

A
Man
and a
Woman
on
~~Vacation~~
an Adventure
in
Sumatra
South East Asia

written by
Kim and Peter



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January, 1997

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COVER DESIGN

We returned home in native garb, much to the surprise of family and friends, complete with sarongs, veils and Muslim hat. The “!” sign in the back round was a road sign that we saw frequently, but we never figured out what it meant.

PETER'S INTRODUCTION

03/08/97
Coral Beach,
Pulau Perhentian Kecil
Malaysia

“Most of us tend to look back on our past less as a single unified story than as a series of episodes—moments of wonderment, discovery, an epiphany that surface in no particular order...”

“I think that we all need to keep a notebook or tape recorder around for times when we feel such moments come to mind. It's the richest legacy we can leave for family and friends. People who know us would seldom guess which events matter to us the most...”

This is an excerpt from “Episodes”, by Pierre Delattre. I read it in the Utne Reader, an alternative magazine while lounging on the beach toward the end of our trip.

I must feel the same, because I continue to be compelled to write, massage and share my experiences with you, the unfortunate reader. I hope that some of our adventures you find interesting. To me many of them were big moments in my life.

KIM'S INTRODUCTION

A trip Peter and I seem to like taking always has a few unusual qualities and considerations and I have tried to sort out some of them to help me understand a little better just why it is we enjoy traveling in our particular style. There are times in the course of our trips that nothing is fun and everything we choose to do seems to bring my anxieties, neuroses and fears, right to the surface where I and anyone else around me can see them, in all their ugly splendor. Why do I do it...spend lots of money to exasperate or humiliate myself.

The mystique of travel to foreign countries is alluring. It sounds exotic and exciting. It is. But that isn't all it is, especially when we make the effort to do it within a limited budget. Comfort correlates directly with dollars spent. The fewer dollars spent, the greater the discomfort. This is one thing when you are 20, and quite another when you are 50. You have had many more years to work on your fears by the time you reach 50. Your physical body is also singing a completely different song than it did at 20...one that is more off-key than not.

So why decide to suck it all up and buy steerage tickets to a remote place. Perhaps it is my own mechanism for trying to keep face to face with my increasing limits that daily threaten to further limit my willingness to change, or my hope to remain gracious in the face of discomfort. I do not want to grow rigid any earlier than is necessary. I hope my world will not become small until it has to...perhaps when my legs stop working and my mind vacations without my body having to go anywhere it will be a good time. And this "mechanism" might just be working.

Traveling any great distance also implies a hope or expectation of seeing a magic in people who by virtue of the distance must be very different than I am. As the date of departure drew nearer and my thoughts became more focused, I realized that, in fact, there was really going to be very little difference in any life, regardless of where it inhabited the globe. Creating life, home, family, meaningful work and a sense of peace transcends all elements of location, climate or level of affluence. What I would travel to see then, would be other people doing just what I do, just speaking differently. Hmmm???

So why exactly was I going to be traveling??? To challenge my aging body and mind — partly. To find magic that didn't exist — well, you can never be completely sure about magic!. To do as the bear did in the childhood song..."the bear went over the mountain just to see what he could see"??? Mostly likely that is what we are about when we plan for a trip like this...we set out mostly, just to see what we can see. Armed with our vague notions, we get ready to go and I find a comfortable relationship with the ambiguities...(who ever knows what they don't know...and how can you fear that!!)...and off we go. And this time it will be Sumatra, in our around South East Asia, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and numerous other geographic points we have only heard about in books.

EVOLUTION OF THE TRIP

09/11/96

IT'S COLD—ISN'T IT?

I'm sitting in Dr. Garcia's office waiting for my mother to come out. I have been thinking a lot about Kim's and my upcoming winter trip. A really lucky thing happened to us on one of our summer trips that kind of changed the course of our winter destination.

Tony, Kim's son, graduated from Evergreen University last June. Kim, Lia and I all flew to Seattle to be with him for this somewhat festive, but unexpected occasion. He was really proud of himself—as well he should have been. Who would have thought? Tony a "college graduate".

Anyway, both on the way out there and again on the way back, the three of us took the bump from American Airlines, netting us \$1000 each in travel vouchers. Lia summed it up best when she said, "I could have a nervous breakdown just thinking of the possibilities of all the places I could go."

Kim and I felt just about the same. Normally we would spend somewhere in the neighborhood of \$500 to \$750 on airfare for our annual winter vacation. Add \$1000 to that and you have a "go anywhere in the world kind of trip." That was 3 months ago. We had sort of made up our mind on either Australia or maybe New Zealand.

Kim and I are campers. That is the only way that we could afford to go on vacation and stay away for 2 or 3 months. We usually travel light, with a sleeping bag that is about the size of a loaf of bread. For warmth we always bring a flannel shirt. We know it's excessive, but we really don't like to catch a chill. Sometime we will even use the extra warmth of our ponchos in an effort to stay warm as we make our way from the bus station to our hotel room.

Then we saw a National Geographic special on New Zealand, titled Land of Contrasts. It seemed like most of the words that were being used to describe the contrast included bleak, desolate, frigid and extreme.

After the TV show, New Zealand seemed like much less of a choice.

09/16/96

Pipe Creek

No new thought on where to go, although Kim has begun to mention Ecuador more frequently.

10/01/96

Phil's Automotive

A small thought on a new location. How about Bali? It's pretty expensive to get there, but we have met a few other people we like who say they had a great trip there.

10/13/96

Ramada Inn Houston

It's Sunday morning. I'm in the middle of doing the Westheimer Art Festival. Yesterday went pretty well—money wise. I talked to Kim last night. She also had a fairly good day at the Starving Artist's Show in San Antonio. It looks as if Monday morning, after I do the deposit, we will be able to

finally pay off our credit cards.

On the plus side, Kim and I have never had so much free time. I should be using my free time to develop some new outlets for our pressed flowered window business, but instead we find that more and more our thoughts are turning toward our upcoming winter trip. On one of our “business” trip to San Antonio, we stopped at the bookstore and browsed thought the travel section. Kim settled on a book about Borneo and I bought two. One general one on all of Indonesia, and another one called the Micronesia Handbook.

Anyway after we got home, and started to go through our books, we quickly found out that Borneo was just too expensive to travel around in and the Micronesian islands had most of its motels in the \$40 to \$50 range. Leafing through the Indonesia Handbook, with it's 13,000 islands, Sumatra seemed to have it all. First it was so close to our final destination, Singapore that if we wanted to we could take a cheap boat to the island. Then it had inexpensive accommodations, vast stretches of beaches and jungles, and a sparse population, at least in the places that we would want to go.

10/18/96

HEB Boerne parking lot

Kim and I just got back from a “city” trip to San Antonio. It was Lia’s graduation from massage school, or at least it will be sometime in the future, so we wanted to take her a present. While we were in there we decided to go to the movies. Half way through the movie it dawned on us the enormity of our just received wholesale order from Guitars and Cadillac’s, a store that specializes in Texas crafts. They called on Monday to let us know that they would like to put us in 8 of their stores to start. Somewhere a \$5000 order was mentioned. He was calling from his mobile so I couldn’t hear everything. We had to shorten the conversation lest our sales rep get in a car wreck.

This is indeed a large order for us. It could change the course of the whole business. So why were we so placidly sitting in the movies enjoying ourselves? Because we are trying to put a new look on this Pressed Flower business of ours. Hopefully, our employees were hard at work, while we finally got to enjoy some of the fruits of our labor. Everything could hit the fan if all of the irons fell into the fire at the same time. It would actually be kinda nice. It would mean that we would be able to keep everyone employed this winter while we were away. I’m sure they would all be grateful, as I know that we would be too—especially while we were busing it around Sumatra.

Kim and I have been talking about down-sizing the business all the while we are actually up-sizing. We are, however, working less--or at least we have more free time. We have begun to dream those dreams that have been in our thoughts for a good part of our life together. Now we are beginning to talk about them, even out loud, and to each other. The changes they are a coming. This trip will be good for our dreams, I hope?

11/10/96

Ramada Inn, Houston

I’m here in Houston doing the International Quilt Festival. I have been here since last Tuesday night. It seems like I have been living in this motel forever. The show it self is going very slow, with about the same money we earn in a good 2 day show being divided up into a 5 day show. Luckily, I loaded a version of solitaire on the palmtop, so I have used it as a diversion when things are at their slowest.

I did however, go to REI, a classy camping store, the other night and bought a new backpack for our trip. I can't wait to get back home to see if indeed everything fits inside. While I have been here, bored and mostly sitting on my butt, Kim has been back home busting her hump getting out the Wedding orders that have been continuing to stack up. She has also been trying to fill this massive wholesale window order. We had to hire another girl to help out. They are doing most of the production, but Kim still needs to coordinate all of them, and unfortunately she also needs to fill in the holes of missing stock production. to be able to fill, at the very

I got my renewed pass- and we have sent away for our they come. I just like to have

Well it's off to work.

11/30/96

Motel 6 in Austin

I'm in town doing the val. It is just 5 weeks till we I have no idea where the trip farthest away from the US

12/01/96

Same place, different day.

This is the start of my coming trip. I am going to That is where you, for ex-a Big-Mac and a medium fries. table, take out your trusty in half. Then you divide the meditately, and with very little of the halves of the ham- of fries. Place them into an trash and deposit the bag



*Peter with his new pack
Ergonomic or aerodynamic*

When you're done with the meal and you are still wanting for the rest of it, you can relax in the thought that it is sitting comfortably under 10 trays of unfinished food. Is there really anyone who does not finish all of there McMeal? I think not?

The last time I did this diet, I tried doing it on the honor system. The theory was that I would just eat to some imaginary half way mark on the sandwich. But that didn't work, because I was always trying to even out the second half. I usually evened it out to about the quarter point before I would become disgusted with myself. The same thing happened with the fries. This new twist works on the theory of out of sight is out of mind.

It works great too with those impulse snacks. Like the last minute grab for the dark chocolate bar that has your name on it in the check-out counter at the grocery store. When you get back to your car

I do think that we are going least, the first order.

port in the mail before I left, airline tickets. I can't wait till everything in my hands.

Victorian on 6th Street Festi- leave for our dream vacation. will lead us. It certainly is the that I have ever been.

training and diet for our up- start my Peter's Half-eat Diet. ample, go to McDonald's buy You bring it back to your knife and cut the hamburger fries into two equal piles. Im- forethought, you wrap up one burger and one of the piles empty bag, walk over to the deep inside.



and dive into the plastic bag, and while the will is still strong, cut that little baby in half. Quickly now, and with out thinking, unwrap one half and throw it out the window. In this case I think it's OK to litter—the birds will probably find it anyway. Now enjoy that brown creamy beauty!

Well, that's it. It worked once for me, I hope it works again. I sure would like to be in shape, and at my age I use that term loosely, for our trek across the wilds of Sumatra.

12/16/96

Parking lot of Fabric Warehouse

Hurray!, our show season is over, and we have begun to shop for our trip. Kim is in Fabric Warehouse buying some fabric to make bags, although they are marked proven themselves to be most of our tropical

And so, how is coming? Well, up Things have just But today I With just 20 days Xmas and New I'm not too sure to do, but "nothing

From here we around to some of the to purchase more of the our trip. We're going to try a hectic shopping day. This wrong foot with one of our wholesale had not sent.

As the time gets nearer and nearer we get more and more nervous.



a new set of sleeping bags. Our old as warm weather bags, have consistently too hot for climate trips.

my half-fast diet till now it has not. been too hectic. started again. till we leave, and Years in between of how I am going ventured..."

are going to go sporting good stores gear that we'll need for to not bust our stones with morning started off on the orders calling to bitch about something we

KIM'S PROLOGUE

10/08/96

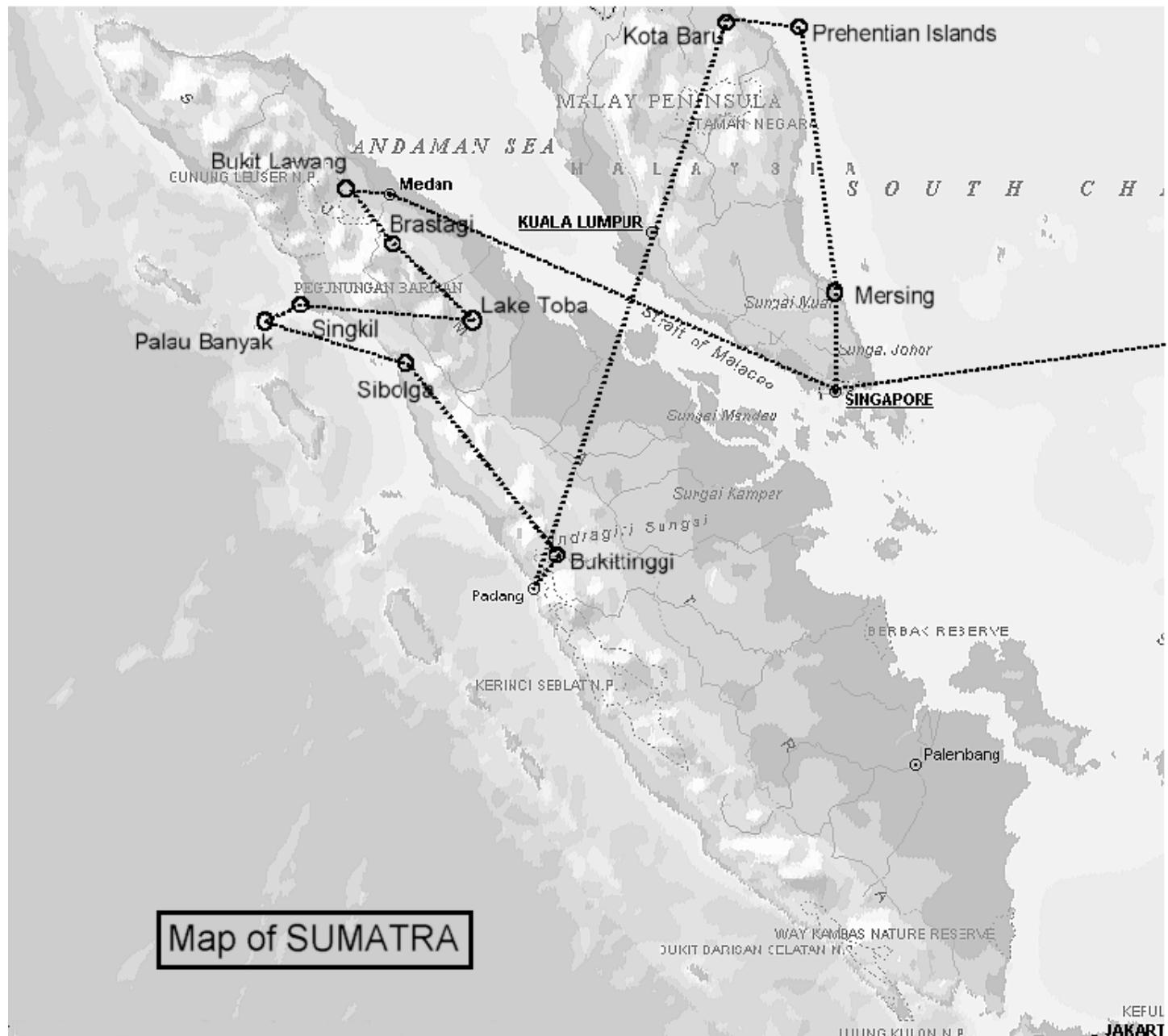
The journey begins long before the plane takes off toward any destination. There are all the musings over possibilities...so many things to see — so little time!!! Our musing/planning for an adventure has begun again and we are trying to sort out a really special place. With \$1,000 credit for each of us on American Airlines, we have decided to at least try to get ourselves out of this hemisphere. The likelihood of our having this much money toward travel all at once again is slim and we can usually find easy ways around and through North, South and Central America.

Last week, on an unprecedeted day off in the middle of our busy show season, thanks to the employees who were busily filling orders while we planned for a day in the city, we decided to hit the bookstore and try to get a bit of "adventure" focus. Barnes & Noble has the enticing soft chairs so we could nestle in and peruse ALL the available information...and even suck down some dandy Starbuck coffee. After a few maps and books, we settled on Indonesia. Rather than hit the more highly developed areas of civilization in this region we narrowed our sights down to Borneo and Sumatra. Peter honed in on the Sumatra reading and I got a wonderful guide to Borneo. Purchases in hand, we headed home with our "bedtime" reading and a feeling that we were about to get into something different than anything we have done before...together.

In the days that followed, we were able to fine tune our focus with information that indicates that the trip to Borneo, while potentially more primitive, would by the same fact, be more expensive...fewer means and ways to travel from point to point. Sumatra, certainly not overly-advanced 1st world material, does seem to have a few more roads on its maps and vehicles specializing in getting vistors from point to point are referred to in the guidebook. Sounds like tourism to me! It seems appropriate that I now need to formally abandon my Borneo book and try to find another guidebook to Sumatra that will let us fill in the picture together. We have always seemed to be able to find complimentary travel guides...one with lots of specific details and another with a lot of stories and anecdotal support of the adventure of going to these places. Peter is now ingesting Lonely Planet's guide to Indonesia and I bought the little phrase book they put out. We hope to set some dates and get the tickets bought by the end of the week.

11/08/96

We bought our tickets. No matter what else follows, if this trip does get off the ground, we know only that on Jan 10, 1997, we will be in Singapore. From there we will go somewhere. It is the most expensive city in the world, so we are unlikely to stay there unless we want to make the two month trip into a two week one.



Medan and Berstagi

KIM
1/9/97

In the Air over the Pacific

With just about 24 hours of traveling time under our belts, we still have no really firm ideas of what we will be doing once we hit Singapore, but we have established a temporary plan that helps us to look at least a little organized, and gives relatives and friends a false sense of assurance that they might be able to track us down. It also helps us keep from coming unglued. We have limited ports of entry into Indonesia and are tentatively looking at entering at Pekanbaru. From there we will travel directly on, possibly via train, to the coast and Siberut Island, on to Lake Toba, the orangutan preserve, Banda Aceh, the Weh Islands, some of Malaysia...it will definitely fill our 2 1/2 months.

So far, we have been delayed twice in SA and re-routed once. The layover time in LA seemed short, but I am contrasting that with the 12hrs we have now been on this one flight from LA to Taipei. My buttocks is numb, my toes are pudgy and filled with fluid. I cannot extend them and walking up and down the aisles of the aircraft has been the only exercise any of the hundreds of us is able to do. Gratefully, it is the night flight and most of our bodies crave sleep. Mine is DEMANDING it. I have slept like a stone for several hours at a time, waking up only when cramps strike from having been too long in one position. We do have the very good fortune of being the ONLY row on this plane with a blank seat in the row of 4 people. It is between me and a very gentlemanly Asian businessman.

We were given a special travel pack at the beginning of the trip which I put into a special place and was not able to find once everyone had settled in for sleep. It had a pair of sleep socks,

a small toothbrush and toothpaste and a little sticky-backed sign you needed to put on the top of your headrest to prevent the attendants from waking you to offer the several amenities and meals that were part of the flight's standard issue. They were also trying to help us re-orient to the new time frames we would be entering. This did not help me enjoy the boiled shrimp and veggie dinner

I received at 2am in my own personal time. The smells were powerful

and I was very glad I was not pregnant. Throughout the flight we have been given juices, snacks, hot towels to refresh ourselves...they don't work, but the staff offers them with such grace and charm that it makes you feel that you've tried to do something nice for yourself. We have each got our own

personal TV in our own seat with a selection of 6 first run movies, TV shorts and travel guides. There is a video game selection and the remote is also a telephone...so cute!

I was fortunate at one point in the flight (depending on how you define fortunate...and I was defining it as being able to move.) At first, I was a bit reluctant to respond when we were awakened by the flight attendants paging for someone with medical background to help. There was a person in distress and of course my first prayer was that there would be a doctor who would respond. With the second page I put on my light, and when our attendant responded to it, it was apparent that only one other nurse been forthcoming. The woman in distress was on the other side of the plane several rows behind us and surrounded at this point by several attendants and the one other nurse. I later learned the other nurse had been out of practice much longer than I had. She deferred to me and I felt comfortable eventually working through my assessment skills. I remembered most of the right questions to ask that helped us truly rule out something serious and rule in a need



for some extra food and exercise. A seat in the first class section, a meal, and elevating her legs helped immensely. Later she hailed me from across the plane as we landed in Singapore, to thank me. The anxieties I had had about my care skills and my potential clumsiness in bridging the language and cultural differences as I needed to touch and question her, had been more easily resolved than I expected. Even better she walked happily off the plane with as much strength as the rest of us. And I had passed almost two hours "moving" and paying attention to someone other than my whiny self.

KIM
01/10/97
TAIPEI

It is sunrise and while we are confined to the airport corridors, we do have one hour to walk around before re-boarding and finishing off the 4 remaining hours of the flight. My hips seem to be the most affected parts of my body at this point. I want desperately to stand on my head, but am restrained by the thought of maintaining some degree of decorum that will show my respect for the cultural transition that has occurred. Peter and I are very tall and quite white. We already stand out well enough.

KIM
01/10/97
Singapore

We have arrived in Singapore and during the last 4 hours have decided that if it is at all possible we will try to go one more leg of our journey and get to Indonesia/Sumatra where we can just stop for as long as we need, to reclaim some form of restful orientation to time and comfort, in a place that we will not have to leave again until we choose to do so (as opposed to having the economics of Singapore do it for us). We will choose our port of entry based on whatever tickets we can get. The hope now, is for something into Medan, out of which we will then begin

our journey in reverse of our original itinerary.

Later: We have been respectfully screwed and have paid too much for our tickets, but in another few hours we will leave the Singapore airport and travel 1.5 more hours and be in Medan, the largest and "most cosmopolitan" of cities in Sumatra, per our Sumatran guidebook. There are several listings for very reasonable accommodations and we have now to hold out as these next hours pass, marking more hours awake than we have ever spent together. There is only a very thin veneer of courteous respect hanging delicately between us at this point in our fatigue. Neither of us is sure what the date or day is and the hour of the day is completely baffling us. I refuse to re-set my watch, feeling desperately like my only hold with the reality of time exists only in SA,TX,USA. I am a woman on a verge of I'm not sure what. I have become more than tired and am very hungry and every once in a while, I find myself looking at Peter, just wanting to hit him. This too shall pass.

PETER
01/11/97
Dhaksina Hotel
Medan, Sumatra

The trip to get here was beyond belief. We are somewhat seasoned travelers, but we did not expect the time everything took. 48 hours later we are in huddled up under the covers in our hotel room.

Singapore was about like we expected—only more so. Everyone at the Singapore airport spoke perfect English so it wasn't hard getting our wishes across. But it was a little too slick and clean for the Kim and Peter Traveling Road Trip. Instead of taking a bus into the city and finding a room, we opted to spend 4 more hours waiting for the next plane directly into Sumatra.

Sumatra only has a few entry points, so our choices were limited. Once we did the math there really was only one choice — Medan — and one airline — Silkair. When we inquired at the ticket

counter we were told by a nice young man, that people really didn't buy tickets at the ticket counter, they were too expensive. We were supposed to use "ticket agents." If we wanted, he would give us the number of one. Ali was his name. After a few fumbled attempts we got him on the phone. He said he would meet us in the lobby. After I hung up, and almost as soon as the words were out of my mouth, the absurdity of the situation came through.

"Where is he going to meet us?" Kim asked.

We both looked around at the enormity of the Changi International Airport and settled deep into thought. We need not have worried though, because Ali found us 5 minutes later with no problem. He knew just what we wanted and said he would meet us back here in one hour with the tickets.

An hour and a half later, another man carrying the tickets, found us in the coffee shop. I looked at them and they looked official enough, but they seemed to be a lot more money than we had agreed upon. He got out his cellular phone and called Ali who appeared just moments later. I explained the problem to him and he immediately called another "ticket agent" – the one I had talked to originally – the one who quoted me the price in American dollars. I thought it was Singapore dollars. So I thought the tickets were going to be \$130 each and they turned out to be \$180 already discounted. Whether we were right

or wrong or being scammed, it was still something we felt we had to do to get out of this too highly civilized country. In retrospect, it was probably my mistake, but we didn't know that then. It cost us about \$400 including airport tax for our one hour flight, but finally we were on our way.

As soon as we landed at the Medan airport I knew we had traveled far enough to start our adventure. For starters no one spoke English, and all of the signs were totally illegible. We had a guide book, The Lonely Planet's Guide to Sumatra, so we asked the taxi driver to take us to one of the recommended mid-priced hotels, the Dhaksina Hotel. The ride through the streets at high speed showed us we were indeed in very different place. It was night, and from a huge prayer tower situated in the middle of the city came loud chanting from a PA speaker. It was a special Muslim prayer time, called Ramadan. It is a time when the Muslims fast from sunup till sundown. It lasts, I read, about a month.

Our hotel was also about like I expected from a third world country. Fortunately, for us the night clerk spoke some pretty good English. Our room was on the third floor, and had a private bath, called a mandi. It was 30,000 Rupias, about \$13.00 US. It had a fan, small bed with a very hard mattress, and little else to recommend it, but we were glad to finally be done traveling. We fell immediately into an exhausted sleep.

MEDAN FACTS

Medan, the provincial capital of North Sumatra, is a cosmopolitan city of over 2 million inhabitants and a booming commercial center for the region's huge oil and agro-businesses. As a result of major international investments in plantation agriculture from the 1870s onward, it grew from a tiny village to a prosperous colonial city of some 60,000 people by 1943. Following independence, the population exploded at an even more rapid rate, with a dramatic influx of various Batak and other groups from all over Sumatra and Indonesia. Today it is by far the largest city on Sumatra, and the fourth largest in the nation-after Jakarta, Surabaya and Bandung.

Medan's inhabitants are notoriously forward and commercially astute, and physically the city has little to recommend it. Although numerous improvements have been effected in recent years, it has been difficult to sustain an adequate infrastructure to support such a large and growing urban population. Medan, like Topsy, "just growed"-and there have been major problems with electricity, water, drainage and pollution, many currently being tackled by the city's administration and all requiring urgent attention. Lower-lying parts of the city are increasingly subject to flooding due, at least in part, to the deforestation of the hinterland.



We woke early, about 6 AM Sumatran time, but 11:00 PM Texas time. We hadn't brought along fuel for the stove so, after several hours of lolling around our room, we went downstairs to get a cup of coffee. The night manager was gone and there wasn't anyone who spoke English. It took all of our energy just to get toast and coffee. It was even difficult trying to pay. Afterwards, we went for a walk on the street. It was loud, noisy and dirty. The people looked like we would be in trouble from thieves and scoundrels, but in fact all we found was kind, or at worst, indifferent treatment. After several hours of wandering around aimlessly we went back to our hotel room, buried our heads under the covers and fell asleep again.

The next day when we awoke, we went through pretty much the same scenario, and then again the next. Whether we wanted to or not we were going to have to make some effort to get out of there. There just was nothing interesting to see and we were quickly driving ourselves crazy. We poured over the guide books until we came up with the little mountain town of Berstagi, about 80 kilometers west of Medan. The next morning we packed, Kim went to cash some travelers checks into Rupias, and we took a taxi to the bus station.

KIM
01/13/97
Medan, Sumatra

We have awakened to our third day in Medan. Each day our bodies seem to be moving more surely toward recognition of the time zone we are in. The aches and bodily complaints from the prolonged sitting in planes and airports is subsiding. Today we woke up with the Muslim chanting sunrise prayers and felt gratefully a little more normal.

The guidebook refers to Medan as a "cosmopolitan" city. Based on a few other guidebook references, I am feeling a need to create my own dictionary of terms to help clarify our author's perceptions. While there is certainly a diverse population, I have always thought of the

word "cosmopolitan" referring to a certain level of sophistication associated with that diversity. In our 3 days here, no sophistication has been apparent. There are many different Asian groups and the city has truly grown like "Topsy"...if there was a plan, it got lost. The infrastructure has not supported a healthy expansion of the building needed to accommodate the many people living here. The pollution from the motorbikes and the motorized becaks is stressful and the waste management is lagging way behind its own demand.

We have gone light on eating the local food acknowledging that we need to take on each thing a little at a time. In any restaurant, the customer makes a choice from a number of dishes placed on the table. The bowl of rice you get is the base and you take a little of this and a little of that and in the end pay accordingly. It is still almost all "mystery" food to us. We look into the windows of the shops and try to identify things. In a little while, we will be ready to go for a local meal. In the meantime, we are eating a lot of fruit, peanut butter and crackers and an array of bakery items that is helping us to rule out very quickly what we like and what we do not. What looks great isn't always.

We both agree that, overall, we have definitely found something/someplace DIFFERENT. There is barely anything we can read...even on the biggest signs, with the exception of USA brand names. The rhythm of the language is absolutely unfamiliar and only a rare person speaks enough English to converse about more than the most necessary and fundamental directions or information. The hotels have a few who speak and understand English, but on the street and in the cabs, they know as much English as we know Bahasa Indonesia. There is a lot of grinning and nodding going on, but that's about it. Needless to say, we have been working very diligently at trying to put together some basic phrases. Our ethnocentrism glares in our faces. "The Ugly American" comes to mind.



Yesterday was a most humbling example of this. After rising at about 3:30am and not being able to convince our bodies to go back to sleep, we got up and had our coffee. We had planned to go to one of the markets in another part of the city. We confided with the concierge how much the should cost so we could negotiate with some dignity....bargaining is required. We set out filled with hopeful expectations and arrived at the fair price with a becak driver who in fact spoke some English. It was not motorized and Peter and I wedged our large selves onto the small seat, the driver balanced himself delicately with all our weight and I am sure he murmured a prayer that the rest of his hot day would only bring him the tiny local folks. We talked as he pedaled us to the market and went blissfully unaware of the time and distance that had elapsed. We got out and tried our best to graciously decline his offer to take us on a tour, wanting to take a leisurely walk back at our own pace. The ride there had taken us through a portion of the city's colonial refinement and some of its seedier commercial areas. I was stunned by the size of a dead rat we passed along the way...definitely a specimen for our Flattened Fauna memorabilia, but the camera just wasn't handy, so we will have to suffice the entry with a hand drawing. It was bigger and healthier (size-wise) than most of the cats we have seen.

The market was large and very uninspiring and we had no interest in the items that were primarily low-end K-mart variety...very cheap shirts, pants, plastic housewares. There wasn't any of the original fabric or clothing that we had hoped to find, so we left. Still being very wary

about what we were eating, we realized that it was midday and we had eaten nothing substantial, actually since we had left Singapore. The crackers and peanut butter we had had with coffee in the wee hours of the morning had long since been used up in that anxiety energy we had been growing familiar with. None of the shops along the street that took us back in our hotel's direction were places where we could safely eat.

We had brought small bottles of water and they were going fast...but not as fast as our patience. We walked over cluttered sidewalks, in traffic that made me understand the word "teeming" as never before and finally squabbled ourselves into a decision to sit in the shade of the English Institute's entrance to regroup.

The gatekeeper spoke not one word of English, but signaled that we were not creating any incivility or cultural offense by sitting on the cement and taking a drink of our water. As we tried to recreate some harmony between ourselves, the heat of the equatorial climate caught up with us. Peter began to laugh and I began to cry...we needed to go directly home and hide under the covers until "the bad man went away" We didn't even have a Rp bill small enough to pay a cabbie...we had only the denominations that you need when BUYING the cab, not taking a ride in it. No banks were open and none would open until the next day. We already knew that because we had spent the day before this wheedling it painfully out of a series of encounters and attempted conversations with people on the street.

Now we were also beginning to gather a crowd from the grounds of the Institute. Two other men had joined the gatekeeper and some-



one on a motorcycle had cruised by us more than two times. A larger motorcycle was off in the distance. This was a gathering of the curious and in no way did it ever seem threatening. Our frustration was in not being able to communicate with ANY of them. One of the men finally came forth with apologetic English that far surpassed our negligible Indonesian and had another friend come forth and change one of our large bills for small ones that would be workable for our cabbie. We thanked him numerous times in almost as many languages and went out to hail the cab which came along quickly, understood the name of our hotel and so we could sit back, feeling like we would finally get home.

The point to all of this for me was how completely out of control I could feel when I could not speak to communicate my feelings or needs to anyone. I was already stretching very few resources by heading out into the city's clamor after so little sleep. My joints still ached and I pressed myself into the situation where the physical limitations were aggravated tenfold by the frustrations that followed my lack of communication skills. Doing it WITH someone else intensified it even more because it multiplied the frustrations instead of allowing complimentary support that might have lightened the situation at another time. More frequently than not, Peter and I can work as compliments to each other, but in this situation we were equally hungry, tired, unable to communicate with our world and anxious about all of it. It was a lesson in how much I lack the simplicity that it takes to recognize where I am, and then to quit graciously while I am ahead.

As the taxi entered a more luxurious part of the city — there is little at the heart of the city between abject squalor and obscene wealth — we saw an incredibly beautiful Buddhist Temple in back of a park along the river that flows through town. After some confusion and many different words pulled out of our phrase book and dictionary, the cabbie diverted himself from our path back to the hotel, and left us off right in

front of the temple. We went in to find a group that resembled any of the best Catholic's Altar Societies, busy with their cleaning up the burnt up incense sticks and melted candle wax. We proceeded from one altar to the next and felt some of the reverence merge with the chaos in our own souls. We were most delighted to find the Laughing Buddha at the center of one of the shrines and we spent a little extra time there. Peter even opened his pouch to let a little of the blessing from this being into it. We didn't know how to ask if we could light a prayer candle or incense for Peter's mom, but we knew that our intent was recognized and mom was included in the heart of the loving Buddha for the time.

When we got back to the hotel we took a much needed nap and decided to go out for dinner at one of the places that would cook according to our transitional digestive needs. We headed for TipTop where expatriates hang out in Medan...went in a cab...and sat for a good while with recognizable cuisine and a beer that was warmish and cost more than our meal. Finishing with an ice cream-like dessert, we returned to the hotel, knowing full well that we had to leave Medan the next morning — it was essential to our survival. We would write out our conversation in advance, do our packing and money changing in the morning. We fell into sound sleep with a prayer of gratitude serenaded by the Muslim chanting...we had a plan!

PETER
01/15/97
Hotel DeMerrel
Berstagi

This is our second night here and it is a definite step up from the craziness of Medan. We have a lovely, but bare room with a verandah overlooking the jungle-covered mountains in the distance. It's a tad on the chilly side here, I'm just guessing that we are about 4500 feet above sea level, so even though the equator practically runs through the middle of our room, if the sun goes behind a cloud, it's time to put on a long sleeved shirt. We



have been relatively happy here, but we are still almost completely overwhelmed by the task that we have taken on. There is only one street in Berstagi, but on it runs a whole variety of vehicles, most in a very poor state of repair. They are loud belching missiles, rocketing along the street a varying rates of speed, but always at the maximum that that particular vehicle can go. It is a test of endurance to go anywhere. Fortunately, our room is off the main drag and we find ourselves retreating into the room's comfort whenever it gets to be too much to deal with.

The language has been a constant point of soreness with us. Every little move just requires so much effort that it quickly exhausts us. There is rarely a person that speaks English, and as for our Bahasa Indonesian, we are still working on trying to count to ten. I know that we have only been here a short time, less than a week, but the language is not coming very easily. Even the simple greetings that we practice over and over in our room, before taking to the streets, seem to evaporate from our minds once we are face to face with a stranger. We say "Hello" a lot more times than we would like to. And then we find we have no answer for their replies so we just nod stupidly, wave and walk on.

Even a simple walk along the one main street becomes very taxing on our nerves. The traffic, noise and constant shouts of, "Hello, Mister" we can only take in small doses. Last night we turned the opposite way from the highway and walked up the hill. We found that this is where all of the middle class people have their homes. The streets were quiet, with little traffic, and even though there were a lot of people out on the streets it was a

much more relaxed atmosphere. Families next to the streets encouraged their children to wave at us and say "Hello." We were stopped several times along our walk and engaged in conversation by people with varying degrees of English. Kim did

very well explaining to each in turn that we came from America, the word United Stated is apparently little understood here, that we were married, *suami-istri*, a really important thing here, and that she had two children, *satu anak laki-laki. dan satu anak perempuan*. The atmosphere was so much more relaxed that we quickly forgot our fears and just enjoyed being out and about on a walk in Sumatra. But by about the tenth conversation our brains were starting to go on overload and we yearned to be back at our hotel. Still, it was a pretty good breakthrough for us, and it was only our first week of an ad-

venture that we hope will last almost 3 months.

KIM

01/13/97

BERSTAGI

We did it all. Changed the money, repacked, and wrote out several conversation possibilities that would cover getting us from the hotel to the bus station and from the bus station to Berstagi. In this latter effort, we wrote out phrases, but highlighted the key words in case the responses came too fast. Repeating key words like — Bus...Berstagi...—is often most effective. A full phrase often leads the other person to a firm belief that person-to-whom-you-are-speaking knows how to speak the language fluently. The responses then reduce my capacity for any further efforts to about zero.

BERSTAGI (BRASTAGI)

Berastagi is a picturesque hill town in the Karo Highlands, only 70 km from Medan on the back road to Lake Toba. The setting is dominated by two volcanoes: Gunung Sinabung to the west and the smoking Gunung Sibayak to the north.

At 1300 meters above sea level, the climate is pleasantly cool, and the town is a favorite weekend destination for Medan day trippers and weekenders.

Travelers come for two main reasons - to experience the culture of the Karo Batak people, and to go trekking. Berastagi is crawling with guides for ticks into the Gunung Leuser National Park or to surrounding volcanoes and attractions.

Single key words acknowledge your ignorance right away and support efforts for growing in humility...someone always seems to get us pointed in an appropriate direction which we re-confirmed as many times as possible while we move from point "a" to point "b".

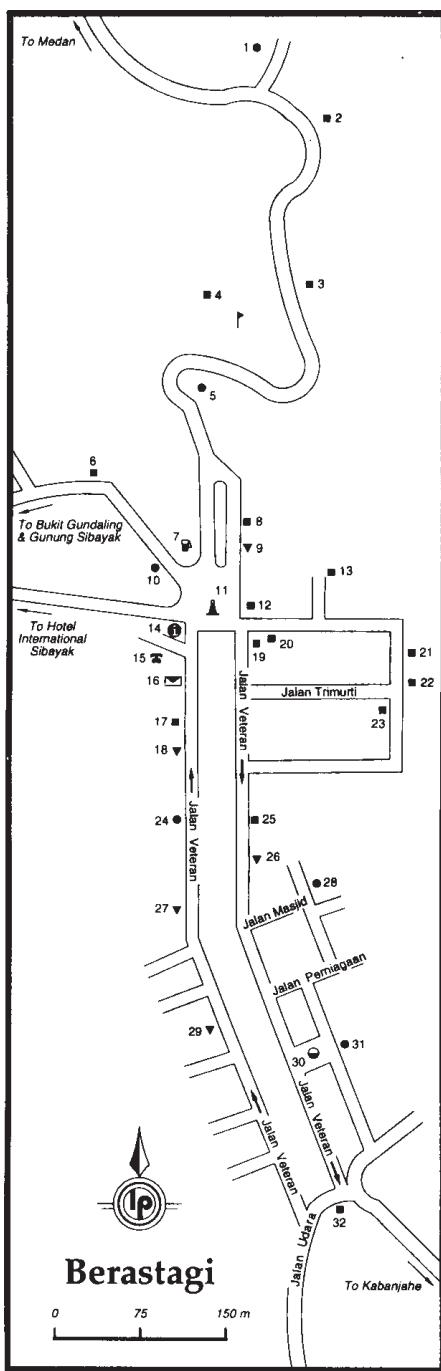
The bus was small and we are big...poor combination, but everyone made noble efforts at making us comfortable as we climbed over the seats (there was no aisle) to the place where we were supposed to sit. Peter was able to see out the front window while I was gratefully blocked from seeing anything in our path. The window at my side was broken and had been taped so my view to the side was limited. A grab-bar also ran even more directly across my line of vision. I didn't really care...I was leaving the city. The bus made me feel like we were in Mexico. Extravagant use of color and sparkly embellishments surrounded the windshield and rounded out the paint job on the outside of the bus. Photographs of the bus were framed and hung over the windshield. I would wonder later if these were the bus we were in or perhaps other buses that had gone on to bus-heaven under this same driver's ministrations.

