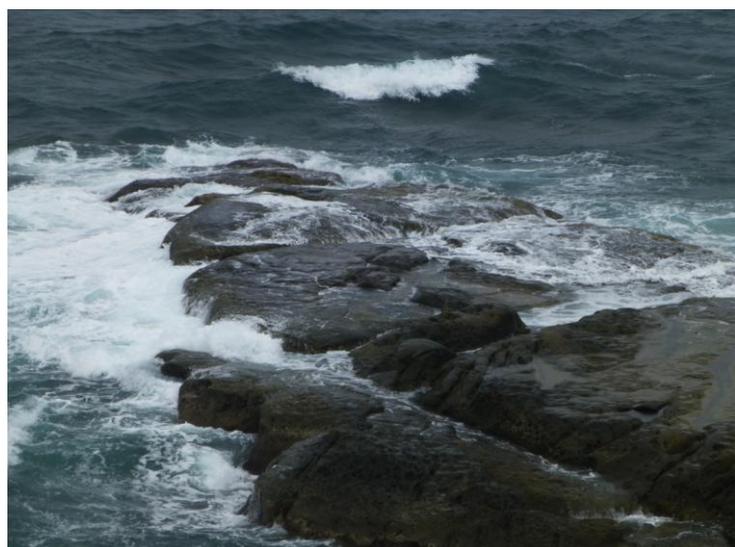
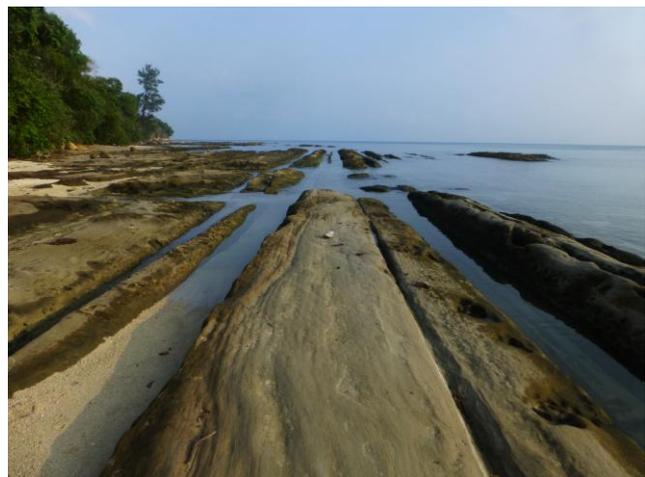
We visited an island about 35 km from land. Here was some of the best coral and fish we have ever seen. We collected some small shells. An Italian couple (Valeria and Emmanuele) joined us. We saw a squall coming with much lightning and raced for home. Once back, I lined my shells up on the balustrade of the veranda. Suddenly one jumped up, scampered to the edge and hopped into the grass.

In the evening we always hear the same record at dinner – Chet Baker playing songs from My Fair Lady.

We can't figure out the long striations of rock along the beach which are straight as an arrow and 100 meters long. In between are channels where the sea rushes in. On top of these long rock stretches are holes filled with boulders of all sizes and also lined up. It is as though a giant comb had brushed the molten rock and sprinkled on boulders. Then on the edge of the beach toward the land are breaking waves of rock. We have seen Bob's sand crab holes with their different designs on the beach. They are quite distinctive (as Bob pointed out) and are possibly unique for each crab.

We walked to the tip of Borneo and looked down on a spit of rock that is Borneo's most northern point. The waves were breaking over it and it is said that people have lost their lives trying to reach the very tip. It is quite stupid to risk one's life in this way. I was sorely tempted which makes one wonder.

The rains have been pouring for a couple of days. We read a lot. I polish off a couple of novels per week. When we go for a walk a little charcoal grey dog joins us. She dashes happily back and forth and then digs holes in the



sand that she plops down in. We call her Scally – short for scallywag. She considers herself our security. She will bark at other dogs then run back and walk between us with the hair on her back raised and looking fierce. This reminds me of the head of the NSA when testifying about terrorist threats.

As we left the lodge in the morning, Karin said, ‘look at that dog. I said, ‘That’s a cat.’ For a second we both thought the other was losing their mind. Actually both animals were present on each their side of the lawn. It shows that if you broaden your scope the seeming differences can be accommodated by both parties. We decided to shorten it to **BYS** – Broaden Your Scope. Scally was always chasing crabs. Karin pointed at a really big crab – ‘There Scally’. She sniffed Karin’s pointing finger and looked wonderingly into her eyes. At this point the crab ran behind a rock. ‘**THERE SCALLY!!**’ She sniffed Karin’s finger again. ‘**BYS Scally! BYS!**’ This again reminds me of the head of the NSA. The US has so many problems that need solving. Illusory threats are the least of our worries. **BYS!**

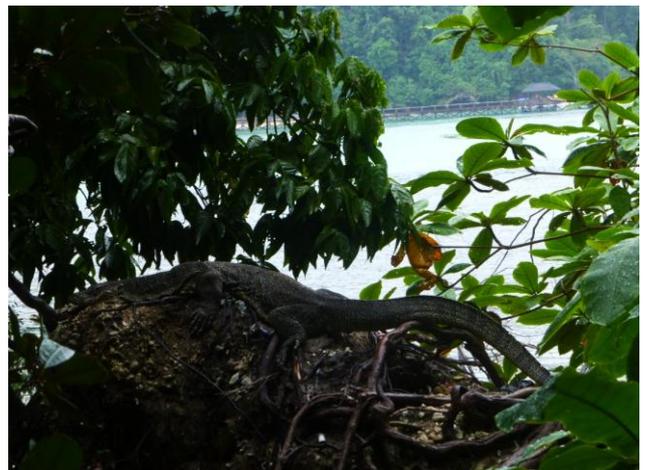
We visited the tip of Borneo in a driving rain again this morning. Some of the tip had blown away – now the ‘ip of Borneo’.

Mary James Art Gallery in Kota Kinabalu: paintings made with coloured wax (batik). Very precise geometric and organic shapes with shadowy human forms. Lots of colour – like looking at coral.

In KK we had dinner on the docks where you choose your food – snapper, lobster, giant prawns, clams, octopus. You sit at tables under tents while the fishing boats bob a couple of meters away. Terrific.



