

Travels In Indonesia with Sam in 1988



August 1988

I'd taken a month's leave in order to take Son No.1 along the backpacker trail of Indonesia, and this was to be our first major travel together. We'd already spent many weekends and weeks exploring France, but they were close to home and my French was a lot more than adequate. I'd only been in Indonesia eight months, knew very little Indonesian and what we experienced would be the first time for both of us.

Shortly before I left the UK, I'd taken Sam to London's Heathrow Airport to prep him for what was to be his first flight, and because he was 11 he'd travel as an unaccompanied minor so needed to know something of the procedures. We explored the airport, chatted with some staff and spent some time on the viewing gallery. I wonder if he can recall watching Concorde take off with a beautiful grace which was not impeded by the accompanying loud roar.

He flew to Jakarta with British Airways yet he, and I, felt that he was not treated too kindly. Firstly, he would have liked a window seat, but for someone his age this was "against the rules".

I waited at Soekarno-Hatta airport for him to appear and figured that he'd speed through immigration because he'd already got his 60-day tourist visa in London.

I waited and waited ... where the hell was he?

Someone else was waiting, the then BBC correspondent in Jakarta who was looking forward to spending some time with her boyfriend. She was angry because their planned short time together would be even shorter. I was panicking. Together she and I went in search of BA's office where we demanded news of our loved ones and to angrily remonstrate about BA's appalling lack of communication.*

It turned out that two passengers had been bumped off the Singapore-Jakarta leg, and we'd 'won' the lottery. They were put up in a hotel overnight and were collected the following morning. I was glad that the flights I'd booked for Bali were for a couple of days later or we'd have been doubly screwed!

When I returned to work several weeks later, I discovered that BA had in fact sent a message by phone to my workplace. Telecommunications were appalling to non-existent back then, and it was to be at least a dozen years before cell phones became mandatory for the chattering classes.

BA's message was routed through the reception desk, and was written down and had been left on a colleague's desk, Colin's, and not mine – Collins.

And he hadn't thought to pass it on!

.....

Note: *Son No.1 suffered from travel sickness, which was generally avoided with a diet of ginger nuts (popular British biscuits), but there are none to be had in Indonesia. This is strange because this country is one of the world's major producers of ginger.*

Bali Hi.

Ayu Cottages, Kuta – Rp.15,000 per night
3.8.88

Sam was sick in the taxi to the airport, or would have been if the plastic bag hadn't been readily available and my rudimentary Indonesian up to getting the driver to stop.

We were hijacked at Bali Airport by a moonlighting civil servant: "*Government workers aren't paid much.*" But for Rp.20,000 plus two fares for Rp.160,000 we've booked a Merpati flight to Labuhanbajo in Flores (*Gateway to Komodo*) for Sunday "*pagi-pagi*" (i.e. bloody early morning)

Now I'm already worried about a few things: Sam's travel sickness and have we got enough money? The main problem, however, is that we've got to travel back overland and sea to Jakarta and one month isn't long enough already!

3 hours later

A discussion, an agreement. We'll forge ahead if, but only if, we can get info about ferries etc. tomorrow in Denpasar.

Our eaterie welcomed us with Shankar's *Song For Everyone*, and the music has gone down since then; it couldn't get better though!

It's muddy in Poppies Lane, our accommodation is a building site, expansion for god knows how many Aussies *et al.* Strangely, they're not much in evidence now. Perhaps the day's rain and the evening cool mitigates against the pub crawls I've wanted to avoid..

Still, with snorkelling trips available at Rp.7,000, swimming trunks bought anew – from Rp.9,000>Rp.5,000 ("*but they're batik, mister*") – perhaps the holiday spirit is beginning to take hold. This evening, to go with my large bottle of San Miguel for Rp.1,600 I had a pineapple pancake; I could have had a banana one because that's the circuit we're on.

Berlian Inn, Kuta

4.8.88

Our early morning dip was good, with reasonable body surfing. It was a long way out, a gradual shelving to the breaking surf; this meant that we were some way from our clothes, towel, my 'spare' (i.e. with a broken frame) glasses and Sam's Swatch watch and his 'North London Athletics Club' vest. They were all lifted from under the bush where we'd deposited them.