Even though the road was curvy and had a number of hairpin turns that normally would have really done the motion sickness thing to me, I think the fear factor involved in the ride counteracted any possibility for nausea completely.

Choosing between the two, terror was the more gracious and socially acceptable response...grinding my teeth in my fear was far less offensive and ingracious than vomiting all over the 6 or 7 people in front of me. My otherwise defiant digestive tract succumbed to cultural decorum for the next few hours.

Berastagi is a one-street town that is a hub and crosspoint for several other points into the highlands. It's markets supply much of Medan's agricultural needs and the tourism has positively affected the highlands in that it appears to have a true manifestation of eco-tourism. The local people are the guides for trips and share stories that truly are the local heritage. They are warm and friendly and do not have the edge that occurs when tourism has exceeded the physical and spiritual resources of a given area. It is easy to feel that there is an exchange occurring between the people who render the services to the travelers and vice versa. There is a balance that sustains a sort of joy on both sides.

We were greeted on arrival by one of the guides who suggested that we might find it more quiet if we took our room in DeMerrel Guesthouse



just up the hill, away from the main drag, and it was so. The room is large and sparse but it has a private bath and a balcony that has made us feel the pressures of Medan melt away. Still feeling vestiges of the jet lag, amidst the clamor of



Every kind of Sumatran fruit we could find

Medan, I am content to do very little here in Berstagi other than sit on the balcony and look at the clouds move around the mountain directly in front of us. The walk to the volcano seems like a good idea for another day and I am not quite sure yet which day that will be. We did respond to the Japanese man in the room just below us by tagging along on a trip to the hot springs and a soaking that energized me more than anything else thus far. The ride on the minibus to and from was much longer than we expected, but it was colorful. Going out, we practiced words and phrases with the 14yr old schoolgirls riding home on the same bus. We had been eased into this event by Mr Hiragi who spoke adequate Bahasa Indonesia, knew what to pay in fares and entrance fees and was willing to help us make our transition.

01/16/97

I am still pressuring myself to do more than my body and soul should. Is it my age that makes me fall apart so quickly? It is so overwhelming to me to know that when I walk out the door in the morning I will be able to communicate with almost no one. The words are long and complex and use my tongue differently. I have recognized that I have limited energy for working at this, too. The long, adventurous walk we had planned for this morning got scrapped in favor of simply coming home from breakfast, and on the way, buying one or two pieces of each of the different fruits found in abundance in the market we pass

going back up the hill. We decided that our day's adventure would be tasting the fruit on our terrace. They are unusual and nothing like any fruit we have ever seen, so it certainly qualifies for "adventure" for us.

It exhausted all language skill we had and believe it or not that makes me as tired as any physical exercise I've ever done. We were able to find two fruit vendors who were sweet, friendly and who also spoke a little English and were willing to tolerate our attempts at Bahasa Indonesia. Each one threw something extra when Peter bargained. When we returned to the Guesthouse, we were so excited we shared the English words for each item with John, the young man who has come from Medan to work at this place. He told us the Indonesian name as we gave him the English ones he had not yet learned. He reminded us gently not to expect so much from ourselves. He encouraged us to be patient with our learning and do it a few words a day. The overwhelming cloud had indeed already left me for the most part and I did not feel apologetic about my plan to go back to the room and read for the rest of the afternoon...so I did.

KIM

01/16/97

Our balcony faces the rising sun and its warmth makes me feel soft. The hillside is carefully terraced and grasses have grown to make



Kim writing on the verandah at DeMerrel Guesthouse

the edges smooth at each drop to the next level. When we walked through the quieter part of town last night, we got to be nearer to the gardens and see the healthy lettuces and chards and onions that were being impeccably cared for. The soil is rich and each garden is tended with great love, its mounds rising with perfect uniformity above the irrigation rows. Weeds have no chance. The men, women and children are vigilant guardians of that which is supposed to be growing...and that which does not belong is ruthlessly extracted.

The view over the fields leads to a "bukit"...a mountain that rises above all the rest of the landscape. It is subject to the whims of the clouds. Some sail by quickly and others rest their fluffy "bulk" serenely as if to say they would like to stay a while. So, they appear to reflect and meditate together while the rest of us wake up, sip coffee and make plans for the beginning of the day. The women just below us are feeding their infants and a man is helping his wife hang out the family's wet laundry. Peter is thumbing through the phrasebook and typing as he sips his coffee and I know he is probably trying to figure out how to ask for another blanket. Everyone has this day to move into.

I cannot change the fact that I cannot communicate in Indonesian today, but I can change my lack of patience with this fact. I can learn five more words and I can retreat to the peace of our room when I need to restore my resources. I can truly enjoy exactly what this day holds for me, even if it is just my own clumsiness. As I

listen to Susie move around with the morning activity in the kitchen, I am in fact quite excited about the idea of one of her lemon sugar pancakes for my breakfast. But first, Peter and I will take our time to "be friends" and figure out what might be an agenda for our day.

Later: It is evening and the Muslim prayer for sunset has been intoned. We had a thoroughly enjoyable day. After a delicious crepe-like pancake with crystals of sugar over which I squeezed sweet-sweet lemon juice, I sipped a glass of sweetened ginger tea, and talked with John and some German and Danish travelers about ideas and opin-

ions on a few other destinations. The feedback on the trek to the orangutan preserve was good but Jon's description of the 3 day route knocked that one right off the list...25km walks for 2 days in and out of the jungle, and a day of walking a little slower in between...too much for right now, thanks. In another day or so we will take the less rigorous trip to the preserve and for today we will take in the National Park just down the road. The minibus leaves from the gas station at the foot of the hill, just a block or so from us. We have packed a lunch and set out, each feeling the increased lightness in our steps. Our perspectives of everything was much less intense and we knew a good day was waiting out there.

We were unashamedly ripped off for our minibusride to the park. We had forgotten what Jon had said the cost should be and when the driver smiled and said 2,000 it just seemed like going along with it was ok. Before leaving the



Typical Batak style house



Streets of Berstagi

park later, we did ask the gardener working in the front of the park how much we should pay and he told us it was 300/ea. We got it right and smiled thinking of how the driver of the morning bus would describe the ride with the "big white people" to his wife that night. He probably took the rest of the day off after he let us off!

Tahura is a 57,000hc preserve whose primary growth is long since gone. There has been select cutting on the current growth. There are paths for all levels of hiking interest, skill and enthusiasm. The selection of caged animals is sad and fortunately there were only 2 captives in the cages along the back of the park. The gardener we talked with after our walk said that when the wild monkeys see and hear a number of travelers coming into the park, they come down from the canopy and walk right up to people for food. There is an elephant available for something like the pony rides in a carnival. There is a display of Batak-style buildings and accommodations in several of them for lodging. There are some walkways and a plaza that are the efforts to make the park's entrance area special. Many of the people from Medan make it a week-end adventure out of the city. Even if they go no further than the plaza it is a good deal, just having come away from that city. The hiking back into the rest of the acreage is sublime.

We picnicked and spent several hours relaxing before we returned to Berstagi. We still had plenty of energy and hit the more intense

segment of the open market when we got back to town – the one that had distressed us so the 1st day we arrived. The mud had dried which relieved 80% of the dismal smell. The minibuses stream in and out taking and leaving produce and small livestock. The Batak women wear their unique headdresses and their children are nursed and cradled in their slings as naturally as the women's breathing. Some of the women chew beetle nuts which stain their teeth red and apparently produce a euphoria. It's addictive qualities are similar to nicotine and interestingly, it is only the women who chew these nuts. The men smoke. We had been told that the men do not generally drink a lot of alcohol...about 5% drink excessively. The presence of the Muslim religion has probably been the biggest influence in this realm. It is so different from the amount of drinking among the men in Mexico and Central America.

We stopped for a few items in one or two shops...cookies and a chocolate bar or two — essential staples to take back to the room — then found a restaurant where a stop for a snack turned into our evening meal. I love this food and am anxious for the time when I can feel comfortable eating more of the vegetables raw. I am doing it a little at a time to increase my tolerance. My fried Tofu with peanut sauce was spicy and delightful. The fried banana with vanilla sauce won no awards. It was dry and bland and it took a good dose of ginger tea to get the taste gone.

On the way out of the restaurant we decided to get a few more post cards and I was hoping that we had missed the school dismissal. I was sadly wrong and that is another story.

Later: The School Dismissal became an event that was a threat for me that increased or softened my anxieties, according to several variables. First however, school and education in Sumatra are prized, and in both the university and vocational education, English is actively taught. The teachers recognize the value of

speaking with a native so they encourage the already gregarious students to approach tourists and try out their language skills. First we responded enthusiastically to the passing child who asked "Hello Mister, how are you?" This must have put the word out into their network so that, as the days passed, if we were seen as the kids were leaving school session, they would come directly to us, even insisting several times that we must come to their school the next day. We discovered that anyone snaring an English-speaker, and bringing him/her/them into the classroom, would get extra "value". We had been targeted by a number of enthusiastic students as their potential year's worth of extra credit and their A+.

It was not as if there was just one session for each of the schools, either. The school day seemed to be divided into two sessions for about 4 or 5 separate schools. When the dismissal occurred, the street towards our Guesthouse was a literal sea of children. If we were at the base of the hill, they appeared a lot like lava pouring down a mountain...slowly, surely moving undeterred in the downhill flow, until the one thing appeared that could redirect its flow...the English-speaker. No matter what reason we gave, they insistently accompanied us back to the Guesthouse and then it was imperative that they get us to write our address into a special book each one carried just for this purpose. Then they waited for us to offer them the chance to write theirs down for us. If the camera was spotted a whole other dimension formed and they wanted a photo of themselves with one of us. As opposed to those cultures who feel the camera steals part of the soul, this culture feels that a photo with a tourist is a badge of honor.

We have since, even had adults stop us for photos with their families. I wonder if this is how the stars feel when they are mobbed by fans? I found myself running for cover if I sensed the time for school to let out.

The final school-related event occurred the evening before we were to leave Berastagi. We had taken a walk to the far end of town where a bulletin board in another Guesthouse offered suggestions for activities, etc., in some of the other areas around Sumatra. I knew the afternoon dismissal was coming on us as we completed our information gathering and I suggested to Peter that we just sit in the gardens until it all passed. We were safe behind a wall and could glimpse the ebb and flow of the kids without being seen...or so I thought.

I began to get nervous when I saw a formally dressed professional woman come through the gate, followed sheepishly by a group of about 8 boys. She had us cornered. She asked if the children could practice their lessons with us. They sat down in a semicircle around our bench and were joined by a group of girls. Each one took a turn reading a question from several legal-sized pages. The sentences were extremely complex but we went along and even had them show us the paper when we were completely stumped by a mispronounced word. I tried to get an exchange going to get some practice in with our Indonesian, but it failed miserably. We finally entered into it wholeheartedly, knowing when it was time to give up. It was, as Peter pointed out, a small price to pay for the warmth we were experiencing among these people.

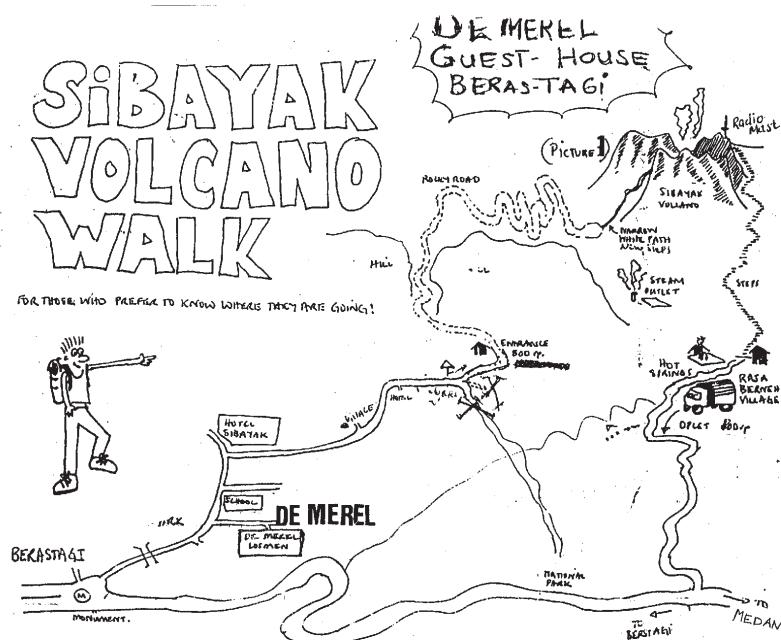


PETER
01/17/97
De Merrel Hotel
Berstagi, North Sumatra

Sitting on our verandah overlooking the mountains in the distance, Kim and I have decided to take a slow day today. Yesterday was our first real adventure — at least the first one that succeeded. We actually managed to get all of the way to our intended destination, have a good time, and return home in shape to do more than bury our heads under the covers.

We went to Tahura National Park, a place that many others have warned us was not at all that interesting. In fact, at the Wisma Sibayak, a guesthouse kind of geared toward young backpackers, there were more than a few signs posted by disgruntled tourists who had gone there and been disappointed in one way or another. One posted note even said that the caged animals were kept in an abominable state and that she was going to write a letter to some animal rights group when she returned to her country. I knew that these accounts were probably pretty accurate, but the fact that these attractions were just at the entrance to the Tahura Reserve, which extended for miles, gave me the idea that we probably wouldn't be too far from at least an interesting walk.

I was right. The park itself was very interesting, but in a semi-dilapidated state. There was a zoo, which consisted of two animals, a young honey bear, and some sort of monkey with only one arm, no doubt the butt of some tourists prank. Their cages were dark and filthy, and they had a sad look in their eyes which just made you want to set them free. There were also a number of typical Batak houses, which were rectangular wooden structures built up on piles, with high pointed roofs. The eaves were gaily painted with designs from



One of the many walks that we didn't do

the region. The park had on interesting, somewhat formal layout and we wandered around the entrance attractions for about an hour or so, but our eyes kept wandering to the forested covered hills beyond. Eventually, we could stand it no more, and we made our way up the first path that we found. Immediately our whole world began to change. This is what we had come to Sumatra to find — interesting wilderness. We headed up hill till we could not see or hear signs of people. We then sat down and had a picnic. The stillness calmed our souls. The only sounds were that of nature calling to us. The forest was mostly pines and huge deciduous tree with a lightly vegetated floor. After finishing our rest we headed over the hill into the cool north side, where it had a more tropical feel. Here where the ground was constantly wet, huge bromeliads grew in the crotch of every tree, and giant ferns carpeted the floor. Tropical butterflies filled the air.

We slowly walked along, I taking in the whole feel of my first Indonesian tropical jungle, and Kim stopping every few feet to closer study some new plant. After wandering and sitting, wandering and

laying, etc., we headed back to Berstagi. In town we found a nice restaurant on the main street were they sold food that we recognized and we had a pleasant meal, warmed by our feelings of completing our first adventure.

PETER
01/17/97
Wisma Iku
Berstagi

Just goes to show that things change in the blink of an eye. We had just finished eating a delicious breakfast at one of the restaurants on the main, and only drag. Kim was at the PO mailing another batch of postcards to her many friends, when the two girls who ran the restaurant came running up the street. They caught up with us as we were leaving the PO.

“Military at your hotel! Hotel De Merrel! You go now, OK?”, they shouted.

It took a while for it all to sink in, but when it did we began hurrying up the hill to see what the problem was. All kind of thoughts flashed through our minds as we ran/walked half out of breath with the effort and with the fear. As we walked up the dirt road we could see a good-sized crowd sitting around the yards and street surrounding the De Merrel. When we approached all of the kids began to shake their heads, point and stomp their feet, anything it seemed to get the point across that we should not go in there. On the lower porch were about 8 men dressed in military clothes. Around the rest of the property and through the open windows others could be seen. Our friend Ferdinand was waiting on the steps of porch. “You get your things out of room, now OK?”

“OK! Now!,” we replied.

As we walked past the military, I grinned sheepishly to them, bobbing my head up and down like on idiot, repeating over and over, “OK?” It appeared to be OK because we were allowed to go up stairs where we began to gather up our belongings. We saw our Japanese friend Ishi at the

top of the stairs. He was talking – no, shouting — a little too load for my taste, considering the circumstances, so we just bowed to him, and went into our room.

We packed up our things a quickly as possible. Not as quickly, however, as they would have liked, I assume, because they kept looking into our room to see if we were done. As we were almost done, two guards came into our room and began to dismantle the bed while our stuff was on it. We quickly moved our bags to the floor. In just minutes the bed was removed, and that seemed to time perfectly with our exit. On the way out Ferdinand gave us our bill, 50,000 rupiah, about \$21 US, for 4 days worth of stay and various meals. I didn’t even look closely at the bill, but just paid and left.

We walked back down the street to the closest Guesthouse, practically next door. It looked very nice from the outside but when we were shown our room, it was small and dank with 2 single beds, and a small window with bars on it.

“*Barapa*,” I asked the young man.

“Six thousand,” he replied.

Kim and I quickly bargained him down to 4000 Rp, but there was no joy in it after leaving our lovely room with balcony and private bath. I asked about a nicer room, but it seems that Ishi had made it here first and secured the best room in the place. In the end Kim found another room facing the garden, and we felt a little better.

BUKIT LAWANG

KIM
01/18/97

Berstagi to Bukit Lawang

Peter has just read his enthusiastic encounter of our entry into Bukit Lawang and our eventual arrival at the Jungle Inn where I have now spent the entire first day, moving from one place in the room to another on the verandah, waiting for the germ-warfare occurring so violently in my intestines to offer some sign of a truce. I have, as a result, been relegated to sharing the perspective of travel to this point, as what I describe as The Minor Personal Insults, Injuries and Annoyances of Almost Any Travel. The trip here was a good beginning, and I might entitle it *She'll Be Puking Down The Mountain When She Comes* – you can hum along if you like.

We set out with bus reservations, leaving Berstagi. Happily, we were on a very uncrowded bus — just one other couple in the mini-van and they both spoke English. They had spent a lot of time traveling in SE Asia and were very amiable. The driver seemed a little terse, spoke no English and appeared to be in his 20's. I had not thought about using the Dramamine for the travel. I had not been sick on the way into Berstagi and figured that somehow I had miraculously overcome my old motion-sickness patterns. This was a very **WRONG** assumption!!!! Only a few turns on the hairpin curves along the mountain road that lead out of town, and I knew that I was in serious trouble. We could not find anything in the vehicle to grip to keep us from being thrown from one side of the bus to the other as we hurtled down the mountain. Since it was a mini-van, the distances we were being

flung weren't physically life-threatening. Seatbelts are unheard of here. Peter had ground his heels between the seats in front of him. I groped wildly through the top of my pack and opened our bag of medicines. I threw down 2 Dramamine without any liquid, and begged them to kick in. It was begging gone to the winds!!! A few curves later I could feel my stomach contents sloshing and that saliva thing was happening like crazy in my mouth. I

was marking time. I opened the sliding window as far as it would go. I hung my head out and the wind on my face was welcome relief for a brief moment until I took careful aim downwind and lost a day's worth of groceries onto the side of the van and into the rapidly passing air.

To my surprise, I felt the van slowing down. I was assuming a sensitive response was manifesting itself in our driver. I still did not know that the kindness of a man in his town or home was totally transformed once he took the driver's seat in a moving vehicle. Mr. Hyde had left Dr. Jekyll in the dust. The man

came to a turn-out, pulled the van in and leaped out grabbing a hose from somewhere and began vigorously washing down the side of his precious vehicle. Peter had me get out of the van, but it did nothing to soothe the savage beast that had been unleashed inside me. The driver continued as before, and I dry-heaved my way on to Medan where we gratefully changed drivers.

Peter hovered around the new driver, trying to convince him of the importance of driving slowly, in hopes of defending me. The new driver was in fact, a bit older, certainly a little slower and while I couldn't enjoy the scenery, I was able to sleep without being hurtled from side to side

BUKIT LAWANG

FACTS

Bukit Lawang, 80 km north-west of Medan, is on the eastern edge of the giant Gunung Leuser National Park. The country is wild and enchanting with dense jungle and clear, fast-flowing rivers. It is also the site of the famous Bohorok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre, which has made this once-remote village into one of the most popular spots in Sumatra. Many tourists opt to spend four or five days here.

It is a very popular weekend destination for Medan people, which means accommodation can be hard to find on a Saturday. The foreign tourists have the place pretty much to themselves during the week.



across the van and my stomach did begin to settle.

I was even more relieved at our arrival that evening in Bukit Lawang. Choosing our accommodations did not seem to be something we couldn't do easily. The guides came from all sides and spoke fluent English. Solomon lead us chattily to our first lodging in Bukit Lawang. It was beautifully nestled along the river and provided us with absolutely luxurious accommodations for only about \$2.00US. It was later that evening that we discovered why it cost so little. The celebration of Ramadan intensifies all the prayer modalities within all the Muslim communities. The chanting from the minaret here in Bukit Lawang outdid anything we had yet encountered in both fervor and volume. These people get to heaven on sheer effort as they pray daily the 5 or so times required by the Koran.

Peter usually sleeps through ANY noise...our camping ground once in Cancun was surrounded with 3 disco's and he did not lose a moment of sleep...it was hateful. Poetic justice did however finally arrived in Sumatra, with the intonation of the 10pm chant. We both finally had to give up any hope for rest or sleep, and just tried to read since even a conversation was ruled out by the volume. The steady drone was finally broken at midnight. We were hopeful, and rushed into sleep with dreams of uninterrupted hours leading us to dawn. Not much later, however, a crackle of electricity signaled our slumbering nerves. The chanting resumed with similar volume and conviction at 3am, continuing fervently until 5am. The few meager hours of sleep that followed this last round did not buoy our spirits or sanctify us in any other way.

When we finished our early dawn coffee, the fray of our un-rested nerves lead us out to find something out of the mosque's range. (One woman we met had developed a "mosque-patrol" she applied whenever she entered a new town. You have to find the sight of the PA System in the prayer centers, before choosing ANY room.

We understood the concept completely now, and had a new perspective for our choices added to all future travels — Ramadan had only just begun and would continue for the rest of the month!)

Silently trudging through the town, we lead ourselves eventually to the Jungle Inn — the place we had originally planned to go to, based on the recommendation of our guide book. It was incredibly salving. We ate a delicious meal at the restaurant and it restored our tattered resources. We returned to our first hotel, apologized to Solomon who had taken us there and who also understood our need to move. We waved a cheerful "Selamat jalan", loaded our packs onto our backs and trudged back up the steep path-road to the Jungle Inn. I mentioned to Peter as we walked, that it seemed to be our pattern to



Taking the canoe to the preserve

do our hardest work in the hottest part of the day. It seems to be another aspect of that buy-high/sell-low approach we take with real estate or any other of the many special efforts we make to assure that we are doing all things the hard way.

The shower we took when we reached our room felt heavenly and I resolved to wash our clothes and my hair the next day. For now though, my body was clean and refreshed. I have dreadlocks and understand how they have evolved as a hair-style...it is much too painful to comb or brush very curly hair on a regular basis.

As a result, it just continues to get curlier and curlier until it matts. Lia would be proud of what presently rests on my head in the name of hair.

We decided in the early evening to take a walk down into town. After a little distance, it began raining so that we turned around and came back to eat our dinner at the Jungle Inn. Sitting there, as we ordered our meal, an unsettledness in my digestive tract began to make itself known. I

went back up to the room to change into dry pants with a softer waistband, hoping that this would relieve my growing distress. It was only a few minutes after I got back to Peter in the restaurant that I realized that I was not going to pass gently through this meal. No change of clothing or other friendly external effort was going to change the course of nature that had already been set in motion. Peter said he would bring my meal up to the room when he finished his, just in case I felt better. I made my way up the numerous steps to our room, noting that the little walking we had done had also taken a toll on all the muscles of my legs — pain was rising in thighs, calves and feet.

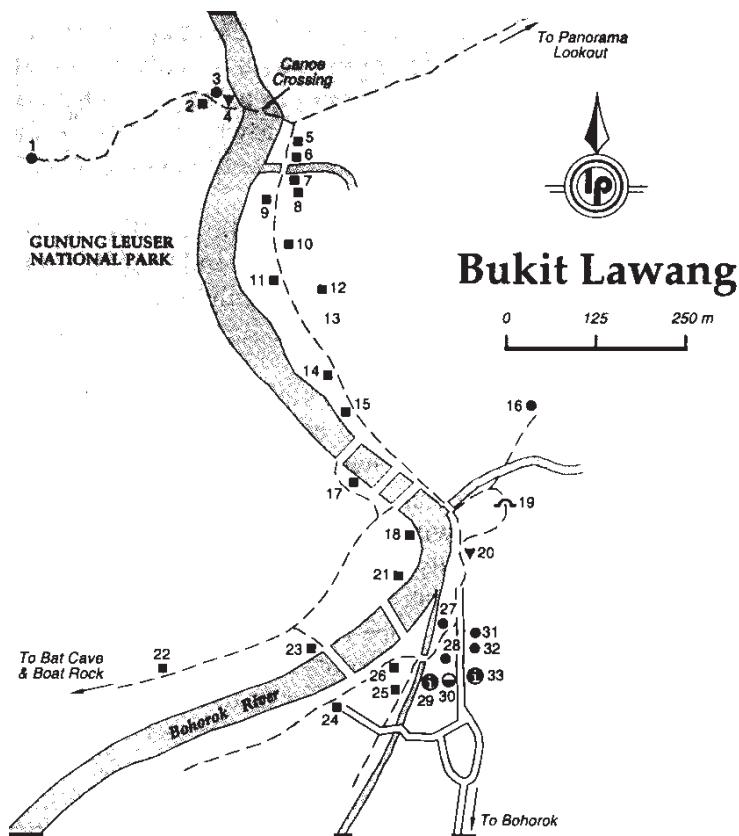
I got into the room and flattened my sad little body onto the bed, knowing that I had probably now taken in enough of the local variation

of E.Coli that would not be recognized as "self" by my own North-American strain. It was that time that comes to most of us when we travel in the 3d world countries when the personal bacterial warfare occurs so that we can finally say we have arrived. It is the event that allows us finally to go wholeheartedly into eating local food and even drinking local water sometimes. It is not a pretty transition, but the outcome is most often worth it. My personal skirmish had begun and I was entering the no-fart zone. Through

the rest of the night, I gave generously back to the earth from the other end of my digestive system. As I entered the worst part, I felt like I was being taken as the prisoner of war and I was not so sure that the victory would be mine. My skin hurt, my heiny was sore and my muscles ached like I had backpacked Mt. Everest. I wanted to whine about how ungraciously I seemed to be cop-

ing — I wanted to blame my aging process — I wanted to protest it all, but it took too much energy.

Peter awakened in the morning in excellent spirits and I didn't begrudge him that at all. I had, long before his cheerful and enthusiastic rising, resolved that I would not leave our room for the whole day. As I am writing, the ginger tea, Gatorade and crackers seem to have become instrumental in negotiating at least a temporary truce in my tummy. I will join Peter later



for a bowl of steamed rice to celebrate this achievement and vicariously enjoy his walk to town, adventure with the monkeys and his afternoon trip to the orangutan preserve. Me, I have had 4 naps in 3 different places in our precious living space — as indescribable an adventure as I could ever have wanted today!



*These Orangatans are the guys that I traveled so far to see
(Orang-utan -- men of the forest)*

PETER

01/18/97

Bukit Lawang, Orangutan Preserve

I feel like I am in midst of some kind of Muslim endurance test. The chanting now goes on, it seems forever. Bukit Lawang, where we arrived today by mini-bus torture trip, is laid out in a long line. The town follows the rushing Bohorok River.

Everything is on either side of the river including the Mosque. It is now 10PM and the chanting has gone on for the past two hours. We are very unfortunate to have picked a place just across the river from the mosque. The prayers are broadcast over four cheap PA system speakers set at full blast. On the top of the mosque is the minaret, it is dome-shaped and is covered in shiny tin. Now I don't know this for sure, but it seems to me that the little fellow yelling his prayers sits in the middle of the dome with a couple of speakers pointing in all the directions of the compass. The tin must act as a some kind of cheap, but very effective reverb unit. As if the poor quality speakers were not bad enough, the distortions as the sounds waft over the thin metal sides can grate on your nerves like someone's fingernails on a chalkboard. And yet the chanting goes on and on.

We met a guide today upon our arrival named Solomon. He told us that there are 21 chants that go on in any one set, but count as we might we always come up to the hundreds before finally giving up, frustrated and exhausted. It is 11:30 PM and still it goes on. It's loud and the sounds don't make any sense. Why could they be doing this night after night. I know it's Ramadan, a month long of fasting and prayer, but why someone doesn't go out and wring this little fellow's neck I'll never know.

Hey listen!, the sounds have stopped. Oh no, now there is some adolescent boy doing the same muddled, sing-song chants again and again. Will it ever end? Will we ever get to sleep? This is three nights in a row! God please help us to find a quiet campsite somewhere in the middle of the jungle away from all civilization soon!

PETER

01/19/97

Bukit Lawang, Jungle Inn

Well, you guessed it, we moved. The Muslim prayers started again at 3:30AM this morning. They went on till just after 5. I had visions of putting on dark clothes, painting my face black, sneaking up behind the mosque and slitting the electrical wires

ORANGUTAN FACTS

The best known animal in the park must surely be the orangutan *Pongo pygmaeus*. The Sumatran subspecies (which lives only in and around Leuser National Park) differs slightly from the one found in Borneo, but essentially both lead the same sort of solitary nomadic life, slowly moving through the trees of the lowland forests in search of food and occasionally company.

Orangutans are the largest arboreal mammals in the world. Large males can achieve weights up to 90 kgs. Yet despite their weight they are able to move through the canopy fluidly, and with an assuredness that is a product - not just of instinct and morphology - but of a perfect knowledge of the forest learned during an infancy lasting five years.

At present there are an estimated 5,000 Orangutans in the park. Nonetheless, an important point to remember is that a major part of their diet is made up of the fleshy fruits found only in the lowland forests.

Without these forests the orangutan would eventually become extinct. As land use patterns change outside its boundaries, Leuser National Park will become the main refuge for these peaceful inhabitants of the rainforest.

The orangutan's two smaller relatives, the white handed gibbon, and the black siamang, exploit similar habitats, although the siamang can use a higher proportion of leaves in its diet than the smaller gibbon.

The ringing calls of gibbons and siamangs, as they announce their whereabouts each morning, carry over 1 km. and are one of the most characteristic and memorable sounds of Sumatra's forests. The white-handed gibbons call early in the morning while the siamangs tend to sing at a later hour, about 10 am.

This calling is referred to as dueting, an apt description of the singing of two adults (and sometimes an adolescent) while they swing in the branches in the highest reaches of the canopy.

Other primates found in the park include two kinds of macaques: the pig-tailed macaque, and the longtailed macaque. The pig-tailed macaque is about the size of a baboon and roams around the forest (both on the the ground and in the canopy)in bands of 20 or more individuals.

The long-tailed macaque is a great opportunist and has done well by exploiting man. It can be found near the campsites at Gurah and frequently sleeps at night in tree branches overhanging the Alas River nearby.

N.B. Do not feed these macaques - Leuser National Park is not a zoo and it is not desirable to turn a wild animal into a rubbish raider.

that ran to the PA amplifier. I didn't, but rather just laid there asking myself over and over, What kind of people are these, and why are they doing this to me?

We slept this morning until 8:30. After we had our coffee we headed out along the river to see if we could find a quieter spot to hangout in for a few days. We walked past all of the Wismas/guesthouses, and even went into a few. The most famous hotel per our guidebook, is called the Jungle Inn. We saved it for the last thinking that there would be a lot of young people being up and noisy until late. God we're getting old! On the way back we stopped there had a delicious breakfast of pineapple pancakes and watermelon juice.

As a lark we asked to see one of the rooms. It is noted for its creative carpentry and the rooms that we saw were no exception, but the room we fell in love with is almost beyond explanation. it faced away from the river and it's up a steep set of steps. The room itself is small, about 12 feet square, with two small windows. The bed is a four poster, made out of bent and gnarled jungle sticks. It has a mosquito net draped around it and it is suspended from the top. There is a small table and chair made out of the same heavy wood. Up a couple of very steep and slippery stairs is the bathroom. It is very creatively done in tile and rock and tin.

There is a porch that runs around two sides with a wooden railing that looks over our very own "waterfall". Not just some puny little trickle



of a waterfall, but a full fledged one that falls in three stages and in spots is 10 feet wide. The noise is loud enough that it dominates all other sound. If there is music below we don't here it. If they are praying below we have no idea. On the porch we have to yell at each other just to be heard. It is truly a paradise! All this for a negotiated price of 18,000 Rupias (\$7.75 US). Sumatra has some of the cheapest accommodations that I have ever run into.

We went back to our old hotel, packed and carried our stuff the half hour walk further upriver to the Jungle Inn. When we got here we were exhausted, and covered in sweat. As light as we had tried to travel, we had not succeeded. Our trek wore us out. And of course we did wait till 1:00 PM in the afternoon to make our move. Drenched, we opened our door, and immediately stripped off our packs, and went out the door to OUR verandah to see OUR Waterfall. It was still there in all its glory. We then peeled off our clothes, gingerly walked on all fours up the steep slippery steps that lead into the bathroom, and took a wonderfully refreshing shower. We laid down on the bed to make mad tropical passionate love and finally slept for a while, lulled by the sounds of water crashing over rocks, and by the comfortable warmth of each others arms.

Now I write this while sitting in OUR hammock, which faces OUR waterfall, and I am just about as happy as a human being could be, and we haven't even seen the orangutans yet!

01/20/97

Bukit Lawang

Oh my god, OUR little waterfall has turned into a raging, thundering torrent. It is raining very hard, and has been for about the last hour — I bet 12 inches of rain has fallen since it started. It's dark out. Every few minutes I walk out onto our tiny porch with my flashlight in hand to see what it looks like now. The roar has steadily increased, so that even as I write these few sentences the

sound has increased in intensity a couple of times. The water is now totally across the rocks, some 25 feet wide! My first thought is that I hope that they have built the foundation well enough and strong enough to last through this. You see the building shakes a little each time a new ton of water crashes over OUR waterfall. My second thought is, "Oh someone will probably come and let us know if we were in danger—wouldn't they?" Well wouldn't they?



Our very own waterfall!

I had a great day today. This morning I walked the short distance to the canoe launch to go see the Orangutan Rehabilitation Center. I had heard that you could buy the tickets to enter the park at the ranger station, even though the sign clearly says that you must buy your tickets in town, which is

about a half hour walk. I thought that I would take a chance. No dice! The stern faced Sumatran guard said “**no exceptions**,” so I, being the only one out of a group of about 15 who hadn’t pre-purchased a ticket, had to be ferried back across the river alone. Once I was returned to the other side I found that there was a whole troop of monkeys passing directly in front of me. I sat down and quietly took out my binoculars, but quickly, they were just too close for them, so I brought out my camera and started to shoot away. I thought to myself just how lucky I was to have been turned away from the National Forest. Those poor guys going to see the orangutans are missing all of the activity on *this* side. I sat still and watched them circle me a couple times and I got some awfully good shots.

I felt so good that I decided to have some breakfast at the Jungle Inn. After I was seated and was giving my order to the waiter I heard a lot of commotion behind me. There was the same troop of monkeys inside the restaurant being fed by the kitchen help. There were monkeys on the tables, and in the rafters, even some sitting on top of the speakers. So much, I thought, for the uniqueness of my monkey experience!

Kim was feeling a little under the weather, so I went to town alone to get our tickets for the national park the next day, and to do a little fruit shopping. I also needed another shirt because everything that I owned has begun to smell very badly. It takes things forever to dry in the jungle so it was easier just to buy another one. Anyway I had only brought two shirts knowing that I would probably buy some while traveling. And I did—a nice batik one.

The walk was enjoyable. I stopped at the National Park Headquarters, bought our tickets and carefully looked at all of the signs and posters filled with information about the jungle. On the way back I bought a bunch of each of the fruits we had found we liked, and a few new ones we hadn’t tried yet. The walk back was hot and humid. I had to stop halfway back and take a nice long water break.

Tough life, huh? I was happy to see that the walk was less exhausting than it had been yesterday. There are a lot of stairs to climb along the path, so maybe I just needed to get in better shape, or at least that is my hope. Back at the room I immediately devoured half the fruit, and fell asleep with Kim for a while. Maybe I’m getting kind of old, but I find more and more that I like to have a nice afternoon nap.

I awoke just in time to get ready to see the orangutans in their afternoon feeding. This time as I reached the ranger station I had my ticket in hand. The encounter was everything and more than I had dreamed. The walk up the hill to see them was longer, steeper and more difficult than I had thought it would be, but it wasn’t too bad. We walked uphill through very interesting rain and bamboo forests. When we arrived at the feeding spot there was no more than a small cleared muddy place for us to stand in. There was a small wooden railing in front of us, and just beyond, maybe 25 feet away, was a funky wooden platform about 8 feet square suspended from 3 large trees.

The orangutans had already started to arrive through the trees. Big reddish long-haired apes slowly swinging from branch to branch. They rarely ever seemed to have jerky motions — they carefully seem to select their next hand or foot hold before letting go of their last. Probably, I am guessing, this is due to their size and weight. A false handhold can mean a long, nasty fall to the floor.

About half of the 8 orangutans that showed up were carrying little babies who gripped the mothers long hair with their tiny hands. When each one arrived at the feeding platform, they were given a cup of skimmed milk which they drank, and a large bunch of green bananas. They took the bananas some short distance away from the platform and peeled them carefully with their teeth, dropping the leftover peels to the jungle floor. While the mothers were absorbed in eating, their babies began to wander around. High up into the canopy above, they climbed performing all kinds of gymnastic movements along the way. Frequently two

adolescents would meet and wrestle and play much to the amusement of the crowds.

After about a half an hour, things settled down into a just-wait-and-watch for both the tourists and the apes. Sometimes, one of the orangutans would slowly swing over and walk along the fence, placing itself just a few feet from the delighted tourists, who after their first shock, would begin to snap picture after picture. The orangs didn't seem to mind and continued to perform whatever antics pleased them at the moment. These included playing with their food, spitting it out and then slurping it up again. Also, one climbed up above the tourists and was momentarily forgotten while some other activity caught the peoples eye, until one unsuspecting lady felt herself being peed on from above. To this the guards said, "Very lucky, Warm rain." and she laughed along with the rest of us.

All too soon it was time to descend the steep hill. Back at the bottom, a few of the more attractive young female tourists engaged a male volunteer in conversation. I hung around and listened, but my comments or questions were usually not heard. Still, I did learn quite a few interesting things. Among them, I learned that Bukit Lawang is a local tourist destination, with Sumatrans coming down from Medan on the weekends. In fact, the number of foreign tourists was so small, the guide told us, that the Indonesian government wouldn't care if another foreigner ever came. When I finally got to have one of my questions answered, I said that he must feel very lucky, because I would guess that there is a huge line of people waiting to



A lucky guard feeding the Orangs

to volunteer.