There is an island called Sapi (cow), but it should be called Biawak (lizard) as it is famous for its sea going lizards which reach 3 meters in length. We walked for an hour in the jungle and saw a smallish lizard and a baby. We started to make a second round when Karin saw the tail of a huge lizard. The lizard had draped its body over the base of a fallen tree that was partially concealed by brush. Carefully manoeuvring, I was able to lift the camera above my head and get a great shot of the sleeping animal. We estimate it was near to 2 meters – a real monster with 3 inch claws.



Nanga Damai near Kuching. This is in the far western corner of Malaysian Borneo. We stay in a beautiful house at the base of Mount Santubong (800 m.) which is covered with rain forest. We were told to not open our bedroom window ..?? Then the girl (Eka) pointed down to the trellis covering the veranda just below our window. There lay coiled a small pit viper with its skinny neck and triangular head. It is quite deadly. The bite of the pit viper is fatal unless anti-venom is procured within 2 hours. The nearest hospital is 1.5 hrs drive away – problem solved. It is the house mascot. I guess it is nice to be reminded of one's mortality. Keeps you on your toes.



Otherwise we are surrounded by beautiful flower arrangements and antiques. We visited another orangutan sanctuary. There was a mother with baby that swung through the treetops 20 metres above the ground. The baby clutched to her mother's belly as the mama did arboreal gymnastics. We managed to get some zoomed photos of their faces which seemed quite placid – especially considering the feats of strength and agility which they display.



Walking back to the main highway a green lizard with big eyes jumped on to a fence and posed for photos. It had an extremely long tail which got wire thin and was 30-40 cm long. Do the vertebrae of its back really extend this far? We were late getting back to the main road. All the transportation had departed and we were stuck. Then two ladies drove by and Karin waved. They stopped and offered us a lift. I was completely soaked with sweat and felt a bit awkward. The trip back, however, was quite pleasant as they were both teachers and we had much to talk about.

The staff here are Rose-la who is from the Iban tribe and Eka who is Indonesian. They speak Malay together. The girls make beautiful flower arrangements from the plants in the garden. Nanga Damai is a little paradise surrounded by jungle flowers and butterflies. And pit vipers. But what is paradise without a snake or two.



## Timor-Leste



Womens' houses of the Fataluku people

**Timor-Leste:** This is part of Timor Island in far eastern Indonesia which became its own country in 1975 when the Portuguese left. This new country lasted for only a few months before the Indonesians invaded. They stayed until 1999 and after killing a fifth of the population they left. When it is not the rainy season, the country is dry and dusty and the rivers are gravel beds. The shores are white sand beaches with crystal clear waters teeming with fish.

### **Atauro Island**

We have few pictures of all the wild life on Atauro because it is mostly under water.

Question: Where is the whale's nose? Answer: On top of its head - the blow hole.

Fish news: Some interesting sightings were the lion fish, pseudoceros worm (blue), forest of fat white sea anemones.

Feather stars - looked like 20 bottle brushes which move independently and allow the animal to swim in an ineffective way. We thought they were plants until we saw one get up and run. We couldn't have been more surprised. Like seeing a bush suddenly run.

On route to the island we had heard that both dolphins and whales might be viewed from the ferry. We saw what we thought were two schools of dolphins but later we found they were pods of short finned pilot whales. Their dorsal fins are quite distinctive.



The sea anemones sting and only the banded clown fish can hide amongst the anemone's tentacles. The anemone produces an antidote to the sting which the clown fish covers itself with. The clown fish live in pairs. If the female is lost the male will change sex and become a female.

Some fish names: Oriental sweet lips. Somber sweet lips. Blubber lips. Kisses \$5,\$2 and \$1 respectively. Also groper - not available for kisses.

Other stuff: An orange curved tube called Giant Ascidia. One end is mouth the other butt with intestine connecting the two. Kind of primitive, but gets the job done.

Blue nudibranch. A kind of snail with 2 tentacles in front and a dorsal bunch of tentacles.



There is a several kilometre stretch of beach with a single drift wood log. This log has a single branch which is at head height. Looking for shells I managed to hit my head on this single impediment for miles around. An amazing feat.

Our bungalow has a straw roof which absorbs the sun's heat - leaving the inside cool. The sea waves break 10 meters away and light breezes sweep across the veranda. The sun is rising as I write this. In the peak of the roof a gecko is making a nasal sound like a finger on a balloon "ben bennnn, ben bennnn". The geckos hide out in the peak of roof. They have orange and blue lines of dots along their sides, a black and white banded tail and bulging zombie eyes. Barry, the owner, once tried to remove a gecko, but they tend to cling with mouth and hands. Most animals try to get away, not geckos. Near the bungalow was an Arafura fantail bird which jumped around displaying its tail, but quite impossible to photograph.



Topu Honis Sanctuary.

Song by kids:

*Amerika Australia*

*India Atsa Atsa*

*Limantali Pitahati*

*Telifoni Salasenbu*

*Kis Kis Kis*

*Tsokalaten tciun tciun*

*Tsokalaten tciun tciun*

*Ai mis siu*

*Lov*



We flew from Dili to Oecussi in a small prop plane, landing on a gravel strip. By chance a guy named Mark was dropping someone off. He drove us directly to Mahata where the older children at the sanctuary live while attending secondary school in the town of Pantemakassar. By chance Father Richard was there. He showed us around. Then we piled in his 4x4 and after picking up some groceries started the long haul up the mountain. Everything is dry and dusty as we await the rainy season. We bought several cases of coke as a treat for the kids. The road up was steep and rocky and about 1 ½ hour drive.



There are 55 kids and about 8 staff. On arrival the 55 kids came one by one and took our hand and pressed it to their forehead. Later after the cokes had cooled down in the fridge they were passed out to the kids. Then all 55 kids came again one by one and thanked us.

The kids play a complex game requiring a lot of simultaneous running. There are lots of disagreements - I touched you! No, you didn't! The exchange never lasts long and they go back to running around. When they get their food at dinner they go to different places to eat. When they go to sleep they choose different beds from one night to the next. They do have a space on a shelf where they have their personal property, however, most of what they have is simply one another.

I showed the kids some magic tricks and they were amazed. Then I showed them how. Now father Richard has to be amazed by 55 magicians.

In the evening there was dancing. The adults were all served tua-tua, a fermented drink made from local fruit.

Their school looks down on surrounding mountains. There were only two teachers the day we visited the six classes. That was kind of sad because the kids

were all neatly dressed in their uniforms and seated at their desks. Father Richard says it is a common occurrence.