Tony Wheeler says in the Lonely Planet Guide that "*most people who lose things at Kuta are idiots who leave things on the beach.*"

We idiots changed accommodation. The Berlian Inn is quiet. It's also cheaper by Rp.5,000, friendlier (tho' that's subjective), and prettier. Instead of the previous view of on-going building work we have well-maintained gardens which obscure the view of everything except visitors passing by, and they are few. (A smiling seller with a tray of I know not what balanced on her head calls by as I write this.)



I could get to like Kuta – if it wasn't for the motorcyclists roaring up and down. And the beach. *“Do you want to buy handcarvings, watches (not Swatch!), rings, beach mats, a massage, a set of six plastic spoons ... “* (eh?)



We bargained heavily for T-shirts at the organised 'craft' market at the end of the beach, and a replacement towel. What costs Rp.4,500 at the Golden Truly supermarket is Rp.15,000 here, a rip off to replace a rip off.

Sam's back is now a brownish red because he spent hours on the beach while I went into Denpasar to get our Merpati tickets to Flores refunded. This was fine and good for the two American ladies who'd just been told that there

weren't any seats available for a week. They also discovered that getting back could be a problem, so maybe, yet sadly, calling off the Komodo trip could be very wise.

Instead, we'll explore Bali, leaving perhaps tomorrow or Sunday for Ubud, Mt. Batur and the beaches of the north coast.

Meanwhile, in half an hour we'll set off for a snorkling trip.

Later

This wasn't so good. Our ride didn't turn up so we had to take a later one only to find that all the best equipment had been taken. We eventually got ferried out to the reef where other boats were parked. The current was strong and without my spare glasses to fit inside the mask I could see very little.

Also it seems that all my duck diving has exacerbated my ear infection – pain and ooze. The Aussie girls on our boat seemed to be more intent on sunning themselves and chatting about their anticipated evening's social activities.

Turtle Island had a crop of kids intent on diving for coins and the cockfight would only take place after "donations" for photographs. Exotic sights are somewhat tawdry and I hate being a 'tourist'.

Yet I can't say that I want to stay at home!

Ubud

Monday 7.8.88

When we arrived on Saturday we headed for Monkey Forest Road and checked out several places before settling on Nick's Pension. This was because it nestled among rice terraces down the slope near a babbling brook which provided a pleasant aural backdrop.

That first day, we strolled down the (then undeveloped) road to the Monkey Forest, took a few photos and discovered the best eating places - Lilies and Otawaties (*now long gone*). We also bought our first souvenirs, a sarong for Sam and two temple scarves to be worn as belt sashes..

Day 2 was spent cycling, for Rp.5,000 each, which we thought a tad expensive when we could have hired a motorcycle for Rp.6,000.

Goa Gajah, with a monster's mouth as the cave entrance, was impressive, not least for the snap-it-quick tourists.



Goa Gajah cave mouth

So we cycled on to Yeh Pulu through quiet country lanes lined with impressive, well kept courtyard houses. The lanes were being paved to cater for the expected influx of tourists. Presently, Yeh Pulu is still a small village attraction, past a well used washing place with similar stone wall figures of women spouting water as at Goa Gajah, to a frieze of figures depicting life some nine centuries ago. Ganesh is still worshipped ~ donations please.



Yeh Pulu water spouts

At the end of the lane is a small homestay where the old proprietor proudly displayed his guestbook: few people had stayed there. Was he dreaming of new found wealth because of the lane below being made ready for his anticipated visitors?

We later cycled on to the old state temple of the Kingdom of Pejeng with its large single-cast bronze drum, made donations at the Museum Arkeologi and ended up at Pura Kebo Edan (*Crazy Buffalo Temple*) with its four-metre high statue of Bima with six (or is it four?) penises.

The legend of this Bima is very interesting. Bima falls in love with a certain woman, and the desire to her has risen. However, the penis of Bima was too big for her. And, she has found another lover at last. Bima has found them making love one day. Bima that trembles with anger tramples and killed them.]

Perhaps I lack a sense of spiritual need but so many temples seem dead, lacking a sense of daily use or need. Yet the Balinese can be seen placating the spirits everywhere with offerings at every entrance, gateways and doors, and their character is very friendly as if secure within themselves and at peace with their world.

When we cut back to Ubud through a newly carved road - built by the army, as an enormous monument to their recent (March '88) endeavours told every traveller - we were only once asked for money, by an adult, for cigarettes. Some children did ask for pens, but it seemed a world away from the main thoroughfares. "A pillion ride? What's your name? Where you coming from? Where you go?" asked in a spirit of curiosity and friendliness.