Another interesting fact was that this place has become so popular as a local tourist destination that they were probably going to have to move the rehab operation further into the jungle. Bukit Lawang would continue, he said to develop without the very animals that started it. In fact, he added, a mini mall and apartments were planned in the near future.. He continued to explain that we were very lucky to have seen the program now, because he felt it only had a few more years left. I walked silently back to the boat launch, thinking to myself that the volunteer was right — I was lucky to have seen one of the few successful primate rehabilitation programs in the world.

PETER
01/21/97
Bukit Lawang

The rains have stopped. This morning the waterfall has already shrunk in size. It is now back to its old roaring self. I sit at the little desk that they have fashioned out of rough-sawn slabs of wood. There is fixed window just over the desk. It frames the water fall perfectly, so that I can type a little and then when I stop to think I can look out the window at Our Waterfall. Unfortunately, however, every time I do that I also lose my train of

volunteer for his job. He said that it didn't work that way here, that the only way to get in was to repeatedly go down to the Indonesian government's office and make a pleasant pest of yourself, and if you were lucky and the officials were feeling generous that day, you might get a chance

thought so that when I look down I have to reread what I have already written. I think that this writing session is not working too well so, lest I bore you anymore I will stop, and just stare for a while.

OOPS! It's time to go see the orangutans again.

KIM
01/22/97
Bukit Lawang

Peter has read his description of the Jungle Inn and our environs here in Bukit Lawang and I can gratefully acknowledge that yesterday I also got to enjoy them firsthand. We went into the orangutan preserve twice and the guards and rangers respectfully acknowledged Peter's returns. The government employees we have seen thus far are all decked out in military camo-garb and do not wear smiles to accessorize these outfits. Much like we have noticed in Central America, military personnel are very serious about their seriousness! Duty requires certain non-nonsense behaviors. No smiling or casual conversation is allowed. The extra 10 words the guard extended to Peter today were probably more than his monthly allocation for light conversation with tourists. In the same vein, there is no animosity or aggressiveness that they show, just that stone faced expression mandated by their desire to perform their military duty properly and respectfully.

So far the country has shown us, mostly, physically very beautiful people that help me understand why the art of the Hindus sometimes

makes it difficult to figure out who is the woman and who is the man in many of the paintings. There is a softness in the men — in the structure of their faces and bodies, the absence of body hair — that is accentuated by the cultural permission for same-sex individuals to share their affection without "sexual" implications — to indulge in touching, caressing and embracing one another openly and often. One walks with one's friends, arms draped over each other's shoulders or around their waists. Sitting together, holding hands or stroking each other's forearms and shoulders while conversing is simply a natural expression of affection in this culture.

I would also have thought that so strong an influence of the Muslim religious practices, (according to what my vague and grossly limited notions of what those "practices" might have been) would have produced a much sterner people. But then I realize that I do not remember thing-one from the paper I wrote on The Five Great Religions back in my fresh-

man year of high school...and I know Islam was one of the "big five". I will read something more when I get home to update this void and hopefully eliminate a few of my stereotypes along with my ignorance.

As for the particulars of this place and time, we have become a part of the flow of the Jungle Inn in the best of all ways. I have mixed the past 9 days with feeling great and feeling like the scum on the bottom of a bad pair of shoes. The Larium we are taking to prevent Malaria has affected my sleep patterns and my



The famous Jungle Inn

dreaming and on the day I have to take it, it also causes some serious diarrhea, a lesser case of nausea and a little bit of dizziness. I am especially wary of the restless insomnia and need to be watchful of whether or not any of symptoms are more intense this next time I take it. We have an ongoing dialogue between ourselves and others we know who take it, about its pros and cons. The absence of mosquitoes in this area makes taking it seem unnecessary to many, but, personally, I am clearly unsure.

KIM
1/24/97

Still in Bukit Lawang

It was sometime yesterday when I realized that I am living in Never-Never-Land here in the Jungle Inn, complete with Peter, Wendy and the Lost Boys. The moment of realization came as I was sitting talking with Khadija and felt the whole reality come into its own in me.

Khadija and Indra have only been married for 6 weeks and she is about the business of becoming accustomed to both marriage and life in the Inn. She is definitely Wendy...the mother of all these "lost boys" and Indra's grounding too. She is lovely, gracious and welcoming for the guests. She bridges the cultural gaps and as a fully "dressed" Muslim woman who is also a Western one (she is from Australia), she gives rise to new sensitivity for the guests who come in ignorance into a Muslim culture. She helps provide understanding with her English, from the basics of the menus and the accommodations to a chance for seeing in a context familiar to most of the visitors, what being Muslim means.

She is an Australian woman with beautiful eyes that match her every word and expression. She has been Muslim for more than 4 years and made her conversion to the practice with a very open understanding and consciousness of all its tenets. She talked with us about the difficulties it had presented for her initially following her conversion. Primarily the isolation it cre-



Khadija and Indra getting married Batak style

ated was the biggest hurdle, as it separated her from her friends in Australia and the radically different life she had been living before her conversion. She made a trip to Mecca 2 years ago that helped her resolve the loneliness she had been feeling and she speaks with genuine warmth about the recognition of the gift she feels that this religion is for her. I was not sure what had made me want to talk more with her about all this, but I realized as she talked that I was seeing parts of myself entering the Maryknoll Sisters so many years ago, and I also realized that Khadija was doing something that I had not done. She had searched her own soul to arrive at her commitment in her conversion, while I had gone into mine, welcoming the opportunity to learn and secondarily acknowledging the additional possibility of becoming part of a religion I had really never learned to feel or understand. I



Khadija and Indra getting married again--Muslim style

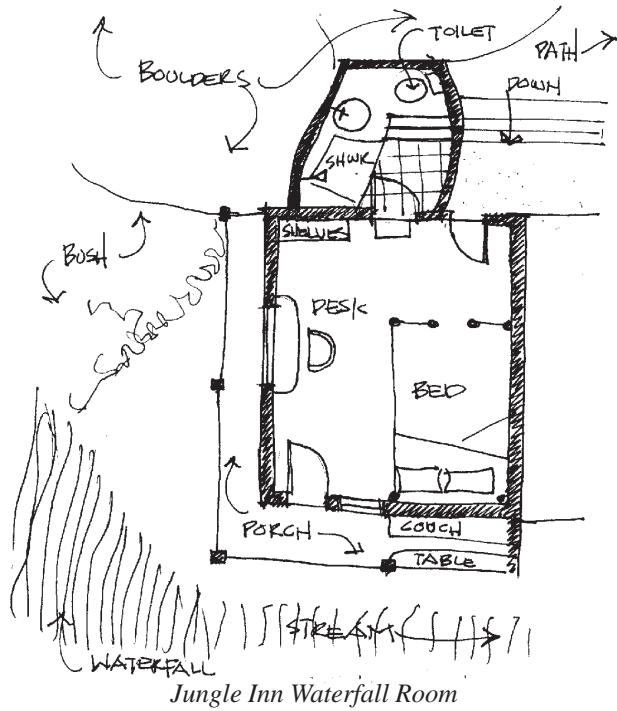
had wanted to travel, and in a time when women were limited in that realm, Maryknoll provided a means to do it. The Jesuits had piqued my intellect sufficiently, regarding the nature of the religion and the theology of Catholicism, and I felt becoming a nun would be a simple act of the will. Being Catholic was incidental, but required for making the commitment. I felt comfortable combining the structures with my intentions, so covering my head and taking up my beads did not have the love in it that it has for Khadija. Likewise, her commitment and deep understanding of who she is as a Muslim woman is apparent in her eyes even more than in what she says or how she is dressed. While Maryknoll was for me, a time of many invaluable lessons, loves and life experiences for me — and one I would in no way have traded — it was not able to help me tap

into my soul. Khadija's soul emanates through all the other manifestations of her Muslim practice and talking with her has given me a healthy way to look at a part of my own past that I might not have understood so well without the perspective I have gained from her. Groundwork that was laid for me, in Maryknoll, has been more than a generous part of what I feel has brought me into consciousness and a sense of my own personal soul at this point in my life. I have been touched by the depth of Khadija's commitment and know that there is, at this point in my life, something within me that I finally can reflect back to her and others with the same conviction and simplicity and power that I find in her.

Indra is Peter Pan. He talked to Peter yesterday and took him to see their private rooms that he designed and built even more specially along with the rest of this most unique and special Jungle Inn. It has grown as the legacy of Indra's creativity and imagination. He is the creator of the "set" for Never-Never Land.

As Peter pointed out, the Jungle Inn is missing some intricacies of design-sense that would make it more user-friendly if those principles had been available to him, but Indra's spontaneity in his work has its own magic and pleasure abundant everywhere. The guests can be accommodated from \$2/night to \$10/night depending on the individual desire for little extras. We are in for the big time at \$8/night which has given us our room at the top across from the head of a waterfall that eventually goes underneath the restaurant's entrance and out into the Bohorok River.

Sitting at the desk in our room, the window faces the falling water and the light overhead makes writing easy. The hammock that is out on that verandah is a bit small, especially for Peter and so it hasn't been used too much. On the portion of the same porch/verandah that is just outside the back door, there is a view across the water into the lush greenery that disguises the steep slope up the mountain rising beside



and behind us. The flowers that were blooming in profusion when we first arrived drew a variety of butterflies that neither of us had seen before. Big and graceful, they flew softly in and out of the foliage, making the peace of the place even more apparent.

The interior walls of our room — our own piece of Never-Never Land — are a combination of halved 4" logs and woven palm matting which has all been coated with a tinted shellac. We were not aware of how thin this was until we finally got a noisy neighbor. Her story comes later. The skylight is just above the bed and encourages time to write there, almost as much as the desk at the window does.

Across the room is our private bathroom. Given the cost of accommodations throughout Sumatra, we feel we are of both the age and the affluence that permits us to take rooms with private bathrooms. Uncharacteristically, it has an above-ground, western style toilet which has been invaluable to us given my bouts with diges-

tive ambivalence. The rich blue and green tiles that cover the floor as you enter the room extend over a very small space that ends at two very steep steps leading up to the toilet...a true throne. A tile shelf rises in front of the commode and separates the floor around the toilet from the floor of the shower which is at the same elevation. The surface of the shower floor and the steps is made of a combination of smooth stones from the river set in special designs in the concrete. The wall of the bathroom is truly an extension of the mountain on which it sits



Kim happy again to be on a western style toilet.

and this is clearly noted by the boulder that juts comfortably into the wall at the back of the shower area. The wood on the walls above the concrete is plywood that has been painted a shade of blue that makes me feel like I am seeing a very deep underwater scene as I gaze into

the bathroom from our bed. It has been playfully painted with designs that round it out. They are a little too basic and my fingers itch to get in and do some embellishment that would bring them into the league with the rest of the detailing.

The main room's overall darkness initially provides a sense of warmth and womb-like comfort. It is meant for a stay that does not last any longer than it should, lest it begin to feel too close and claustrophobic. We will be leaving just as that transition in feeling has begun to affect us. In the meantime, we have spent incredible time in a place where my body in particular, has been allowed to regain its balance.

Finally, there are the Lost Boys. The staff of waiters and guides are young boys anywhere from 15 to maybe 19. The few women on staff do the cooking and laundry. It is here that I have become comfortable finally with the fact that the waiters in this country JOIN you at your table for dinner. There had been some confusion in my mind about this, but it is just a cultural fact, and Peter and I have become comfortable with it finally.

Apparently the boys aren't paid a salary for their work, but are given their room and board. It provides them with a way to learn English as well. Some of the more enterprising ones become guides and earn money independently taking tourists on trek. There are specific job requirements for Trek Guides, and each one is licensed according to parameters set by the

Guide's organization. The treks that are led by the unlicensed all seem to end in stories with more or less disastrous conclusions. In general the "union" seems like a good grass roots means for controlling the economy at this level as well as providing a definably safe and consistent service for the tourists.

I am not sure who among these "boys" are actually guides right now. A few of them are way ahead in their knowledge of English. Neon Deon is the best of them all with complete mastery of humor and slang. Gecko has bonded more tightly to Peter and me with his insecurity in speaking and understanding English. They all call us mama and papa, but Gecko's search for security with us reflects his limits most sweetly. He slides in next to Peter and holds onto his arm or his shoulder and we exchange as much conversation as possible until he just falls comfortably out of the talking, into a comfy spot alongside Peter...something like



Kim and one of the "Lost Boys".

the kittens that live here too. Reno's language skill is actually as good as Deon's. Their initial focus is a bit different. Where Deon's every thought is about the women who are present or are yet to come, Reno spent a long while talking to us about dreams of becoming a director of movies. Peter coaxed him into a perspective of realities and encouraged him to think about buying a simple still-camera first to help him understand photography. They talked about developing the skill that would give him an ability to earn money if he began to create imaginative cards he could sell. This could be a route to increasing capital, etc, etc. It was a perspective that defi-



nitely tweaked his curiosity. "Stern-face" is another of the boys, who's brooding eyes intrigue many of the girls and he hides his shyness behind his guitar playing. He has not told us his name yet. He has retained a sheepish distance since we had to rap on that very thin wall in our room to get him and the British girl he was wooing at the time, to quiet down after enduring the noises of their activities and conversations from 2:30am until almost 5am. They courteously complied, but I think it left him feeling embarrassed. Still he smiles when he sees us and we say "hello".

Each one of them is proud of how beautiful he is. In the afternoon they bathe in the river and choose a sarong or pants and shirt according to their current mood. They love their beautiful long hair and stroke it knowing well that it is both beautiful and admired. When they have completed their ritual, their feelings of pride radiate from each one and they set their sights on the beautiful women that have arrived that day. There is no sophistication in their presentation of themselves — they are like a litter of well fed, blissfully happy puppies, unashamed of their enthusiasm after having been let out of seclusion. They leap and tumble over each other and their own feet in their best efforts to win the women's hearts — not one of them more beautiful or wonderful than the other...how do these women choose???

In our time in Bukit Lawang, whose center is marked by the Bohorok River and whose passageway through town is a brick path that wanders up and down the flow of the mountain, along the water's edge, we have stopped for meals and spent time sitting in many different places just to watch the town's activity continue in our presence. I have been most touched by the children's play. Bathing is the high point of their day I think. It occurs after the evening meal when the women and children emerge from the houses with the dirty dishes. As the older one's tend to the more serious needs for household maintenance, the

children get rid of their little bit of clothing and begin slithering over the rocks with the flow of the water as if their bodies had been made just for this time. They laugh and dive and splash and somewhere in the middle, lather up their bodies, and brush their teeth. As sunset moves toward darkness, the older women surreptitiously dip themselves in, still dressed, efficiently lathering up both body and clothing and finally they too immerse themselves with as much relief and pleasure as the young ones. While I know it is in violation of proper use of "riparian areas" it is the community's relationship with the wa-



Dining with a view of Bukit Lawang

ter that brings it it's purest joy and retains it's innocence. I am grateful to have sampled this before it changes. I have never been among people of such simplicity and innocence, and I hope some of it has imprinted itself on my heart as I get ready to leave.

PS. To complete this last day we have hiked up further from our Jungle Inn to the Arok Inn whose sign we saw the first day. The more treacherous path was not suited to our desire or ability to carry our packs when we first arrived. Having now discovered it however, if we do return to Bukit Lawang we will come to this place and have our gear carried up for us. As rehabilitating and welcoming as the Jungle Inn is for the short stay, the Arok Inn is made for a long quiet stay — the one is for the days/weeks stay and the other is for the stay that stretches into

months. There are few who make it this far and they have done so with isolation as an intention, and the privacy is definitely more plentiful. The Bohorok races by and the energetic with their tubes come here to make the start of a white-water adventure. I think that if Peter had completed Corn Island it would have felt, if not looked, much like this place.

Tonight we will eat dinner with Ken, the author and photographer we met at the beginning of our stay here. We met him the first day of our search for a no-mosque inn in the same place where we found him this morning. He was disappointed not to be able to show us an outstanding specimen of the insect kingdom that he has been patiently photographing. I already have his book on Cacti at home in TX, and hope that if he is contracted for work in the US and finds himself in Big Bend in the Spring, we will get him to autograph it. We have enjoyed his company on a couple of occasions and have shared some good laughter with our mix of travel adventure stories.

PETER

01/26/97

Bukit Lawang, Jungle Inn

How to start an entry that spans such a short time, yet seems so very much longer? Our trek into the Gunung Leuser National Park begins with our meeting Chris and Rose. We were immediately drawn to them because they were one of the few couples we met that were about our same age. Most of the travelers we have met have been young Europeans, and while we always seem to get along with most of them, Kim and I have a few more aches and pains than the younger set can relate to. So after the first friendly exchanges of pleasantries we settled into talking with Chris and Rose about what ails us.

Kim started off with the diarrhea that had been plaguing her for the past few days. Rose was totally sympathetic, having had similar problems on and off for the past few months. She and Chris

had been traveling at this point for 7 months, and still had 2 more left. I then chimed into talking about my knee, which probably has a meniscal tear and will have to be operated on sometime in the future — Chris understood completely having had knee problems for quite a while. He then one upped me with a carpal tunnel wrist that almost drove him out of the tree surgery business. I countered with an arthritic back that had been my nemesis for the past 10 years. The friendship had begun.

Meanwhile, Rose and Kim were continuing to run through body parts at an alarming rate. Quickly we exhausted the stories in one blazing outpouring of babbling. We then settled into a discussion of traveling. They were looking forward to taking a trek through the forest. Kim and I were similarly toying with the idea. On the next day when we again saw them we were surprised to see that they had lined up a guide, a time and a price. These California people act quickly, I thought. Kim and I probably would have talked about it for a few more days before even making our mind up if we were going to go, let alone actually hiring a guide. This seemed just too good to pass up. And we didn't.

“We'll go,” we immediately chimed in. It was to be an overnight, 2 day trek. We were going to camp out at some big waterfall. Our guide, Saucilio said that he understood that these were aging, gray haired trekkers. He even called the women Mamma, and us men, Papa. Great I thought, a guided nature walk through the jungle was just what we needed to kickstart this adventure. Rose and Chris even brought Saucilio down to our restaurant, because he had told them he always wanted to meet the people he took out beforehand. He seemed nice enough, and his English, though not great was more than passable. Rose asked him straight out how hard the walking would be.

“Little up, little down.” was all he replied.

I think we all read into it what we wanted, but it seemed pretty clear that Saucilio knew what he was dealing with here.

"We walk 5 hours first day. I fix lunch. Then camp at waterfall. I fix barbecue chicken dinner. Very good. I bring everything. Next day we walk back. Maybe 5 hours back."



Bohorok River

"Will we see a lot of animals?" I asked.

"If we lucky. Must be lucky. I can no promise."

He seemed to have most of the right answers for us, but when Saucilio said that we must be ready to leave by 10:00AM we knew that we had found our guide. We all quickly agreed that the day after tomorrow we would leave.

Thursday arrived and wouldn't you know I would have my first case of diarrhea! At the last minute I almost decided not to go, except for the fact that I had been constipated for the last three days and there was a certain amount of relief that came with...well you understand what I mean. Instead of canceling I took a half a tab of Imodium, loaded up my gear and we made our way to the other side of town to meet them. We were to leave from their hotel.

Bukit Lawang is laid out so that it follows along the rushing, Bohorok River. There is only one means of getting from one end of town to the other — the sidewalk — a nice brick and paved walkway that twists and turns. In spots there are some pretty steep stairs. It is a 30 minute walk from

end to end, so I thought to myself that this would be a pretty good test to see if I could keep from being sick on the trail. There was gas but there was no seepage. Great, I thought, the Imodium appears to have kicked in just the right amount. I carefully ate 2 crackers as we walked.

We five left from the back of the Bukit Lawang Hotel, a pretty upscale hotel for the place. Everyone was waiting for us. Saucilio had mixed up a bath of anti-leach juice for us to apply to our socks. It was really just tobacco and water. Each of us in turn soaked our clean city socks in the juice. Then we were off. The first 5 minutes of the walk was across the planted fields and although it proceeded in a general upward path. I liked the pace. After that we never hit another flat spot till we reached our beds in camp. It wasn't just 'hilly', it was literally straight up for the first full hour of the walk. In many places we could reach out in front and touch the earth, which we did frequently to help pull ourselves up. We still hadn't reached the first summit, when Saucilio took pity on us and gave us a rest. We were covered in sweat from head to toe, and breathing heavily under the exertion. Saucilio gave us each an orange and a couple of cookies. They didn't even rent space before they were wolfed down by the famished group. Rose



Chris, Rose and Saucilio

asked him if there was much more up hill to go.

Saucilio, who had by now lit up a cigarette, answered, "Little bit more up, then little bit down."

Satisfied that the hard stuff was almost over we rose again, hoisted our packs and started the uphill grind. It was more like torture, than a vacation. I felt like we were on a forced chain gang march. This was certainly nothing that I had bargained for. I began to whine.

"Hey, doesn't this guy know we're old?" I shouted to no one in particular, as up and up we continued to climb.

"Where is the 'little bit down'?"

"You know," I continued, "I really would like to see something besides the front of my shoes!" No one else chimed in so I temporarily stopped. Out of the corner of my eye, I did notice that the forest had changed several times, from a dry open feeling to a moist tropical look. I thought to myself as I walked, that were passing up some pretty interesting stuff. In places, huge tropical trees soared high in the air some 150 feet above us. Many of them were draped in thick lianas. At one point our guide even climbed up about 50 feet an one. We took photos of him while frantically trying to catch our breath.

After the second hour we reached the top. I took this moment to try to reason with everyone, but it was decided that we would have a talk with

our guide during our lunch break. Great, I thought, if I last that long. Fortunately the diarrhea had long since been forgotten. I was now sorry that I hadn't eaten breakfast.

All too soon (in less than 15 minutes) it was time to get up and walk again. At least it was down.

Something different I thought. 'Up' had been surprisingly OK on my bad knee, but 'down' sure wasn't. At first I thought that I had found what I call my "rock legs". That is when you can walk from boulder to boulder while stepping easily from one foot to the other, kind of like taking giant strides using your muscles in the upper leg to steady the forward movement while also maintaining balance. It is a different kind of walking. Usually it takes, even for a young man, a few weeks of difficult walking to get comfortable with the pace. Initially I

was very proud of myself with having found my "rock legs" so soon. I was taking these huge giant steps down the mountain with very little trouble. Not bad, I thought for a man just finishing his second week of vacation. But by the end of the third hour that right knee had really taken a beating. Still, with this kind of abuse I would have thought it would have been much worse.

We stopped for lunch along a little stream at the bottom of the mountain. I had now taken to calling the hills "mountains". I immediately took



Soon we were covered in sweat from head to toe.

off my pack, and jumped in the stream to cool off. The water was refreshing. I found a small section where the water fell over a small waterfall and laid in my very own Jacuzzi.

Saucilio was serving lunch. All the others were already eating and calling me to come join them. I hated to leave, but my hunger got the best of me. Lunch consisted of paper bag plates filled with a huge handfuls of previously fried rice scooped on it. There was also several plastic bags, each filled with a different food. One had cut up tomatoes and cucumbers, another held 5 fried eggs, one for each of us, and the last had some kind of corn chips. Our paper bags sagged under the weight of the greasy food, as we used our hands to scoop the food into our waiting mouths.

We had a talk with Saucilio, telling him that we were "old" tourists who really wanted to see more than just our feet as we walked along. He seemed not to understand what we were talking about. Then I tried a different tack. I told him that as a guide we wanted more out of him than just the walk. We wanted to know something about the forest that he knew so much about.

"Everything," I said, "is new to us here. Even the ants and termites were different than anything that we had seen before." I told him that we wanted him to explain things to us as we went along.

"Also," I continued, "we wouldn't mind if we walked a little slower and took a few more breaks."

And so the trek continued. As we were walking — no, scaling up the mountain — an interesting fact about these people was revealed to me. I remembered my first dinner in Berstagi, where I ordered potatoes and eggs for breakfast. I was pretty surprised to see my plate contained a pile of French fries with a fried egg on top. So to it was with the word "trek". To these people it means just that — a trek. It's not a nature walk, or a simple hike, or even a camping trip — it's a **trek**. A hard, difficult hike.

To get your money's worth it must be long, arduous and almost life-threatening. Then I think

they feel that we have gotten our value out of it. They are very literal in their speech. If they say "trek", by god, that's what you are going to get.

Saucilio was no different. But now we had thrown a monkey wrench in his plans. Slow down he could do, though not enough for our taste. But Jungle Jim he was not. He really didn't know much about the jungle, except where the paths were. Now every time we passed a termite mound he felt compelled to point it out. Ants he could also find. By the way they were huge, scarce and not aggressive at all.

"Hey Saucilio," Kim asked, "What kind of tree is this?"

"Mahogany."

"How do you know? They all look alike to me." I queried him further.

"Because the Ranger told me."

And so it went on, our breaks got a little more frequent, but the pace slowed only slightly. On we marched up again. For about another hour and a half. Then came the downward trek. It was beyond belief. So steep was it that in many places we spent more time on our butts than our feet. The constant pounding on my knees was really taking a toll. About half way down we passed another group of tourists, about 8 of them, with their 2 guides next to a small river. One of the guides was quite occupied with trying to keep two full grown orangutans out of camp. He did this by taking a flaming torch and trying to chase them back up a tree. They would retreat a little, but then I guess the temptation would get to be too great and one of them would try to make a secret entry. Back to the fire the guide would go to get a fresh torch.

We all felt sorry for the orangutans. They have that little-lost-puppy kind of sleep eyes that make you want to just hug them and feed them all your food. Having been at the Orangutan Rehabilitation center we all realized that human contact could only make their survival more precarious. Besides, they could catch many of our germs from us —

possibly making them sick or even causing death.

Anyway, without boring you with the difficulty of our decent anymore, I will let it go with the phrase, It was Hell!! We reached our camping spot along the Buku River. I collapsed into a heap on the stony shore line my knee throbbing. In my

been stopped by a huge waterfall. It was like my very own. The rest of the group was still back at camp. I could find no easy way down to the bottom, so I had to content myself with finding a nice comfortable rock facing the waterfall and just stare at it's majesty. The cicadas, a kind of cricket, had started their sweet but raucous sounds. One



Our decent was hell

pain racked stupor the first thing that struck me was the steepness of the jungle on all sides of the river. That meant to me that tomorrow, when we left, it would be more of the same.

After I could regain some feeling in my knee, I put an my bathing suit and made it down to the water. It was about 6:00PM, so it was getting cool, but I found a nice deep spot down stream from the group to splash around in. Then I walked a little further, hopping — no limping, from boulder to boulder, till I could go no further having

tree full of them calling to another. It was definitely "jungle sounds". It made me stop and realize that here I was deep in the heart of the Sumatran jungle – camping! Suddenly I was one very happy puppy.

Back at camp Saucilio and his assistant had made us dinner. Barbecued chicken, vegetable soup/stew, and some delicious bean curds in sauce. They also brewed a pot of herb tea. We all sat and enjoyed a hearty meal together. Afterwards we sat around the campfire, built conveniently along the rivers edge and talked and laughed the evening

away. Later before we went to bed the boys taught us a Bukit Lawang card game. It was simple to learn, but kind of fun to play. Their enthusiasm and frequent joking made the game even more memorable.

Our encampment was a tent structure built of sticks. Draped over it was a huge sheet of black plastic. This is what we slept under. Underneath we were cushioned from the smooth flat bounders by only a thin rubber camping pad, which each of us had carried. But we were so tired by then that no one complained or lost sleep over the rough accommodations. I myself, found that I had a very restful sleep, only waking occasionally as one or another body part would go numb. Then I would just roll over and immediately be back at sleep.

In the morning we awoke to a beautiful day in the jungle. Fortunately, we were not going to leave till 10:00 AM. A very civilized hour I thought. I walked down to the waterfall again, this time the whole group came along. We sat for a long time in awe of its beauty. Then we went back for a nice breakfast of hot tea and a noodle soup, once again, prepared by our young hosts. All too soon it was time to pack up and make our way out. The climb up was slow and tortuous, but only lasted about an hour. Then we seemed to hit some kind of plateau or ridge, which we walked along for the next hour or so. It was very pleasant walking, and we were all very grateful for the respite.

Then Saucilio signaled it was time to go down. None of us saw a trail, but we followed wherever he told us to go. Literally hanging on to the plants

and roots we slid down the mountain. In a half hour the worst was over and for the rest we were able to take to our feet instead of our butts. We had entered the back of the Bukit Lawang Orangutan Rehabilitation Station.



Our camp

Almost immediately we came in contact with Mina. One of the largest female orangutans with one of the worst reputations. Already she had bitten some 20 people. She was about 35 feet up a tree right in the middle of our path. She started to descend.

Slowly, but deliberately she made her way toward us. Saucilio was carrying a walking stick which he banged loudly on the trunk of the tree as he shouted at her. She could have cared less. As she hit the forest floor, panic hit us. Each of us tried to run in a different direction but she had cut us off from the only real path. Steep and thick jungle surrounded us. Saucilio banged away and yelled at her, but she paid no mind to him. Instead she slowly knuckled her way toward us. When she was about 6 feet from us, the helper guide threw 2 soda crackers at her. She sat down on the edge of the path, picked them up and delicately began to eat them. "Now!" Saucilio said. We made it past her and hustled ahead down the path. I turned around and tried to capture it on film — one of those really rare photo moments, you know?!

We walked for about another half hour, when our guides pointed up in a tree over our heads to show us 2 full grown orangutans. Out of the jungle from our other side, another 2 came crashing toward us, one with a baby clinging to her fur. Now there were four. Two started to come down, as the other two raced through the trees to get in front of us. If it worked we would have been surrounded,

but fortunately we were quicker on foot. We were able to make it past them. As I looked back at them they had those sad droopy eyes that seemed to say, "why are you leaving so soon?"

That was our last encounter with them - the "men of the jungle". We made our way down the steep slope to the river below where a canoe took us to the other side of the river, and back to the Jungle Inn. We talked among ourselves and it was agreed that although it was not at all what we had expected or even wanted in a jungle trek, it was still a very good memory.

LAKE TOBA

KIM

01/28/97

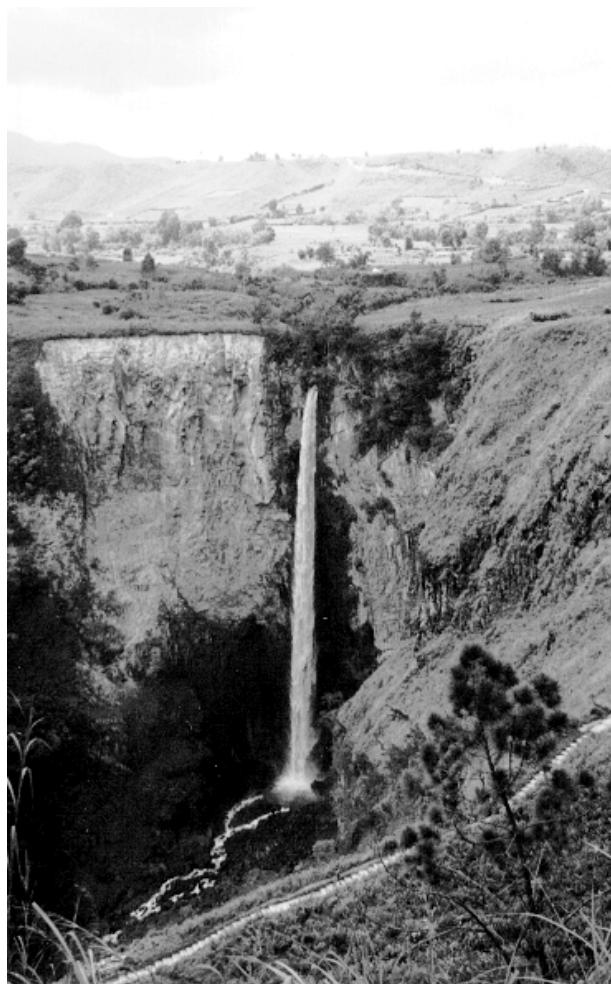
Bukit Lawang to lake Toba

We left Bukit Lawang in the luxury of a large bus. The agent who sold us our tickets greeted us as we came near the bus stop with his sing-song announcement that there would be a slight change in plans. We would not be served breakfast as originally planned, but the company would pay our ferry fee from Parapat to TukTuk. With a comfortable half hour before we left, we sat in front of the same shop we'd come in to. The only two other passengers who were to be traveling with us were a young man from England and his friend from the US. Our seats reclined, our driver was not in competition with any outside force to break speed records and we seemed to be headed for a good journey.

We stopped briefly at a Palm Oil Plantation where the driver explained briefly the processing of palm oil and the Dutch management of the



Kim looks at a palm oil plant.



Sipisopiso Waterfall

industry. There has never been any animosity with the Dutch management of many facets of the economy according to his explanation. Later we stopped at Sipisopiso Waterfall to see it cascading very majestically down the side of the gorge. There were concrete steps down to the bottom of the ravine and valley where it pooled, but the 15min we had for our viewing the scene there wouldn't even allow for going down to the first level. From there we continued to Berstagi for our lunch break. Our driver was into some relatively tight scheduling, but we took the two other bus passengers with us to Raymond's where we were exuberantly welcomed back, had delicious lunch, and took advantage of the available PO and a money changer with a bit better rate than we would find in Lake Toba. With all that completed and only a brief encounter with

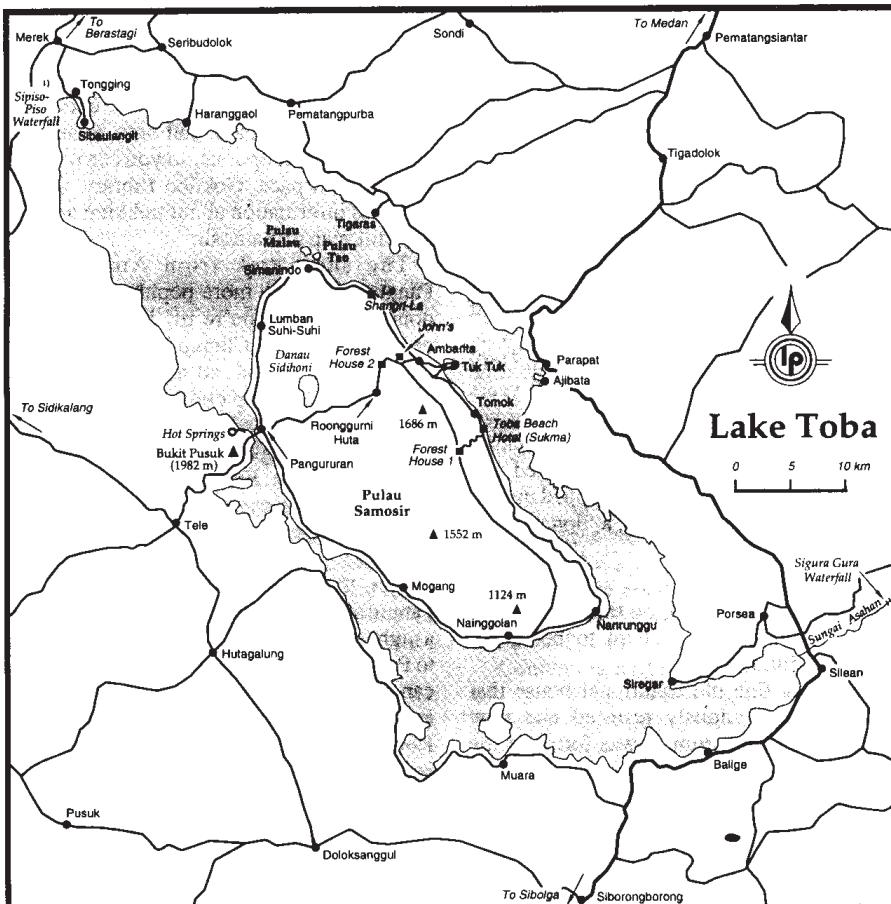
three students who remembered us, we got back onto our bus and were ready for the last leg of the trip. As Raymond had said, it was not good for the bus company, but we were completely enjoying the luxury of travel on this almost empty, comfortable bus. The Dramamine had been a good decision simply for the curvy roads. I slept some, but was able to eat and enjoy the trip and was completely grateful for the wonders of some of our "pharmaceuticals."

Our arrival at Lake Toba was uneventful and we asked a couple of sources about the realities of telephoning since we needed to call Lia in 2 days. There was some ambiguity, but apparently without any hotel surcharges, the rate to the US is around \$2/min which was good news. We are very disappointed that we hadn't made a better effort to bring along fax numbers which is a really cheap alternative. Now we will wait with hope that our call will find everyone and everything in good order.

Kim
01/29/97
Samosir Island, Lake Toba

IS IT HOT? LET'S WALK!!!

We took a 10K walk today that was truly reminiscent of the kind that are most characteristic of our travels. The guesthouse we came to initially is owned by a couple Peter had met at the Jungle Inn when I was ill. We had been "as-



saulted" on the ferry ride to Samosir Island by a number of young boys representing the hotels and guesthouses. They are very persistent with their hustle and it becomes aggravating when it is that last bit of energy they are pulling at, af-



We take a boat across Lake Toba to Samosir Island

ter all the rest that has been spent in just getting to the destination. It requires pretty direct rudeness to get them to back off, but they can be subdued. We were the first stop for the ferry and the walk up the jetty was short. The German woman who owns the place with her Sumatran husband was on the ferry and lead us in.

The room is very elegant and has both a western toilet and hot water shower. At \$11/night it is pricey, but we decided to go with it and make our decision for how long we would stay based on how our days unfolded. The airy room and comfortable bed would not be lost on us. The restaurant had been their original enterprise. From that, they grew into the addition of the guesthouse. It is widely known for its delicious food and we were both impressed with our meal. We ate it mainly to enable us to take our Larium, having snacked the whole day as we traveled. We had a wonderful avocado and tomato and garlic salad with a potato dish from Annette's German repertoire. The Larium had something of substance to land in, and I was anxious that it would not re-create the insomnia, strange dreaming and diarrhea that had followed my last dose. Happily, it didn't.

Leaving for our walk in the morning feeling healthy made for a much lighter step. Peter had a bit of uneasiness, but we decided just to take it a bit at a time and at least wander through

LAKE TOBA & PULAU SAMOSIR FACTS

Lake Toba, a remarkable volcanic crater set in the middle of North Sumatra, 176 km south of Medan, is one of Sumatra's most spectacular sights. The lake is huge - the largest in South-East Asia - occupying the caldera of a giant volcano that collapsed on itself after a massive eruption about 100,000 years ago. Measurements of ash deposits indicate that the blast made Krakatau's 1883 effort look like a hiccup. It is surrounded by steep mountains, ridges and sandy, pine sheltered beaches.

Lake Toba is the home of the outgoing Toba Batak people. *Horas* is the traditional Batak greeting and it's delivered with great gusto.

Samosir, the impressively large, wedge shaped island in the middle of Lake Toba, is thought to have been created by a subsequent upheaval between 30,000 and 75,000 years ago. The island has long been North Sumatra's premier attraction for foreign travelers, although it acquired a bad reputation for hustling in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Things have quieted down a bit these days. It's still a good place to rest up after the rigours of Trans-Sumatran Highway travel, and you couldn't ask for a more spectacular setting.

Most foreigners stay in Tuk Tuk where there is nothing much to do but relax. Those with a serious interest in Toba Batak culture will gain more satisfaction from scrambling over the mountain ridge to the villages on the other side of the island.

TukTuk to see if there might be better accommodations a little more directly on the lake's edge. Midway through town and the many guesthouses, souvenir shops, and restaurants we got to the breakfast hour and stopped in a large place with no clients other than us. We ordered omelets and the entire kitchen crew sprung into action. The meal settled Peter's discomfort and we felt ourselves ready to take on some more serious walking. The guidebook's description of the remote Shangri La guesthouse intrigued us and looked like a walk we could handle, although the several maps we checked gave

us the sense that we were not going to know how far away it was until we got there. Just our kind of thing!.