Father Richard says that most of the things told about him were at best a semblance of the truth. He recounted the dramatic days in 1999 when because of international pressure Indonesia was forced to end the occupation of East Timor (6th April 1999). The Indonesians decided on a scorched earth withdrawal, but tried to make it look like a civil war. They were able to arm and support East Timor militia to help do their murdering and destruction.

Father Richard received advance warning that the village of Kutet and the sanctuary would be attacked. They hurriedly hid their food and medical supplies. They then set up guard posts which would watch for military convoys coming up the valley. He showed us where the posts were located. While we were listening to these war stories a group of little boys from the sanctuary crawled up onto an embankment and with the accompaniment of a ukelele sang songs. We have christened them The Wild Boys of East Timor. They really did sing well. Too bad the world missed this.

The Indonesian supported militia (Besa Merah Putih) were spotted on their way up the hill and the alarm was sounded. The militia were well-armed but without a lot of experience. The UN had earlier sent a helicopter to observe in the area. Father Richard and the villagers used this to spread a rumour that a helicopter had sent them



Timor Wild Boys

arms and that any attackers would get an unwelcome surprise. Well - everyone had seen the helicopter so it must be true. In fact, all they had were machetes, spears and bows and arrows. They put on a brave front and when the militia neared the villagers began ululating and acting a bit crazy and frenzied. Both sides were quite scared, but there was some fighting. One of the villagers was shot in the head and later died. Another was shot in the ankle. Two of the militia were also killed. The day came to an end and as the sun set the militia withdrew. The villagers and sanctuary children hid in caves in the surrounding mountains. Here they stayed for several weeks and only returned to get hidden supplies. All the houses were burned. One of the kids was sent with a message to the Australian UN troops, and after 3 weeks these came to secure the area.

The mountain sanctuary was rebuilt higher up. It was here we stayed. It has grades 1 through 6. They receive children and women from dysfunctional families.

Father Richard belongs to the SVD order in the Catholic church. They make a point of going to remote areas in the world and providing social services. He gets no support other than what he can get on his own. He gets no support from the church. They live hand to mouth - sometimes there are lean years and other times good years. They buy their supplies from across the border (mung beans, rice etc), but grow vegetables themselves. He started an NGO called Topu Honis (approx. translation: "lead by the hand"). So donations from the US are tax deductible. There is no overhead - donations go directly to the target.



*Game that reminds me of 'New Orleans' - a game from my youth*

The sanctuary is run in a non-authoritarian fashion and the children are encouraged to develop their individuality. We were struck by how happy and confident they seemed. When they start secondary school they move to Mahata in Oecusi. They will complete 12 years of education. A number have received scholarships and gone on to get university degrees or vocational schooling.

The children and women have many stories - some traumatic or tragic. But there were also cases of children trying to escape a limiting future. One such was Augusta, a spirited girl, who was taking care of her younger siblings and not getting any education. She saw her life going down the drain. So she walked out and came to the sanctuary.



No one speaks English. Father Richard holds the evening prayer in Meto. The kids recite after him in a kind of sing song tone. Then they go back to playing or dancing to music.

Leaving, we were followed by many of the kids out on the gravel road. They kept waving until we disappeared from sight.

Shortly after, we left the road and started down a path in the forest. The sun was hot, but we followed a splashing stream and were in the shade of the trees. Now and then we stopped and threw water into our faces. Palavi, Leo and Imaculata, students at Mahata, were our guides. The path was steep and a little treacherous where we crossed a narrow slope with a drop off on the down side. Finally it flattened out and we reached the town where we all had cold cokes. 4 hrs. in all. I was drenched with sweat and Karin had sore muscles the next day, but our guides seemed as fresh as when we started.

We visited some with the older kids at Mahata. They served us tea and coffee, and we sat in a group, but couldn't really converse. Father Richard says that sometimes a silence is full and sometimes it is empty. This was somewhere in between.



There is no adoption from the center anymore. Several of the kids were adopted to parents in USA and Australia, but it took so much effort and time that Father Richard has discontinued the possibility. The kids seem to grow up quite balanced and happy - so that's what counts.

Father Richard is 78 - we wonder what will happen to the center when he is gone.

Today is a holiday, but we have arranged to have two boys on motorbike taxis (ojeks) to drive us to the ferry.

Baucau - The pousada here is nicest place in all of East Timor. We caught a microlet in morning intending to go to Tutuala on east coast. They drove around Baucau picking up passengers. Road not too bad. 17 passengers. 15 in back with Karin and me with baggage in front with driver. We were let out at the junction to Tutuala. Bought some ices for 10 cents each and waited. After an hour were picked up by a truck delivering gravel. After gravel was delivered we were driven to a *pousada* on a cliff overlooking the ocean. This was the summer residence of the Portuguese *commandante* (see picture below) which they are trying to bring back to its former glory. They have just added a restaurant to the hotel. It is served cold and greasy, but they are doing their best. It has potential.



There have been 4 earthquakes during our time in East Timor which moves back and forth a few centimetres each time. There is also a volcano erupting near Bali - our next destination. In the morning we get a ride in a pickup. Karin in front and me in back. I'm paying \$10 for this ride. We pick up a lady with water jugs and a guy with a plank. The road is rocky with humps. After a short while, we drop off the woman and pick up 4 workmen. They look like they are carrying 2 5-liter cans of gasoline. All of them immediately light up cigarettes.

The terrain is rough. We squeeze around the top of a landslide. I look up into a canopy of a large tree. There are about 20 honey bee nests - each about a meter across. Tetun for honey is *bani been* (bee liquid). I asked if they harvested the honey. Hipolito says, No, they sting! I guess 100000 bees are a bit daunting.

Eventually we get to the very eastern tip of east Timor. East East Timor - or actually East East East.

We always have a bit of trouble communicating. Most Timorese speak only their local language. Now we are in an area which is cut off from the world except for this rocky road we just came down. The pickup turned around and left us. There is a primitive guest house which is run by a teenager who speaks only Fataluku. There are no other guests. When dinner time comes the boy indicates that we should go down the road and ask people to feed us. Whatever works.

The setting is terrific. White sand beaches, crystalline clear water, colourful fish and coral and a slightly nagging feeling of *will we ever get home again?* I guess we could learn to speak Fataluku. As I am having this worrisome thought a gecko inside the bamboo starts making rude noises that sound like WokYou , WokYou.

We are starting on our 3rd day here. A fisherman took us out to an island (Jaco) with lots of beautiful coral and another fisherman picked us up and brought us back. Things are looking up. The food is soaked in oil so we are giving up on lunch and dinner. This diet guarantees arteriosclerosis and early death. We will get by on rolls and jam for breakfast and some pot noodle soup for other meals.