I am saddened by me sense of cynicism, a feeling of déjà vu as the evidence of unfeeling, uncaring and unseeing tourists and their impact is everywhere. Little good has come from the meeting-clash of cultures. When cremations are turned into circuses and dances to celebrate life are turned into photographic displays, then awareness is lost

Somewhere, possibly everywhere, roots are intact and the culture, the community life continues. I would sooner be seen as a welcome guest than as a voyeur, yet inevitably this is how we are seen and labelled, the same as those who've passed by before us.

Tuesday 8.8.88

With our hired bikes, we walked across the suspension bridge over the Campuan River and up the steep hill, to the Neka Art Museum. Until the arrival of western artists to Bali in 1930s, traditional painting was limited to temple scrolls and calendars and the themes were exclusively religious. However, Neka houses a collection of 'traditional' paintings by young 'naif' painters influenced by the likes of Rudolph Bonnet and Donald Friend.

(According to his diary, Friend enjoyed a sybaritic lifestyle which would now see him locked up for years in Kerobokan Prison.)

Neka Gallery/Museum was built in 1966 by Suteja Neka who wanted to gather together the best examples of local art and in so doing has served to give artists international recognition. The Museum is a collection of separate rooms around a three sided courtyard which overlooks a ravine. Photo albums and books of press cuttings give a personalized and hospitable ambiance.

At the rear of the gallery In a beautiful setting, with views over a ravine, this is one of my favourite places in Bali to while away an hour or two.



Mutual Attraction by Abdul Aziz is one of my favourite paintings

Although painted as separate pieces during different years, these two works later were joined together into a single piece in 1980 by Suteja Neka, founder of the Neka Museum, after he noticed that the man appeared to be admiring the woman. The figures seem to be leaning in doorways; their shadows painted on the actual picture frames add a three-dimensional effect. Plain backgrounds focus attention on the figures and the mutual attraction between them. Warm earthy tones emphasize this.

The house of Antonio Blanco by the suspension bridge downhill from Ubud, is somewhat different. There was no-one at the entrance with its ticket kiosk, but the gate was partly open so went in and immediately felt like trespassers. We went into a pavilion and gazed at his pictures. These were dedicated to his wife, a Balinese dancer, indicating an obsessive and ego-centric character.

The man himself discovered us and seemed quite charming: *"Is anyone looking after you? We usually take a nap at this time."*

He then instructed one of his staff to put the shutters up. We unbarred the gate and tip-toed out, leaving a Rp.500 tip for the 'government (non)attendant'.

Not finding the back route heading towards Batur, we biked back through Monkey Forest, swathes of rice paddies, villages of wood carvers and once again enjoyed the scenery.

Artha Sastra Inn, Bangli - Rp.9.000
Wed. 9.8.88

We're awaiting lunch ~ Sam's first *nasi goreng*.

This is a truly delightful place, an old palace residence run by really friendly people. We're in the inner courtyard area with a view of intricate carvings, especially the tall doors with reliefs highlighted in gold.

The journey here was by *bemo*, a people carrier overcrowded with market goers, school children, plastic artifact sellers and a radiant young couple dressed in traditional garb.

It's nice to escape the droves of beach seeking young travellers and souvenir sellers. A German couple opposite "are only interested in culture" so maybe we're going to experience a deeper reality rather than surface pretensions. It's possible we'll attend a cremation tonight or tomorrow, and I hesitate to be part of a package of Pentax flashing bystanders.

(We didn't go, but I can't recall why.)

Sri Homestay, Anturan Beach, west of Singaraja
Friday 12.8.88

We've seem to have found one of those quiet idyllic beach bolt-holes complete with sunset and friendly people which I sub-consciously seek on my tropical travels. There are no souvenir vendors apart from a sea shell seller on the sea shore.

John Surman's *Edges Of Illusion* is playing on the restaurant's sound system as I await my black rice pudding for breakfast. Sam is out snorkelling somewhere on the reef which keeps the sea so calm.

I'm not snorkelling because I'm suffering aches and pains in neck and legs from yesterday's climb of Mt. Batur.

After a short sleep in a nondescript nameless place, we set off at 4am with a young guide named Nyoman, the commonest name encountered in the past three days. We scrambled up the dusty lava scree and made it to the crater rim edged with clouds like dry ice, and watched the sunrise over Lombok.