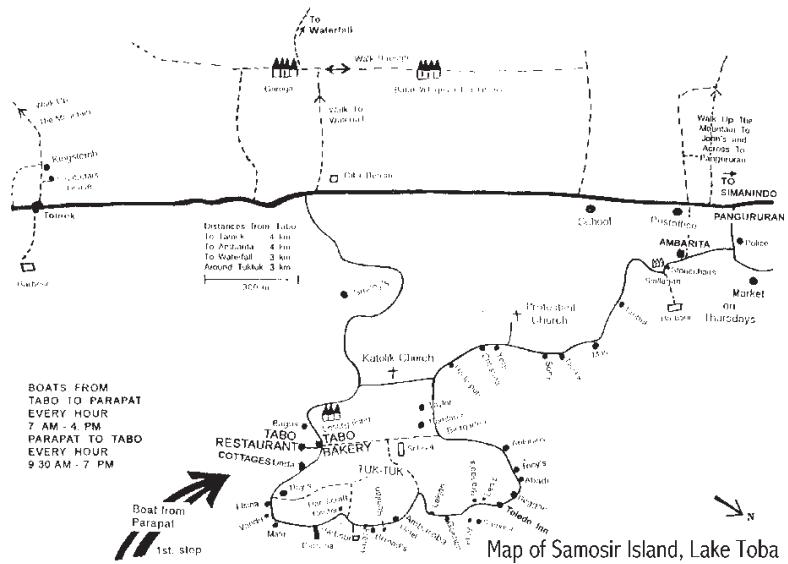
As we walked, the terrain changed radically and leaving TukTuk finally took us out of what was mostly commercial about Samosir. The road wound around toward the mountainous side of the crater, scalped bald of any trees and left with a close cropped covering of green. The cuts were filled with the only tree life left. At the base of the crater the valley is formed by an expanse of rice fields stretching out with no signs of human life. Perhaps it was the heat of the day that kept the human life away — all except for us. We trudged along faithful to our theme — Is it hot? Let's walk!

As we paused at shady points along the badly rutted road, avoiding the speeding vehicles, we noted another woman who had started out at about the same point we had. We later found out in conversation that she was 80, and she was very

decorous in her wide brimmed cloth hat and comfy culottes. Somehow we joined our courses and she told us of her love for Sumatra, her returns here with her husband every year for the past nine years and her sadness at the death of her husband last year after their trip here. They were Dutch and had actually lived most of their lives in Lebanon where he taught Linguistics at the American University. As we chatted and walked, she suggested that we stop and see the guesthouse where she was staying as it's quiet might be pleasing for us. Her hearing seemed selective and eventually we accompanied her down a set of killer-steep stairs that she maneuvered much more adeptly than we did.

We sat and visited with her for about half an hour and finally determined that we were still going to head for the Shangri La, but would return to TukTuk Tomball if the spirit moved us. It was certainly more isolated than the rows of accommodations in TukTuk, but the cottages were a bit closer together than we liked and they were also all pretty well filled.

Onward, back up the stairs-from-hell, unevenly spaced so your feet never knew quite how fast to go...and varying in heights that surprised your muscles with every new stretch and strain, we finally arrived at the road. We wondered again at what all our maps truly were trying to tell us about just how much more walking we faced. At



Map of Samosir Island, Lake Toba

some point a very young man with the most modern car-type vehicle we have seen since leaving Medan, stopped to ask if we wanted a ride and for 5,000Rp we hopped in for several kilometers at a fee that allowed him to take all the rest

of the school children home for free that day. The distance was still more than we could have completed gracefully so we shrugged, once again, at our fiscal incompetence and faced another set of stairs that supposedly would lead to Shangri La. We took on the descent which was very much like the ones we had faced before, and eventually arrived at a collection of Batak style cottages with few signs of life. The man painting the roof didn't seem to see us. A young girl eventually showed us three of the rooms and we agreed that they were lovely and peaceful and the sandy beach in front was another pleasant attribute. The real issue in the back of both our minds was the packs...they loomed even heavier in our minds when we tried to figure out how we would get them there. The ferry was a different one that came to this place and the one to TukTuk did not make this stop. A ferry to Parapat, then another to ShangriLa was a possibility. The other would be a ride in a minibus with the schlep up and down the stairs. Somehow the magic was not working. We requested a coke which was served to us and then the girl disappeared completely from the restaurant. A series of signs that read "self service" still didn't let us know where to leave the money when we finished.

We spoke to the only 2 couples staying there and they were quite happy with the place

and we told the girl when we finally found her again, to hold the 2d bungalow for us. If we decided to take it, we would be back around 2pm the next afternoon. With a few glances over our shoulder, we climbed back up to the road and began the walk home.

PETER

01/30/97

Tabo Inn

Tuk Tuk, Samosir Island, Lake Toba

WE A WAKE WITH AN INTENSE APPREHENSION

Today both Kim and I awoke up with a heaviness that was hard to explain. We were still both very tired from our marathon walk to Shangri-La yesterday, but there was more. What was it? Neither of us spoke much as we woke up late and dressed slowly. Kim got her coffee at the restaurant and went out to sit next to the lake. I sat on the front porch of our little bungalow and played with the computer. I think I spell checked one of my stories?

When Kim got back, around 9:30am, we still spoke not more than just a few civilities. By about 10:30 we were dressed — somehow it seemed to take that long — and we were out on the road that ran through town. Tuk Tuk, where our hotel is located, where most of the hotels on the island are located, is a tiny mushroom projection jutting out from the rest of the island of Samosir. Samosir itself sits in the middle of this gigantic lake, and the lake sits in the middle of an inactive volcano. Anyway that's more than I wanted to say about the matter except to say that there is really only one road on Tuk Tuk. It follows the lakes edge, and all of the hotels and shops are along it. We were heading toward the Anjou Hotel, about a 30 minute walk. We walked in silence, each of use deep in our own thoughts. We reached the Anjou about 11:00am and decided to have breakfast.

After we ordered I said to Kim, "Do you have the same heavy feeling that I do."

"Yes," she replied, "I just can't shake the feel-

ing that something might be wrong."

"I know what you mean. What if...?" I couldn't finish, the words sticking in my throat.

You see today was the day we were to call home. It was 11:00pm back home. We had been gone for 3 weeks and today was the day we were to call Kim's daughter Lia, who had been good enough to manage our affairs while we were gone. We were very far from home. It was one day of travel back to Medan, and it was almost another 48 hours of travel to get back to Texas — if everything ran smoothly — and there were so many things that could be wrong back there. Things that we might have to travel back home to!

We finished our breakfast in silence. I paid the bill and we walked downstairs to the Telephone office located in the lobby of the hotel. It was one of the largest on the island, but really the telephone office consisted of a cheap fax machine, a desk and a couple of chairs. It took about 10 tries to get an operator, and several minutes more to get Lia on the phone. Kim was talking to her, so all I could do was watch her face for signs of the impending doom. She was smiling, she was laughing! — but then Kim always laughed. Then I heard her ask Lia if there were any problems back home. She listened, I waited. It seemed like everything was OK. Hallelujah! I thought immediately, "We don't have to go home!" Kim talked to her for another five minutes and than I said hello and good-bye, and it was over. Slowly, arm and arm, we walked back to hotel secure in the knowledge that we would not have to go home — at least not until we made our next call home in a month.

KIM

01/30/97

CHILDREN IN CHARGE

None of the observations/activities described here is made up...we have seen at least one example of each case/event. On the other hand, how I have chosen to perceive and interpret them is entirely from the inside of my own imagination. I have asked for no local verifica-

tion of my analysis...it is a look from the outside in.

I have never traveled anywhere that I have found such pure love for children. It is a place and culture where the feeling that children are sacred and wonderful prevails without anyone ever having to say so. While it is most obvious in the women, it is not the least uncommon to find a father walking with his young child cradled or saddled over one hip. A child is virtually never heard crying and yet there is no evidence of "spoiling" which might seem to be the consequence of this kind of indulgence. The children are stair steps and as is seen in Central America, the oldest child, all of maybe 5yrs, will often be carrying the smallest infant in a sling while her parents are both busy at other tasks, and she tells it stories and rocks it gently. I have not seen a mother with the look of exasperation that asks the universe why this is her plight, or that look of desperation that questions the overwhelming nature of the daily attention required in each of the smiling faces that surround her, dependent on her for every need. Likewise the fathers do not reflect any hollowness in their gazes that speaks of exhausted frustration from overwork necessary to supply the family's essentials. There simply appears to be a deep and abiding peace with the presence and integration that weaves these young beings into the tapestry of daily life. This is a place where family is a blessing around and through which life flows simply and with great love.

Moving a step further, as we have walked along the village streets and watched the daily activities unfold, we have observed a precociousness, if not a prematurity in the development along the life-experience spectrum (looking from my perspective, that is). It started in Bukit Lawang after I had recovered from whatever ailed me and I went out on the town with Peter who was about 2 days ahead of me in acclimating. I'd gone with him to the orangutan preserve one morning and on the return, we met again with a couple close to our age, who asked us to join

them for dinner down in the heart of the village. En route that evening, I heard the sound of muffled mini explosions...a sort of gunpowder sound that resonated a little more deeply than fireworks. The sound became gradually clearer as we descended the steep stairs moving us closer into the center of town. As I looked over my shoulder I saw three children, the oldest of them being a young 5 years and carrying a small torch from a little fire that was burning at one side of the play area. She hunkered down in front of a 4' long bamboo tube, placed the torch into an opening on the top and blew through the 2 or 3" opening. Out of the other end a huge puff of black smoke emerged accompanied by the exploding sound I had been hearing throughout our approach. I asked Peter to check to see if I was seeing things right, as the younger one took his turn at the same thing, lighting the torch at the fire, carrying it to the bamboo "cannon", inserting it into the top hole, blowing deftly through the opening and "BOOM!" Yep, there it was again. I did not want to stay to see the toddler take his turn. Dad was nearby and unfazed. I was stunned.

This seemed to be the trigger for several other events I would notice in following days. Twice, we passed these young beings...approximately 2 1/2 to 3 years old, tops, squatting comfortably, naked and wielding a full sized machete, hacking gently at small things...unobserved and in no apparent danger other than that which welled quickly and graphically in my personal and vivid imagination. I don't think my kids were allowed used a table knife until they were 5!, and then only with strict supervision. I think that if these kids had scissors, they'd be allowed to run with them.

We finally figured we had caught on to a trend when we saw another 2 year old with a full box of matches all spilled around him, obviously not an autistic savant practicing his quick-count — just a child at play...OR WORK??? That was what we had been missing. This was On-The-Job training in its finest hour? Perhaps. We had seen

no disfigured or dismembered children, nor had we seen frantic parents snatching things out of the hands of their babes. Thinking it out together, Peter and I arrived at the realization/speculation that maturity came quickly in these parts and there were clear levels of testing that lead you into adulthood. As you apprenticed through the system, you still were allowed the joys of a child's play. Every night you accompanied mama to the river or the well and played like pollywogs, slithering and sliding over stones, in and out of buckets and tubs, laughing like the world was truly your oyster. You were truly the child; loved, a blessing and still a part of a family that needed a strong infrastructure and you became aware of the process early, still however, with a balance of respect and demand and expectation.

If you did well with the matches at the age of two...finally figured out somehow what they were for and how they got to work, then you moved up to the machete. Hacking your way through the little things, you became adept and were able to chop some of the bamboo. Hollowing it out at the age of four would not then be difficult and at the age of 5, you certainly were ready to play at discharging gunpowder as if you had also fashioned your own cannon. The trip into the fields or out on the boat or into the realm of housework moved gracefully into your life right from birth and you would become teacher and assistant for the others who came along. And so it was no wonder that you would be given the keys to the family motorcycle when you were 8 or 9.

It helped to explain for us why our bus drivers were all between the ages of 12 and 16 and more than comfortable with the task at hand. The "apprentice" took charge of all the exchanging of money and the older one kept the wheel. The larger bus we rode in from Bukit Lawang to Lake Toba was driven part way by the 17 year old and the remainder of the uphill, hairpin turn road was taken on handily by the 13 yr. old. And all

the while I was comfortable.

Finally we had a handle on it. It was a chain of command, a process of growth and maturation and it simply started from birth rather than from high school or college graduation. We were experiencing a country with the children in charge and they were doing the job quite well. The only family I know in the USA who might offer a parallel to this is the Prychka's in Mays Landing, my beloved neighbors who shared years of child-rearing and neighborliness with me and whose children were held in awe in that same neighborhood for early driving skills and applied understanding of differentiating and sorting scrap metal.

As Peter often accuses me, I have "made up" the interpretation, but the events themselves were most certainly real. And, as other events have occurred, I have let my thoughts about the country and the child-like qualities of all its inhabitants continue to unfold, because I find an innocence and simplicity in almost everyone we have met that is unparalleled in any other of my travels.

PETER

01/31/97

Tuk Tuk, Samosir Island

Lake Toba

Today we did nothing. Laid around the hotel. Laid by the lake and swam. Got badly sunburnt. We packed and had dinner at Tabo Restaurant and were ready for departue the next morning.

Sidikalang, North Sumatra and Pulau Balai

PETER
02/01/97
Hotel Sibayak
Sidikalang, North Sumatra

We'll, the party's over! Today we traveled from Tuk Tuk in Lake Toba to Pangururan on the other side of the island. It took about 2 hours of some very slow going in a mini-pick-up. We started out from our hotel at about 7:30AM, and were immediately picked up by the police chief of Samosir Island. He insisted on taking us to the bus stop, and would not take a thing for his trouble. He dropped us off and told us to get on that bus, and we did. For once we were thankful for the bad roads and the poor condition of our vehicle, because it helped slow our driver down. I know he wanted to go fast, but he couldn't.

For the first hour we had the back pretty much to ourselves. About half way around we began to pick up people and livestock. At times we were so packed in I felt like screaming, but then I would look over at Kim and smile. I was the lucky one I thought. I only had to deal with my legs that were beginning to cramp up, and that I was about to die from the stuffiness. Kim had this and more. At one point she had a tied up rooster half in her lap, who, I remarked to myself, was being fairly well behaved. The woman holding him was drooling red beetle-nut juice onto Kim's arm, and another women kept pointing to her wrist asking Kim to give her her watch.

Finally we arrived in Pangururan. At first we were really at a loss as to where we should go to catch our next bus, but we just took a couple of deep breaths, left our bags in the closest store, and slowly walked around town. We met a civil engineer from Medan down visiting his mother, who just happened to own the store where the tickets for the bus were sold.—and he spoke passable English. With little trouble we were placed on another mini-van for the second leg of the trip. There was no roof rack so they had to tie our packs on to the smooth roof. I didn't feel real secure about it, but the crowd which had gathered to see the "big white people" off, assured me it would be

OK. Mercifully our driver let us sit in the front seat. Kim said that she needed to be next to the window, so I sat between her and the driver. Before we had even gotten to the corner the driver asked me to give him my watch. Great, I thought, now it's my turn. But I needn't have worried, because our driver was just too sleepy to give much thought to harassing me. The road was about as wide as a car-and-a-half. It twisted and turned up over the mountains, which had very few trees, and was about as steep as you would think the side of a volcanoes crater would be. So it was not with a little worry that I looked with one eye over the side to see nothing to stop our slide off the road. There was not even a boulder half way down to stop our death plunge. With the other eye I could see our drivers eyes perfectly in the rearview mirror. They were bloodshot and half closed—sometimes almost all the way closed. As we sped along at a high rate of speed, (but in reality much slower than most rides we had had so far, in Indonesia) he would honk his horn at everything that moved. He did it even in his sleep, and it usually seemed to temporarily wake him up, sort of like a self-inflicted alarm. It was interesting to observe, but I would rather have read about it, than lived it.

About 2 1/2 hours later we were unceremoniously dropped off in Sidikalang. I think our driver indicated that this was the station to Singkil, but we could find no evidence of one. Besides, by that time we had had it and decided to spend the night. We had no idea where we were and no one spoke a bit of English. Finally we just hopped into another mini-bus and "told" our driver to take us to the closest Losemen. Actually, we said, "Loseman? Hotel? Motel? Loseman?" Getting on with all our large luggage was a trip. No one moves here. So we literally had to drag our packs and ourselves over the top of the two ladies sitting right next to the door.

We were dropped off at the Hotel Sibayack. No one at the front desk spoke English, so it was quite difficult even asking for a room. When the little girl behind the counter told us the price I couldn't believe it. I made her write it down. 30,000

Rupias for a room with not much else. I thought that we were getting taken to the cleaners, so I left Kim with the luggage, and wandered around town looking for something less expensive. Almost as soon as I walked away it started to rain, and then the heavy lightning began. I was drenched before I could get to the end of town. I found one other hotel, but it wasn't anything we wanted to stay in. So we wound up taking a room without a bath and no windows for 20,000. We collapsed into our beds exhausted from the effort required.

Later on, after we had rested, we went for a walk outside on the streets to see if we could find something to eat. Almost instantly we were bombarded with kids and people constantly shouting at us, "Hello Mister!" They continued yelling until we answered them in some way. If we didn't, they would keep shouting in a ever rising staccato that never ended until either we answered or we were out of sight. We walked through the market area. It was just closing. It was a sea of people, vehicles, food and garbage. As we slowly walked along the "waters" parted only slightly. The shouts were constant and intense. Kim said it reminded her of what movie stars must feel like. And she whispered to me that she now understood why some of them like Sean Penn had gone berserk and turned violent on his audience.

After about an hour of aimlessly walking, we found we were lost in a town that had only 2 streets. We finally managed to find our way back to the hotel thankfully, without having to ask directions. On a whim, we decided to walk past our hotel in the opposite direction. Ramadan, a time of fasting from sunup to sundown for one month, ended at 6:30pm for the day. Food stalls were beginning to open along the street. Kim and I decided to chance our first street food attempt. She ordered "mei goring" (fried noodles and vegetables), and I selected "nasi goring" (fried rice and vegetables). We got it "to-go", and took it back to our hotel. It was delicious, but we decided not to eat all of it lest it give us a problem on our bus ride tomorrow.

We slept as well as anyone could in a room with out any windows, and awoke around 7:00am. By 7:30 the hotel manager was knocking on our door to let us know that he had found a bus to Sebussalem. It was leaving in 10 minutes. We made it and with minutes to spare. We were out the door and loaded into a small Mitsubishi mini-bus. These are the work horses of Sumatra. You see them everywhere in differing degrees of repair. Most have a good number of missing body parts, they are wired together and they are loud. Ours was no exception. Because we were among the first passengers we had some pretty good seats in the back. The other 4 men in the van wore winter coats, despite it being about 80 degrees. I had on shorts and a T-shirt. They insisted on trying to close all of the windows, but thankfully it only took about 5 or so minutes for them to rattle open again. One or another would eventually awake with a chill I guess, and close all the windows, fall asleep, and again they would be bounced open.

Soon we left the city behind us. From there on it was through beautiful forests and hairpin turns. Even though I felt sick from lack of food, I had to smile as I thought to myself that we had finally done it. We were off on another adventure. And as any good adventure, I didn't know where or when it or even how it would end. The jungle covered hills were breathtaking. Huge trees towered above the canopy; in spots looking like monuments. I was sure that there were monkeys here and I had an urge to have our driver just drop us off on the side of the road. We would fend for ourselves. In the end I just daydreamed as a looked out the constantly opening and closing windows.

After about 2 hours of slow switchbacks we arrived in the town of Subulussalem. On the map it was indicated in small black letters so we assumed it was some kind of a tiny village. We were very surprised to find it was a thriving metropolis. The ride ended at the bus terminal which was about the most different place that I have ever been. The road that entered the market/bus terminal was a single lane with multiple lines of traffic. There were hundreds of becak drivers, bicycles or motorcycles



The Subulussalem market

with side-cars attached. These guys carried everything from women and children all dressed up for a day of shopping at the market, to sacks of cement piled almost as high as their heads.

There were also cars, and trucks, mini-vans and pedestrians by the thousands. The road itself, which had been blacktopped in some distant past, was very badly eroded. Every few feet there were craters and ditches, many almost a foot deep. Everyone swayed and dodged to avoid them as best they could, so that you had drivers weaving fluid figure eight's within others trying to go straight no matter what the condition. The road was only wide enough for a single lane, but it had two way traffic with passing allowed on both sides whenever an opening came up, which wasn't often enough for some driver's tastes. Intermixed among the vehicles were the unfortunate pedestrians. These were the low men on the totem pole. If there was a complete disdain by the vehicle drivers toward the becak drivers there was a total lack of interest in the pedestrian's safety. Young or old, male, female, pretty or not, it made no difference. They were expected to get out of the way, quickly and however best they could. Why there were not more of them killed I could not figure out.

Finally into the terminal we pulled. There was a massive line up of vehicles of every variety lined up in front of the market. We pulled into a vacant space and within seconds we had people yelling at

us, "Singkil! Singkil!" All it took was a nod from me before our bags were whisked from off the top of the van. They disappeared into the vastness of the market before we could even pry ourselves out of the van. I tried to ask about the bags, but everyone was shouting something or another. I struggled to look up the word "bag" in the dictionary, as we were hustled into a waiting mini-van that looked in the worst shape of any I had seen up to then. (And I had seen some pretty bad ones). Then I saw our bags being brought from the very bowels of the market and they were strapped to the top of the van we were in. I was given a ticket on which was written 14,000 rupias. Relieved about our bags, I gladly handed over the money, not really even caring about the fact that I gave the raggedly dressed old man 20,000 and he disappeared waving his hand as he ran like he was going to get change. "Yah, sure," I thought. Surprising me once again though, he returned some 10 minutes later with correct change.

Up till now we had been sitting, like we were



Inside the market

Subulussalam

Subulussalam has a feeling of frontier town, which it is. Now growing fast as a center for logging related industry. Subulussalam is the capitol of the sub-regency Simpang Kiri. Just recently they got connected on to the Indonesian phone system. Subulussalam is a transit point, where one changes busses. This is where the road to Singkil parts from the Medan - Tapaktuan road. Its importance will grow soon when the Singkil road, the new harbor in Singkil and the national road from Sibolga in Sumatra Utara coming up in Rimo, are ready this year. There is now a new phone office, but it lacks the service for collect calling and fax. The market is behind the bus terminal and extra lively on Sundays

told, on the steamy hot bus. When another 10 minutes had passed and we still hadn't moved I figured heck with this and I got off to wander around. Kim stayed behind, choosing not to try to mix with all these people. Slowly, I moved into the market just trying to let myself go with the human ebb and flow. There were interesting things and people to look at everywhere. I tried not to focus my attention in any one spot too long lest I draw even more attention to myself. It seemed to work, as people went about trying to bargain hard for some plastic bucket or bunch of green bananas. I circled back around to see what the taxi situation was. They were still loading bag after bag onto the roof, till it was about 6 feet deep and hanging down to the very edge of the windows. There, mashed between all the sacks and baskets sat out two lonely little backpacks. The driver, a kid about 14, motioned rudely to me to hurry up and get in. I guessed that they were waiting for me, but after sitting inside for another 15 minutes I decided that I had interpreted the gesture incorrectly. As I got out again, the kid got in, so I go back in. He talked for 5 or so more minutes with some of his friends and then started the engine. We took off at a high rate of speed, only slowing down for some obstinate obstacle that wouldn't move despite massive horn blowing. By now we had accumulated about 6 more passengers. As we circled town, to the shouts of, "Singkil! Singkil!" I was very happy to be off on our next leg of the journey.

My hopes were dashed when I saw him turn down that same one lane road that led back to the market. He was one of those fast jerky straight line drivers. He honked and yelled at everything. We were always literally inches from the object in front of us, be it becak, person or animal. We

swiftly pulled back into the market into our same slot, and he turned off the motor

Twice more we made the same circuit. On the second go-round I asked Kim if she had seen our yellow net bag with all of our food in it? She hadn't. The next time we pulled into the bus station, after again making the circuit, I got out and looked up on top. It wasn't there.

I shouted to anyone who would listen, "*Satu tas?*" (one bag?)

No one paid the least bit of attention to my pleas — or so I thought. Then out of the corner of the market I saw a

man carrying our bag walking straight toward us. As he gave it to me, all I could say was, "Terima kasih! (Thank you!)"

At that very moment I think my whole image of this country changed. What if it had been New York? Or LA? Would I ever have seen my bag? These people are so poor that in one guide book it asks you to please not leave out your valuables to tempt the people. One camera it said could easily be worth more than a person's house! It had been a misunderstanding. They had carried off our bags so quickly that they had put it on the wrong vehicle. There must be something to this Muslim religion I thought.

After the third circuit, when our van was packed to the bursting point, the young kid got out and let another man into the drivers seat. Aha! I thought, the kid was just the warm-up driver. Now that our real final driver was here and we would soon be off. And I was right this time. We didn't turn down the road to the market but instead headed out of town on the road to Singkil. Alas, we didn't get very far before we came to a small

service station on the outskirts of town.

There we stopped. We weren't sure why. Our driver got out leaving us all — by now we were 14 — to sit in a closed vehicle in the equatorial sun. For the first 15 minutes no one seemed to mind. Then some grumbles were heard and the side door was opened for some fresh air by the guy who had on a down jacket and was sitting next to the door. It must have been a 105 degrees! We saw our driver come out of the back room rolling a used tire. That was it, we now all figured out what was going to happen and about half of the people left the van. The other half stayed meekly behind not moving, perhaps afraid they would loose their choice seats.

The tire was mounted on a rim, brought over to the car. Our driver noticed there was something wrong with it. Everyone stopped work to come over and participate in the conversation. In the end the crowd convinced him that it was an OK tire. He mounted it and in less than an hour we were again on our way. I was tempted to bitch, but as I saw the tire it replaced I decided to hold my tongue. That and of course the fact that no one could understand me.

Now we were really off, I said to Kim. We kept a good pace for about the first two hours, and we only took on 3 more passengers and their luggage. The road was newly paved. There were work crews at almost every turn. New homes were being built up along the road sides. I really couldn't understand this because the hills looked like a huge chainsaw had buzz-mowed down all of the trees. As far as the eye could see in all directions for mile after mile were cut-down forests, road construction and new homes. Then in the little town of Rimo it all came to an end.

Our driver was calling, "*Singkil! Singkilsingkilsinkil!*", over and over. We stopped every few blocks to pick another passenger. On the other side of town the road turned bad. No!!! Now I mean really bad. It was as bad as the road into the Sebussalem market had been — only this

one seemed to go on forever. We were now 21 passengers, luggage, cargo, wildlife and two very big white people who were taking us much more room as all the rest. It was just because of their sheer size, but that didn't matter to the crowd when every foothold was precious. Our driver couldn't go fast, but it wasn't slow enough not to rattle your teeth and shake a few car parts loose. Luggage was falling off the roof, fenders were falling off the van, and the crowd was getting bouncced around like a can of tightly packed sardines left in the sun too long. Fortunately, we all had a small respite after about an hour when we had a flat tire. Again, only half the mini-van passengers got out of the vehicle. All too soon we were back en route. I figured out that what little shock travel there had been, it was more than used up by all the weight that this poor Mitsubishi was being asked to bear. Assorted fenders and grills and stuff kept being jostled off and dragged for a while under the vehicle.

At odd intervals, we would stop and make efforts to get some of the pieces back in place. Three and a half hours later we had travelled 27 miles the little seaport town of Singkil. We know people who have jogged the same distance faster than the journey we had made in this van.

There was no main square, but rather it was another one of those one street towns that seem to be so prevalent on Sumatra. I guess we were dropped off Downtown. Kim and I were so very happy to be on terra firma again. We piled our luggage up, and stood up to stretch ourselves out. Again no one spoke English, but that didn't stop anyone from trying. I walked accross the street to buy a couple of Cokes. I opened one as I back came across the street. A man quickly grabbed my elbow and said, "In here" as he hustled Kim and I into a small wooden room off of the street. "Ramadan" was all he said. I understood that these people were still fasting, and that it really wasn't very polite to be sipping on drinks when no one else in the town had had anything since 5 in the morning. I nodded thank you, and we sipped on our hot sweet drinks. He then closed both doors

to the room effectively shutting off all air circulation. It wasn't long before we had quickly swigged our Cokes just so we could step outside again. The air smelled hot, but sweet, and we were thankful to be out in it again. Everyone was sitting at picnic tables which were set up in rows under the shops overhanging eaves. We sat down to watch the show and to try to get our bearings. We concluded that we were definitely in the middle of another one of our adventures — one we had traveled 12,000 miles to get to, and we still didn't know where it would end—we hoped

Pulau Banyak. It was little chain of islands that we had heard about. Banyak means many — there are 99 islands — but only a few are inhabited. At present there are about 4000 permanent residents and last year only 50 foreigners came to visit, or so the guide book said—a fact that they seemed very proud of.

But first we needed a place to spend the night in Singkil. In the morning we would look for a boat. As fortune would have it, we had sat down in front of the Inda Wisma, a hotel that had been recommended to us, by someone I couldn't now remember. The guy who had ushered us off the streets was the owner. His Wisma was full up, but he recommended another one about a kilometer back. He suggested we take a becak to it. He even got one for us. It was quite a feat trying to put all of our bags and ourselves onto the tiny, gaily-painted wooden sidecar. In the end we just kind of hung the bags from the front and back, and we carried the rest on our laps. The guy bicycling it

had a hard time getting the thing moving with all the weight, but once he got going we proceeded smoothly back up the street.

The Wisma we stayed at was run by a very nice family. One of the kids was home from his college studies in Jakarta. He spoke passable English.

It was nice to have his help as we were pretty mentally exhausted from trying to communicate even the simplest idea. Our room was comfortable, but it was right off the family living room. Still we concluded that we were so tired that we could

sleep through anything. I'm not sure we really believed it because both of us had seen the Moslem mosque right across the street. Its PA speaker loomed large over the tower, and it was pointed right at our room. However, it was the only room in left in town.

We took a shower, slept for about an hour, and then walked back into town to buy provisions and look for a boat to Pulau Banyak in the morning. The shops were open and willing to sell us food, but it was weird buying so much to eat while the whole town watched us. We knew that they hadn't eaten and drank today, but there was nothing else we could do. They were all gracious and even treated us with a sense of humor. Asking at many points along the way if we were Christian. We had been told by all of the guide books to answer yes, even if you didn't have a religion, because the concept of why you didn't have one would be too difficult for them to comprehend. "Yes," we answered about a zillion times, "Catho-



A cargo boat bound for the islands

Singkil FACTS

Singkil is a small town with only 5.000 inhabitants and just recently connected to other towns by road. In the beginning of the 90's the river or coastal boats were still the only way of going there. The houses are still of old style and built in wood, some have nice carvings. The former residence of the king, next to the main Mosque, is in very good condition, but as it is a private home, it is not open to the public. There are six Mosques in Singkil. Mondays and Thursdays are the market days. Prices for food are relatively high in Singkil, but accommodation cheap.

Walk down to the bridge ("Jembatan") and enjoy coffee in the coffee shop, Al Hidayah, just next to the bridge. From it's verandah you have a nice view over the busy life on the river with canoes going back and forth. On market days (Monday and Thursday) Singkil is very colorful.

Culture.

If a wedding or a circumcision celebration is going on, do not miss it. Traditional dances are often performed, as Singkil has a very active dance troop. The locals appreciate your presence as long as you are properly dressed. Ask at your losmen.

Traditional cigarette "paper" production Traditional cigarettes with a special tobacco quality, hand rolled in a kind of thin sheet from the Nipa palm, are still popular in remote villages in Aceh. The "cigarette paper" comes from Singkil where the production is still carried out by hand in a traditional way. Branches from the Nipa palm, cut into long sticks, are used. The sticks are split 'and the "paper" retrieved. An overloaded canoe brings the sticks to Singkil, and women, sitting on the river banks in the town, do the cuffing. The "papers" are then dried in the sun along the roads. Walk down any of the back streets along a river arm and you can witness the process.

Transportation

The town is small enough to walk everywhere. From the losmen area to the bridge takes approximately 20 minutes. Becak is otherwise the only local form of land transportation. From the losmen area to the bridge is Rp. 1.000. For canoe charter ask at your losmen or at the bridge. Bargain.

Singkil can be reached by boat from Pulau Banyak, or by road from Banda Aceh and Medan via Subulussalaun. There are direct minibuses from Medan and Tapaktuan. If you charter a boat to Pulau Banyak, talk directly with the boat captains; the agents are quite expensive. Price levels depend on weather, availability and public holidays, but should range in-between Rp. 100- 1 50.000. As you can go direct to an island with beach accommodation you save on the cost of local transportation in Pulau Banyak. Be sure that they take you to the island you choose. Two, of many, captains are Pak Mide with the boat Takdir Dilahi (ask for him at the bridge) and Pak Duski with the boat Putri Duyung (ask for him at the river arm behind Losmen Pumama). A new harbor on the sea side will be ready and come into operation during 1996. Until then most boats leave from the bridge ("Jembatan"). That will probably make a part of this information obsolete. A new road between Rimo and Barns, Sibolga will soon be ready. A few busses travel this road already. App. 6 hours journey.

lic!" It seemed that as long as you respected their customs, they would respect yours. We felt no animosity on their part, only curiosity — lots of curiosity.

We finished our shopping, buying a little bit from each of the stores and open markets. We each now carried huge bags overflowing with food, back up to the hotel. We had found and talked to three different people about a boat to the islands in the morning. I let Kim do most of the talking, because her Bahasa was better than mine, but on the

walk back home I told her that I thought we had booked with two boat captains. She thought only one. One left at 7:00AM and the other was to leave at 10:00AM.

Being early risers, but not too early, we went for the one at 10. As we neared the end of the street we ran into one of the people we had talked to about the boat. With a lot of gesturing, and looking up stuff in the dictionary we got the message that we should be ready by 7am. I think Kim now believed, as I did, that we were double booked.

There were indeed 2 cargo boats leaving for the island tomorrow. If we missed them we would have to wait 3 days. We asked the young man at our hotel if he could help us straighten it out, and he assured us it would be no problem. He cleared it all up, coming by later in the evening to let us know that we were to leave at 10. Great!

The mother offered to fix us a meal, and we jumped at the chance. She prepared a little of this and a little of that — most of it shellfish that had been caught in the river that ran through the center of town. We had seen the condition of the river and we were hesitant about eating the clams, oysters and fish but in the end hunger won out. It all was delicious. Once again, although the family didn't eat they went about their business of watching television or talking, leaving all of the eating to us.

The chanting from the mosque was loud, but we were ready for it, or so we thought. Knowing that it would only go on till 12 midnight or so, I didn't even try to sleep, but instead typed for a while on the computer. Kim put in her earplugs and went to sleep, exhausted. What we weren't ready for was the whole family rising at 4 AM talking, eating, watching TV, etc. An hour later the chanting started again. It went on for about an hour and then stopped. Silence! Great, I thought. But my delight was short-lived because an air raid siren screeched for some 10 minutes. Neither of us knew exactly what it was for but I felt that it was a last minute cry to wake up any unfortunate souls that were able to sleep through the morning prayers. It worked, we were now fully awake. That

was it. The house settled down, I guess everyone went back to bed. It seemed like the rest of the town did also. Eventually so did we.

About 7 AM we were awakened by the becak driver wanting to take us to the boat. There had been another misunderstanding. We probably had told him "*tujub*" (7), instead of the much preferable "*sembilan*" (9). We guessed that he said he would come back later. Groggily, we packed in the morning heat, and then took another shower before getting onto that open

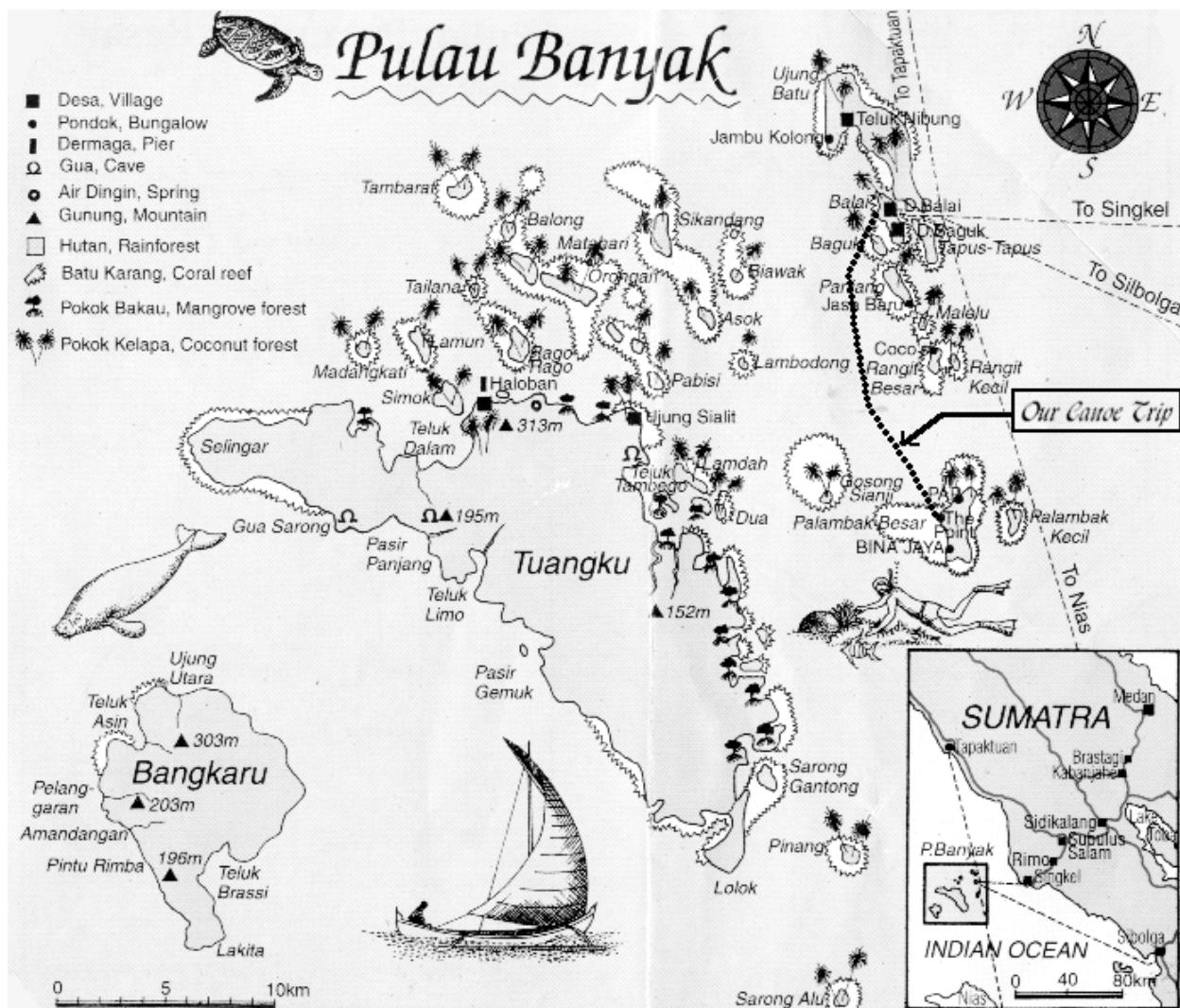
sided cargo boat for 4 hours. A different becak driver came at the right time, and off we went.

We arrived at the boat dock only to find out that the boat would be delayed. Actually, no one told us — we just assumed that to be the case when we didn't leave till 11:30. We were once again, surprise surprise, the hit in town with everyone coming over to take their turn at talking, yelling, staring, or otherwise just hanging around the "big old white people." It was incredibly hot and humid. No one was drinking anything. If we wanted to eat or drink we needed to do it behind closed doors. We tried it one time, but once again found the room too hot and stuffy for more than 10 minutes.