In the evening we sit on a log on the beach and watch the fish jump. The most amazing sight is watching hundreds of tiny fish leap across the water in little arcs of silver. Once we saw a school of larger fish doing this with arcs that were several meters across. There is an abundance of fish and schools of porpoise. I think the reason this place is so idyllic is its inaccessibility, bad food and communication problems. However, if you improve all this then it won't be idyllic and maybe the fish won't do their silver arc trick anymore because someone is charging around on a jet ski.

The teenager in charge tries to write up our bill, but has difficulty. His math teacher is probably one of the local fishermen, and one of numbers is not in whole dollars. We do it together. We think the room is a bit overpriced, but not when we hear that the fresh water which we have been tossing about in the bucket shower has to be carried several miles down the mountain.



We get a ride with Hipolito and he takes us to Los Palos. It turns out that there are no buses until the next day. We go to Hipolito's house where his wife Albina gives us cupcakes and drinks. They are very pleasant and generous people. We manage to arrange a ride to Baucau with Eddie in his broken down car with wobbly steering.



The people are open and friendly. On the bus the conductor offered us cookies. When people gather there is always a lot of chatter and jokes.

The country seems quite poor with no visible means of support. Tourism can't bring in much because no one goes there. It is a bit of challenge being here as a tourist. You may have to ask for things that you would consider obvious - towels in the bathroom, sheets on the bed, less oil in the food, but the response is never grumpy and no one expects a tip. Most people speak only their local language. You can get by with miming. Try to mime this: 'There is no toilet paper in the bathroom'. It pays to be uninhibited.

The schools seem to be plentiful and the school kids all wear colourful and tidy uniforms.

We notice some projects of dubious forethought - A 2.3 million dollar football stadium out in the middle of nowhere. Another project: A housing project of 50 little houses in the most unpopulated part of East Timor with no schools, shops or jobs nearby. You might use them as a chicken farm, I guess.



In Bacau there is a very fancy swimming pool where we and the manager's daughter were the only swimmers. It was in such stark contrast to the otherwise poor country.

*'Public shows of affection are not encouraged.'*  
I don't need encouragement. I do it naturally.

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The three commandments of the Water Monitor Lizard. Thou shalt Fight, Eat and Procreate.

## Bali, Ubud



Next to our lodging is a rice field patrolled by ducks. They march purposefully along the dikes in a long line of about 30. Then the one in front has a change of heart and comes to a stop. There is confusion and bumping and then everybody turns and walks back. I am reading on the edge of this field. I look up and 30 ducks are all looking at me with one eye. They are perfectly



still as if they are waiting for me to tell them what to do - like I'm the Messiah. I'm not the Messiah and I don't speak quack. Actually the guy with a pole and cloth is the Messiah. They are trained to regard the cloth as their mother and will follow it anywhere.

The gardens and temples and resorts are quite artistic with orchids, bull-rushes, lily ponds and small bridges.

Putu and Kadek (Inang Villa) are a young couple who run our guest house. They are continuously giving us little treats - including iced tea, evening drink (arak) and foot massage. Our room is quite luxurious with kitchenette and only \$40. Compare that to Jaco Island in East Timor with a mattress on the floor and where you need to ask for toilet paper and you have to find your own food for \$50.

The Bali culture is very intricate. There are lots of temples, little offerings to the gods are seen everywhere and pieces of coloured cloth hang from cornices and poles.



The dancing involves all the body all of the time - curled toes, twisting fingers, rolling eyes, contortions. The music is a cacophony of sound with all of the musicians apparently playing whatever inspires them on xylophones, flutes and gongs.

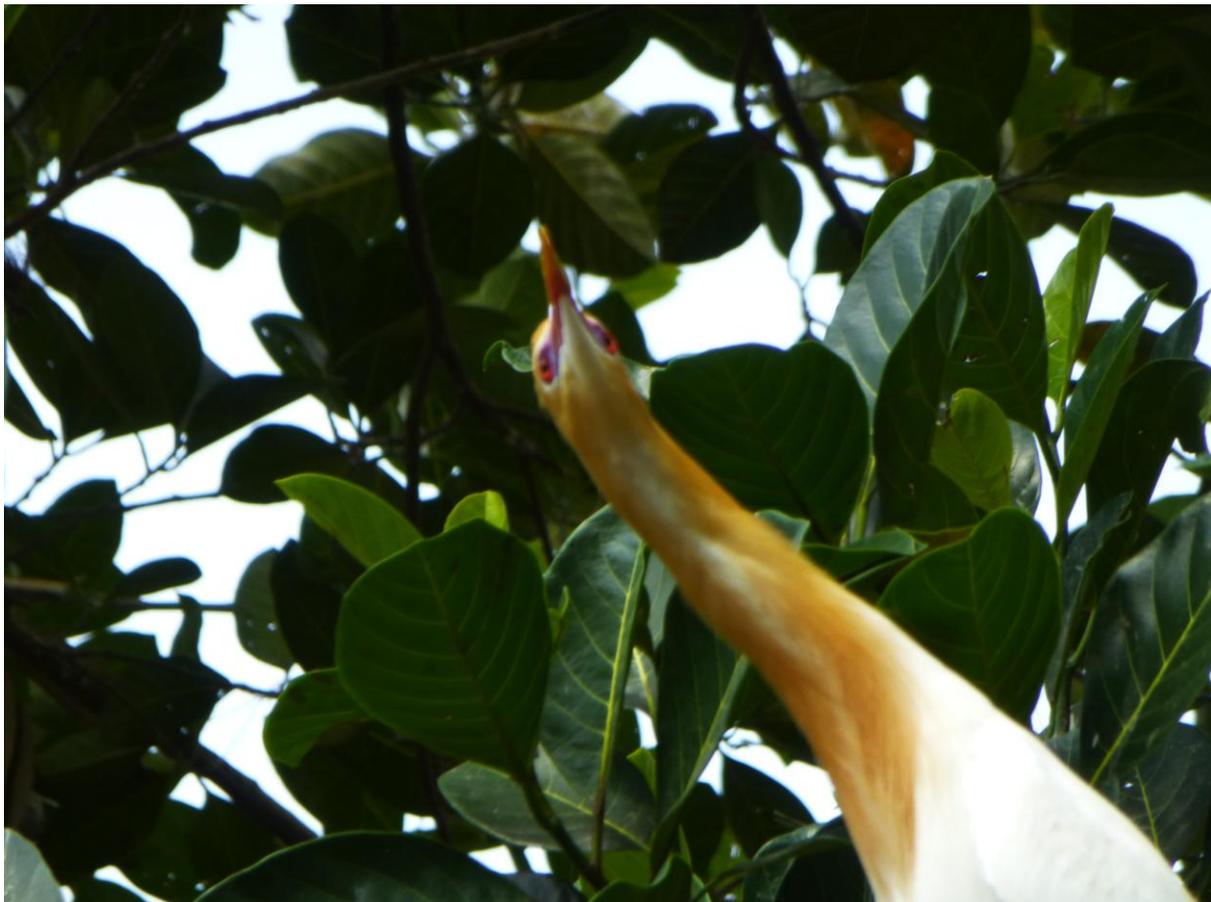
The Bali style paintings are varied: one can see paintings like a hunter woman carrying a deer or a cock fight or moonlit scene in a dappled jungle - all of them very pleasing. The classic styles are full of figures doing different things, but without a central focus. One of the paintings we saw was entitled 'chaos' where all of the proportions, moods, feelings, im-