The crater floor was sharply edged in morning shadow, highlighting lava flows, past eruptions and obvious evidence that this is a not yet dormant volcano.

Down below we could make out the carefully mapped terraces of human endeavour, of scant agricultural reward of corn and chillies. Birds were more common than previously seen or heard, one sounding remarkably like a skylark



Batur '88, a painting in Jakartass Towers based on a photograph I took.

What spoiled the view were the ubiquitous guides – “*Where you from, mister*” – and the guys pestering us to buy the bottles of coke they’d carried in buckets on their head alongside us as we climbed up.

But we found our necessary solitude, sat took photos and thought our thoughts: Nature 1 – Humans 0. Or perhaps the score is really Nature 2 – Humans 1 because, after all, the locals have fought back, carving a living from the land and the invading tourists.

We cleaned off and relaxed in the hot springs below and then headed for the north coast and here.

I continue to ache, but I’m sure the morning’s massage did me good because I haven’t had so much pain deliberately inflicted on me before. She, an elderly deaf mute fisherman lady, knows every meridian pointing the hands and legs. She looked frail yet was very strong, as she proved while walking and down my back and pressing pressure points.

She also told me a lot: 50 years ago she was a good dancer; she had ten children – “*Kenapa untuk anda, satu anak cukup?*” (Why for you is one child enough?). Also, suntan lotion isn’t as good as her embrocation, and my body isn’t in good fettle.

I know that! But can I believe her when she says that I’ll feel the effects – beneficial I hope – in six hours?

For now, I still ache and must wait.

Monday 15.8.88

Nirwana Cottages – Lovina

We moved 4kms so we could have coconut palms obscuring the view of the sunset.

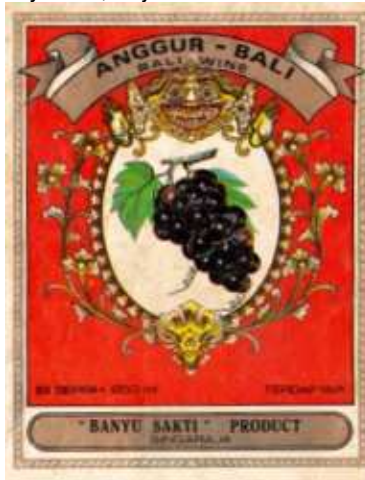


Lovina has a long way to go before it reaches the crescendo of Kuta; hopefully it never will. The waves rarely crest above six inches in the mornings. As at Anturan, it's as smooth as a millpond. A cliché but true as, with glasses in my mask, I glide just above the tops of coral reefs which appear to be in decline.

Maybe this is the inner reef we've been exploring, with sediment building up. Shells there are a-plenty, as our beach balustrade testifies. I don't know how we're going to get them all back to Jakarta, though most are quite small.

My ear infection dims the sound of the sarong sellers who, thankfully, are barred from Nirwana premises. They wait instead at the steps onto the beach.

Still, this is the life of a Sybarite, or just another sunset.



And this is a perfectly awful drink. I'd even feel ashamed if I'd brewed it myself!

17.8.88

Terima Homestay – Labuan Lalang

It was a long way along the north coast by *bemo* from Lovina. The ride was one of those laden with wild life, tame local people, ducks and 10 gallon containers of home brew (*I'm not sure whether I was referring to the number or size of the containers.*) Sam was busting for a pee, but didn't want to go where he could be seen. Fat chance: along every apparently deserted stretch of road,

someone appeared. Although the driver and I found it amusing, we did eventually pull over and our vehicle provided a shield from prying eyes.

We came here yesterday for the snorkelling at Pulau Menjangan, reputedly some of the best in Indonesia, and we thought it worthwhile to check it out before leaving Bali for our overland journey across Java. And so that is why the *bemo* dropped us off here, the gateway to the island and the West Bali National Park. This area of north-west Bali appears to have been depopulated because when we stroll through the dusty and somewhat barren land we found several small medicine bottles.

Labuan Lalang may be a good base for Pulau Menjangan* we read, but apart from boats to the island it's far from equipped to cater for visitors, who are few in number. Actually, today there are more than the average of two a night because there's a group of divers and two Canadian teacher-travellers, Ginny and Bronwen who agreed to share the costs of our boat trip to the island.