Our boat finally left when every inch of it was occupied. In front were the woman and children. Up top, all of the men — oh yeah, and Kim and I. The boat itself was wooden, about 40 feet long. It had a deck section covered by a tar-papered roof. There was about 4 feet height from deck to roof. This is where the women and chil-



Downtown Singkil



dren stayed. Toward the stern of the boat, raised above the inboard diesel engine and covered by a wooden roof there was another sitting area. It also had about 4 feet height, no chairs, backrests etc. It had a floor area about 8 feet square. Under it sat the 10 male passengers, the captain and Kim and I. At first impressions it was a very stern looking Muslim group. The men talked officially among themselves ignoring the strangers. They passed some kind of papers back and forth each one taking the typed papers, looking at it for a while and then making some kind of comment. Kim and I speculated as to what the paper's contents were, but we were never actually able to figure out what it was.

At first, there was just enough room to sit with your legs under you, but after about an hour, one by one the passengers began to stake out their turf. In the end they were laid out like sardines, arms and legs all entwined among whatever free space was left. Only Kim, I and the Captain remained upright for most of the trip. Then even the captain found a spot to take a nap. He called on his young son to handle the boat most of the way. Eventually I went out into the sunny stern of the boat just to stretch. I liked to the boat captain's son, who was about 15. Each of us tried to use my dictionary to communicate from. Actually, he did a much better job remembering his English than I did remembering my Bahasa. After about an hour we both tired of the learning

and sat in silence.

From the boat dock in town we wound around brackish water channels for about 45 minutes. I felt like we were on a Amazon jungle trip as we passed grass houses and fields. The water was calm and our progress slow and deliberate and very relaxing. Then I saw that we were going to leave the mouth of the river and head out to sea. The Indian Ocean! My very first time. I had been in the Atlantic, Pacific and Caribbean, now the Indian Ocean loomed in front. I could see the waves crashing on the sandbar that separated river from sea. I looked for something to hang onto to brace



*The water on the river was very calm.
I felt like we were on an Amazon jungle trip*

myself for the roughness of the open water.

We easily sliced through the surf and entered the Indian Ocean. It was dead flat calm. Even calmer than the river that we had just come from. I thought that the swells would pick up the further we got away from the mainland, but I was wrong. The surface gleamed like a well polished mirror in the tropical sun. It stayed like that all of the way to Pulau Banyak. It was flatter than a lake. Kim who had taken Dramamine for the anticipated rough crossing had not needed it in the least.

KIM
02/03/97

STILL ON THE MOVE!

As we boarded a small fishing boat carrying some passengers and cargo to Palau Balai where we were going to make our connection for Palembak Besar, and hopefully a week or two of lazy island living, we were, of course, the odd men out in this seagoing adventure. The women went below with their children and we verified a few times the all-rightness of me sitting above with Peter (being the only woman among the men), so that I could avoid sea-sickness. There was no problem, or violation of cultural taboos and we all sat cross-legged under a tarp-and-wood bimini with the captain, his two sons and five or six other adult men. Once again, early into the trip, the father called the 16 year old to the helm and laid down for a nap in the space that was being competitively sprawled into by the rest of this collection of rather serious-faced men who also really wanted to take naps.

A man from Java, darker than the others was wearing a baseball cap with "King of the Road" embroidered on it. He appeared to be well known among the other men and if not the butt of their jokes, patient and practiced at being teased at great length by all or any of them. He attempted to converse with them about some "official" papers the two government officials had brought out and were sharing among the others. Since they didn't appear to be interested in his opinion, he scooted into a nap position next to the Chinese man making reeds to put into balloons so they would whistle — obviously preparing for the welcome end of Ramadan and all the celebration that would ensue in just one week. He had already sold several of the noisemakers to the children on board below, another reason I was desperate not to have to be in the women-and-children-area. Having achieved a certain measure of comfort, his head resting on a lumpy plastic bag, the attention of the rest shifted noticeably. The most serious of the officials

quickly twisted a piece of paper into something he could use to extend his reach and tickle the sleeping man's ear.

Cap comfortably over his face, the reclined napper began to swat at the tickles, sending muffled laughter out through the ranks of the other men. It continued with some cap-pushing and more ear-tickling and still the napping man persisted. The seriousness of all the others had given way to full-fledged giggling and with each attempt to annoy the man, they laughed and giggled even more. It was as close to a return to the second grade as I've gotten in a long while. They carried on until everyone was bored and they arranged themselves into an intertwined, loosely arranged blanket of bodies that I used to love watching when I went early to pick the kids up at day-care. The serenity on their sleeping faces made me smile.

As we came nearer to Balai, the captain awakened and gradually the others too. The younger sons had trailed fishing line for any possibility of an odd catch and the first one came in. We had a school of Jacks in the wake and the excitement escalated as each of the 2 boys pulled in their lines, removed the fish and threw their lures back. The captain slowed the boat and made his best effort to swing back, partly an effort to keep the school close enough to get as many fish as possible, partly to keep the excitement alive and partly just because it was something else to be doing. All the men had now come to life and were in the back trying to cash in on the action. The man from Java was definitely unclear about what to do, but eager to try anything appearing fun. The others, were fairly adept at picking the fish off the hooks and

the pile began to grow significantly with much laughing and cheering. As he began taking us back onto the course to Balai, the captain reached over and tweaked the King-of-the-Roads balls and the raucousness began to subside with the division of the fish being made among the enthusiasts. The most serious of the government officials had three of the glistening Jack neatly tied, in hand. His cap was very jauntily off to one side and his briefcase that at the beginning he kept tightly at his side to assure the respect his position merited, had long since slid into the anonymous pile of baggage that soon would be unloaded onto the dock. What a group.

PETER
02/03/97
Pulau Balai

We arrived at Balai, the main city in Pulau Banyak, about 4

PM. It was very hot and humid as we stepped off the boat onto a small open air restaurant. As luck would have it, the owner of the hotel in Pulau Palembak was also there. Their boat was being repaired, but if we liked he could find a charter for us—for 20,000 rupias. The normal charge was 10,000 for both of us and I tried to bargain, but it seemed to fall on deaf ears.

I was surprised to see a small dugout canoe arrive with an tiny inboard diesel motor — and, the boat had no cover! Our skin is still really white, and a trip like this could have fried us had it not been for Kim, who as a lark bought an umbrella in Singkil before we left. At first I felt a little weird sitting under a yellow umbrella as our canoe slowly chugged along, but after awhile I felt more like Humphrey Bogart in African Queen. My little Katherine Hepburn sat comfortably between my legs holding back the ravages of the sun with her



We passed deserted island after deserted island

FACTS about Pulau Banyak

Uninhabited islands, fantastic beaches, fine coral reefs, rich in variation and fish, virgin jungles and a rich wildlife, make Pulau Banyak such a unique place. Pulau Banyak is a just recently "discovered" archipelago in South Aceh. It consists of "99" islands, in which less than 4.200 people live. The main village is Desa Pulau Balai, which forms one settlement together with the village Desa P. Baguk in the island of Balai. The other villages are Haloban, Ujung Sialit and Teluk Nibung. Only the island of Balai has electricity (between 5:30 p.m. and morning). Desa P. Balai has a post office and a telegram office. International phone calls can be made over radio. There is no place to change money. The earliest people lived in Tuangku Island and arrived from Simeulue. Tuangku became a kingdom in the 18th century, but was controlled by the Sultan in Banda Aceh. It was a transit point for the slave traffic between Nias and Aceh. The population is today mixed with Minangkabau (Padang), Nias and lately Acehnese. The local languages are Halobaii, related to languages in Simeulue; and Singkel, a dialect of Padang and Nias. Desa P. Balai became the main village in 1941.

Weddings and circumcision-celebrations are colorful and interesting to see. Traditional dances have their origin mainly in the Minangkabau culture (Padang), but are specific for Pulau Banyak. A very special dance is the "Lansir Madam" which is an odd remnant of the Dutch colonial era. This dance has recently been revived by the dance troop of the Baguk Village. The concept of time hardly exists in Pulau Banyak. Wonderful when you are at the beach, but frustrating when waiting for the boat. Pulau Banyak is still not a very big tourist destination and is very Indonesian. Traditional values are strong and the people very much appreciate visitors who try to respect their way of life such as "decent" dressing in the villages. Away from the villages wear what you like. Nude bathing is accepted as long as no one "has to" see you. There are lots of empty beaches and islands, so don't worry. Most islands have mosquitoes, some many and others not at all. Insect repellent is sufficient to keep them away. Stingrays are common in Pulau Banyak. They are dangerous to step on where they lay hidden in the sand close to the beach. It is seldom someone has the bad luck to step on one, but it can happen. If it happens, contact immediately a local to get the wound treated. As most of the food supplies are imported from Sibolga, shortages do occur. The locals are still very inexperienced in running beach resorts and you need some

Villages

Four out of the six villages in Pulau Banyak are so called "Desa Tertinggal", i.e., underdeveloped village without electricity, adequate health care or schools.

Desa Balai and Desa Baguk These two villages have grown together and are located on the small island Pulau Balai. It is the administrative and commercial center of Pulau Banyak and the main entry point for visitors to Pulau Banyak. Appr. 2.000 inhabitants. Local language: Singkil (or Jamu), a Padang dialect. From here you can find transportation to the islands with beach accommodations. Balai/Baguk has several losmens and a few restaurants. It is basically a fishing village. There are no cars, only a few motorbikes that cannot go far on this small island. A bridge is slowly being built that will connect Pulau Balai with Pulau Ujung Batu and the village Teluk Nibung. For those who prefer village life there is still easy access to nice beaches. On Pulau Balai itself some coral for snorkeling can be found on the southern end at the lighthouse. The closest islands can be reached by paddling a small canoe by your self, or if you need company, just ask someone to show you. Ask in your losmen. From the main village in Balai you can make nice day trips to the Baguk, Tapus-Tapus and Panjang islands.

Pulau Palambak Besar Someone said: "The most beautiful island I ever saw in Asia". Palambak Besar is definitely beautiful, and also the fourth biggest island in Pulau Banyak. It takes about 3-4 hours to walk around and it has white sand beaches almost all the way. In the middle of the jungle is a swamp forest, interesting enough for short treks. The only locals live mainly in 10 to 15 huts spread out around the island. Most of them are Nias people, very easy-going and helpful. Their are a fair number of birds in Palambak: Great-billed Heron, Pacific Reef Egret, White-bellied Fish-eagle, Brahminy Kite, Common Ringed Plover, Pink-necked Green Pigeon and Pied Imperial Pigeon, Stork-billed Kingfisher, White-rumped Shama, etc. Sometimes a Hawk Bill Turtle, can be seen laying eggs in front of The Point Bungalows. Nearby, Palambak Besar, are the islands of Palambak Kecil to the east, and Gosong Sianji to the west. Both are nice for day trips and also better for snorkeling and diving. Palambak Kecil has its best reef at the southern end.

Gosong Sianji sometimes has currents and water visibility changes a lot. There are nice sandbanks outside The Point. In low tide they are visible and can be reached by walking through the water.

Palambak Besar has three beach accommodations, all far apart. The character of these places are all different and surely one will fit your taste. The Point on the northwestern point has two four-room bungalows each with a big verandah with bamboo furniture. A restaurant with a 270 degree sea-view and a small bar/shop, is placed on the point itself. The Point has electricity in order to serve cold drinks, juices and store vegetables. The Point also has the best view. Snorkeling is best straight out from the Point to the north. There are also free traditional canoes for use. Diving activity is planned to be started at The Point in September 1996. Bina Jaya Bungalows in the south western end has four one-room-bungalows with bamboo furniture and a cozy restaurant with set menu. Bina Jaya has a Volley Ball court where you can enjoy a tough game with the local Nias guys. Bina Jaya has the best swimming beach in Palambak. The coral reefs are far out, but big fish can be seen. They also have free traditional canoes. Pondok Asmara Palambak (or just PAP), on the northern shore has four one-room bungalows with verandah and a small restaurant with a set menu. The jungle and a small river for your bath are in the back. The sea is shallow in front of PAP, but next to it is a very nice beach stretching all the way down to The Point. Just outside PAP to the left is a small but very nice coral reef. Free traditional canoes are available. Walking time: PAP to The Point: 20 minutes. The Point to Bina Jaya: 40 minutes.

From "A Travelers Handbook to Aceh", Aceh Tourism Office 1996/1997, written by Mahmud Bangkaru

little yellow umbrella.

As we passed deserted island after island I mused to myself that this was exactly what I thought the south seas would look like. Tiny islands dotted the landscape. Each one had a seemingly perfect white sandy beach surrounding it. They were all fringed with very tall coconut trees. Many of them hung out at odd angles over the sea. At any moment I expected naked brown skinned "savages" to come out in their canoes and capture us. They didn't — instead we just kept cruising along for about an hour and a half, mostly in silence.

When we reached Pulau Palambak, and The Point Hotel I was not disappointed. It looked like all of the other islands that we had passed. Like a real tropical paradise. We beached the boat and

threw all of our luggage onto the sand. We sat for a moment so happy to be done with the days traveling. We were finally there-here! A tall lanky dark-skinned man met us.

He lead the way to our new home. We wound our way back away from the beach, past a charred and burnt yard to a small wooden building with a porch across the front. There was a big log buried in the sand which we used as a step up to the porch. He left us there. We opened

each of the three rooms in turn, one was obviously occupied. They were small, dark boxes of a room, with two thin well used mattresses on the floor. There was some nice bamboo furniture on the porch and we sat for awhile to survey our surroundings. In the distance we could see the lovely aqua blue Indian Ocean. Through the burnt vegetation we could also see small glimpses of the



Our first look at Palau Palambak

white powdery beach.

Our neighbors had just come back from a day of snorkeling. They were a young couple from Sweden. I asked how the snorkeling was. The look on their faces said it all.

"They've dynamited the reef to catch the fish. There are just small bits and pieces left. We didn't see anything interesting. We heard that there was a dive operation, but the guy just up and left. That's what we're going to do tomorrow — if we can find a boat out of here?"

Kim and I looked at each other. No words needed to be spoken. We sat in silence for a while. The hot tropical breeze blew across the scorched earth and we had a good whiff of charred ground. After a while we set about the business of making ourselves comfortable. Hauling our bags into the tiny room, making up our beds, hanging up the food bag, and in general distributing our "stuff".

After we had poured cool water on our heads in the mandi, we got a warm coke from the kitchen building in back, and sat down on the beach. It was truly a tropical paradise. True, our accommodations were less than we had dreamed of, but then if it were easy to get to and the place was Club Med there would have been a lot more people here. We had many options open. We could move to another spot, or even to another island, we could camp, look for another house, or just be happy were we were for a while. In the end that's exactly what we did do. In fact things did look better. Hey, maybe this wasn't too bad after all. We could use it as our base camp to explore the island. OK, now things were beginning to look up. Then we met Doctor Love!

It was getting dark and we were eating a little dinner of raw pancakes and a bowl of fruit when the same black guy who showed us our room walked by. He went to the beach gathered a lot of dry wood, built it into a small pile, and set fire to it. He watched it for a few moments and then came back to us and said, "A little fire. I like fire."

He left us and walked the opposite way down

the beach stopping to gather more wood along the way. He did the same thing, only by this time it had gotten dark and we didn't see him again. I looked at Kim and said that maybe he was the one who had been setting fire to the yard? She agreed with me that it was possible. We giggled ourselves to sleep, repeating over and over,

"A little fire. I like fire,"

The next day we awoke and things looked and felt brighter. Then Doctor Love set fire to our front yard. I do not mean a little campfire—I mean a full blazing brush fire. We were sitting comfortably on our front porch, I was typing something



Dr. Love setting fire to our front yard

or another on my palmtop. The Doctor appeared, we said "Hi" to him and he waved. I could smell that he was smoking a clove cigarette. He walked up and down the pathway in front of our building deep in thought. He seemed to look up in the sky a lot and rub his chin — thinking. He reached down took a clump of dried grass and lit it with his Bic lighter. He leaned down and torched the dead vegetation in our front yard. Almost immediately the flames took hold and leaped into the air in the dry morning air. Flames jumped 6 to 8 feet in the air as it raced to engulf the rest of our yard. At first, I was worried about our grass covered roof catching fire, but then I could see that there was a land breeze, it was blowing the flames and the smoke out toward the sea. Doctor Love stood a small dis-

tance away, puffing on his clove cigarette, obviously very pleased with his work.

I was speechless I just couldn't believe that someone could set fire to the yard while the tourists sat 5 feet away. In the end it seemed to work OK. The constant breeze kept the smoke to a minimum, and the flames leaned out to sea, away from our tinder thatched roof. This man was definitely someone to watch.

KIM
02/07/97

Palambak Besar, Pulau Banyak

As we have spent the time in a little more quietness since arriving at Palambak, I have also read more that helps me understand the innocence and youth that we see everywhere. In the explanations of the people of Sumatra, particularly in this northern area where we have been traveling, the boys leave home when they reach puberty. The Bataks used to have separate spaces where the boys went to sleep, apart from the married couples and other children, once they entered adolescence. Now, they simply leave home and set out to find a wife or independent way of life. Since they are usually no more than 14, they fall into these places and the growth of tourism allows new places for them to earn money and frequently, take complete charge. They have no other responsibility for family any more. In some cases, once they do find mates, they will be allowed to return to the homes of their mother's. In the meantime, they become the leaders of the country, its industry and the guides for determined travelers like ourselves.

I watched Mawan last night while we talked with him at the Point. He is 22 and in total charge of two tourist accommodations and the needs of all the tourists that come in. He has been doing the cooking for the past 5 years. He laments its boredom and the complexity that is presented by the needs of so many different travelers. The end of Ramadan brings a time for

great celebration but he has to come out to us. He does it less than willingly but recognizes that since all the other help has abandoned 6 of us, leaving us with no food, water or boat, it will be necessary for him to pass up the partying. He doesn't really want tourism to flourish that much. From his perspective, it is a definite pain in the ass.

KIM
02/10/97
Palembak Besar

ISLAND PARADISE WITH A TWIST

To recover a little ground and get us from our boats arrival at Balai, to the present, we first needed to get into our specially chartered dug-out with inboard motor, piloted by a non-english speaking man who had been goaded into the task of hauling Peter, me and our bags on to Palembak. He was not overjoyed but he wasn't cranky either. We got in and made the last leg of this very tedious, long journey and eventually landed at The Point where we stayed for our first few nights on the island. It is an accommodation with two bungalows, each with four small rooms. Each room is only about 9 ft square and the entire building is precariously balanced on very irregular pilings. When anyone in room 1 moves, the activity is felt fully in room 4. We decided on an end room in the second bungalow with a little window that looked out to the west and the flat, calm Indian Ocean. Two younger couples seemed happily ensconced in the other bungalow and were full of sociable enjoyment...they were talking a lot and we needed quiet to soothe our grinding joints and the painful confinements we had endured to get ourselves to this absolutely beautiful tropical island that we knew immediately had been one of the many we had drooled over in the photos of OUTDOOR and all the other travel magazines.

One other couple was in this bungalow. We had seen them leaving Singkil earlier in the day. They had already snorkeled one side of the is-

land with great disappointment and had been told that the dive operation they had actually come for was not operational and that it was very unclear as to when it would start up again. They were obviously discouraged, badly sunburned and were already planning to leave the next day. A bit discouraged ourselves by the less than clean and airy accommodation of the small room and the recently scorched foliage that spread out in front of the bungalow, all the way up to the beach, we talked with them through the evening and decided that we wouldn't bail on the island just yet but sympathized with their discouragement, remembering other times when we had just needed to move out, not being able to take any further stress of the less than accurate information that comes with this kind of travel. They were heading on to Berastagi where order was more prevalent, and the mountain coolness would be a profound relief for their scorched bodies.

We slept soundly if not completely comfortably in our little cubicle and lamented the poor circulation. Before our neighbors left the next day, they told us of other accommodations they had seen on both ends of the island off the Point. Each one was a 20 minute walk in either of the separate directions. We decided to make the check on whatever was off to the right. We walked by PAPS, four small, free-standing bungalows with its own kitchen/restaurant and decided we would wait until a bit more of a walk, stopping to actually see inside them on our return walk, if it struck our fancy later. We rounded another point and sat in the shade, swam a little and decided to return since the heat seemed to be more than we wanted to deal with. We had had no real sun exposure up to this time, other than getting a bit burned the last day in Lake Toba. My nose was just browning, but my chest was still red so I had worn a T shirt to protect myself. We had, fortunately, remembered to bring the umbrella and needed it very much for the walk back.

In spite of the heat, we did stop at PAP's and were mildly impressed, mostly with the inde-

pendent bungalows. We decided to think about it and possibly see the other place too. In the meantime, we would work out the little annoyances at the Point and be thankful for having found this beautiful place at all.

It was now just 3 couples staying in the bungalows and as we sat that afternoon, nursing burnt areas that had not been protected by the umbrella, we noticed that the cook had decided to leave on the late afternoon boat. We didn't think much of it until the other helping person whose primary job seemed to be the turning off and on of the generator in the evening, came to Peter and me and in a collection of English and Indonesian parries, seemed to be saying that we would be able to fix whatever we would like for ourselves, if we wanted any dinner.

He could see no signs of the cook returning, and he thumped his flashlight into his palm indicating that he was going off with his friend. It seemed easy to figure that if we wanted to eat and the cook was gone and generator man now history also, that it would be a good idea to get to dinner preparation before the sun actually set. He had said nothing to the other two couples (we later learned that he has some reserve about talking to young people) but he called me mama and passed on information easily to Peter and me.

I was not feeling "motherly" enough to volunteer to do all the cooking so we let the others know the situation and we all converged to prepare something. It was only mildly upsetting to find very little for the preparation. One of the young women was quite piqued but was leaving the next morning anyway and we took her aggravation as a sign that seemed to confirm the rightness of her plan. The other couple who would be staying was more affable about the situation and eventually we had introduced ourselves, cooked up one of those camp meals that always surprises everyone by really tasting good too. Later the couple, who was planning to stay, even went back and made fried bananas for all of us.

This had had been made possible in part by the return of generator man who had fired up our 4 hours of electricity and faded somewhere back into the interior. We were happy, our bellies were full and it was once again time to take Larium, our anti-malarial medication.

Peter has continued deliberating the worth of taking this medication from the beginning. Dr. Melby's recommendations in Aan Antonio had bolstered him somewhat as we began taking it, but doubts crept in and out and each week brought stories from new travelers. He had had no side effects to this point. I, on the other hand who was vowed to take this medication to the end and panicked at even the sight of a mosquito, had had two instances of side effects that had disturbed me a bit and unsettled my convictions. I was lulled back into confidence in it when the last dose had done nothing, and I took my tablet and went to sleep when the generator and all our lights went out at 10pm.

The sound of an arriving boat sometime around midnight and an ensuing re-firing of the generator, a mix of voices and activity around our bungalow, and on the porch seemed to catch Peter and I at a spooky level. We were responding to sounds and movements with less than pure calm. Vulnerability and panic are not usual responses for either of us but they were gathering force at this point. I thought someone else was in the room at one point and later Peter had the same feeling. We were having little bits of sleep and even after things quieted down and we realized that someone had just been given a room...a late arriving boat captain who was taking the young couple at 5am — we did not get any really restful sleep.

When we got up, we decided to snorkel off the point before breakfast. We were operating under the assumption that the cook had been one of the returning beings that had interrupted our sleep. The sea was dead flat and it was a quick swim out to several beautiful, undamaged coral heads and a multitude of beautiful fish we

had not ever seen in the Caribbean. We swam and marveled and after half an hour, I realized that I was getting very dizzy. I have done that before in choppy water while we were diving and snorkeling so I just told Peter I was going in. He joined me and by the time we were at shore I was really unable to keep walking so I sat at one of the tables under the canopy and put my head down. We decided it would be better if I went ahead and walked back and layed flat. I hate when I do that!!! In evaluating it a bit, we realized that our convoluted dreaming and anxiety the night before was very likely a component of a response to the Larium and this dizziness was most definitely the effects of it. If Peter ever takes another one, I will be surprised and with this go-round, I am not sure how I will feel next week. Significantly added to our consideration is the fact that in taking Larium as our prophylaxis, we will be unable to be treated with it if we happen to fall into that margin of people who still contract the disease in spite of their prophylactic care. Our decision for Larium was the presence in Indonesia of resistant strains of the disease and in particular, the cerebral malaria which is most often fatal. Oh, dilemma, dilemma!!!

I lay down for a while and Peter wandered off to see about breakfast only to discover that cook had NOT returned and no provisions had come back either. The failure of the cook to return added a bit of anxiety to the developing picture — the absence of provisions was a distinct problem. There was really nothing to eat. Peter and I had a few veggies and a couple of pieces of fruit but we all still seemed to believe that the cook would be back. When generator man, who we had now come to know as Dr Love, came up the path with two beautiful fish, he claimed happily that we had dinner! The young couple, Michelle and Jason had come over and we had been trying to form Plan B, now realizing that the end of Ramadan occurred during the upcoming weekend and it was a time for all families to be together...hence cook would realisti-

cally not be coming back for about a week, if at all. If Dr Love was hesitant to pass along the truth of this bad news to us, I think he was also hard put to admit to himself that he had lone responsibility for these 4 starving white people. I strongly suspected at this point that the original chef had long since jumped ship somewhere, having been simply overwhelmed by the demands of white people wanting food at such regular intervals.

Now our very shy and not very apt replacement as social director, cook, etc. looked to be Dr. Love It was evident that he was not taking well to the new responsibility, i.e., creating loaves and fishes from nothing, for the masses (us 4) out of the 2 fish begged off of from a passing fisherman. The arrival of a food solution had buoyed his spirits considerably. As we went back toward the kitchen around 5 PM, all with separate ideas of what to do with the fish we thought we were supposed to prepare, we found that he had already prepared them for us. He timidly pointed out a covered pan, indicating the fish — and I had already discovered the pot of rice cooking way beyond its time and plentiful enough for at least forty hungry men.

In spite of the day's rest, my body had failed to overcome the dizziness and nausea and it even seemed to be increasing in efforts to finally overcome me. Michelle was devastated at the fish's appearance in the pan. In her hunger, she had spent the afternoon imagining the succulent batter-fried strips she was willing to prepare with the lone egg and bit of flour she had uncovered. Peter reached into the pot, ever trying to stave off despair, and popped a piece into his mouth. After a brief chew, he declared it truly edible, if not perfectly tasty. I felt my admiration of his efforts rise through my nausea, but nearly lost it when he brandished a piece towards me, hoping I would join in his act of encouragement.

I had been trying to focus on creating a salad from a remnant of cabbage and two of our tomatoes with our last cucumber. Getting

up to select something for the dressing and catching the piece of fish moving handily across my sensory field, I lost the fight. I reported quietly that I wouldn't be able to continue this one and aimed quickly back to our porch and my rat-tan lounge, praying that I would not throw up or faint in the process. I succeeded in getting back to a flat position and later saw the three headed for Michelle and Jason's porch, plates in hand but not looking as happy as any of them had planned to feel.

The three of them stayed for what Peter later described to me as a very silent meal. I had seen him leave Michelle and Jason where the three had been eating. He had gone out to Dr Love who was standing on the point, probably feeling more stressed than he ever had in his life, having had to perform in such an unfamiliar realm. I saw Peter's broad gestures and felt so proud, knowing that he was thanking Dr. Love, who then seemed to be joining in the conversation, as witnessed by additional gestures and some laughter. The sun was setting and I knew that when Peter returned to our porch later, I could have him get me some of that plain rice to put into my now, much more restful stomach.

PETER

02/10/97

Bina Jaya

A TRIP FOR FOOD

Today has been has not been the best of vacation days. First our cook took off to visit his family a few days ago, somewhere on the mainland. That left us with only Doctor Love to cook for us—except that he didn't know how or what to cook for the tourists. The "tourists" now consisted of a young English couple, Jason and Michelle, and of course Kim and I. Not only did the Doctor not cook, but the cook had only left us 1 egg, 6 cokes, and a very little bit flour. We needed to make a trip to Pulau Balai for food if we wanted to eat.

So Jason, myself and the Doctor charted a small dugout from one of the local islanders. The

Doctor said that we would leave about 8 AM the following day. The morning came and went, 8 o'clock, then 10 approached. Jason went off to see what was holding him up. He found him in the kitchen area with one of his friends, talking. Jason asked when we were going to leave.

"Oh, leave at 8 o'clock. What time now?"

Jason told him it was after 10.

"Go see boat. Now! I go."

And off he went down the beach, we guessed to get the boat. He returned about a half hour later and said, "Boat come." and went back to the kitchen to wait.

Soon the dugout came up to the front of the point. A young islander was piloting. He beached the boat and waited patiently while we all got aboard. When the three of us were seated he took off. By now it was almost 11 and not very "partly-cloudy".

Our dugout was about 16 feet long and had an inboard diesel motor. It was fairly unstable. When anyone shifted even the slightest it threatened to capsize us. We went very slowly, about as fast as you might walk. I kept expecting our captain to pick up the speed, but he never did. At first I thought it was because that's all there was, but he must have slipped on the throttle, because we picked up speed at one point. He caught it in time though, and we settled back into our slow progress. It seemed to take forever. First I would see an island in the distance and stare at it while we made our way toward it. Only we never seemed to reach it. So I stopped looking, but every 5 or 10 minutes I would glare back at it, and yep! It was just as far away!

There was of course no shade. Kim had tried to give me the umbrella, but I said I didn't need it. I did! So I was slightly miffed with myself as I saw our captain take out a large umbrella and sling it over his shoulder. The noonday sun beat down on us. Jason was young, he hadn't even bothered to bring a shirt. Dr. Love curled up in the bow of

the boat, dressed in Levi's and a heavy cotton shirt. I had shorts and a light T-shirt. I could feel the burn of the sun on my white flesh. One of the things that we had neglected to bring had been sun screen. "Oh, we'll be able to buy it there," I had declared. We hadn't. Fortunately some other tourist had left a small bit of it at the Point. I bathed all of my naked flesh including my ears. Now I was hot, but hopefully I would not burn.

After an hour of travel we came upon the boat going back to the Point. Mawan, one of the part owners was on it. Dr. Love and he exchanged words for about ten minutes. Then Mawan said in English, "You know there's no food in Balai? It is Ramadan."

I had seen the town on our way in. I could not believe that a town of that size, the main one in the chain of islands, didn't have food. Even if it was Ramadan! Apparently Dr. Love didn't believe him either because we continued on our way. I said to Jason that I didn't trust Mawan. "What kind of owner just leaves a bunch of tourists on a semi-deserted island with no food?", I asked. "Now I think he just wants to make sure we eat only in his restaurant."

It took forever to get to Balai. Almost two hours. We finally pulled up to the dock in front of a restaurant. We sat in the shade for a few minutes before venturing off to do the shopping. I had quite a list. I had carefully made it together with Kim the night before. I then looked up as many of the words in the Bahasa Indonesian dictionary and carefully wrote out the translation next to each. Then on the way over to Balai I listed a few question that I might need such as:

"Libat libat." (Just looking.)

"Apa Bahasa Indonesianya...?" (How do you say...?)

"Saya mau beli..." (I want to buy....)

"Barapa?" (How much?)

"Saya tidak mengerti Bahasa Indonesianya." (I don't speak Bahasa.)

And the ever useful:

“Dimana kamar kecil?” (Where is the toilet?)

Dr. Love took us onto the main street which ran along the edge of the sea and said, “Food there. Meet one hour.”

OK, we answered and began the two person parade. That’s what it felt like. That’s what it always feels like. Two big strange circus people walking down a street lined with people trying to get a glimpse at them or maybe just a wave of Hello. There were dozens of small shops. Some only had rickety old wooden tables up front covered with piles of strange fruits and vegetables. Others had small stores filled with goods in a shop behind the table. In them, there were various jars of candies, soap, crackers etc. I told Jason that I thought we should walk all of the way through town to see all there was to buy, and then come back making our purchases on the return. He agreed.

Upon closer inspection of the shops we found not much in the way of canned goods. This was something that Kim and I had found pretty consistently in Sumatra. Not since Medan had we seen a “supermarket,” and then only one. One shop had a few cans of sardines and some condensed milk. So we turned our attention to the tables out front. Small piles of dried fish were everywhere. I guess we could make soup with these, but then I have always hated fish soup. There were also small oranges, bananas, a tiny variety of potatoes. Also there were about the smallest onions I have ever seen. Later, back at home Kim told me they were considered a delicacy, but I found them just a pain in the ass to peel. There were also many piles of I guessed different herbs and roots. With these, I had no idea what to do.

“Well,” I said to Jason, “ready to take the plunge?”

“All right then, let’s give ‘er a whirl,” he said in his heavy cockney accent.

We walked into the shop that had the largest amount of piles on the table. There were about 10

ladies and children gathered around talking, and sorting food. They all looked up as we approached. We both spotted a couple of heads of cabbage at the same time. I pulled out my list and said, in my best Bahasa voice, “*Kubis! Barapa?*” (Cabbage! How much?!)

One of the old ladies answered something that sounded like, “*Kopirittiury burjumja ...*”

I mumbled to myself, “OK, We’re not going to understand this. Let’s try, and I indicated that I didn’t understand by shrugging my shoulders and saying, “*Tidak mengerti Babasa Indonesianya.*” (I don’t understand Bahasa.)

All this did was make the frustrated lady speak louder, longer and with more animation. She said something that made all of the other ladies laugh out loud. Not knowing what it was I just grinned like an idiot, and shook my head up and down. Another lady approached me and asked to see my note. She studied it for a very long time, then turned it over and wrote 1500.

“*Ya! OK! Bagus!*” I answered and we put the head of cabbage off to the side making one pile for Jason, and another for me. We moved on to the next item on my list. Jason didn’t have a list. It looked like he was just going to buy whatever I bought.

“*Jeruk manis! Barapa!*” I said picking up a dozen small oranges. The lady picked up my list and wrote 1200. “OK,” I answered. I knew that I should bargain, but the effort that it required was beyond my meager capacity. So instead I just said OK.

This went on till our heads were spinning with the effort. By then we each had a cardboard box filled with goodies. I was only about half way down my list, but I felt it best to move on up the street to the next shop to continue our purchases. Besides there was a young boy who took great delight in whipping me with a banana peel every time I turned around. I wanted to smack him, but no one else seemed to pay much attention to him. As we walked away, in frustration I guess, he hit me in the back with the peel. I turned around and yelled



A trip to Balai for food

“Hey!” At him, but he had already run off.

At the next couple of shops we continued to pick up an item here and another one there. One shop would have cooking oil, but not margarine. Another would have cookies, but no... well you get the idea. About half way back to the dock a wizened up old woman approached. She had warts and sores all over her body and I was pretty sure she was crazy. Especially when she kept trying to grab things out of my box as we walked along. One of her grabs was finally successful. She got a large package of cookies that I had on top. Actually she got the cookies and the flour, but dropped the bag of flour. Once I saw she meant business, I quickly picked it up and swung around protecting my box with my back. Each time she made another grab I would deftly turn, putting it out of her reach.

Thus it was, that the three of us cartoon characters walked through the center of the shopping area. The town watched in delighted amusement. Some of the children called out some, I’m sure, not nice remarks. Others just looked on. One shop keeper seemed to apologize for the old ladies repeated jabs, but I tried to indicate that it was “OK”. All of the paper money, the Rupias, have been in circulation for quite a long time. They were very crumpled and less than paper-thin. I had long since give up the idea of trying to fold them into neat pile and put them into my wallet. Instead everyone just kept them as crumpled bits of colored paper. Each time I made a purchase I reached into

my pocket pulled out a handful, and paid usually by the color. Trying to sort through the money, keep an eye posted for “the grabber”, and hang on and guard the ever growing box of food I dropped a wad of bills into the dirt. She made her move. She was quicker than I and grabbed one of the bills closest to her. It was a brown 500 rupiah note. It was worth about 22 cent US. I let it go.

She took the note to the same man that I had made my recent purchases from. She laid 3 marquesa and 2 clove cigarettes on the counter. She was still clutching the red cookie package tightly to her bosom. I felt sorry for her and told her, “*Bebas!* (Free!). She didn’t seem to notice. The shopkeeper did, and seemed to nod in approval while making a little twirling action with his finger around his temple.

Toward the end of the street we met Dr. Love. He even helped us out by translating the word for “vinegar” (or so we thought) at one store. Although later it turned out to be some kind of oil to clean your gun with. Finished with our shopping, exhausted from the mental gymnastics we loaded everything into the tiny dugout and made our way back out to sea. By now it was about 4 in the afternoon and we were heading right into the tropical sun. I could feel my right ear was starting to burn, so I took out my scarf, dipped it in the sea and put it over my head. Jason thought that I looked like a littl old Polish lady from the back, but I was just happy to get out of the tropical sun.

Finally we made it back to the point, dropped off the Doctor and Jason and then shoved off for Bina Jaya, where Kim was waiting with open arms — for the food.

KIM
02/11/97
Bina Jaya

REFLECTIONS FROM A “VACATION”
WITHIN THE TRAVEL

The morning is soft and cool and mostly greys. The turquoise water in front of the bungalow is lapping gently against a sandy bank of



Reflections

palms that is eroding slowly so that eventually our little row of four bungalows will stand in water, but not before we have to leave. It began raining about 5am this morning and the coolness seems like it will be with us for most of the day. It is a pleasant relief from the intensity of the sun's warmth at the distance of only 2 degrees latitude away from the equator.

I can see my reflection in the screen of the computer and realize that it has been a couple of weeks since I have seen myself in a true mirror. We have become comfortable with a wardrobe of assorted pieces of clothing that create a fashion statement unique to this sort of travel and climate and a number of other variables. Comfort is the ultimate directive and we have several expressions of that modality. Today's is the long soft pants —Peter's are blends of blue and white rayon with an occasional coffee stain and mine are turquoise and cream, purchased after bargaining a shopkeeper down to \$4, and yet to be stained with some unremovable substance I am sure to spill on myself. Both are soft tied at the waist. The sleeveless

tops are the perfect compliment for our lounging in the privacy of our own space and if the coolness persists, we may need our flannel shirts — sporty plaids of the Walmart variety, probably made not too far from here in one of Kathy Lee's very own sweat shops. Otherwise, if company comes along we will find something with sleeves that will keep our sense of respectful modesty present and in evidence, in the absence of words that could convey it, if we only knew the right ones to use.

Ever since we arrived at the airport in San Antonio and first began trying to figure out what time it would be when we got where we were going, I have been unable to really get a handle on exactly what time it is. I am comfortable enough knowing that as the morning begins for me, it is evening where my children are. Do I need to know more than that? I am not hungry and I slept well...it must be time for me to be sitting here writing since it feels so good. And as for what the date might be, Peter's watch is somewhere with that information and the alarm on his computer is set to tell us a few days before our visa in Indonesia is supposed to end.

We have finally moved into our own small bungalow here on the island of Palambak Besar,



Our very own bungalow at Bina Jaya

known as Bina Jaya. There are four separate bungalows spaced about 20 ft apart along a docile part of the Indian Ocean. 98 other islands form the complete archipelago known as Pulau Banyak.

Only three of them are inhabited. The largest one has been made a National Preserve and a project for reclamation of turtles is being carried out by volunteers there. Perhaps 20 people are the whole population on this particular island where we have come, all of them families of fishermen who dry their catch patiently and take their accumulated stores on to Balai or Singkil for sale. The woman who brought us our lantern last evening before sunset, is the mother of three children. I have difficulty imagining their lives and the nature of their aspirations. This level of simplicity is as awesome to my understanding as the complexity of my needs must be for them. What do they imagine about these people who come to their island with boxes of food and bags of "stuff", to swim in the sea or sit on the porch of a bungalow and stare off into the horizon. Since there are almost no words we have in common to share our perspectives, we sit together on the porch when one of them wanders down in their curiosity, and smile, breaking the silence occasionally with a few words like "bagus" (beautiful), "baik" (nice) depending on which of us feels compelled to comment. These words in the wake of an exchange of names, eventually yields to a silence with which I am becoming more and more comfortable. Eventually, the given visitor leaves with a smile and a wave — "terimah kasih" (thanks), or "selamat tinggal" (a

blessing on your stay).