pressions are displayed at once - laughing, frowning, passion happiness. It is as though the painter wants to show all of life in one instant. I suppose we are supposed to be transcended and reach a calm state with no expectation or suffering.

There does seem to be such an effect of that nature on the people. The people on Bali are very non-abrasive and polite. They speak in quiet voices. There is a softness both in men and women. However, I wonder, will achieving *a state of no suffering* make you less sensitive to other people's suffering? The Indonesians have a sordid history for violence and summary execution of hundreds of thousands. One struggles a bit trying to fit the carefully arranged bull-rushes in the temple in front of me with the history of brutality.

I see that there are 2 ducks doing the mating ritual. Now all of them do it. The same thing happens when one starts wagging its tail or flapping its wings or chasing in circles in a kind of ceremonial aggressiveness - then all the others do the same.

We heard that there was a place nearby where there were lots of herons. We expected to go to a pond with reeds. Instead we drove to a dilapidated little village where people were doing there ordinary chores. In the trees and rooftops all around were hundreds of white herons. The local folklore is that a black heron arrived first and then led all of the white herons to this little village. It is a little like swarming in bees. Only they have been swarming now for 50 years. This must be an exceedingly rare phenomenon. The herons pooped on us which given the circumstances was less rare.



The ducks are back. I'm telling you guys - I am not the Messiah.

The coffee in Bali is high in caffeine and a bit bitter. It was discovered that the weasel like 'Luwak' would eat the outer fruit-like covering of the coffee bean and then swallow the rest. The caffeine would be partially removed as it travelled through the digestive tract of the animal. These beans are collected and sold as the most expensive coffee in the world. A very small bag of poo coffee costs about \$20.

There is a tradition of carving in Bali. We drive to a rural mountain area where one of the most famous carvers lives (I Made Ada). He is in the process of fashioning his work shop into a great 10 meter square statue of the Hindu god Vishnu flying on the back of an eagle (Garuda) Beneath the eagle you enter the shop. It is reminiscent of Antonio Blanco's house with its 8 meter high statue with dragons stretching out on either side. The carved statues are large and impressive – life-like rearing horses, long limbed couples in ebony, painted ceremonial figures. The prices are very cheap considering the fame of the artists, the rarity of the wood and the quality of the piece. This area has many sculptors and one can find interesting pieces like a giant rocking horse, but most are religious Hindu figures.



The dancing chants, temples, art museums, herons, sculpting, terraced rice fields, poo coffee, traditional restaurants attract a wall of tourists, taxis and touts, but it is worth it. Speaking of touts I am moved to song (a la Bob Marley): No money no buy. Noooo maanny nooo buuy.

Seminyak/Legian - Remember the song from South Pacific

Bali Ha'i will whisper  
In the wind of the sea:  
"Here am I, your special island!  
Come to me, come to me!"

This music inspires images of beaches with coconut trees and gentle people with hibiscus flowers swaying in the sea breeze. Well... You can forget that. Today there is a kind of buffer zone along the beach several blocks wide where you can buy mirrored sunglasses and wooden bottle openers shaped like penises (???) or you can have a sign saying 'XX is gay' and you can fill in his/her name. You jump aside as one of a tribe of motor bikes gets too close. Every shop vies for your attention: Hi Boss, What's your name? Where you from? and even as you walk away you hear 'I love you' and 'I miss you' said somewhat ironically. Someone stopped me and put his hand on my stomach then on my thighs while explaining that he saw

how I was walking and that I was in desperate need of his assistance to attend to my feebleness. I thanked him for the advice, but was on my way to surf. Sorry.

Most of the tourists are well built, wearing bright clothes and for those with the body - showing this off to the greatest advantage, preferably with tattoos.

I tried surfing in Bali where conditions are near perfect for beginners. I manage to get the board moving by paddling like mad while lying flat. It is standing up which is a challenge. One needs to grip the sides of the board and move one foot between your fists then stand. My body is too stiff to do that and I get stuck halfway in between. Eventually the wave begins to peter out. I imagine the surf instructor coming along side:

Sir, hellooo, wake up  
This is the last stop  
You need to get off the board.

It usually ends with me simply toppling over.

Sir, do you need assistance?



## Cambodia



We have now landed in Siem Reap. This is where Angkor Wat, the temple city of Cambodia, is located. Girls should not have bare shoulders or shorts, however the walls of the temples are adorned with bare-breasted dancers (Apsara), sooo, this does not apply to stone girls.

On entering the country I saw the guy ahead of me handing the passport control officer something. When my turn came the officer rubbed his fingers together and said 'tip, tip'. I refused to give him anything. I tried to complain, but suddenly no one spoke English. I spoke to one of the guides and he said that other foreigners had experienced the same.

The stone structures are Hindu and Buddhist temples for worship of gods from both religions and, as such have no practical purpose as houses. The first ones were built around 900 AD and they continued to build until the 1200's. In 1431 Angkor was abandoned after being sacked by Thailand.

The moats which surround the temples are 200 meters across and were probably an artefact of getting sand for building the foundation as well as for fortification. The arches for the doors are 'corbel' and are made by layers being successively pushed forward.

