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DIFFERENT ADVENTURES ON PLANET EARTH...



BY DARREN ADAMS

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I See Nothing. I Smell Nothing!

I was happily sipping white wine and partaking of some hot nibbles before my flight in Garuda's Dewa Lounge at Bali's Ngurah Rai airport when there was a rather loud 'Bang' next to the drinks fridge.

The staff studiously avoided the situation until a customer asked why the automatic coffee machine wouldn't work. Without looking in the direction of the machine Putu said, "Oh, out of order".

Eventually a guy with 'Electrician' stencilled on his shirt arrived and unplugged, then re-plugged the power leads into an already blackened and melted power box. 'Boom!' again. "Mmm, he said, "... out of order now."

Regrettably, I was therefore forced to drink alcohol instead of caffeine.

In Bali, Indonesia

An Empowering Gift for All of Us

When I was ten my parents bought me a bike to get to school 3 miles away. This powerful gift widened my world and social contacts.

Twenty years later, I provided through PLAN Australia, a bicycle to a family I sponsored in Indonesia. Two years later, with a guide from PLAN's office, my wife and I visited our Foster Child and family at Buwakan, 15 kilometres from Jogjakarta, on the slopes of Mt Merapi.

Leaving the taxi at the main 'road' we spent an hour stumbling up rough tracks to the village. We were shown the village concrete mandi (toilets and washrooms) and water tanks built with sponsors' funds. Meeting the family of mother, older brother and a very shy 10 year old boy, we were ushered into a single rattan room, earthen floor on which the family placed straw mats to sleep, open windows and a divider to the kitchen area from which the bare breasted mother issued forth all manner of foods which were placed for our hospitality on a vinyl folding card table provided by the village headman. The table leaned with dishes of rice and goat meat, krupuk, fried bananas, mangosteens, and freshly opened coconuts replete with (just for us) plastic bendy straws!

The village teacher proudly showed the school books and the bike our money had provided. It was the only way the child could get to school 10 kilometres away.

I have often wondered if he had, years later, ridden it into Jogjakarta to join the anti-Suharto protests. It would have been a just use of our gift.

Beware of Javanese Bearing Maps!

I'm a sucker for maps, so when the English speaking Javanese who sat next to me on the Mutiara Seletan from Solo to Badung pulled out a travel guide and offered it to me, I accepted.

My natural caution was damaged by exhaustion brought about by worry for my wife and 12 years old son, who were suffering from Bali Belly for 5 days now, as we travelled overland by bus and train on our journey from Denpasar to Jakarta, staying in losmen accommodation using vouchers issued from our Australian travel agent. Tickets we found to be dodgy and of little use.

So when we arrived in Bandung and the taxi took us to the accommodation listed for that city's voucher, I wasn't too surprised to find our room was in an army barracks with squat toilets shared with dozens of commandos. We moved on quickly to try two other vouchered accommodations, both of which were of similar low standard.

Finally we accepted the taxi driver's recommendation of a 3 star hotel. We had just gotten to sleep when were woken by the front desk informing us we had a visitor. It was the stranger from the train, asking if he could have his guide map back and would we also like him to arrange a tour to the local volcano tomorrow?

Did he follow us? How did he find which taxi to trace where were staying particularly as the taxi had no radio?

The mystery of the Suharto era Javanese intelligence system eludes me to this day!

I now provide my own maps.

In Bandung, West Java, Indonesia

Mt Bromo Hubris

I enjoyed my 4.00am chicken porridge and steaming coffee as I watched scores of young backpackers trudging past on their way to see the sun rise over Indonesia from the top of Mt Bromo, Java.

They had been walking for at least two hours from lodgings miles down the valley. I'd ridden up the evening before and my horse, with a dozen others for similarly middle aged, over weight tourists, was waiting for me outside my room after breakfast.

I wore three layers of clothing, including two pairs of jeans; the temperature at this altitude was nudging freezing.

Riding down the rim and across the 'sea of sand' three miles to the active volcano, I passed many backpackers sweating and puffing, and I thought "Stupid people, it only cost twenty dollars for the accommodation and horse. You should have paid. You'll be sore and sorry well before the end of today!"

When I went to dismount, I couldn't move. Spine frozen! The cold, a body unused to sitting in the saddle for an hour and the several layers of clothing, conspired against me. The horse guide with the help of several of the backpackers I had quietly poured scorn upon, tipped me sideways in an A-shape off the horse.

In agony, I edged one foot, then the other, up two hundred concrete steps, while fit Swedes and Germans raced past to meet the sunrise. Some even offered to carry me up.

I learned a lot about arrogance that morning!

In Indonesia

About Author

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Why is the website called bytestories.com?

This is a place for "byte-sized" stories and there is a 1500 character (about 250 words) limit for two main reasons. Firstly, we want you to know that "War and Peace" isn't required to leave your mark. Secondly, it takes about 2 minutes to read each story meaning you can head here whenever you want a quick (and entertaining) read.

If you would like to share a story or create your own eBook, simply head to bytestories.com, Register an account and click on the "Share a Story" button.