Between the Bina Jaya bungalows, a set of pathways has been created that have been maintained and the garden areas are in various states of cultivation and manicure. The coconut palms dominate the landscape all around us and rustle gently in the breeze. The gray that started the day has given way to a promise of sun and the heat is increasing proportionately. Siesta here is a must sometime between 2pm and 4pm at least. The intense heat during that time of day makes breathing laborious and typing is effort enough to break a sweat. Peter calculated our number of available days and as with all our plans, the reality will follow the unfolding of days and the "if's" they present. It seems like we will be here for at least two weeks, indulging in the quiet, with time to read, write and stare, in between sleeping, eating and snorkeling. (It seems like a rather extensive list of activities to me right at the moment.)



The women of Bina Jaya

Peter left for a short snorkel and wore his shirt to kill 2 birds with one stone — prevent sunburn AND rinse the shirt! I have reposi-

tioned my chair in response to the flourish of activity and industry. Actually, he has been quite industrious. He awoke trying to figure out a way to collect the sweet rainwater as opposed to continuing to filter our plain drinking water from the well. It is brackish and the viral gaurd in the pump still leaves a taste of iodine. It is good to cook with, but leaves something to be desired in the continuous swigging one needs to do during the day. While he did not get to the final stages of the water collection operation, he did get his brand new machete into working order and added

a stick to the handle that allowed him to get us three green coconuts for their sweet milk. He also washed the morning dishes that resulted from my single household-related effort — preparation of eggs and potatoes in the kitchen that is also part of our Bina Jaya resort.

If the bungalows were full, a cook would be on hand for preparation of the fixed menu but since Peter and I are the only inhabitants and are quite willing to cook for ourselves, we have been given the key to the kitchen. An odd assortment of pots and two kerosene burning stoves comprise the preparation area. Most local cooking is done in a wok and I have 2 here, along with a rice pot, straw steamer and plate service for 20, just in case we have guests.

LATER: We went down to the Point for din-

ing them to call us whenever dinner was ready.

When Dr Love shyly called us, I went to pick up dinners for me and Peter. There in two separate melmac bowls were piles of dry, dark plain duck meat that had been cut the size of small turds. I envied the spicy ones with their red coloration and appearance of moisture even though I could not have tasted them without removing the first 3 layers of skin from my mouth and tongue. The steamed rice had been well prepared and Mawan was proud of a cooked cabbage and egg combination he had made. I ate 3 pieces of the duck before leaving my remains to Peter. The rice filled part of the emptiness of my stomach that had originally been open for a big serving of Nase Gohreng (fried rice with vegetables and an egg). The cabbage was something I could eat,



Peter the "Tropical Cook"

ner and mostly to get bottled water since Peter seems to be responding poorly to the filtered well water. The walk was vigorous with the rising tide having taken away most of the beach. Mawan was happy to see us arrive. At Michelle's suggestion they had killed the oldest, most aggressive duck and he delightfully suggested that we could have ours spiced or not. "Spiced" equals VERY hot chilies so we declined and went in favor of plain. Once again, I allowed my own thinking to create expectations. I remembered my own recipe for Duck a l'Orange and a succulently prepared duck in plum sauce I had once eaten. We got our cokes and went up to the beach tell-



Peter the "Tropical Dishwasher"

but Peter could not. The conversation and laughter with Michelle and Jason filled other spaces, but as we returned home in the dark, it became clear that dinner had been more ideation than reality.

Peter and I were both thoughtful and tired as we sat back on the bungalow's porch. We played backgammon to pass a little time and finally surrendered to the fatigue and went to bed. Once in bed however, the half-full condition in my stomach gave way to heartburn and I finally got back up and went to the "cookie" can knowing that if I ate at least a few, the acid would



Bina Jaya's abandoned restaurant

reduce itself. Back in bed, I read until my headlamp went out and fell asleep to a soft, puffy rhythm Peter's breathing had taken on. My dreams were of a friend's mother from high school who had a huge carrot cake with thick, moist cream cheese frosting slathered

on top, in her refrigerator to give just to me. By the time I awakened I had accumulated two more very delectable dessert items and was trying to figure out a way to share them with the "poor". Some parts of a vacation seem to be designed especially to remind one of the wonderfulness of the luxuries and conveniences that have been left at home in the name of adventure!

And, by the way, along with a few other night images, I spent time in thought about the fact that I am afraid of catching malaria and I am also afraid that when I walk along the water's edge at night the little ghost crabs will bite my feet. It's the small things that creep into those thoughts in the dark! That time when you really get to come to grips with your true fears!!

Peter
02/14/97
Bina Jaya

THE SECOND FOOD TRIP TO BALAI

The day started like any other. Life at Bina Jaya had finally settled down, thank heavens, into a semi-predictable routine. Kim and I said to each other that that was what made all of the hard travel worth it. Sure there was adventure, but Bina Jaya was the pot of gold at the end of the adventure. Here we were able to form a safe comfortable secure routine in a truly magnificent paradise somewhere near the end of the earth.

So here it was that we had awoken early. I fixed the morning coffee, and we sat and read on the porch overlooking the calm Indian Ocean. Our view of the islands beyond, way off on the horizon, was framed by the coconut palms that dotted the coastline. They also shaded our little

one room bungalow from the morning sun. After a leisurely morning we moved to the back of the property, where the kitchen building was. It was as empty as the other three bungalows were. We set up our little backpacking stove on one of the tables and Kim made us a delicious meal of banana pancakes. As we ate them she said to me, "You know, we are getting low on fresh fruits and vegetables."

"But I just went to the store last week! Could we have eaten everything already?" I whined.

"No, we still have food. I just mean that we should be *thinking* about (she emphasized the word thinking) our next food run."

I didn't want to think about it. After the last trip with Jason I thought we had enough food to last at least two weeks. We sat in silence for the rest of the meal. And so it was that we passed the next few days. A pleasant routine taking place, but with the ever present thought of another town trip looming overhead -- threatening to break the calm. Then Jason and Michelle walked up the beach to bring us the rest of their food. They were leaving on the boat which was going to pick them up at 3:00PM at the Point.

"You think that we could get a ride to Balai?" I asked all the while trying to eye the food that they left so casually on the porch.

They thought that there would be room, be-



A walk down the beach

cause we were supposed to be going on Mawan's "big boat." "But if I were you I would get there early. You know how the Indonesian 'rubber time' works" Michelle said.

I did know. I looked at my watch. It was already noon. Let's see, to get there by two, and there's a 40 minute walk up the beach, we would have to leave in about an hour. Time to get ready to go. So we said good-bye to them and started our preparations to walk up to the Point. We were going to travel as light as we could, yet we still needed things to entertain us if the wait was long. We each brought a book, rain gear, our passports and of course money. I knew from our previous trip that small denominations were the only thing we could use, as no one usually had change and there was not a bank for 500 miles. So we counted our 100, 500 and 1,000's into little piles. Satisfied that we had enough, we closed up the house, buried the computers in a plastic bag in the sand next

to a coconut tree, and walked off down the beach toward the Point.

The walk was spectacular. Just what you would expect from a south seas tropical island. Thankfully there was a cloud cover, but there still was enough light to give the greenery a bright pastel green glow. The beach spread out in front us like a slanted white carpet on which an occasional coconut tree had been blown over. As we stepped over them I thought that they looked like a magical pic-up-stics game.

When we arrived at the Point we found everyone packed and ready to go. "When are we leaving?", I asked Jason.

"Don't rightly know. I can't get a straight answer out of Mawan."

I said that I would go see what was happening. I walked back to the kitchen area. There was



Kim reflects on a hard days work

Mawan cooking on the wok. "Kim and I would like to go to Balai with you. OK?"

He said he thought it would be better if we went tomorrow with a charter. Dr. Love could arrange it. His boat might not come back for days he explained, "Better you go charter. Dr. Love fix. You wait. I tell you, OK?"

I thought about it for a second and said, "OK. While we are waiting for you to do your thing, could we get something to eat?"

From the look on his face I could see that I had pushed my inquiries one step too far. I asked for a couple of cokes. He said "No Coke, only Sprite." Another shitty lunch, I thought to myself. Instead of saying it out loud I just reminded him that we would wait for him to find out something. When he did, could he please just let us know.

For the next 3 hours, we sat around on the beach, talked with Jason and Michelle. I spent some time talking to a Greek guy who was nice enough to loan me his travel guide to Malaysia. He said he was interested in going on our charter tomorrow, and I said great. Everyone was getting antsy to go, but no movement had been made to get the "big boat" ready. I could still see it up the beach. It was low tide. The blue and red wooden boat laid on its side, leaning at about a 45 degree angle. I walked back to the kitchen to see what was going on. Mawan, Dr. Love and three other islanders were just sitting around eating what looked like a pretty nice meal. I remembered that Jason had said that Mawan had told him that there was no food for breakfast this morning. Those sure look an awful lot like pancakes I thought to myself. "Hey, Mawan, any word on my charter for tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow at 10 in morning. Dr. Love fix. Pick you up at Bina Jaya. OK?"

"OK, tomorrow at 10 o'clock. At Bina jaya."

"What about "big boat". When will it leave? Today?"

"At high tide. Maybe one more hour?"

I went back, and told everyone what I had seen. Kim and Michelle said that they were starved and were going to go back to the kitchen to get Mawan to make us something to eat. But when they came back 10 minutes later with only four Sprites I knew the mission had not succeeded.

Kim and I walked back up the beach to Bina Jaya, secure in the knowledge that we had started a plan in motion. A plan that would eventually lead to groceries. We hoped! The walk was even more lovely and we both kept repeating over and over just how lucky we were to have found an island such as this one.

The next morning we awoke at the crack of dawn to make preparations for our trip to town. We were pretty much ready, having left our packs packed from yesterday. We found that the getting ready was really more mental. So we relaxed on our porch, watched the sea, and awaited the arrival of our charter. Would it come early? Would it come late? Would it come at all? These are the questions we pondered out loud to each other.

When 11AM came and went, we sprung into action. We closed the house, reburied the computers, and headed up the beach toward the Point. Once again we were off on an adventure. One we hoped this time would end in food. About half way there we met Dr. Love. He was walking on the beach. I knew something was happening because he had put on the same traveling clothes that he had on for our last trip to Balai, a pair of jeans and a heavy T-shirt.

"Boat no come, Fadder. I go. Find other boat. You go Point. Wait. I come wid boat."

"When," was all I could think to say.

"Soon," he replied as he walked off in the direction that we had just come from.

At the Point we met the Greek guy. He couldn't figure out what was happening either, so I filled him in on what few details I knew. Then we settled in for the wait. No one was there except a couple of other tourists, and there was — sur-

prise, surprise — nothing to eat in the kitchen. Jason had paid Mawan the rent and food money he owed. So I guess, Mawan had decided to go with them to Balai last night leaving the three tourists to spend another day without food. We had brought crackers, coconut and some marquisas. We grabbed one of the last Sprites and went to the beach to wait.

By about 12:30 I could hear the distant drone of a diesel motor, and a small boat appeared on the horizon. By 1pm a very little, very thin dugout arrived at the beach with Dr. Love. The young boy who collected coconuts on the property behind Bina Jaya was piloting the boat. He was maybe 15 on a good day. The Greek guy showed up at the beach. As he was leaving this island for good so he carried his two very large bags. Add the five of us and we had a good load. We carefully made our way into the canoe, and distributed ourselves as best we could. Kim wound up having to sit on the Greek guys backpack — other than that I thought that we fit quite nicely. The ride was bumpier than I imagined it would be. For the past two days it had rained. I guess the storms had given the water a slight roll, because up and down we rode over each wave. Our captain, in addition to steering the boat, had to constantly bail the ever collecting water. All of the weight probably didn't help either. Since we were really cramped, everyone kept changing positions a lot. I know in my case, the confinement started to do a number on my back, so that I shifted uncomfortably with everyone else. Each time we moved the boat threatened to capsize. But fortunately our dugout had two outriggers for stability. They seemed to work quite well.

We took a very circuitous route. The same thing happened the last time we went to Balai. We would zig very far out of our way, only to zag back at very sharp angle. It was almost like we were on a sailboat trying for some tactical maneuvers. At first I thought it was to avoid the coral heads, but later I thought it was more because they believed we would think we were getting a good value for our money if the trip lasted longer. It wasn't! Only Dr. Love and the young boy stayed in one posi-

tion throughout the journey. The rest of us foreigners continued to fidget.

When we arrived in Balai, we pulled up along side Mawan's "big boat". He exchanged a few words with Dr. Love, and then turned to me and said that he was just getting ready to go back to the Point and we should go with him. He said that there might be a storm brewing and he thought we would be safer than in the little, overloaded canoe. I had to agree with him, but I said we had already paid for the charter. He said he wouldn't charge us full price, he would give us a deal off the usual 5,000 rupias. And he added in his broken English that our charter would take us from the Point to Bina Jaya when we returned.

"OK," I said wiping the sweat from my face, "we will see you in about 2 or 3 hours. We have some shopping to do."

"No! We all ready to leave now. You come now!"

"Oh no, I just chartered a boat to buy food. We're all out of food."

There was a heavy set Italian guy on board the boat. Everyone seemed to really enjoy his company. In fact I saw Mawan fawning over him like a little school girl. Kim recognized him from Pulau Palambak. He's the cook's lover she reminded me. Then I spotted the cook inside the cabin of the boat. Apparently he was going to come back. I looked over at him and he gave me a kind of girlish wave. He winked at me. I winked back and waved. "He likes you," Kim whispered in my ear.

"Hey, you always want to be on the good side of the cook in a place like this."

Mawan was vehement in his insistence that we leave right now. I thought to myself just how ridiculous it would be to return without food, and I was about to tell him so when the Italian guy blurted out, "It's OK. We can wait an hour while they shop."

This seemed to placate Mawan who repeated, "One hour, but hurry!" And, to make sure we did,

he sent Dr. Love along with us. Actually this turned out to be a pretty good thing. All we had to do was tell him that we wanted “*benzin*” for our stove and off we went to exactly the right shop. I think we even paid all of the right prices for everything because he seemed to be bargaining for us too.

After we had been walking for a while, I noticed that most of the tables out front had nothing or very little in the way of fresh fruits and vegetables. I asked the Doctor and he replied that the boat from Singkil would not come with fresh food until tomorrow. I thought to myself, “Then why the fuck did he let us come today instead of tomorrow? But I just looked at Kim and shrugged my shoulders. I whispered to her that our trip was indeed taking us for a ride this time and she laughed.

We finished our shopping as best we could and in slightly less than an hour we found ourselves back on the “big boat.” Mawan pushed off almost immediately. Dr. Love and the boy rode along side in the small canoe. The two boats moved side by side till we got some distance out from Balai. Then they began to play a type of tame slow “chicken” with each other. The Doctor kept taking sips from some large Tupperware bottle, which I assumed was water. About a half hour into the journey, Dr. Love stood up on the bow of the unsteady boat, took off his shirt and began to wave it over his head all the while shouting something we could not hear. It was then that we speculated there might be something other than water in that jug.

Peacefully we cruised out among the chain of tropical islands. The hum of the motor, the gentle bobbing of the boat and the muted drone of languages that were unintelligible, put Kim and I into a restful stupor. The canoe had easily outdistanced us and was almost out of sight. We could see the outline of Pulau Palambak forming on the horizon as the sun continued to set lower behind it. It was now about 5:00PM and some of the afternoon’s heat had begun to subside, helped by the breeze that the forward movement of the boat

caused on our overheated bodies.

Then the motor sputtered and came to a complete stop. And so did we. There was some yelling going on as Mawan manually worked the bilge pump. Water squirted out of the tube with each stroke. At first I thought maybe we just flooded the engine, but then, when heard the clanging of tools being used, I knew we were in for a wait. Storm clouds loomed on the horizon edging closer to our helpless boat. They tried to start the engine but it did little but tiredly turn over a couple times before they quit and they began clanging on the engine again. That’s exactly what it sounded like to me. I didn’t go look, but it sounded like there was more banging of wrenches on metal than there was twisting and turning of nuts and bolts going on.

I really didn’t seem to care at all what happened. The ocean, the sky, being stranded out at sea had a very calming effect on my psyche. At first, as the boat began to rock and roll, I worried about Kim. She has a tendency to get seasick, but when I asked her she said that she had taken a second Dramamine and she felt tired but otherwise great. I looked around at the rest of the passengers. The Italian guy was up front. Mawan had taken this opportunity to give him a back rub. He was grinning broadly. The gay cook came out to see what was happening to his boyfriend. He jumped and danced around squealing something in Bahasa Indonesian that we didn’t understand, but then it was more fun to just speculate. The clanking, and unsuccessful starts of the engine continued.

By this time the small canoe with the Doctor and the boy noticed that we had stopped. They had almost reached the island. I could see them turn around and head back in our direction. When they pulled up alongside I could see that both of their eyes were bloodshot and they seemed to be having a hard time keeping their balance on the rolling sea. Everyone was very animated in their gestures and conversation. Mawan opened up a bag of dry sugar cookies and passed them around

to everyone. He threw them over to the canoe and then shouted for them to send over the plastic jug. He caught it and took a big swig before offering it all around to the passengers and crew. The crew all partook. Just Kim and the Italian guy refused. I thought about it and said, "What the hell! I'm on vacation." I took a couple of deep swigs. It was home-made banana whiskey! Alcohol is illegal in this orthodox Muslim part of Indonesia. It had a nice harsh kick to it, followed by the pleasant taste of ripe bananas. I liked it and it almost immediately made my head swim a little. So I was more than a little sad to see it get passed back to the canoe.

It became evident to me that the engine was not going to ever be fixed by the two boys in the engine room when I began to hear their wrench pounding start to take on a basic reggae rhythm. As a joke Mawan tossed the canoe our bow line and told them to tow us in. Everyone had a good laugh over this one. This was the largest boat in these parts. A canoe towing a boat dozens of times larger??? But as the reality of our situation started to sink in along with the sun, and the storm clouds continuing their trek across the open water toward us, the possibility seemed more concretely worth a try.

It wasn't like a marine patrol was going to come along and save us. So the little dugout started it's engine. It sounded like a toy. As the rope tightened I could see the propeller come out of the sea. It was not much bigger than my fist. No wonder I thought, we always moved so slow. The little boat bucked and chugged, and made a rapid gurgling sound each time the propeller lifted com-

pletely out of the water. Eventually I could feel us making some headway. We all talked among ourselves and estimated that it would take at least an hour more till we reached shore. Then life settled down into an even more relaxed state. Hey, it was out of our hands! All we could do was hang on and enjoy the ride. One of the crew turned on a cassette player and the sound of some obscure Indonesian Rock n' Roller drifted around the deck. I said out loud to no one in particular that it was really unfortunate that our motor broke with us out to sea, but it was really fortunate that Kim and I had chartered our little tugboat. Anyway, I added, people pay a lot of money just to lounge about like this on the open sea.

It took a little more than an hour to reach the beach in front to the Point. We unloaded all of our gear onto the beach, and waited till all of the activity settled down. Our "tugboat" took the Italian

guy over to PAP's. Apparently he had had a fight with the cook, as they were now not talking to each other. The cook walked off the beach with a huff, kicking up the sand with his toes as he did.

Dr. Love sat a short distance away from us. I think he felt somehow responsible for our predicament. We had a nice and interesting conversation with him about the life and politics of the islands. The sun had already set by the time our canoe returned. We loaded everything in and headed out across the bay to Bina Jaya. The boy's eyes were still glazed over from the banana whiskey. He raced us through the water, kicking up large waves which splashed in and soaked us all. I think he did it partly to get us home before dark, but



The "Big Boat" getting towed by the "Small Boat"

partly for the pure joy and exhilaration of it. I think he was feeling pretty proud of himself, having saved the "big boat" from the very brink of disaster.

Soaked to the skin we unloaded our stuff on the beach. I gave him an extra 5,000 Rupias. He indicated it was too much, but I couldn't thank him enough. I bowed many times while repeating, "*Terima kashi! Terima kashi!*" Back on our porch it was dark as we stripped off our wet clothes and sat down. We looked at the soaked cardboard box of food. It didn't contain a single thing that we could eat quickly, so we brought out the last of the peanut butter and jelly and put it on sugared soda crackers. We washed it down with the warm Sprite we had been hoarding for just such a special occasion. Exhausted, but contented, we made our way to bed. As we climbed under the mosquito netting, Kim said to me, "Peter, these shopping trips are murder!"

PETER

02/15/97

Bina Jaya

1. Sit around all day and read and write
 2. Walk down to the Point for fish and rice dinner. Hooray the cook is back. Talked to Mawan about working as cook for 5 years at Point, now he's 2nd in command/partner. There is a lot of stress and responsibility. He is worried about getting aids from western girls.

02/16/97

Bina Jaya

1. Went for early for a long snorkel out to the reef. Found a cut with some interesting coral. Schools of a multitude of fishes, angelfishes and small lionfish.
 2. Got very tired swimming on way back.
 3. Spend some time in afternoon talking to Mary, daughter, and neighbor. Tried to learn some Bahasa.

PETER

02/17/97

Bina Jaya

**I LOVE THE FEELING OF WALKING
BAREFOOT**

I love the feeling that comes with living in a place where you can walk barefoot. Texas has so many rocks and stones and thorns that even if you try to walk about, sans shoes, the land will make sure that you fail. Kim and I have tried to make a place in Pipe Creek where barefooting is OK. And to a certain extent we have succeeded. But just stray off the well managed paths -- a stroll up to the garbage cans will do -- and you will quickly come home looking for your flip-flops.

But Ahhh!, here in the warm moist tropics nearly everything underfoot is soft and warm. And those that are not, announce their presence loudly -- they are nearly always easy to avoid. The feeling of walking over sand and grass also slowly toughens up the bottom of the foot, so that in no time at all you find that you needn't avoid that stray pebble or walk around that loose shell. Sometimes you find yourself even seeking out the rough terrain just to see what it feels like to stroll over a bumpy road with not a care in the world.

Walking on the beach is the best. When it's low tide, the sand forms a hard flat sloping sidewalk that looks like it goes on forever. Once, in some other distant place, I tried to walk forever on the hard packed sand, but I found that after about 2 days walking the slope had made one leg seem longer than the other. The low hip really began to hurt after a while. I tried walking backwards, and then even tried putting on only one shoe on the long foot. But these solutions only worked for a short time. But as for the bottoms of my feet, they sang the whole time, happy to be finally set free from the confines of those nasty ol' smelly Nikes.

Here in Bina Jaya the beach and land are soft. I am even surprised that walking through the high grass does not cause more discomfort than it does.

I find it's mostly the anticipation of stepping on an injurious object that makes me sometimes flinch with each step.

I love walking barefoot here. The feel of wet sand squishing between my tanned toes. The way the early morning dew cools them, and the gentle freedom that comes with having less on. A T-shirt, a pair of shorts and bare feet. Can you beat it?

I am half way into an adventure that will span almost three months. In the end my feet will be like little soldiers gleefully walking across almost all but the most stubborn foreign objects. I will try to remember and savor these moments because I know all too soon the spikes of Pipe Creek will be upon us.

Walk on my little friends and enjoy your vacation too.

PETER

02/17/97

Bina Jaya

1. Sat around and read, made love, read some more.
2. Walked to Point to find out about boat to Sibolga.
3. Walked home along beach in 3/4 full moon.
4. Read till late.

PETER

02/18/97

Bina Jaya

**A LAST VIEW FROM THE PORCH IN
BINA JAYA**

Here I sit on our porch overlooking the calm tourquise waters of the Indian Ocean. In the distance I can see a whole bunch of little islands, and way off in the distance I can see the large island of Tuangku. Usually it's jungles are covered in rain clouds, but not today. Today the the whole sky is a pastel blue with fluffy pink and white and gray clouds. The birds have been very active this morning making sounds so strange that at times I think some large animal is being pursued by an even larger one.

The time at Bina Jay has gone slowly. The peace that we both have needed has come easily. This place is what our vacations are about. We have been to heaven—we have been to Bina Jaya. How lucky we are. How truly lucky to have spent time in a remote tropical paradise such as this.

For the past two weeks we have had this place much to ourselves. Most of the time was like living in a South Seas Ghost Town. There is something beautiful about walking out onto the hot white sandy beach and knowing that you are alone. In years gone past I have had the pleasure of being in many wonderful places such as this. Some almost as truly magical as this one. But how very fortunate I am to have a good friend to share the quiet solitude with. To share it with my best friend, lover, and now wife Kim.

Now it's time to pack our backs for the walk up the beach to the Point, where hopefully there will be a boat to take us to Balai, and then another to Sibolga, back on the coast of Sumatra. The road map has been marked. Now all that is left is for luck to help us on our way. There are so many things that could go wrong, and probably will, but I hope that we have a pleasant adventure filled with new stories.

Sibolga to Lake Maninjau

KIM
02/20/97
Bukittingi

We have just completed yet another marathon journey between Point A and Point B. Leaving the peace of Bina Jaya was necessary now so that the rest of the trip would include at least a little bit more of this huge country. This time we seemed much more relaxed and the fear of getting back into civilization and the shouts of "hey mister, hello missus" from everyone didn't loom in our imaginations like a threatening cloud. We weren't in a huge rush to get down to The Point. We knew that the boat was reportedly going to leave at 12 noon, really would be taking off possibly around 2 PM and maybe not even until 5 PM and then if it broke, it might not leave at all. We packed positively and made the walk more easily than any before, finally having become accustomed to the weight of our packs.

Mawan told us that the boat was in fine condition, and we would leave in a "little while." I knew I was definitely in a better place than ever — that ambiguous phrase, with ALL it's implications did not even begin to set my teeth on edge. It was noon. We bought a coke and enjoyed some conversation with 2 German men who had just arrived the day before with another companion who was now at Bina Jaya. They were very sweet and reminded me so much of our kids. Life had infected them with its joy and it shone in their eyes. I like that. We talked about the sense of security that is delivered at conception with the first taste of your mother's milk, but how it gradually builds into a fear of change as you grow older...and of the things that your brain knows, but your heart hasn't yet come to trust and understand. It was the good stuff of conversation that helps everyone in it to reconfirm the sense of rightness in the pursuit of whatever guides us to our joy.

By 3:30 PM, four other travelers arrived from PAPS and another four appeared from the bungalows at the Point. It was a full load and

everyone immediately went for the rear of the boat and whatever shade could be found on this very hot and sunny afternoon. Peter and I stayed at the front, armed with my trusty umbrella and the knowledge that the sun would cast a shadow over the front 1/3 of the bow, given the direction we were going in. The group was a loosely affiliated one with little in common and less desire to become any more deeply associated, so it was in silence that we set out. It was in an even more pressured silence that we endured the first engine breakdown. The captain did the noisy banging-wrench thing that had not been successful the last time when the boat had to be dragged in by the dugout. This time we were far from our destination and prayer seemed appropriate, so I did. I think the captain did too...he had no helper on this crossing and did not want to bear the burden of disgruntled white people all by himself. After two sets of banging-the-wrenches and revving the engine, it started.

Within about an hour and a half we had completed the hour long trip and we all spilled onto the street of Balai. We were herded, actually, like schoolchildren, and dropped off couple by couple at the unlikely losemen along the street. Ours had chicken slatting that opened the wall onto the main street, from the waist to the ceiling and allowed us to see into a parlor-porch-patio space that adjoined. It also allowed anyone along the street to see us inside our room, as long as the lights remained on. We ventured out for a walk through town, returned everyone's greetings and finally came back to the restaurant owned by a man we had met on our first entry into Ballai. It was as real a meal as we had had in a while and helped us pass time until we could start our thoughts of sleep. Tonight would be much later than usual since our room was joined directly with the restaurant that was part of our loseman as well as the home of the family that owned it. Their TV promised to stay on until at least 11 PM when the nightly Muslim prayer would lead them all into sleep. We broke



out the pack of well-worn French playing cards and launched into another round of 500 which I would of course loose, but it passed a little more time.

A Dutch couple was also making the trip to Bukittingi. They were staying in the same loseman and so I shared the current news that had been given us at dinner. We were to be leaving at around 7 AM. They had been assigned a room next to ours. Theirs had about 3" to 6" openings in a couple of the bricks just below the roof that served as their only ventilation and so I refrained from complaints about our wide open space. The *mandi* (bathroom) was unique among all others we had encountered up to this point. It was, first, across the street. Apparently it served more than just our loseman and its family. It was lit with a single 40 watt bulb and was adjacent to the wharf. I did everything I needed to before dark, having decided that I did not want to find myself squatting next to a wharf rat in the dark of the night. In spite of my having had a small rat for a pet when I was in 4th grade, I hold a fear in my heart of hearts for rats in general and wharf rats in particular knowing that they reach particularly large size in their rugged course of life.

We were up and ready at 7 AM silly us!!! It wasn't until Peter went to the Dutch couple sitting some distance from us in the restaurant, that they told us they had been informed the boat was going to leave late...maybe 9 AM. I had some coffee and had taken my Dramamine. I was ready, and could take another Dramamine in 4 hours...whether I needed it or not. The journey was going to be 13 hours long and we were advised that the amount we paid would cover food en route. Still we went armed with some nice dry, bland biscuits and such, to keep the spaces in our stomachs full, but not too full...it is a delicate balance preventing motion sickness! I failed to think through to the really important question however...what are the bathroom facilities? The "none" which would have been the re-

sponse if we would have asked, would have left us in no better position anyway, so I went blissfully on board, not having needed to pee after my coffee and it only being 1 1/2 hours later than the scheduled time for our embarkation.

Since we had paid the "big bucks" for our seats, several people were shooed out of some floor space near the bow of the boat. We loaded our backpacks to the front and worked out a space arrangement with a Sumatran official who was also being given the same "first class" consideration. We could stretch out a bit, with some ease and manage to lie down if we altered our body positions just so and relinquished our need to have anything like private space and a need to remain untouched by relative strangers. No one wanted to think any further to the fact that if they had told us the trip would be 13 hours, it might be 16 or 18. It was surprising how quickly we each fell into sleep, even this early in the day.

When I awoke an hour later and found my comfortable sitting position, the peeing question came to the forefront of my thoughts. I knew I could hold it for several hours, but for more than 10 hours was going some. Something would come to me. Second guessing my thoughts, Peter noted to the side that he had just seen one of the boys take a dump in a pan and throw it overboard. I was going to keep my eyes out for a woman doing something along the same lines hoping for a cue. In the meantime, I reviewed all our possessions to figure out an appropriate receptacle. I knew I could put my poncho on and it would form a tent with some degree of privacy. I also determined that the gas can had a marginally large enough opening. Space where I could dangle my legs opened up. It would all be possible.

Armed with a plan and not yet completely desperate, I was surprised by a crew member who brought our meal up to us. The official looking Sumatran man was also on the agenda for a meal, so 5 of us were rewarded for having paid

the highest fare, being given a rice and fish meal. We got an incredible amount of rice which had been cooked way past any means of identifying it other than the fact that it was white and underneath some fish. There was no separating the individual grains...it was a solid mass of whiteness which was also warm. The fish was in bite-sized pieces and the skin and bones were included. Of course it was in a chili sauce. I have watched Peter in complete amazement as he has eaten things on this trip that I never would have thought he would pass near his lips, much less, over his tongue. He actually enjoyed the fish and ate most of mine. I broke into my rice ball and worked in a bit of the chili sauce, but a good 70% of both our servings went back to the sea. The glass of hot water we had been given as the beverage of choice was good for a couple of sips, but I mostly washed my hands with it. Utensils are rarely used with the meals that we've had, unless we are in a more upscale restaurant. I chased it with a few Marie Biscuits which have become strangely tasty to me at this point.

That was the only scheduled event for our 13 hour transit, so I was left to return my thoughts to my bladder. In the hours that followed, until dark, not one woman got up to pee. The kids did a great job, just pulling down their drawers and letting go at will...sometimes near the edge of the boat, sometimes not. I waited out those daylight hours and when dark hit, I made my move. Unfortunately with all my efforts and preplanning, I missed the bottle's opening for a good amount of overspill and then added to the melodrama by having to change from one pair of pants to another. It was a day when I reviewed every story about peeing that had ever affected my life.

As I straightened myself out and surreptitiously threw the contents of my jar overboard, we caught the sounds of someone choking. It had been going on for a little while, but now had my full attention, as I noticed that the person

was not able to take any breaths in between. They mother of the teen-aged boy who was choking had hailed the captain who just looked at the boy and didn't have a clue as to what to do next. I watched the captain shrug and walk away. I had been praying so hard for it to stop, but that didn't seem to be working. I asked the Dutch man to come with me to help me translate. He was fluent in speaking and understanding Bahasa Indonesia. I wanted to do a Heimlich maneuver or something to finally help with what had now become an unbreakable coughing spasm. He had vomited and when I got to him, there was no blockage. We held his arms above his head and he was able to take a few deep breaths without coughing. I had gotten him to take off his leather jacket (it was still at least 90 degrees), and as I held him around his chest I could feel his little heart was going way faster than it should have. Mostly he needed to be reassured at this point so that his heart rate would lower itself, the diaphragm could relax, and he could get some rest. We ended up having to work through it without our translator who had decided he couldn't go this one, for reasons he never did share. He had laid back down and went back to sleep after I had gotten up and headed towards the boy. Perhaps not knowing that I was a nurse, he didn't want to get involved. At the same time, it is always surprising at how words are not necessarily needed to help. They do make it a damned site easier, but we finally got this young boy to the point where the spasm became less frequent and he slept for the last 2 hours of the trip, with all our charades, sign language and an unspoken trust.

Somehow my request for help from the Dutch man had gone beyond some point in our understanding or communication with him. Later, when the boat finally docked I decided to set aside the awkwardness of the situation and ask them if they wanted to share a cab and try to get to a loseman together considering the fact that it was after midnight. In response, he



and his girlfriend barely looked at us and just mumbled as they jumped the edge of the boat onto the dock. He did later come back by us as we came off the boat to let us know that there were losemen about a kilometer down the road. They promptly turned and took off in a hurry so as not to have to walk with us. Having worked in Indonesia for his Master's studies and having a fair command of the language, I wondered if we had somehow violated some social taboo in my intervention that he was trying desperately to keep separate from, but could think of none. The boys relief along with his mother's grateful glances, assured me that our efforts had been OK. Peter and I decided not to try any further to close the growing gap with the couple. We walked through the darkness hoping that we were in fact headed for an area where we would find a place to sleep. We pondered the issue as we walked through the dark backstreets seeing them scurry ahead, making sure they kept their distance from us, while we tried to figure out what had actually happened.

When we did arrive at the same large, well lit hotel as they did, I made an effort to thank them for the information. At this point it had become less an act of gratitude and more a point of needling them. Knowing they were also headed for Bukittingi, I even sent the guide who had intercepted us and booked our tickets for the next morning on a Tourist Bus, to share the information with them. It was going to be a 9 hour drive and the guide even promised us that we would stop for a few sightseeing attractions along the way.

The motel was no aesthetic winner, but it had a bed that we fell asleep on without any difficulty. We set the clock with an 8AM departure on our schedule and slept until it went off. Downstairs, the couple was checking out but they had gotten tickets from the same guide for the same bus. They were a bit tight-lipped, but volunteered the location of a supermarket they had found while provisioning up for the 9-10 hour trip. While

Peter paid our bill and chatted with the guide, I made a beeline for what truly was a "super-market" by the standards set for anything we had seen since leaving Medan. There were 4 actual rows of food items and a bakery section. I worked my way through it quickly and while there was no fresh produce, we had a new variety of cookies, etc.

When I got back Peter said the guide was telephoning for the bus and we would be leaving in a little while. It was about 9:00. We exchanged a few pleasantries with the couple who were forced to sit facing us in the hotel lobby. At about 9:45, the minibus arrived. The warm up driver took us and the guide on a run through town and then to the bus depot/AKA convenience store parking lot. The scene began to fall apart when three locals got in. Peter confronted the guide, seeing that this was not a tourist bus and it was not going to be a tourist drive. The guide was less than reassuring when he told us that we would definitely not be picking up extra passengers or livestock. Even with the arrival of a second driver, who made yet another run through town for a package or two, but who drove much more civilly, Peter was not soothed. The Dutch couple had slithered deep into the back of the van trying to appear completely unconnected with us. Peter appeared ready to confront someone and they did not want to be identified with the effort in the least. And of course Peter's words and aggravations were accepted with vacant stares by driver and guide and we were hustled into our seats so the journey could begin.

Leaving town helped some, as the driver was definitely driving more carefully and slowly than a number of peers we had encountered up to this point. Peter relaxed after also insisting that he would not sit on the hump in between the driver and passenger over which a piece of plywood covered in fabric rested. Another passenger was given the seat and at an early stop, he changed with a young boy who volunteered to take the



Leaving Sibolga

seat. It was a torture seat and the young boy took it as an act of kindness, knowing that the elderly man the driver had put there in Peter's stead would never survive so long a ride in that kind of discomfort. I was riding shotgun and stayed there because we knew the ride was going to be all hairpins and even the Dramamine might have limits. Finally we all seemed to be situated and we were moving along comfortably, stopping just an hour into the trip for the driver to get some breakfast at a roadside stop. We had just entered the mountains and the air was cool. The mountains had an interesting blend of evergreen pines and the ever present foliage of the jungle.

About two hours into the trip all appeared well until I noticed an irregular slowing and acceleration through the fog of my Dramamine-induced nap. Awakening, I realized that the driver was napping too. This was not good. I kept looking over at him trying to think of what to say in any language. Only a few guttural noises came out. They were enough to waken him though, and we stopped in the next berg where he went into a little store and bought something to drink. I hoped it was Jolt or some serious caffeine derivative. Peter asked me quietly from behind my seat, about my tension which was palpable at that point. The young man in between me and the driver was sleeping soundly, but Peter had

noticed my head continuously turning towards the driver as we were riding. The country-western tape was droning on and I was very unsure about the remaining 8 or so hours. The driver returned and seem to respond to the drink well and we traveled on.

Unfortunately we went 4 more rounds of his napping-while- driving and my grunts and glances. He was becoming pissed, but then I wasn't caring since I was afraid of becoming dead or maimed roadkill on the asphalt or the side of the very precipitous slopes we were weaving through. By the time we reached Bukittingi and were anticipating being dropped off at our wisma, (as had been promised by the guide who booked our trip), we made stops to drop off the local passengers and then he dropped us off with the Dutch couple in the middle of town. The words and anger poured out between him and Peter and finally we were assured by someone from Bukittinggi that we were not very far from the wisma and the driver departed amidst a flurry of Minang curses and gestures. It was the most uncharacteristic interaction we have had in this entire trip. I think the Dutch couple was pissed that I had aggravated and insulted the driver by keeping him from REM sleep as he drove, but again I really didn't care if my tension was an insult, I was not convinced that it was a good day to die, and I had won.

Several little angels appeared as one young man walked us in the direction of our wisma. As he turned off we continued in our assigned direction, getting ourselves to a questionable corner. Yet another two young people were coming in or direction and saw us looking desperately at our map. They pointed us just the short way that remained between us and a place to sleep. The not too pleasant rooms in the wisma were at least clean and the bed invited us to the rest we so desperately needed. We signed in for the night with hopes of finding something else in the morning. This was the third day in transit, our



nerves were a tad raw and sleep would provide part of the relief we very much needed. But then, this IS the work of traveling. Perhaps we would awaken and find ourselves in a place where morning's light would create a more welcome appearance -- one where we could rest in for at least a couple of days before moving on.