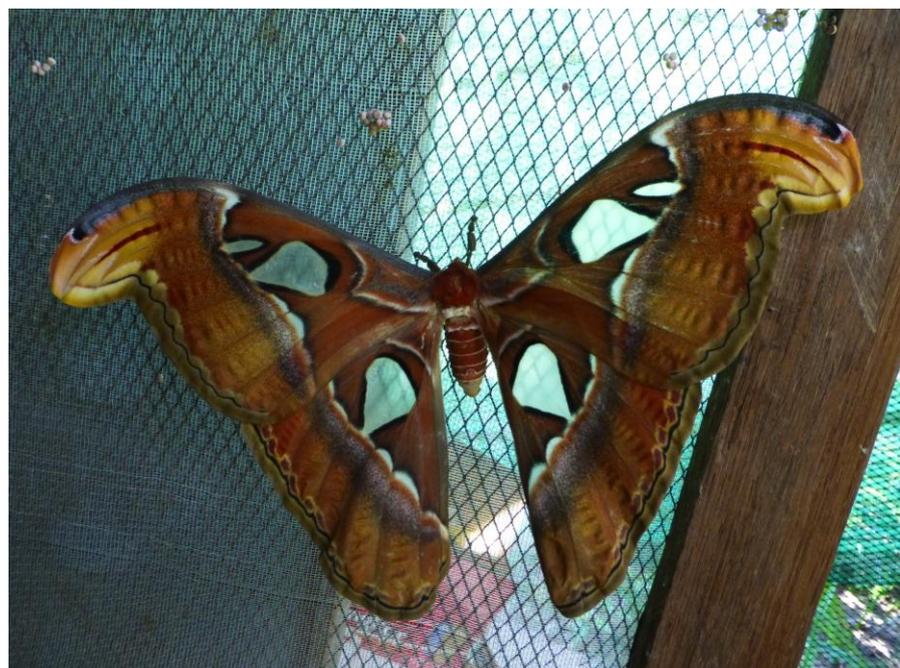
At the temple of Ta Prohm nature has attacked the stone structure. Great silk cotton trees with giant roots have grown into the stone crevices.

One gets a strong sense of the inexorable power of time and nature eroding man's vain attempt to achieve immortality.

Bombs and butterflies:  
We visited the butterfly museum. Here was the most extraordinary creature – an Atlas moth measuring up to 25 cm from wingtip to wingtip with gorgeous and subtle colouring. It is amazing that this animal is strong enough to move these enormous wings.

We also visited the nearby landmine museum with its pictures of people with limbs missing and examples of unexploded ordnance from US, Russia, Vietnam and China which lie scattered in the Cambodian countryside. As the US will not ratify the UN proposal to outlaw anti-personnel mines they accept the collateral damage of children losing their arms, legs and eyesight.

Donations to the landmine museum go to supporting a center for maimed children. As I sat there a little girl happily ran by me. She was missing her right arm from the elbow and down. There are still an estimated 1 million pieces of unexploded ordnance in Cambodia. There is a placard here stating that the US State department supports the center - a good gesture but does not give the kids their arms and legs back.



We are now experiencing a holiday called the water festival in Siem Reap with everyone dressed up. The center of activity is around a canal where boat races will take place. The trees along the banks are festooned with bright lights. The boats are colourful, narrow, about 10 meters long and have room for 22 paddlers. Two by two they compete and are gradually eliminated until a final winner remains. There are both men and women's teams.



## Laos



Morning on the Mekong. The river is moving past at a good clip. We are on a houseboat that rocks in the current. If the tether to the bank should break, we would be in Cambodia in about

an hour. Well... except there are some falls about a mile down river. An experienced kayaker *might* manage. So there is always hope. It might be handy to learn the word for help in Lao - Soo ay daa. This may be said in a high falling tone or a rising tone. Get that wrong and you may have just said 'Where are the toilets' as you sweep on toward the falls.

This place, Ban Khone Nua, is on an island, Done Khone, which is part of a delta where the Mekong breaks up in to 10 or 12 separate streams. The islands are peaceful with winding paths and people with pointy hats grow rice and water buffalo are munching in the shade. There is quite a bit of traffic on the river with wooden canoes of different sizes. Just a little downstream from us is the 'French Bridge' and along the sides of the river are pretty houses built on stilts.

Most people here on Don Khone do not speak English or French. When we go to a restaurant it is challenging. The waiter comes to the table with a pad and pencil. We point at an item on the menu - 'battered fish and steamed rice.' and ask 'is the fish with bones?' Communication and confidence immediately collapses and the waiter begins desperately to look around with frightened eyes. We say that that's OK. 'We will take this one, this one and this one.' The waiter runs away. When the bill comes later, it says "Δ2". In Malawi hundreds could be expressed by pumping the fist and in East Timor a fisherman said 13 by clapping once and holding up 3 fingers.

I sit on the edge of the houseboat and dangle my feet in the water. Some creature bit my little toe. We had a water snake sunbathing on the chaise lounge in the morning so maybe it was a snake.

At the southern tip of Don Khone we hired a boat to go out in the Mekong. We saw several Irrawaddy dolphins and a very tall grey heron.





Old woman harvesting rice.

We then took a tuk -tuk over to where there were rapids. There is clearly a precipitous drop in elevation of 15 or 20 metres which gives rise to many falls and rapids. There are lots of herons who are trawling the splashing waters for fish. We also saw olive backed sunbirds and a 5 cm beetle that looked like a fancy party hat (chrysochroa rajah thailandia or metallic wood-boring beetle). The metallic back splits open to reveal wings that allow it to fly.



We do this before lunch because then the temperature gets above 35 degrees C and it is time for sitting in the shade.

We were rather surprised by the size and strength of the dock when going to see the dolphins. It was a massive cement structure rising 8 metres out of the water and with a ramp and large rollers for hoisting something up. Then there was a railroad bed the tracks of which are long gone, and at the North end of the island the French Bridge that a small locomotive could cross to a smaller island.



Suddenly the picture became clear. Waterfalls, Railroad. Aha. The Mekong stretches from Vietnam to China. The falls are the only hindrance for transporting goods. The French tried to force the Khone falls in a steamboat and failed. Another Frenchman took a raft down them. We visited these falls and cannot understand how he survived. But he did.



French Bridge

People take inner tubes down the Mekong but after passing the French Bridge you had better head for shore because what awaits is a thunderous swirling foaming cataract.

Anyway that little train track was the route to the interior back in the 1800s.

Addendum: The only person to make it up the falls in a boat was a Norwegian (Peter Hauff) using his anchor chain and winch. He thought the fee being charged by the train people was exorbitant. (Man after my own heart).