We all have gripes here, like no food, no decent flippers my size and no light. Sam broke that while jumping up to look at our roof *tokay* (gecko), an ugly blue-grey speckled with red spots fat lizard. We found food, passable rice with *tempeh* and *tahu*, a kilometre down the road where monkeys cavorted across the road.

We later passed on the sickly biscuits and sweet bread we stocked up on for supper.

The snorkelling, however, was really superb in terms of fish life, quite **on** a par with Fiji. Sam saw a large eel, or was it a snake? We both saw a large, sharp fanged brown fish with protruding white eyes pick up a small clam several times and then swim off with it. This was not a fish to tussle with.

For the rest, it was like being in an aquarium. The shoals ignored our presence. Though flipperless, I was able to glide among them enjoying the colours: some striped black and yellow, multi-coloured parrot fish, iridescent blues and reds, all feeding off the coral.

There was a deep and steep drop off which the divers enjoyed with caves to explore. Diving is an expensive pastime: we heard a quote of \$50. The Japanese we saw had all the gear, including made to measure wet suits. Our outing, shared with Ginny, Bronwen and two late arriving Germans, cost £5 (*then c.Rp.20,000*) including snorkel hire and the boat hire.

This ride was interesting too because it afforded us a view of the now dormant volcanic origins of the area. Two peaks made an interesting foreground for last night's classic sunset.



This is my idea of Nirvana.

(***Footnote:** Sam and I returned to Menjangan in 2013 on one of his hotel inspection tours. Some resorts are decidedly upmarket, and we particularly recommend **The Menjangan**. The snorkelling was just as good as before except for the plastic drifting among the corals.)

Yogyakarta - Rama Hotel (Rp.3,500)

22nd August 1988

Days later, it's 7am and the rain has just ceased.

We haven't gone swimming; I reckon that paying Rp.20 thou for the use of a pool and the bland company of tourists doesn't outweigh the cheapness and, more importantly, the chance to live Indonesian style.



The furniture, like the entire building, has the scruffy air of having been lived in for a long time and the owner's family live downstairs with an enormous collection of *kris* (Javanese 'holy' daggers). There are caged birds galore chirruping away and the squat toilets serve as the *mandi* drainaway

China pots of tea are left on a table just outside our door, but at odd hours so I have yet to have a hot cuppa.

There's a German couple here who were here when we first arrived. Apart from visits to the *mandi* for laundry and the other usual purposes, all we've seen them do is write – letters, postcards and in reply, we presume, to received missives. So when do they gain the experiences to commit to paper?

Sam complained yesterday, Sunday, that we hadn't done anything either.

He's left his yet-to-be-written postcards in a shop, possibly the one in which I bought some shirt material. We've walked to the *kraton*, and seen a troupe of busking tumblers, and another one on Saturday night. We've eaten and drunk a great deal, often in Suparman's for the western food and Bintang beer, and while sitting on the sidewalk in the night market on Jalan Maliobro also enjoyed the (chicken) *nasi gudeg*. We've also played 12 frames of pool, and for a change, I won most of them.

We've also assuaged Sam's longing to ride in a *bejak* (trishaw), the ubiquitous form of transport here.

Sam has bought a collection of batik paintings which aren't to my taste and, bar one which shows the influence of '60s psychedelia and pop art, are somewhat commercial. However, in doing so he's displayed a hard-nosed attitude to bargaining – even though I think he's paid over the odds.

Maybe I have too in my purchase (for Rp.40,000) of a Tulus Warsito original of a bicycle, shadowed against a wall with an electricity meter. The subject matter is not particularly Indonesian, but the skill and artist's eye is only obvious to a trained eye. Mine?

We shall find out later today about the required skill as we both attempt to produce a masterpiece in a workshop probably run by Tulus' brother.

Later, assuming the rain has held off, we hope to get to the last night of the Ramayana ballet at Prambanan temple. This only leaves tomorrow for Borobodur and the Bima Express back to Jakarta,

Yogya is one of those staging places, somewhere for rest and recuperation for weary travellers, a banana pancake to ease the pains of *nasi goreng* and "*hello mister-sister*".

This holiday is rapidly coming to an end, and I asked Sam yesterday what he wanted for his birthday (August 31st) he replied, "*Another month in Indonesia.*"



Tulus Warsito - *Kemarau*