PETER

02/21/97

Wisma Bukittinggi

Bukittinggi, West Sumatra

It was only three days of travel but it felt like much more. I know from past experience that the effort required to move from spot to spot is huge. We started by boat, moved to mini-bus and then finally onto foot. Everything moved about as smoothly as you would want, but it still cost us a lot in mental and physical energy.

This morning, unhappy with last night's hotel selection, we set out to walk through the streets of Bukittinggi looking for another one. We looked at just about every one in the city, but we could not find one that we felt was worth the effort required to move. So we just came back to our room and took a nap. Afterwards, we played cards, and now were in just a kind of stupefied state. We know that this is not the end of our journey. We must in fact pick a new location to move to from here. We have several choices.

Will it be Door No. 1: A 2 hour trip to Padang by bus. Then look for a boat to carry us to the uninhabited islands of the coast.

Or will it be Door No. 2: An 8 hour bus trip to Pekanbaru, and than a river boat trip back to Malaysia where we hope to visit the beautiful island of Tioman.

At this point I really don't have an idea which one we will chose. In the end it probably doesn't matter as I am sure that both places are worth the visit. Ha, how the strands of time and decisions weave the tapestry that we will always remember

as our Sumatran Adventure.

Kim just called me outside our room to the patio where she is sitting. It seems like the wind is blowing volcanic ash from the top of the still active volcano Mt. Singgalang. It's OK now because it has started to rain.

PETER

02/22/97

Bukittinggi, West Sumatra

Uncertainty of what or where our future travel will go still hangs over our head. The Wisma that we are in is just not that nice. We are not overly thrilled by the time we have to spend there. I think if we had found a nicer one we might be less agitated about moving on.

Bukittinggi itself is a lovely town. Set up in the mountains, it has a delightful temperature most of the time, and at night it can even get a little chilly. It is surrounded by mountains and volcanoes. In fact, as I sit writing this thing on the patio outside our room I can see one very large volcano. Of course I can also see the satellite dish and piles of rubble that lay in line with the same vision also in our courtyard.

OOPS, coffee time is over and Kim is calling me to come back to bed to cuddle and to help plan our day.



Bukittinggi! I just like saying it.

KIM
02/23/97

Today had a flow to it that was absolutely delightful. It took a few days for the trip between Pulau Banyak (with the peace of Palambak Besar) and Bukittinggi to work itself out of my system. I had to go through a brat phase that makes for less than gentle time for Peter and me. We lapse into these cyclic bitchy dialogues that are really boring and something we both know we should not even start up, but when enough of the variables of the "frustrated, tired, hungry" ilk are present, the words rear their ugly heads in spite of our belief that we are better than that. Sitting on our porch gazing at construction rubble that was the "view" didn't ease things and we were too tired to do our normal walkabout. The first day had been one of those days where we passed time, waiting for bedtime and in between, fed ourselves the first meat we had had since leaving the states. After a more than full night of sleep, some balance was eventually restored and we had enough energy for walking through the town the way we like to do it.

We had no luck in discovering another hotel that had more attractive rooms or at least something with a better view, and I think we looked at them all. The midday heat is even more intense — we are almost directly on the equator here. (We had even had the good fortune of passing over the equator on our drive to Bukittinggi. Our driver who slept while driving

did not even have as a last thought, stopping his "tourist bus" for a moment of silence or a gander at the tacky Equator gift shops.) At any rate, after our morning walk, the afternoon was well spent in napping, and we did that in the coolness a luxurious oscillating fan that came with the room. As evening hit, we ventured back to the little restaurant and actually, for the three nights we spent in Bukittinggi, we ate some form of meat at the same restaurant. Peter was in heaven.

It wasn't until we finally got up on Saturday morning and set out for the market that we felt in full swing. This market was the most extensive and in-



The fringes of the crowded market

tense of any I have ever seen and Peter said he could not even recall an equivalent in Central America. We were too stunned to think of buying anything in the crowded core of the market...it was well organized and even departmentalized, with all the fish products in one particularly aromatic section, the beef and other meat was hung and set on tables in elaborate displays and the fruit and vegetables were stacked, arranged and displayed with an eye for color, design and palatability (if there even is such a thing). There were 5 gallon, enamel bowls with artfully created chili pastes and bags of chili from the whole dried ones down to the most finely powdered chili blends. Other spices with fragrances I either didn't recognize or couldn't smell because of the residue of chili from an earlier sniff had corroded my nostrils. There were fried things and dried things and things made of flour that were all the different noodles and a few other imagina-

tive creations of thin, chip-like, wafer-like things with flecks of green and spice in them. They were round and crisp and large and small and thick and thin and all of the above in huge bags. Not everything was identifiable, but nothing didn't look wonderful and the ladies especially wanted you to know that this was their own work and art. They pointed and shouted about what they each had to sell and Peter and I continued along aisle after aisle until we finally arrived at something that looked a little like a passage to the fringes of the market...at least there was more than 2 feet between the rows of tables and they were outside the roofed area so that a glint of sunlight occasionally made its way through.

We surfaced for air and just looked at each other, both asking if we had it in us for another round of the intense center. We agreed that it was in our best interests to stay on the fringe for a little while longer. We even got a burst of courage and bought some fruit. Peter was so inspired that he began buying until he finally stopped after he had taken on a watermelon and the bags were becoming too heavy to carry as the afternoon heat began to be felt.

We were definitely energized and went for another run-through of the market's center. It was still too intimidating and we couldn't get it together to make any purchases. Our wanderings were definitely becoming affected now by

the heat and we began wandering toward the clock tower—the landmark we had used to keep ourselves from getting lost throughout our adventures and days in the town. The climb involved more stairs than we realized and at one point, unable to find a stall selling anything to drink that we recognized, we sat off to the side of a row of stalls in semi shade. We ate a piece of fruit and stood up hoping for the recharge we needed to get us to the top of the city and directed back to our room. We emerged relatively unscathed, intact, laden with fruit and even found a couple of cokes. The walk through the park at the top of the town that we had planned to include with the market adventure would have to be put off at least until evening if not until the next day.

We soaked in the shower and lay down, sopping wet on our bed, hoping to fall asleep before our bodies realized that it was still hot. We succeeded. Waking up

later, we found enough energy to head down the hill for dinner. Back up the hill...impressed by our legs and their capabilities for keeping on, but wise enough to give them their needed rest, we dropped into bed, talked about the day until we fell asleep and slept deeply. We woke up ready to take on the park. And that was today's adventure and its particularly relaxed enjoyment.

Along with breakfast and any other event that has brought us into town in these past 2 days, we have been checking for info on how to get out of Bukittingi and on towards Padang and



We went for another run through the market

then to Malaysia. The information is so inconsistent, we have decided to go for the best 2 out of 3 times for bus and plane departures. The final decision came down to a flight out of Padang and into Johor Baru, Malaysia, putting us on the east coast of Malaysia and accessible to the best island adventures in that country. We would make the decision on which one in particular that we would take, once we got there. After breakfast we took the leap of faith and bought the tickets which looked legitimate (and were) but after battering the partial truths of travel in Indonesia, we agreed that it would not surprise us if we arrived at least a day late and perhaps a dollar short of any actual flight. We knew we had to be out of Indonesia since our visa would be up and we had at least taken the first step toward accomplishing that goal.

I held out for a casual trip to Padang with time for a few days at Lake Maninjau, and just an overnight in Padang before we left the country. It meant less time in the city's noise. Peter agreed. All decisions complete in our hearts, we had this last day in Bukittinggi and now were off to the park that we had passed by several different times, too exhausted to even walk through absent-mindedly. We paid our fee and found ourselves in a well planted park that had been cared for with some loving hands and hoes. It's greatest asset was the view of the Sianook Canyon and from any of the many points along the walk that it could be seen, it was breathtaking. We had the desire to go out the road that lead into it and then up the bijillion stone stairs to the top of it on the other side, but gave in to our own frailties for the day

and just opted to look reverently at it from the shaded "other side".

It is both a town and park that attracts more Indonesians tourists than foreigners. We stopped to visit with a batik artist in the souvenir shop area and selected a few more pieces to add to the gifts we wanted to take home. That morning I had found a small shop near the clock tower where I had been able to buy the prayer beads I wanted to get for Peter's mom and these gifts all seemed right just for the ease with which we found them and the fun that went with the conversations we had with the shopkeepers while we made the purchases. While buying the beads, Peter had misunderstood a question asked us by the shop's proprietor and somehow Peter had indicated in his response that he was Muslim. The shopkeeper nearly fell over the counter in his effort to take Peter's hand. While there is almost no effort to proselytize in this religion, there is a great joy that comes with sharing it with someone of the same belief — a very deep familial warmth — and the man's joy was not completely lost when we finally clarified our actual religious commitments.

As we left the shops and walked on through the park, a young man came up to Peter and wanted to "practice" his English. He walked along with us and just a few moments later, an entire

group of school girls came up beside me and explained that they were at the park with their teacher and asked for some of our time to help them with their English as well. We found a shady part of the park and everyone of the 10 or 12 girls pulled out a notebook and they be-



Kim teaching English to the girls

gan asking all about us and our life, logging our answers very carefully. We both felt it as such a different experience from what we had felt in Berstagi. Having traveled now for much longer, both our physical and emotional resilience was much greater. As these beautiful young girls asked their questions so earnestly, I was absolutely grateful for the opportunity to answer their questions and work out how to share thoughts that we didn't always have words for. When they asked me what I thought of the people of Indonesia, my heart and my eyes filled up immediately. Looking at each of them in their innocence and whatever it was that I saw in them that so touched the deepest and purest reaches of my own heart, I knew I did not have enough words that meant "wonderful" in English or any language, that I could give them for their notebooks.

We finally used our coup-de-grace, the photo of Peter and I with both kids. It has been perfect on a hundred occasions and all the girls have giggled over our handsome son while the boys are more direct and ask when we will bring our beautiful daughter to meet them. We exchanged addresses, took numerous photos of different groupings for all the available cameras and left the park with the feeling that this was truly a great adventure. Another big dinner, a night of good sleep and we were off for another series of bus rides to Lake Maninjau.



We finally brought out the pictures of the family

KIM

02/24/97

Lake Maninjau

We were packed and ready to go nice and early. After almost 2 months of schlepping them, we have become much more comfortable with our packs. The local minibus was polite enough to stay stopped until Peter and I got into it's

empty bowels WITH our packs (the usual response is to start up while we are struggling to pull the mighty weights over people's bodies and onto the bus). The driver motioned us to move forward since he still would pick up others as we moved into and through town toward the main bus station about 3 km outside Bukittinggi. We had changed money anticipating the smallness of Maninjau and possibility of no money changing facility at all.

I think we were unaware of the fact that we were frayed at the edges with the prospect another unknown. In my impulsiveness and most un-team like manner, I lurched toward the first big bus that had

been pointed out to us by a woman who had conversed with us on the minibus. Peter heard a person on the same big bus say there were no seats, but the guy had already hoisted my bag onto the top of the bus and was grabbing for Peter's. The somewhat chaotic look of the bus depot made me resolute in my desire to just GET OUT, and I was less than attentive to anything Peter might have been thinking. Out of frustration, he followed me and we both got into our

Standing Room Only positions in the narrow aisle. I could feel Peter's eyes boring through me, aggravated at the prospect of an unknown amount of time ahead of us without a place to sit. Somewhere in my mind, I had hold of 1 to 2 hours as the estimated transit time, and figured I could tolerate that in any position based on past records. Since it was still morning and would also be morning when we arrived at the lake, I chose to ignore the powerful, pissed-off energy being sent my way through the back of my head. I lodged myself securely and didn't have to hold onto the overhead bar. The view was clear

through the top windows, I had taken Dramamine (the guide book described, individually, the 44 hairpin switch backs that were the descent into the little town) and only the top windows opened in this bus. Since I was standing, the wind was blowing directly onto my face. Sure it was less than perfect — what else is new? With the exception of one stop for a flat tire, which Peter used with great flourish to take a chance to sit while we waited on the roadside, we made the trip in a little less than 2 hours. We were dropped happily off at the place we had been told we would. With only one street in the town, we could not get lost, so we shouldered our packs and aimed in the direction of the wisma we had chosen from the guidebook. Our arrival there was a sweet surprise — we were the only patrons and had the choice of all the rooms on the upper level. We made our selection and went directly out onto our own balcony that looked onto the water. We had a full view of the entire lake. We took showers in our little bathroom, sighed deeply and felt good about the move. Peter went

down into the lake and I sat and watched him from the balcony. The city clatter fell away from both of us and we knew we would be more than comfortable waiting out these last few days in Indonesia. We would find a good plan for a route out and were looking at finalizing the trip with the remaining three weeks in Malaysia. The plan would unfold and we would do it gracefully in this serene little village in the crater of a volcano — much smaller than Toba, but much more precious because of the absence of 1st world tourism.



We had a full view of the lake

PETER
02/24/97
Lake Maninjau

I wish that all of our travel transitions could be this short and sweet. This morning we awoke about 7:00AM and as usual I brewed us up a cup of heady Sumatran coffee. We sat around our Wisma for a while and then headed off to town, where we cashed another \$100 in traveler checks. We then walked down the street to have a delicious breakfast at one of the many fine European coffee shops that dot the main street in Bukittinggi. Then we went next door to the travel agency and booked our tickets to Malaysia for this coming Saturday. It turned out to be Door No, 3!

There is some confusion over our exact departure date. Two out of the four travel agencies that we stopped at said the planes left Monday Wednesday and Friday. The other two said Tuesday Thursday and Saturday. We have to call back home to Lia this Thursday and then travel on to Padang to catch the flight, so we wanted to give ourselves a day of travel in between. After all we are supposed to be on vacation. Anyway, the travel agent that we wanted to go to was closed, so we picked the one just a few doors down. He had a

big chalked in sign that said MWF to Malaysia, but when we inquired about a flight on Saturday he got on the phone and called Padang direct I guess. Before we knew it, actually about 30 minutes, we had our tickets. I told Kim that I didn't feel very secure about the day. She confided that neither did she, but she felt it would work out OK anyway.

After that we went back, packed our bags paid our hotel bill, and walked the one block to the main drag where we immediately caught a Minibus for the bus station. As usual it was hard dragging all of our gear into the back of this small taxi, but as there were only a few people inside it was much easier than expected. We did load up on passengers along route, but not too bad.

The conversation was animated inside and as usual we were the center of attraction. The lady next to me had seen us in the bank and she knew just enough English to engage me in conversation, where as usual I floundered after several simple sentences. The old Muslim gentleman across the aisle said, "Were you from?"

"Amerika," I answered.

Then he said, "Amerika, number one!"

I countered with, "Tidak. Nike is number one!", and everyone laughed.

Then he said, "Bill Clinton." and gave me the thumbs up signal. I just nodded and the whole cab turned into an animated talking contest. Unfortunately, the only words I could understand were the words, "Bill" and "Clinton". Everyone seemed to like him a lot so I just grinned and returned the thumbs up sign as often as I was given it. I figured they must like him because of all the controversy surrounding the Indonesian businessman who donated so much money to his reelection campaign that it caused a scandal. Possibly in return for future favors, but I don't really know. I just know they seemed to like him a lot!

We hadn't been at the main bus station more than 30 seconds before we were hustled onto a big public bus headed for Lake Maninjau. Unfor-

tunately we were herded onto it before we realized that there were no seats left. Great I thought to myself. The guide book says that there are 44 hairpin turns on the way. But in the end it wasn't as bad as I imagined because it only took an hour and a half. One of the shortest rides we've taken since we landed in Sumatra. It would have been shorter but we had a flat tire in route. I was however, happy for the nice chance to sit along the way. We had a great view of the crater lake far below.

The bus dropped us off in town. Maninjau is another of those one street towns that we have become so fond of. The blacktopped road followed the lake shore and there was a nice selection of hotels along it. As usual we picked the furthest Wisma we could find in our guide book. We loaded up our gear and walked down the road in the hot afternoon sun. Once again, it was closer than it looked in the small map in the guide book. It sits right on the waters edge. We picked a room on the second floor for 10,000 rupias (\$4.25) with a bath and a balcony that faces the lake. So far we are the only people in it. Kim said to me as she fell fast asleep for her afternoon nap, "I think that this is going to be a good trip!"

PETER

02/25/97

**Tropikal Baru Homestay
Lake Maninjau**

We had a lovely night in our room over looking the lake. We have our own private balcony so that as we slept we were able to keep the door and windows open. Everyone went to bed early last night, except for the Karaoke bar a ways up the road. We could just barely hear the sing-alongs as we fell into a deep sleep. I awoke about four in the morning; the moon was high overhead casting a silver tone to the lake. The mountains surrounding the lake were silhouetted against a blue gray sky. The lake was perfectly still and it reflected the whole scene with very little distortion.



View from the Abunda

I wanted to take a picture but told myself to wait until the moon was a little closer to the mountains. Of course by that time I was fast asleep. In the morning the moon was still visible but I reasoned that the sky was now too bright to see the moon to its best effect. I guess that I will just have to remember the scene with my mind's own camera. Too bad, I would have liked to share it with you. You'll just have to take my word for it. It was magical!

After coffee on our deck we headed out to town to eat breakfast and explore the sights. We picked a little restaurant close to the middle of town. Abunda Restaurant, was its name, and it had a nice look to it. And as we walked inside we were not disappointed. The menu was full of interesting items—whole pages of them—in small print. I finally settled on the Fruit Dish Special and cold Lemon Tea with sugar. Kim went for the Scrambled Egg Toast with a nice Coffee Cream Shake to wash it down. When our food arrived it was presented very nicely, but everything tasted like things we have never had before, and Kim added like nothing she will ever have again.

Let's start with the easy one, Fruit Dish Special. It looked like cut up fruit, but even without the rind which was in fact still on all of the fruit, it was a little too green to be tasty. Even the chocolate sprinkles, which were used quite liberally, could

not hide the buffalo milk/yogurt sourness. Lemon tea with sugar was refreshingly served over ice. It was very tart and very sweet. Plus I think it had some Ginger and something else that defies description. I can only say that it was bubbly. This drink turned out to be our favorite item. In fact after each bite Kim, when finished wiping her tongue off with the paper napkin, she thanked me for letting her have a sip.

She offered me some of her meal, but as soon as I saw her cleaning her tongue off after each bite, I declined. She said something about the oil from her meal sticking to the roof of her mouth. She said she couldn't seem to get it off despite frequent and vigorous scrubbing. I pointed out to her that she had little bits of pink paper napkin all over her tongue and mouth, but she said it didn't bother her because, as she put it, she couldn't taste anything anyway. And she added if she couldn't remove that gluey substance she would never be able to taste again. The lemon drink's acid taste was able to cut nicely through the first two or three layers that had accumulated, but she added that the drink's fizz scared her like it had me.

She offered me some of her coffee drink in exchange. It took a while to distinguish the taste, but I settled on bitter coffee grounds whipped up in chipped ice and served over a glass of sugar. As I took my first sip she cautioned, "Look out for how deep you put the straw!"

The bill came to 5,250 rupias, unfortunately all I had was a 10,000 bill. It took 15 minutes for our owner to figure out how he was going to change such a large bill. All the while I was afraid he was going to see our barely untouched plates and drinks and asked us about our meal. We just wanted to get out of there, but in the end we waited while he ran all over town looking for change for our \$4.26 US bill.

Happy to be out in the sunshine, we walked to the nearest store and gratefully rinsed our mouths out with a warm bottle of Coca Cola.



Lake Maninjau

KIM
02/27/97

The lake and the peace of the village have continued to work their own magic for us. I am taking a lesson in batik from an artist who came here from Jakarta. It has been interesting up to this point in travel shopping, to keep seeing the same designs with each separate artist claiming that they are his own. From this artist, we found out finally that copying the design never reflects exact duplication, therefore one can claim it is his own — a line here and a line there changed makes it his.

My young teacher, Khepech, is not in love with teaching batik. He makes his living doing his artwork and has discovered that teaching works as a supplement. He is inspired by beautiful young women he would like to charm so that the second day in class when three young women joined us, he was filled with a bit more energy than he had shown the day before when I was the only student. During my first instructions, he and I

both labored along mostly at the communication and I was grateful that he went to market and out on a few other errands while I plugged away at the first and most tedious waxing. I didn't even panic when, all alone, I spilled a major cupful of wax right into the center of my design. I figured that either there would be a way to fix it, or I would just make some radical changes and my very symmetrical design would just have to become an abstract.

I worked from 10 AM until 2 PM. Not having eaten breakfast, I decided that I needed to leave for a break and eat. Khepech was back from his outing and had no problem with my intentions and even offered to clean up my major spill and a few other small ones while I was gone. Peter found me at the Simple Restaurant where I had ordered several items. He was faring well with his time alone and was glad to see that I was working happily with all my usual focus and intensity. I was back to work at 3 and finally left at 5:30, having finished the initial waxing and the application of the first two colors.

It was in my attempt to select colors that Khepech and I had a real communication chal-



Kim working on her batik

lenge. The limits of language once again reared its little head and coupled itself with a limited ability to communicate "concepts of color". At one point in his frustration, he walked out of the room at one point and left me to "think about color". I felt as chastised as I had when grandma sent me to parochial school one day with a regular dress instead of my proper uniform. I sought him out once I realized that we faced a Grand Canyon of concepts not to be understood by me within this short lesson, and asked him to explain the simplest process I could use and how we might make "blue" a part of that. We got a mutual handle on it and I left having set

both shades of blue I had chosen. I needed to take the next day for the purple and black that remained. I was extremely proud, the next day as I watched a young Dutch woman really stick to her guns in trying to get further along in the color chain than I had. She had an unlimited amount of time to work hers out and had the firmness of her conviction to hack away kindly at Khepeck's stubbornness. I hoped that I might have done the same if I had more than 2 days which in the beginning he had told me would be more than enough time to do a piece. The reality is that 4 days is necessary for the very different techniques of color application and blending that are involved in this wonderful but tedious art form.

I did my intermediate waxings and got the colors applied and felt proud that I had completed a piece with a design that was not the best compliment to the medium and technique.

Peter and I agreed that you definitely have to complete a first piece in any medium to know what mistakes there are to be made. Mine was definitely the selection of a design that had far too much small detail. It is an art form that begs for flourish and bigness and so I will take that lesson with me to my next piece.

With the completion of this activity, it is time now to leave for Padang and the flight we had scheduled before we left Bukittingi (a place and time which now seems long past.) Peter has taken in some of the sights of Maninjau while I



Minang men dancing on glass

was being an artist and they sound wonderful in his description. In the course of the stay, we have also attended a performance by local Minang men which was one of the most outstanding ones we have seen. There was enough skill and sophistication in the presentation to make it an exceptional performance, but it was not so glitzy that you did not recognize the songs and dances as truly part of the life rituals of this group of Sumatrans. Like the Bataks, the Minang are a distinct mountain culture and are proud of this individuality. They are another example of the diversity of the Sumatran population, loosely connected on this massive island, like no other island we have ever visited. We are refreshed by the land, the lake and the conversations with the people we have met and are ready to leave.

Having paid for our bus ticket 3 days in advance is supposed to guarantee us a seat on the 6:45 AM bus. We have befriended a German couple here and they will also be leaving on this



bus and while they did not book so far in advance, they did book directly with the driver. In the course of running into each other every night at dinner, we have shared numerous stories of horrific bus rides and tortured traveling throughout the 3d world countries. They get top honors for a bus ride (Citroen mini-truck) in Africa with 24 passengers, livestock, 2 tractor tires and baggage. They are jokingly telling us that our booking through the tourism office will give us space on the roof. They board the bus one stop ahead of us and available seating will test the mettle of this friendship/acquaintance! It is good to be able to share the laughter about these things with others of the same ilk...we feel a certain gratitude in knowing that there really are other people with sound minds and aging bodies who are doing what we do...a validation, if you like.

MALAYSIA

Kota Bharu, Perhentian Islands and Mersing

PETER
02/26/97

**AND HOW IS THIS MANDI THING
SUPPOSED TO WORK ANYWAY?**

I just have not been able to figure out how one is supposed to do all things that one has to do in the bathroom here. First I think it necessary to explain the very basic layout of an Indonesian Mandi or toilet. Each one that I have been in always has the same two very basic elements. A large concrete tub that can be filled with water, and a hole in the cement for the human waste etc. to go down. The tub can be configured in a whole variety of different ways. It is usually rectangular and about 2 feet by 3 feet by 2 feet deep. But it can also be at it's simplest just a large plastic tub. It can be filled in a whole variety of ways including by tap at the most sophisticated places to by pailes of water that the user has to hand carry in from some other source.

There is no sink as we know it. There is also no toilet paper, towel, towel rack, clothes rack or towel. The actual toilet is always the same, it's on a raise platform of about 6 inches. Sometimes the whole is just formed out of the concrete. At others it is an actual porcelain bowl set into the floor and level with it.. Usually, but not required, is some kind of a rough place to put your feet—so you don't slip off and into the bowl. The function is really quite simple. If you're pooping, you squat over the hole. When your done, you use your right hand to ladle water using the provided plastic scoop. You then pour water onto your left hand, which you then use to clean up your butt as best as you can.

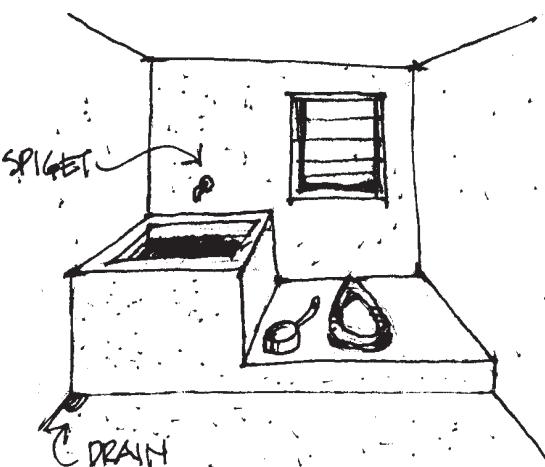
Some pretty self evident Rules of the Road come to mind, such as don't ever put your dirty left hand back into the tub. Don't use the plastic

ladle for drinking. And, something I found almost impossible to do, try not to pour water all over your clothes.

If you are going to take a bath, you stand anywhere you want and ladle cupfuls of water over your body. Soap up and then repeat until clean. If this was all you had to do in there than it wouldn't be so bad, but there is more. For example brushing your teeth. Are you supposed to spit in the toilet bowl or just on the floor? How do you put your clothes on over your wet bottom? Should you drip dry? How about fruit? Where and how do you wash it? You know you have to wash your clothes in there too. If you get the water in the large tub contaminated with soap or what ever then you have to empty it, clean it out and then refill it. Refilling can

take hours because in most places the water does not come out of the tap very quickly. If your carrying it in you can guess why you wouldn't want to contaminate it.

Kim keeps saying that the video on the plane ride over to Indonesia should include "Mandi Instructions" instead of just showing us another Kung-Fu movie. I think she has a point, it's almost two months later and I still have the same nagging questions, although one question did get answered, that is why you never supposed to eat or touch another person with your left hand. Because if I didn't tell you already there is never any soap in the Mandi, just a rock. No we haven't figured out what the rock is for either! Besides how would you wash your hands in a place with out a sink? Maybe the rock has something to do with it? Or maybe it's just used a temporary drain plug for the floor. I don't know, and now that we are leaving I probably never will.



Typical Mandi

PETER

03/01/97

**In the air on our way to
Kota Bharu, Malaysia**

Well this is it, we are leaving Sumatra and headed for Malaysia. It has been an interesting trip. Perhaps more interesting than terrific. There have been many harrowing miles in transit across this vast island. They have always left us sort of weak in the knees. Just this morning, through the streets of Padang we sailed in some Taxi out to set the land speed record for Indonesia. There have been many, many, many—too many trips like that for our taste.

But in between the frightening car chase scenes there has been some real beauty. Lake Manninjau was such a place. A jewel amoung the many stones of travel. We spent a very pleasant 4 days there. Much of it, sitting on our second story balcony staring out at the crater lakes. watching as it's many faces turned stormy, or sunny or cloudy. Then there were the many walks that we took together and some apart. Kim decided to take a Batik class while there. I will leave that story for her to tell. I decided not to take the class—instead I opted to just relax. I spent a lot of my time reading in our room, and a lot of time just walking around town. So much so that I can still feel the strong pull from the strenuous walking in the tops of my legs.

I even finally took that walk to the waterfall that I had been hearing so much about. It was wonderful to again spend the day amongst the tall jungle trees. It was an easy walk. I didn't need to hurry as I knew that Kim would not be back from

her class until late. I spent a long time just sitting in the jungle, next to the clear stream trying to soak it all in. The waterfall itself was fabulous. It fell in two stages of about 50 feet each. It wasn't very wide, but 'bout time it reached the small pool at the bottom it had some kick to it. I put on my bathing suit and stood about as close to it as I dared letting the cool mountain water massage my aching muscles.



The waterfall itself was fabulous

Afterwards, I sat around watching everything from the ants walking up a huge dead tree trunk, down to the way the sun filtered through the jungle canopy leaving shadowy patterns on the floor. It was wonderful to have no plan and no schedule. The only reason I finally left was because the small bees had begun to become a nuisance. They never did sting, but when they insisted on crawling under the straps to my sandals I thought I might just move the wrong way and they would. So after about 30 minutes I decided it was time to leave.

I really took my time coming down the hill. Every little thing seemed to hold a fascination for me. Maybe it was because I knew my vacation days were now numbered, and this fact somehow helped to heighten my senses, but I would walk a few steps and then just stop and wait and listen. Eventually my patience was rewarded when a whole troop of monkeys passed by. There is just something magical about seeing them and it never ceases to amaze me how they can catch and hold my attention. I left the path and I followed them for a ways until I got afraid I would loose my way.

Walking back to town through the abandoned

rice fields I thought to myself what a delightfully wonderful day it had been. Kim was waiting for me back at the room. She had finished her batik. It came out quite lovely. After we exchanged stories of how our days had gone, we walked off to our favorite restaurant, the Palantha. It too, as were most of the restaurants in Lake Maninjau, right on the water. It was a great place to just to sit and watch the sunset. The food wasn't too bad either. We ate there often.

From Lake Maninjau we took an early morning bus around it's perimeter. We had bought our bus tickets two days earlier at the urging of our travel agent. He told us that, yes it was a public bus, and yes they stopped to pick up everyone along the way, but if we bought our tickets in advance we would be assured a seat. No small thing I thought to myself for the 4 hour bus ride to Padang. Needless to say we bought them. They were only 3,500 rupias each, about a \$1.48. How much could we loose by prepurchasing?

It wound up that they were indeed saved seats. Shortly after we boarded the bus it began to fill up until it was overflowing with people. They pretty much blocked the view in all directions. So much for seeing the magnificent vistas as we made our way around the lake. But at least we had seats. By the second hour, people were beginning to tire from standing on the ever-swaying bus. Then they began to just lean on anything and anybody that they could. I didn't mind though because I remembered my ride down to the lake just a few days before when it was me standing. As uncomfortable as it was having people leaning on me for two hours it was still not as bad as standing. We arrived in good spirits in Padang. Upon arrival we decided to share a *taksi* with a couple from Germany that we had been running into, it seemed for the last month. We had to bargain hard to get out fare down from the asked 12,000 to 4,000. Unfortunately the first hotel that we tried didn't have any of the cheaper rooms left, so we got into the cab and told him to take us to another hotel. This time we forgot to bargain for a rate. When we got there

and I tried to pay him the 4,000 he said, no that was to the first place now it was 12,000. I tried to reason with him that the second motel was just a few minutes away from the other but he wouldn't be deterred. I started slowly handing him 1,000 bill one at a time until we both tired of the aggravation at 8,000. That was a mistake we all said that we wouldn't make again.

The room was a little overpriced, and although it was nice and a little way away from the noise of downtown, it only had one window and it faced unto the courtyard. We couldn't sleep with the window open and despite the fact that we had the fan on it was hot all night long. Kim and I went for a walk through the market area. It seemed to go on forever. There were 4 large 2 story buildings. Each one housed a different category of items. One had nothing but clothes and fabric. Another had nothing but building materials, while another had fresh fruits, vegetables, fish and meat. And on and on it seemed to go. At one point we decided to try upstairs. As soon as we walked up there I knew it was a mistake. It was filled with some very seedy looking people who were just hanging around—up to no good I reasoned. All of the shops were boarded up and closed except a few, and these held nothing of interest, or it seemed to me of worth.

We walked through it to the next exit quickly but without running. It seemed that everyone had something nasty to say. We just walked on. At one point a guy called us but I just waved Hello and kept on. He came up and bumped into Kim, so she later told me. Once we were outside I noticed that Kim had left the zippers open on her daypack. I closed them for her and it wasn't till later that she noticed that a small bag with some money was missing from her daypack. It wasn't much money, less than \$10, but it left an unpleasant taste. The night before we left Indonesia, after almost 2 months, this had to happen. I really wanted Sumatra to have a perfect record. Still, we told each other it was such a small thing compared to all the kindness and safety that we have felt here.

We are big believers in Karma. I know that that man will not get any enjoyment out of the money. The next day we got up for another hair-raising race through the streets of Padang on our way to the Airport. Once there, we were happy to have that part of the journey behind us. Now it's just fly and then sit and wait for a plane so we can fly again.

KIM
02/28/97

We all had seats, INSIDE the bus. Our friends were nearer to the driver — we were next to the open door. It was peaceful going for a while, but gradually we accumulated enough passengers to equal a true Indonesian busload. Decorum went to the 4 winds quickly and Peter who was sitting on the aisle had several people propped over him. A gentleman standing on the entrance step wanted to engage in conversation. I had fallen asleep and even when his voice awakened me, I kept my eyes closed. The increasing heat and the wall of humanity that blocked the little bit of breeze that had been coming in was an antagonism I knew I only had to endure for another hour or so. The Padang trip was nothing compared to the other marathons we have done and the intensity of the eastern sun rising fully on my shoulder would not break me. I was moved now by fantasies of the buses in Malaysia that everyone assured us were driven reasonably, most often air-conditioned and ran on a real timetable.

We went in search of our rooms in Padang with the German couple and found something reasonable. We would only be there for the night and they wouldn't be much longer after us. We walked for a good part of the evening in search of some special food stalls along the beach that not only were supposed to offer good food, but it was supposed to be "a scene that became more and more active the later the evening got." This info was provided by both the German and the English guides so we felt prepared for an

evening of tasty treats. We had done some extensive walking throughout the afternoon in what proved to be the antithesis of Medan...a beautiful, clean city with clean streets and reasonable drivers.

The German duo had mastered the mini-bus system on their afternoon outing, so we hopped onto one to get us to the beach and harbor, hoping to preserve our energy for walking when we arrived. No one on the bus knew exactly where we wanted to go so we got off instinctively when we felt we were in the general area. We made it to the seaside and the walkway along it, but only a few stalls were lit and open and most of them were selling cigarettes and biscuits. The further down the walk we went, the quality decreased significantly and the primary item being sold was turtle eggs...not just a few stalls...EVERY one we passed had jars of them. Not having seen them before, I thought they were Ping-Pong balls with small dents until a woman approached us to buy from her stock and sucked on one while extolling their properties for increasing the strength of the heart. Needless to say, a definite pall came over us and we finally turned around, finding the rest of the vendors closing as we wandered back. Not a single item of the delectable Padang food we had originally sought was in sight in either direction. It was 10 PM and we found a restaurant as we turned to walk away from the seawall. It was not serving food so we stopped for a beer.

Back in our small room, the fan kept the night from being oppressive. We were in a corner where the ventilation was less than perfect — a detail we had not noted when we checked in that morning. There were also more mosquitoes than we had come upon anywhere during the past 2 months of travel. This necessitated the closing of the shutters on our only window. I fell asleep hoping that the stories of Malaysia's modernness and sophistication were not lies. I knew I needed a little of it before we went home.

03/01/97

We flew for the whole day! Three flights and we were in Kota Baru and on our way to the Perhentian Islands where we anticipated spending the last three weeks of our time in the beauty of island living. The cab ride assured us that we were indeed in another part of civilization. The length of the ride and a few observations even in the darkness of night told us more...this "bustling little city" was BIG and verged on 1st world. A walkabout the next morning confirmed our feelings when we hit the market and found on its fringe not only a McDonald's but an A&W!!! They even have color co-ordinated Muslim headgear for the uniforms of the women who work at both places!

The market center did have the traditional open stalls and was huge and holding its own in the presence of several department stores. There definitely seems to be room for both for at least for a while. The prices were higher than in Indonesia and we were stunned at the cost of the clothing and fabric. All the women dress exquisitely and we are curious at how they can afford it. Even at a higher wage standard, it does not seem likely that the prices we saw would still be affordable. Even in ringitts, they were more expensive than we could afford, even with a margin for bargaining.

Our homestay was basic and we decided to stay an extra day to see a bit more of this city. I had wanted to see the 40 meter Reclining Buddha and we needed to wait an extra day for the exchange to be open for cashing of travelers checks. While the banks are open on Sundays, the exchange rates are not available so they don't make those transactions. The tourism office got us our tickets for transportation to the islands and invited us to the cultural center's presentation of the local crafts...kite flying and top spinning. Who could resist. (We got the top spinners, but no kite flying in our presentation.) Interesting however and with the demo of drumming and martial arts, we didn't

feel the least cheated! We were booked for our taxi to Kuala Besut the next morning and were still experiencing the mixed emotions of what they used to call in the Peace Corps, "Shock-On-Re-entry". We were undergoing cultural transition and even though it was radically different from our expectations (what else is new!) we figured it was definitely a step in the direction of home.

Chugging along gently in a big boat filled with travelers, we landed on an island that smacks of a combination of Brewer's Bay and Cane Garden Bay in the BVI. I had finally determined the way to differentiate what we had encountered and experienced in Indonesia, particularly northern Sumatra where our travels had been confined!!! We had spent 2 months in a place of "provinciality". We had returned in our trip to Malaysia to almost the "present." The concept I am still working to resolve in my un-



The market was huge

derstanding is the means by which the technological development of Malaysia has kept a parallel preservation of its ethics and integrity at the personal level, in its people. It is something we have discussed with different people throughout our travels and how that it is attributable to the influence of Islam in their lives. Their religion is an intrinsic part of all their lives and actions. It shows everywhere!

Here on the islands, there is so much influ-



The locals spinning tops

ence of the Europeans in the development of tourism that it is hard sometimes to realize that we are not in a resort in Europe or America...with the exception of the absence of alcohol and perhaps drugs as well. We are more privy to knowing about the alcohol because it is served in only one of many restaurants here and no hard liquor has been available at any time in our trav-

els. You wondered, Linda, at what might be present and a parallel to the 12 step program in this part of the world, and I feel strongly that Islam is the living existence of life as a 12 step program.

PETER

03/05/97

Matahari Chalet

Palau Perhentian Kecil

Malaysia

IT'S THESE STUPID GUIDE BOOKS

Well, we arrived at what will probably be our final destination before we head home. I can remember sitting on our porch at Lake Maninjou and leafing through the guide book, looking for our next destination.

“Kim,” I said, “you know we only have about three weeks more left of our vacation. I think I have one major move left in me. How about you? I would really like it to be something nice. Some-



Kim with the famous “Reclining Buda”--he’s a big guy!



Kim poses with the Buddha not reclining

thing special. Something I can remember while sitting back in Pipe Creek soldering windows.”

“I have to agree with you. I would like a nice tropical beach. And maybe a place where there would be food too,” Kim swooned as she said the word “food.” “Our visa is about to run out for Indonesia so how about if we go to Malaysia for a while. I have heard some pretty good things about Palau Tioman. It’s just off the east coast. And beside that, according to our guide book, monsoon season is almost over.”

“Hey, that’s a good idea. Let’s look it up again and start to plan.”