Eventually the roads got good enough in the 1900s and the train fell into disuse. The tracks were taken up and used to make bridges and fences on the island and are in use today.

Jungle House, Laos: Michael Boddington, his wife Xoukiet Panyarouyong, and Keyang He (Angela), the intern. Mike has worked with the unexploded ordnance problem and with prosthetic limbs for those maimed by these (dropped mostly by American bombers during the Vietnam war - some 2 million tons in Laos). For this work he has received the Order of the British Empire signed by Elizabeth R. In the letter she writes that Mike is 'most trusty and beloved'. Xoukiet works for the UN studying human trafficking.



Their guest house is outside Vientiane where the 'guests' are treated like family and there are vigorous discussions in the evening with a good deal of humour.

Vientiane is not so old. The king Chao Anou decided to get the emerald Buddha back which had been stolen by the Siamese. He went with too small an army and attacked the Siamese. This was a case of David against Goliath where Goliath won. He was chased home and the Siamese razed the city of Vientiane.

There is a most beautiful hornets' nest on the Jungle House property shaped like a tear drop and about 40 cm across. It is a bit risky if you try to get too close. I discovered this when trying to get photos down their entrance hole. The stings caused swelling on both arms. Great photos though.



The villagers have started constructing their own metal detectors to find scrap metal for sale. Mike has the idea that if you could use this entrepreneurial interest to effectively remove all the unexploded ordnance in Laos in a few years. The training and materials would cost about 20

million dollars. There are about 3000 villages in Laos. This is much cheaper and faster than government programs today. Every year in Laos, 50 people are injured or killed (30%) by unexploded ordnance. 40% of these are children

Ordnance: There were 580000 bombing missions in Laos - about one mission every 9 minutes over a period of 9 years. The cluster bombs contain some 680 small bombs that are about 10 cm in diameter. The intention is that they should all explode, but roughly 20% fail to do so. The target was to attack the Ho Chi Minh trail also fight the Communist Pathet Lao. The US were never officially at war with Laos and there is a heavy responsibility to repair the damage to the Lao people. One human life is often compensated for in millions of dollars in the US - therefore a reparation to Laos of a mere 20 million must be regarded as the least one can do.

Luang Prabang. About 30km out of town there are a cascade of waterfalls that descend from pool to pool down the mountain side. They have a unique look which is caused by the calcium carbonate that they carry. Wherever the water is running a deposit builds up forcing the water to run

somewhere else. In the end you form a pool with a lip where the water runs over evenly. The water is the colour of light jade. There is a butterfly museum and bear sanctuary nearby.



In the evening we saw a Cambodian movie which had flashbacks to the time of the Khmer

Rouge who had killed a fourth of the population of Cambodia. It showed how traumatized people are trying to rebuild their lives. It also showed how events could be viewed from many different perspectives and how the truth kept changing.

Elephant village: We rode elephants from the forest to the river in the morning. To get them to kneel in the water you say 'map, map'. Then you slide off and start scrubbing their hide. Some of us new mahouts decided to stay their elephant's back. This had advantages as the

water could be quite deep and someone had poo-pooed in the bath water. I suspect one of the elephants as the poo-poo was about 10 kgs and green. They produce a prodigious quantity of pee and poo because of eating 250 kg food and drinking 100 litres of water every day.

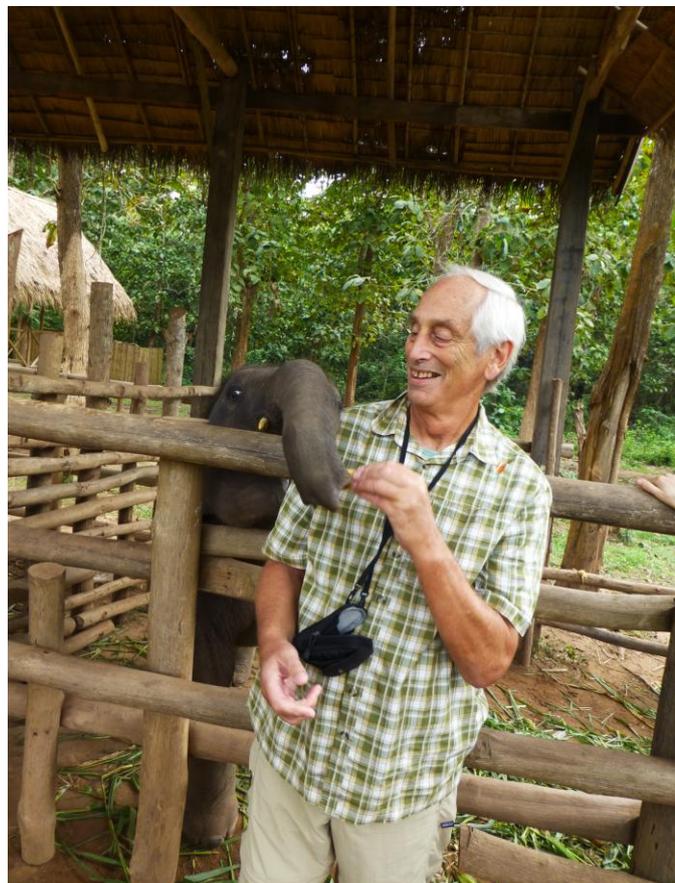
They enjoy bathing and wave their ears back and forth. They are quite comfortable in the water and will duck their whole head under - so, there is no point in trying to stay dry.

Despite having rather huge faces they don't have many expressions - a bit like John Wayne. Their nose is of course their most astonishing feature. It makes them look a bit like an octopus with one tentacle. It has the same flexibility and can pick a banana from your hand.

There is little difference between the words Elephant and Elegant though you may say they are diametrically opposite. They have no upper lip, but their large lower lip makes up for that and hangs down like a pendulum. And when they move they trundle. However, unlike the brontosaurus when they walk two legs can leave the ground at the same time. They walk like an Icelandic pony - first two legs on the left then two on the right. Though given a choice they will stand still. They spend most of their time eating. They seem to have one meal a day which lasts all day long. The small ones are quite agile and can lift their legs up, but as they get older 4 tons take its toll. Average longevity is 80. Having said all that they have a certain aesthetic with their wrinkles forming swirls of design in an elegant fashion.

I look into the eye of my elephant. She looks down. Perhaps she finds it disturbing to have eye contact.

Soon the bathing is over and we say 'soeng soeng' and she lifts her knee so that we can use it to clamber on. It is easier to be a tall mahout, but Karin



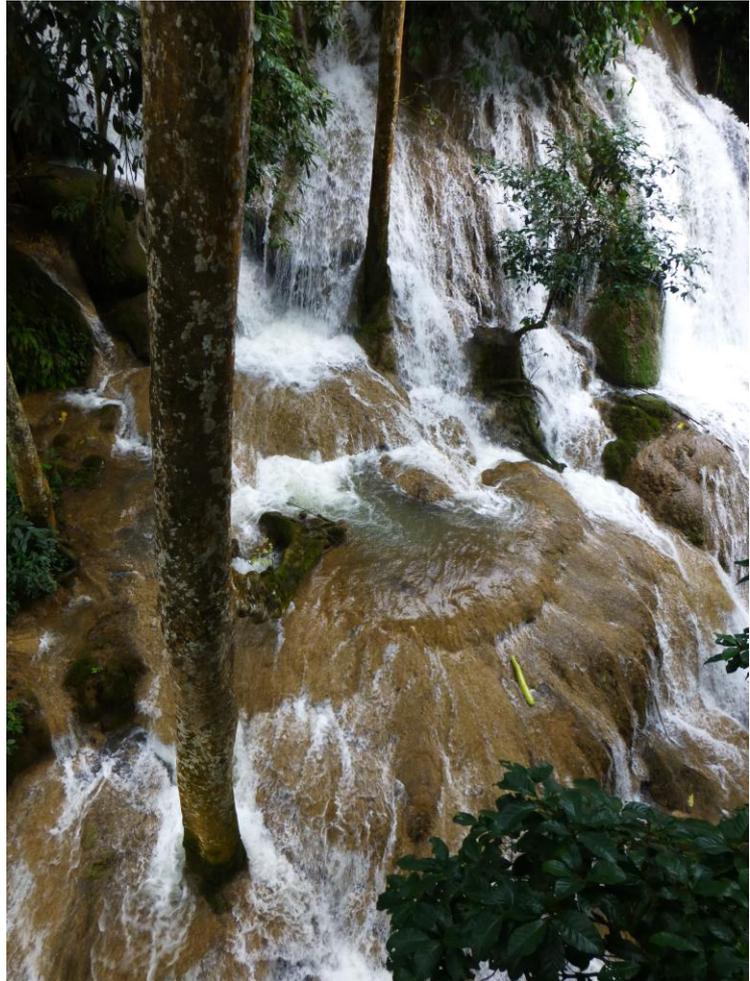
manages quite easily. Suspiciously she seemed also to learn the mahout words quickly. There may be parts of her past of which we are *unaware*.

After two days we made a fond farewell. We said 'cop chai lai-lai' and all the elephants lifted their trunks and trumpeted. No, Johanna, that is grandpa making a joke. We would, of course, like to take one home, but, sigh, the deer would be offended.

Today in a resort in the forest we saw a 10 cm long grasshopper, a stick insect, a hairy caterpillar and a cat named (fittingly) Migraine. The weather has been a bit chilly, but all the same a guide by the name of Benoit took several of us on a hike to the 'secret' waterfall. It is secret because there are no paths to get there. The only approach was climbing up through the water which was rushing in the other direction. We jumped between boulders to avoid the heaviest current. In our group were Bill and Alia from Seattle. Unfortunately, Bill slipped and pulled a muscle in his leg. This was relayed back to camp. When Karin heard the manager on the phone mentioning some "old guy" had to return to base, she thought it might be me (just for a moment, of course).

We continued for one and a half hours - at one time pulling ourselves up big vines and roots. Above the falls you could jump from a rock to a pool below and also swim behind the falls where there was a shallow cavern. You could then swim out into the cascading water which forced you beneath the surface.

Many of the things we did would normally seem quite risky, but the calcium carbonate lining the rock gave a very secure (almost sticky) footing. This allowed you to scale an almost vertical rock face. Benoit claimed he could do the whole climb with no hands - which he then did. It actually seemed more practical compared with using your hands. These immediately created a rooster tail of spray into your face.



I doubt this trip is listed in the guide book. You are required to sign a paper absolving the resort of any responsibility for injury or death. You should be young or nuts. We all fulfilled one or the other of these requirements. Afterwards we gathered for a self- congratulatory drink at the lodge - just like in the whisky ads.

They have a steam bath at the lodge which they will fire up. You can then run and jump into a pool fed by a spring. Karin and I made several trips between the two. We then dried off and glowed our way to dinner - Pinky and Shiney.

Karin saw sign for a hotel “Rooms: fair condition”. That seemed quite honest. Until she saw that the ‘f’ in ‘fair’ was actually a plus sign.

In Luang Prabang there is a great drink here called Lao Lao. It is 40% alcohol and costs 10 kr/bottle. There is a nice hors d'oeuvre to go with it – Mekong river weed with buffalo skin sauce.



We walked down a side road to the morning food market. There was a basket of live frogs, a dead squirrel, a shark, strange fish, live snails and a beautiful boa constrictor chopped into 1 ft. pieces.



It is a good place to go if you need inspiration to become a vegetarian. Several times in Laos I have asked people if there are any animals in the forest. They always respond by saying, 'No, there are people nearby.' At first I thought that the animals were frightened by noise, but now I think it is because they get eaten.



Lao fashion

In the morning around 6 am mostly elderly people come and sit on mats on the road. Beside them they have baskets of sticky rice. Then a procession of monks comes by. Each monk



stops at each person and he or she puts some rice in his basket. In this way the monks get something to eat and the people earn 'merit'. This is obviously ceremonial - there are easier ways to get breakfast. Therefore it is a little like praying.

The tourists have caught on to this and stand around in groups photographing the procession. A loud Lao guide explains that the monks are getting sticky rice and he actually takes some out of a woman's basket and shows it to the tourists who snap photos.

I had positioned myself behind a bush with my camera, but now I felt disgusted and left. I don't particularly like religious ceremonies, but I don't treat people like monkeys.

Luang Prabang has many large temples. At one of these was a sign 'We have not gone beyond death.' I thought this might be in response to tourists' questions.

We went to hear a storyteller who was accompanied by an old guy playing an bamboo flute instrument called a *khene*. He sat still until the storyteller would whisper into his ear. Then he would liven up and play a lively tune before, once again, subsiding and waiting patiently. It reminded me so much of my Mom when she was 95 and played for the Old Time Fiddlers - Someone would be playing and then they would say, 'Take it away Bert'. Then Mom who was half blind and deaf would come to life and play variations on the melody.





Tourists at Sunset