And that’s just what we did. Our guide book said that Tioman was a very tourist-y place, and pretty pricey to boot. Then, as we aimlessly leafed through it, on almost the last page we came to the description of the Perhentian Islands. They were

almost at the Thailand border. “It’s awfully far.” I said. “I don’t know if I can handle another 13 hour bus ride. Tioman is so close to Singapore. The book says we can get to it in 2 hours by a big air conditioned bus.”

“I know that,” Kim countered, “but listen to what it says about the Perhentian’s. It says they are the most beautiful islands in Malaysia. They are “undiscovered,” and we could be among the few to see their fantastic unspoiled tropical reefs. Besides,” she added, “I think there is a store on the small island.”

“That’s a good point. And with the what the book says about the difference in hotel prices between Tioman and these, I bet we could even save some money by flying close to there. And then busing it to the boat dock.”

We looked up the closest city to the islands in our book. It was Kota Baru. It was so close to Thailand that on our small map it actually seemed a part of it. This fit perfectly with our modus operundi for travel. Always fly to the most distant, remote and primitive place in a country, and then bus it back to civilization. That way you, totally and completely, are immersed in the country. Then the rest of the trip just gets more and more civilized. There would not, I reasoned, be as much culture shock when going home.

There was a map of Kota Baru in our guide book. It said it was a small, compact city, with very traditional Muslim values. Even more strictly enforced than Indonesia, it added. We looked up hotel prices and planned on seeing all of the sights. Kim really wanted to see the reclining Buddha. “It’s over 40 meters long!” she said. and then enthusiastically added, “We can light incense there for Mom too!”

Well, that just about settled it for me. “Let’s do it!”

We booked our tickets the next day to fly from Padang to Johar Baru in Malaysia and then once we arrived we didn’t even leave the airport. We were so excited we just booked straight through

to Kota Baru. We were pleased with the airport in Johar Baru. It was small and compact, and had just enough stores and restaurants to make our wait interesting, but not so much as to make us feel like we were already back in San Antonio. "And this," I beamed, "is the capital city airport!"

"I think this is going to be a good move," Kim said as she munched on a bag of Japanese potato chips.

The plane left for north Malaysia about 3 hours later. The trip first took us to Kuala Lumpur. The whole flight was about an hour. The airport had a real international flavor, which to us meant that there were a lot of pricey things that we could not afford — a lot of leather and clothing stores. There also was also a really nice selection of restaurants. We stopped in a few of them during the 2 hour layover.

Finally, it was on to our final destination — Kota Baru. That took less than an hour. Flying in, we were immediately amazed by the size of the town. The 40 minute taxi ride from the airport through the streets of Kota Baru did nothing to alleviate our uneasiness. It was solid city for most of the way. "This city is huge," I said to Kim as the driver cautiously made his way through the four lane streets. They even had traffic lights. And everybody stopped for them! Until they turned green even! At one point our cab made an unusual sound. As if some thing had shifted in our trunk. Our driver slowly pulled over to the side, turned on his 4 way flashers and gave the vehicle the once over. Satisfied that everything was OK he proceeded, but at an even slower pace. After Indonesian driv-

ers I felt like telling him to hurry up, but instead I held my tongue, winked at Kim and we actually enjoyed a ride for the first time in months.

The hotel we picked from our guide book was right where it said it would be. And it was about as nice as the book said. The main problem came with the scale of the map of the city. It seemed like such a small city in the book. We however, I mused to myself, drove an awfully long way from the city's downtown area.

We took a room in the Menoura Guest House, a small hotel for tourists. The book said there were a lot of them. Most were run by Chinese and catered to foreign travelers like us. Ours was just that. A very skinny five story building



This city is huge

with many very small rooms, some without windows, most without baths. It was fairly cheap (16Ringgit, about \$6.50 US), and as it was about 9 PM we chose to stay rather than look any further. Besides, we reasoned, we would be heading for the islands first thing tomorrow morning.

As it turned out the next day was Sunday. In this part of the world banks are closed on Friday so we were able to find many of them open. Just as the book said. What it neglected to tell us was that we could not cash travelers checks on Sunday, because as it was put to us at the four banks we visited, they would not know what the latest exchange rate was until the exchange opened on Monday morning. Well, we were stranded. We couldn't go on without money. Our book said that we would not be able to change money on the islands, except at one place that charged exorbitant rates.

I should tell you something about these guide books before I continue. They are the bible of travel to these countries. Every traveler has one. They tell you literally everything about everything in the country they are about. Where the cheap, middle, and expensive hotels are. Where the banks are, who has the best exchange rates. How to catch a taxi, and how much to pay. It even has sections on mannerisms and dress codes. Without them you would literally have no idea where the best sites are, and how to get out of the city when you are done.

Ours was the one most often used. It was the Malaysia, Singapore, & Brunei, Travel Survival Kit, put out by the Lonely Planet. Almost every traveler we met had a copy. It is the size of a small bible, and about as heavy. For example, it had described Kota Baru as a place that "Many travelers stop at on their way to or from Thailand, but end up staying much longer." That was indeed the case for us. With the banks closed we decided to stay longer. Kim was excited because now we would have a chance to see that 40 meter Buddha visit had been bugging me to see.

We did indeed find out that we enjoyed our, what turned out to be a 3 day stay. not only did we make a side trip out to the country to see the Big Buddha. (By the way it was huge!) It was reclining, sort of laying on it's side, but it was a bit cartoony for my taste. It really didn't have much detail in the carving. And then we walked our butts off all over town. Especially when we found out there was a McDonald's. Then when we saw an A&W Root Beer we were in heaven. It was funny to see it filled with Muslim women dressed in full floor length robes complete with head-veils, sipping on a Coke and munching on an order of fries.

It also had a nice and very interesting market. We joyfully noted as we walked around town that there were no more shouts of "Hello Mister." In fact, no one seemed to pay much attention to us at all. Even when we were in the market there

were no high pressure tactics used to entice us to buy something. "By god", I said, "there's even prices on the fruit!"

This was clearly a very civilized city. Not at all what we had expected. There was no mention of McDonald's in our book. Although I didn't actually say it, we were expecting something along the lines of towns we had been in Sumatra. After all these

are the same people, same religion, same language, we said. Somehow we felt cheated, but in sort of a delightful way. I mean it wasn't that we were not enjoying ourselves as we were stuffing our faces with burgers and ice cream. Still, we reasoned, the Perhentian Islands would be primitive enough for us. So why not just lean back and enjoy the luxury, because we were going to have nothing to eat but beautiful scenery soon enough.

When we passed by the tourist office we were please to find out that we could buy our tickets for the taxi ride to Kuala Besut, and then we found we could even buy the tickets for the boat ride over. Open ended! Round Trip! I really didn't want to do it, but the guy behind the tourist counter had treated us so well I wasn't sure how to refuse without offending him.

The next morning we left our motel and waited for our taxi driver on the street below. He was there 15 minutes early. We were his only passenger, and he spoke passable English. I asked him if we could stop for some gas for my stove. He said it would be no problem, and soon we were



A Muslim McDonald's!

on our way. He was a pleasant fellow and we had a nice slow and safe ride through the countryside. There were towns and houses all along the way. They had a very upscale look, especially for the country. Kind of reminded me of Pipe Creek.

We started seeing other tourists in Taxi cabs almost before we left the city limits. Many of them we recognized from our hotel. When we arrived, about an hour and a half later at Kuala Biset. There were about 15 or so foreign tourists already waiting for the boat. I told Kim that I thought we might not be the only people who were going to discover the Perhentian's.

There are two islands, Pulau Perhentian Besar and Pulau Perhentian Kecil. They are close together. Our guide book said that the Kecil (small) island was the best and it was also where the cheapest accommodations were. In fact, it said that Long Beach was the best place to be. The captain's assistant asked us in turn where we wanted to go and each person answered, the small island, Long Beach. Oh yeah, except for one couple who wanted to go to the big island. They had a special introductory coupon for some upscale resort. They later told us, almost apologetically, that after 2 months in Thailand they felt they deserved a little luxury. When we docked to drop them off, they were a little sheepish about getting off. We all added to their discomfort by adding some comment like, "Hope you enjoy the Club Med pool?" or "Have a Rum and Coke for me."

So many people got off the boat at Long Beach that they had to make three trips by dingy to unload all of us. It was a beautiful beach, situ-

ated in a very picturesque horseshoe bay. It was lined with coconut palms, and there were probably about 10 different resorts. Each one was just a few feet from it's neighbor. Kim and I left our bags at the first one, and then walked up the beach to visit each one in turn, to see which one we liked

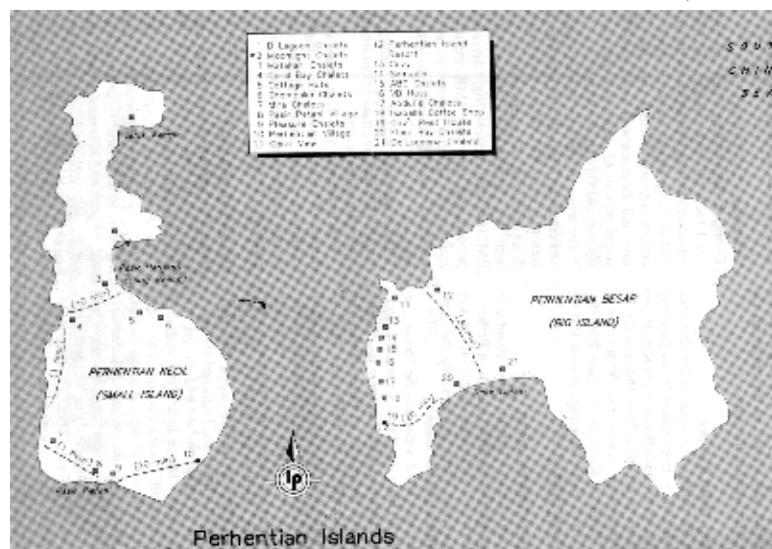
best. Our book had its own recommendation, but at this point we felt we wanted to see them all and make up our own mind.

Most of the resorts consisted of single bungalows, many of them simple A-Frames. But most of them were set

back away from the beach and they were too close together. The average cost was about 20.00 ringgits (\$8.13 US). We, of course picked the most expensive one we could find at 45.00 Ringgets \$18.45 US). But we reasoned that this was to be our last two weeks and we wanted a good view of the South China Sea.

Our book told us that this was the best bay for snorkeling. I was a little dismayed not having seen any coral as our boat approached. Still I thought that maybe it was to one side or another. It wasn't. It was a beautiful, albeit crowded beach. Once again our guide book had let us down. First, it was that horrendous trip to Pulau Banyak where they told us there was food and beautiful unspoiled coral. There was no food and the Chinese had been bombing the coral for years. When they finished, they poisoned the rest of the fish. We had gotten the impression that those islands were more upscale than they really were.

Now, we got just the opposite impression. These islands had been discovered by tourists for years, and were in fact very popular. The coral, we



later found out was here, but it is all on the other side of the island. Fortunately it is only a 30 min walk through the jungle to get there. Yesterday I walked over, and was again surprised to see an even more beautiful bay than ours with many nice hotels, for about half the price. The snorkeling was very good. Our book once again told us that all the good snorkeling was on the east side — it is in fact on the west. Hundreds of travelers have followed these off-handed remarks written down in these "traveler's bibles." These books have indeed made Long Beach a very popular place. They don't seem to be able to build fast enough to keep up with the demand that they alone have generated. Oh well, maybe we will schlep all of our stuff over to the other side tomorrow?

Hey, Kim just told me that she found a train that goes from here to Singapore. "Our book," she said," says it's called the Jungle Train. Very little used. It goes through some of the most beautiful scenery in Malaysia, I think we should take it."

I thought, "Oh no, here we go again!"

PETER

03/06/97

Pulau Perhentian Kecil

Mata Hari Hotel

Today we went for a walk to the other side of the island. It had quite a different feel from the side we had just left. First, it is where all of the coral is. The water was calm, whereas, our side consists mostly of body surfing quality. There are fewer chalets for rent, but there are still a healthy number — more perhaps than we would want, but then this has been a trip filled with compromises.

We had a wonderful day snorkeling and laying in the sun. There are also less people on this side, I think it's called Coral Beach. There is one larger beach, but then there are 3 or 4 more small ones. This is where everyone goes and they all seem to spread out nicely. On one of our walks we found a lovely set of chalets, but they were still under construction. We weighed the pros and cons of moving to a place that was not finished. We finally

decided on moving into it, despite the possible daytime construction noises and the lack of electric and water at certain parts of the day. It is more in keeping with our budget. They are going for 25.00 ringets (\$10.16 US)vs. ours which are 45.00 (\$18.28 US). I know neither is a huge sum of money, but we really didn't want to go above \$10.00 US on this trip, if we could help it.

Today we begin the moving process. We will have to carry all of our stuff through the bush for about 30 minutes. We could take an island boat taxi, but the surf on our side is so rough that I am afraid we would either get dunked or at a minimum all of our stuff would get wet. It's OK. I think we both feel stronger and healthier than when we did that first trek in Bukit Lawang. This should or could be our last magical spot to ride out the end of our trip from. We want it to be as perfect as possible, but we also want it to be filled with some adventures. The other side has snorkeling on demand. Be it morning, afternoon, evening or night time I think we can just walk off our front porch and go. Maybe we can take some of those early morning swims that we fell in love with on Anegada in the BVI?

It's time to start packing. Here's to another safe and adventurous trip. (I lifted my cup of coffee in salute as I said/typed this.)



A cheaper place to stay

KIM
03/07/97
Perhentian Islands

TIME FOR REFLECTION

We made our initial impact on the island...or vice versa...at the high rent district in the Matahari Chalets. No deal could be struck to get a rate cheaper than the 45 ringitts/da (\$19) for the remaining 2+ weeks we have before it is time to fly home. After 3 nights we found a nicer, cheaper place on the opposite side of the island. We made the 30 minute walk through the jungle at the narrowest point on the island to Coral Bay (our new home), easily with our packs, leaving behind a surf that had become dangerous to swim in, in trade for a flat calm bay, full of more coral than we have ever seen. What a deal! The electrical supply is if-y in our new place with current generator problems and occasionally it is necessary to fetch water from the well if there isn't enough in the tanks to supply the room, but what is ever perfect anyway.

Four young people are in the last leg of preparation for the opening of their dive shop in this same complex. When we first arrived we were most struck by their long and arduous work day without power tools. They show signs of working too hard and there is an absence of laughter and relaxation that may be from the need to complete this work. It is difficult to imagine that the pressure comes from anywhere but within themselves since island time here is as variable as anywhere. It was not completely surprising that when Stein (the leader and head of the whole business) left for Singapore to buy the last pieces of equipment that were not arriving according to his expectations, the other 3 just lapsed into near frivolity.

We have enjoyed some long conversations and they seem easier with themselves even though they still work almost as much.

The bay provides us with the kind of morning swim we enjoyed in Anegada and we have the luxurious choice of meals throughout the day at 4 different restaurants along the bay. If they are not to our liking, we can walk the 30 minutes to Long Beach where we started out, and select from an equal number of restaurants there.

We took the 2 hour walk on the jungle path into the village to buy snacks and were surprised that it was larger than we expected and much more populated. By reports of other travelers, in the past 2 years the island has been completely transformed with all the chalets being modernized or newly built and with a definite eye on the upscale touring market. We are fortunate that the finishing touches have not yet been applied. In another 2 years it will no longer be affordable for the likes of us.



Kim reflecting on the beach

Our chalet looks toward the sunset and we arrived for new moon. In the past few nights we have watched it grow and with it, the silvery reflection on the sea at night.

Our balcony and very large room are more than what we need as a transition into our final travel and return home. As the manager of Matahari suggested, it is somewhere between Sumatra and what we have in the USA. We have been reading, playing cards, devouring food as if we'd arrived from starvation, and have spent wonderful hours in the sea. It is the time for some reflection and I am grateful for it as it is giving the impact of our time in Sumatra a chance to settle and become clear.

Among the points that I have reflected on

most, the first is the recognition of the vast difference between traveling and vacationing. It is not simply a rhetorical difference...it is a giant leap between two very separate and distinct realities!

Traveling is the work of moving and changing and seeing...of assessing and choosing and experiencing the consequences of all the above. In Sumatra, "all the above" equaled intense labor. It was short distances in long hours in buses and vans that battered you intensely under the drivership of young men with bad attitudes in the presence of automobile power that brought those attitudes to bear. It was the adolescent male response to raw power. In almost every case, if any of them moved a safe distance from the driver's seat of a vehicle it produced a human being of the sweetest and most generous demeanor. If fortune brought you to an old vehicle and a somewhat modified driver, you still had to contend with roads — Not simply roads filled with chuckholes, but 25 mile-long chuckholes capable of swallowing civilizations, laced with just enough macadam to get it onto the map and encourage driver and vehicle to call it "road" and take on its challenge.

Traveling is the schlepping of gear that weighs more than it should and consists of "stuff" that is unnecessary. If we are wise enough we set aside most of that along the way. Looking for a polite way to move it on and off buses and trains and boats clumsily creating more commotion than is customary in the normal order of a small town's day/activity is difficult at best and a major aggravation when one is tired or confused or hungry and otherwise out of sorts. Carrying it like a mule to find a place to sleep, a traveler prays that the first place will be affordable and clean enough to keep the transport at a minimum. It is one thing to climb a mountain, disturbing the stones and boulders and quite another to barge into the daily life of a small village hoping that your best efforts will support rather than deface or disenchant what, when done with right balance, can become price-

less sharing.

In the absence of understanding and speaking a language, if a common 2d language is not present, the work of traveling intensifies as simple needs begin to require twice the time to be translated before both parties are sure that any real understanding has been reached. This excludes any conversation that otherwise relaxes a transaction and transforms it into a true communication.

Sumatra provided its unique perspective for travelers, with its extreme provinciality. Bridging the simplicity of the Sumatran approach to life with the complexity of requests presented by the traveler is a challenge for both sides and is probably bridged with infinitely more grace by the Sumatran whose life is designed to welcome strangers and create a feeling of warmth for all who come into their lives. The people in most of the villages we visited live in a home that is only 20' square, that is open on all sides through the day and boarded up one plank at a time at night when the whole family lies down on the floor and sleeps. There is no furniture or if a more affluent family has a few chairs, everyone still sits on the floor to watch TV. Plumbing is a hole in the floor and it is sometimes lined with a porcelain basin. Bathing is done in the river in the evening simultaneously with the dishes and the laundry. While this is poverty according to some standards, it is simplicity for them and their daily life reflects itself in their eyes and manners as a precious gift rather than an arduous, overburdening challenge. It seemed that in the beginning it even took energy for us to believe and accept this openness and trust, and to reciprocate it at least a little bit as unquestioningly as it was offered.

The vacation on the other hand, is the time taken in the place that speaks to your soul the moment you step off that bus or boat. (And sometimes it is necessary to wait at least 12 hours before your soul is able to make that recognition and connection.) It is the 2 weeks you

spend in Pulau Banyak or Lake Maninjau or Bukit Lawang that restores and vitalizes you and gives you time to experience yourself in harmony with your hosts and the beautiful places in which they are fortunate enough to have their whole life. It is the time spent enjoying the particular joy that place has to offer and discovering how you blend with what you have come to.

The travel attracts many other people like us and none of us are sure just why we do it. Some stories are harrowing, many are funny (but only in the retelling) but all of them are parts of the adventure that demands this huge expenditure of energy that is called out of us by some inner self-punishing voice, still in need of a bit of therapy. All of us are smart enough to take the vacations within the travels and it is in any of these places that we all find each other and share stories and help one another with the best way to get to the next destination. And it is understood by some better than others that each of us is an emissary from our own culture, equipped with incredible power for representation of what is best about ourselves and the lives that are in many ways different but in just as many, the same. When the language barrier is bridged and communication is achieved (however it is achieved) we all leave and what we are — what we have been in our presence with our hosts in these travels — will have spoken so loudly and clearly that they will hardly remember what we have said (or been unable to say).

We have wisely chosen a place that is soul-filling and -resting for us as our last vacation in our travel. We will return home rested as everyone is after a true vacation. At the same time we will have given ourselves with our same hearts and souls to travel in a part of the world, chosen by accident more than by knowledge.

The second perspective that has affected me deeply and continually throughout the trip and one that has reverberated through thoughts and conversations with Sumatrans, Malaysians and other travelers, is the Muslim religion. My

knowledge of it when I left for the trip was limited to (1) a course in World Religions during my freshman year in high school (Islam was clumped with Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism for some reason), (2) media coverage of Shiite activity in the middle east (a phenomenon wherein I have yet to figure out who is the “good” guy and who is the “bad”, out of a bunch of very violent people and their ideals) and (3) Farrah Khan’s recent movement within the US to establish a stronger community of Muslims within the black community. Names flash — Muhammad Ali, Akim Elijah, Ayatollah Khoumeni...there is no continuity in why, how, where or when I logged them into memory. The excerpts from Farrah Khan sometimes made me nervous — a fundamentalist rigidity has never sparked a positive response in me, especially when it promotes hatred in the name of God — but I never pursued information that might have clarified or amplified my perspective at all. We even started the trip with comments from several friends about the idea that travel in a Muslim country might not be great for a woman, particularly. Many suggested that they have made concerted efforts to avoid travel in Muslim countries because of negative feelings about the religion and the people. We acknowledged their input with vague feelings of agreement.

Somehow, we eventually set aside that commentary and figured that as in all other things, if it started to feel bad, we would leave. Otherwise, we were intrigued by our reading about everything else in this country. What we learned about Islam comes completely from our encounters with the Sumatran people we met who openly shared their feelings about their religion and its application in their life. It is a body of knowledge that I want to amplify with more facts from the doctrine and I hope to make it a study once we return home. The feelings I have are deep awe and respect for an integration of spirit and practice that I have never witnessed before in my own life.

We were presented with the reality of Islam

in a Sumatran's daily life immediately on our arrival in Medan. On Jan 2, 1997, Ramadan had begun. It is a month of fasting from sun-up to sundown for all Muslims. It was explained to us that it has several levels of application. Because Allah is for the poor, the fast reminds them physically of deprivation and it brings them more consciously to a renewal of compassion for others who do not have enough. It is also considered to be a time of physical cleansing when the fast actually allows the body to rid itself of excesses and toxicity. It also is a time for cleansing the soul — prayers are intensified and personal self re-evaluation is important. The practice varies with the individuals. Some eat regular meals at the approved times (before sunrise and after sunset) others only eat small token-meals for light sustenance. The calls to prayer throughout the day are made even more conscious.

Since we were in the North of Sumatra where there is a more conservative focus, it was even encouraged that visitors not eat publicly in respect for the fast. We were taken aside on a couple of occasions so we could drink our water or eat our snack out of sight of the villagers. In other places, no notice was taken and non-Muslims ate and drank publicly with no sense of judgment or question from practicing Muslims. It is apparently the highest of holidays and it culminates in Idul Fittri, a 3 day celebration at the end.

There was a curiosity about us as travelers and with everything else, we were often asked what religion we were. It had been explained in our guide book that it would be incomprehensible for a Sumatran Muslim to conceive of anyone not having some form of religion. We decided to admit to our Christian/Catholic backgrounds to allow for politeness as well as our inability to explain our relationship to religion effectively in a commonly understood language (remember that it took me two weeks to count competently to ten in Bahasa Indonesia). Their satisfaction

with our response was not in what religion we had but that we HAD one. Likewise, they loved that we had children and seemed saddened that we had so few. They had no interest in making us Muslims, but they were both proud and touched in the heart when we expressed a positive reaction to Islam's effect as we saw it on their lives.

Our impressions of Islam, coming from Sumatra, were more powerful and positive than any other thing we saw or did in our travels. It was stunning and humbling to see over and over, such a pure accord between belief and action coming through a practiced religion. It is the same in the home as in the politics. There is a genuine respect felt and expressed everywhere. Hospitality is not just a courtesy — the energy extended to us was so simply given that we were sometimes caught wondering what they were expecting in return. It reminded me how jaded we can be, believing so readily that good done for us has to have a motive or reason.

The mushallahs are full at prayer times and the men walk to and from this time shared, arm in arm in their discussions. The families share — both parents take real time with the children and their pride in family is not one of possession, but one of sharing life. Peter asked a young boy in a bar/restaurant where the rare presence of beer on the menu was notable, — if it was not difficult to be present so much with the westerners and still practice his faith. The boy simply reminded Peter that he was Muslim — as if it should answer as completely as it did. In one place where the boys were truly independent from their families and very much into a restaurant often filled with young westerners and especially western girls, they reminded us that even if they weren't always perfect Muslims, they were Muslims. A young man managing one of the places where we stayed, engaged us in long conversations about life and it was clear that he could not conceive of a life with a woman or a future that was not Muslim. He felt it would be

too difficult otherwise. As clearly as each response was made, it never left us with the feeling of someone having been rigidly goaded into their statements by a controlling religious superstructure.

Over and over, discussions also lead to the perplexity that confronts them as a country in the direct face of change and evolution into a contemporary economy. The temptations of materialism are a deep concern for every adult we spoke with. They hope most of all that the grounding their children have been given will minimize the temptations — and there is a serenity that surrounds their hope that this will be so. While they know as parents that they cannot stop its progress, they hope to have some control. They hope that they will be able to continue growing with the balance they presently feel and express. We had money fall out of our pockets, unmarked bags misplaced and have even left our key in the door when we left our room. The money is returned immediately and we are sought out to be given back our mesh bag full of food. On the other hand we have been asked frequently for an article of clothing or our watch, but it is a request for something admired. If we give it, it is joyfully received and if not, there is no thought of taking it without permission.

I have the feeling that in reading more carefully the precepts of Islam and the teachings of Muhammad, that the people of Sumatra hold the essence of a religion in both heart and action. There is no intellectualism in the practice, and the simplicity is in no way either ignorance or naiveté. Not knowing Muhammad, I still have a deep conviction that he is represented quite clearly and purely by these people. Certainly I do not see representations of Christ in as many Christians and this may be why it all strikes me so profoundly. I have seen religion represented by many practitioners who mouth the texts and display morals of convenience. In Sumatra, I have been able to share time with people who do not consider their religion an obligation, rather they view it as a gift, a blessing, and an honor. They

speak sadly of fanatical displays, they do not take responsibility for what saddens them as the misunderstood practices that are not at all in accord with the wishes of Allah. We have always been fortunate to meet people who are good human beings and many of them are also religious — it is not necessarily one and the same. The people we met in Sumatra have a pure commitment to honor the present deeply and they are guided openly by their religion — there is no dichotomy or separation between religion and life — it is truly one.

Obviously I have been deeply endeared to the Muslim people in this part of the world, who have educated us about their religion and its deep, deep meaning in their lives. We have been immersed among people whose hearts and heads are in true accord and we have found ourselves wanting to understand and know more, not because they have wanted to tell us of this religion's great worth to them, but because it shines in their lives and their eyes and in everything they have extended toward us as we have traveled here. I hope the legacy we have left in our wake has given even a small measure of the same in return.

PETER
03/08/97
Coral Bay

I haven't used toilet paper in 60 days!

PETER
03/08/97
Palau Perhentian Kecil
Coral Bay

THE WALK TO TOWN

Today we took a walk to Pasir Pelanti Village, the main and only town on the island. It was a very pleasant, though somewhat difficult walk. There are no roads on Kecil. For two hours we walked, following the trail as it went from beach to jungle. After the first hour we came to a small

group of chalets set up off a small beach. We stopped to have some breakfast, and wound up having a very pleasant conversation with a young man from Australia. He had about 10 different body piercings that we could see, and multiple large tattoos. He sized me us as I sized him up. We were both wrong about our first impressions. He was very sensitive guy on a 2 year trip around Asia with his girlfriend. We mostly talked philosophy-of-life stuff. Kim and I mentioned to him that we had just come from 2 months in Sumatra and that we were very impressed with the moral character of the Muslim people there. Something, I added, that we are sorely lacking in the west. Our Christian



There are no roads on Kecil

religions seemed to have dropped the ball, getting too commercial and greedy. Whereas the Muslim people exude a kind of goodness that shows in their everyday life from the welcoming smile on their faces when they meet you, to the safety that we felt when walking in large crowds of them.

The owner, a local man, overheard what we were talking about and chimed in that he thought in Malaysia it depended on where you went. He said that he felt the major cities were more “some good/some bad” but in the countryside they were mostly all good. I told him that we had just come from Kota Baru and that we felt the same good energy while there. He then told us that Kota Baru is made up of almost purely Muslim people. That, I said, just reinforces my point. He agreed that there

was a strong vein of goodness that ran through the Muslim community.

Continuing to follow the well marked trail, we only got lost once. By the end of our journey we were indeed sorry that we had not brought a drop of water. It had been overcast for most of the walk, but still we had sweated buckets. Entering town was like moving back to Sumatra. Almost every child shouted “Hello”. The buildings were poorly constructed and there were piles of garbage everywhere. Then we broke out of the housing area and into town. It turned out it was not too bad. There was a restaurant — but they only served rice and juices. There also were two very small grocery stores, but even they had more than had been in all the stores in the largest towns of Sumatra. We loaded up on enough snack foods to last us the rest of our two weeks. We got several bags of cookies, bread, crackers, potato chips, etc. When we left the bill came to 48.00 ringets (\$19.50 US). This put a smile on the dour-faced owner and his wife. They spoke no English but they let us know in no uncertain terms that we were welcome anytime.

We sat on a small bench next to the water to wait for the next available small boat to take us and our bulging goody bags back to Coral Beach. After ten minutes Kim said she was hungry so she walked back into the store to buy a small bag of chocolate chip cookies to munch on while we waited. When she came back she said they were so



Then we broke out into the housing area

happy to have her come back that they had not charged her full price, and they had given her a bunch of bananas. I guessed that perhaps we had paid too much for everything. Kim said she thought I might be right.

We got a small power boat driven by a couple of teenagers to take us back. We were told to pay 10.00 ringets, but they asked 20. So this time we bargained them down to 14.00 (\$5.69 US) and then said OK. They also did not speak much English, but I tried to let them know that I didn't mind paying the little extra. The ride went pretty quickly — about 10 minutes or so. When we arrived in our bay there was a boat load of tourists waiting to come ashore. There is no dock, so what usually happens is they just honk their horn and wait until one of the small power boats comes out. The way it works is kind of interesting. Anyone who is there, whether they are from competing hotels or just out fishing, goes out and picks up the tourist — at no charge.

Our driver indicated that he needed to pick up some of the passengers on the way in. Even though we had chartered the whole boat, we both nodded OK. He picked up about 5, plus their bags, and deposited them and us on our lovely white sandy beach.

When we got back to our room we picked up our face masks, changed into our bathing suits and hit the water to cool off. We easily swam the length of our bay and back, stopping to delight in the many coral heads or some particularly beautiful fish. At several places we laughed so loud that the people on shore turned around to see what was so funny. We were just filled up with the relax-



Kim's windchime

ation and excitement of what a good day it had been.

Back in our room we made peanut butter and banana sandwiches, and ate half a bag of chips. Then we took a nap and awoke refreshed looking for another project. Kim is now making a windchime out of bits and pieces of dead coral and shells and me — why, I am just writing this.

PETER

03/09/97

Palau Perhentian Kecil
Coral Bay

HOW ABOUT ALL THAT STUFF WE BROUGHT?

OK, I got to tell you from the outset, this is probably a "guys" section. The original idea was for Kim and I to write about the same "stuff" we used on the trip, but we found that it just didn't work out the way we planned. She did not have the same relationship to the "stuff" as I did. So we scraped her section. Here is mine. Ladies, I have forewarned you. Read on at your own risk.

One of the great things about having a little money is that we are able to buy all of those little toys that would make our life easier. When I was 30 and traveled around it was never a question of whether I was going to bring along the smallest lightest water purifier on the market. I just brought iodine tablets for those emergency situations. If I didn't get a chance to get those, or if the bottle was over 5 bucks I knew the a couple drops of chlorine would work just fine.

But now I have more money than time and a purchase of a water purifier can take up huge blocks of thinking time and studying time. I scoured the stores in San Antonio for the latest

and best. I looked through back copies of Backpacker and Outside magazine. I even logged quite a few hours on the Internet looking at companies specs and reading articles written by other travelers. I wanted the best value that my hard earned money could buy, but I wasn't going to scrimp a few dollars here or there. If there was a better one out there somewhere — I was going to find it.

So now that our trip is almost at an end how did this acquisition of "necessary" items turn out? Let's list the goodies and go through them one at a time to see where we were smart and where we were just consumers.

There is quite a list! At the risk of boring you I am tempted to eliminate a few of the things, but in the interest of scientific research coupled with the fact that I just plain want to, I am going to forge ahead anyway. You can read those sections of interest to you skip the others if you wish.

1. Pur Water Purifier

This is one of those love/hate items. Although I have strong opinions about it I have not yet reached any conclusions. This item can purify almost any water source rendering it safe for drinking. Water was so cheap in Sumatra, about 50 cents US for a quart, that we found ourselves not using it. Beside we found that it imparted a slight though distinct iodine taste to the water. Upon arrival in Malaysia water is more expensive, about \$1.50 US. Also we found by scrubbing the actual filter it got rid of most of the iodine taste. We are now using it again. It's big, bulky but...?

2. Whisperlite International Stove \$65

This is no doubt a hands down winner in both Kim's and my book. In the morning both of us love to have a cup of coffee and a biscuit before we get up to face the world. Without it we were faced with the certainty of every morning getting up to find a place that had coffee and then bringing it back to the room. Usually it was bad and it disrupted a peaceful morning flow.

The Whisperlite stove will burn any fuel, although we had trouble using kerosene. It is how-

ever kind of a guys stove. A little finicky it requires constant prodding and shaking. Sometimes you even have to take it apart and clean it. For this trouble it is the lightest, smallest stove sold.

This will definitely be added to all our future carry lists.

3. Montbell Solar Battery Charger \$45

This is an item that I looked long and hard for. I had bought two others in the past. One we even took on our last trip to the BVI. I tried to use it, and found it severely lacking. It just took too long to charge our batteries, 2 days for 2 AA's. And even then it didn't seem to bring them up to full charge. This new one claimed to charge 4 AA's in 2 hours. But when I found the company (Montbell) it was going out of business. After countless hours of searching on the Internet I found the company that had produced them. The president of the company even called me when I E-mailed him about our up coming trip to Sumatra. Finally I found the \$120 charger discounted in a store in California for \$40. I got it 2 days before we were to leave. It weighs less than a pound and is 6 inches by 8 inches, and is made from almost indestructible plastic.

So how has it worked. Very well indeed, but not up to the stated specs. I brought 2 different sets of rechargeables. One from Radio Shack the other from a Eco-company called Real Goods. Radio Shacks work nicely although they take about 4 hour to charge up fully. Real Goods hardly work at all. For the last month we have been completely out of Alkaline batteries. It has been hard to find 4 full hours of sunshine especially while traveling. When we stay in one place it has been easy and kind of fun. Our headlamps, which we use for reading at night go through a pair of Alkalines in 2 hours. Although the bad rechargeables only last an hour I have been able to keep up with the demand.

Good purchase. I have probably broken even money wise on just this trip.

4. Portable Potty Seat \$20

I know, I know what you are thinking? What a pansy! But let me explain. The toilets in Indonesia are little more than a hole in the floor. The one thing that I can not do with my bad knee is squat. How was I ever going to use them? Then, while walking through a camping store, I came upon a portable inflatable potty. Upon further examination I found that it inflated into the shape of a toilet. You were supposed to use the supplied bags, but I thought that I could just put it over the hole in the floor. Then, I reasoned, I wouldn't have to try to shit while standing.

It was a complete disaster. I usually get constipated during my first week or so of travel so I wasn't too upset by a few unsuccessful tries. (Although on this trip I didn't get very constipated because there was nothing to eat.) But then I began to realize that when you sit on it it actually compresses your butt cheeks together, instead of spreading them like a western toilet seat. I have not used it again—although I continue to carry it!

5. Backpacking Tent \$185

This puppy stays home next trip — for sure! About 3 years ago we searched for the lightest and smallest tent made. We found it. It weighs 3 1/2 lb., and is about as small as you can get. We never know how our travels are going to go, but we always have in the back of our mind that we are going to find that perfect secluded campsite, and there we will blissfully stay, secure from the elements, in our handy dandy tent. In our last three trips it has just not been the case. We always seem to find some cheap hut on the beach, or lean-to in the jungle to stay in. On this trip we haven't even used it once.

Besides, should the need arise, with the help of a machete and a little ingenuity I know that I can always make a shelter where ever we are.

6. Convertible Backpack \$150

This is an interesting purchase. I was doing an art show in Houston, TX. It was a good show and so I found myself with extra pocket money.

After a day a brisk Saturday sales, I was on my way back to the motel when I saw that they had just opened a new REI backpacking supply store. On a whim I went in. I immediately fell in love with one of Eagle Creek's Convertible backpacks. These are packs that with a few straps and zippers turn them self into a soft sided suitcase. Truth be told I already have one of these, a North Face, purchased on a another whim about 10 years before.

This pack had the added features of being lighter, smaller and it came with a day pack which, get this, zipped on and off. So I bought it.

How has it done? With all of the other purchases I found that it was constantly being stretched beyond it limits. It's sides always bulged, though they never split. This made the daypack difficult, if not impossible to zip on. When I did put it on it stuck out very far behind me, and it's weight tended to pull me backwards. Also the suspension system, the shoulder straps and waist belt, were wholly inadequate for the weight I am carrying. The straps really cut into my shoulders.

I love the day pack, which is well laid out with many compartments and pockets for all my stuff. In truth I like the system, but only with about 3/4 of the weight. I would take it if I can manage to leave with a lighter load. If not it will remain an expensive suitcase. The daypack, however, I will continue to use on a daily basis back in Texas.

7. Thermarest Pads \$50

When I was younger and traveled I can still remember thinking to myself that there was nothing ever soft enough to sit on. Be it camping in the wilderness or a hard, uncomfortable hotel chair. So the thought of leaving without a pad was not even a consideration. These pads are beauties. They are light, small and comfortable. We use them everyday — mostly to sit on. When we do camp we use them for sleeping pads, there intended use. We sit on the porch with them, use them at the beach, under a hard chair, and many times under an inadequate hotel mattress.

8. Sleeping Bags 2 @ \$15

These are without a doubt the best item we have brought. For years I have been looking for a light tropical bag. There are none on the market that are as light as I want. Then I saw an ad on the Internet for a silk tropical sleeping bag that weighed less than a pound. for \$60 bucks. I told Kim we had to have one. We toyed with the idea of making our own out of ripstop nylon and a cotton sheet liner. In fact, on one of our trips to the city to buy the materials we stopped at a discount sporting goods store. As we walked through the sleeping bag section I had a moment of pure genius. "Why don't we buy one of these cheap heavy sleeping bags and just take out all of the filling?"

And that's just what we did. Kim opened one side of each bag and removed the cheap insulation. Then she restitched the side closed. When she was done we had a 1 lb. bag with ripstop on the outside, a light and soft gauze like liner, and a full zipper. We could even zip the two of them together if we wanted to. And it cost us much less than making it from scratch.

On this trip we have zipped ourselves into them when it is cold, used them as a cover on less chilly days and as a pillow on hot sticky days. Great idea! Kim & Peter you are genius!

7. Fins \$20

This is one item I am really glad I brought. Without them I would have had a tough time seeing as much as I did. Unfortunately on the advice of a friend I had cut them off, making them shorter – theoretically, so they wouldn't take up to much room in my pack. I did a really nice job, even doing the finish work on my grinder, but the part I cut off was thin and light and really wouldn't have made much of a difference. It did, however, make a difference in how much ease of power I had once in the water. Bad decision to cut them off.

8. Palmtops \$750 mine & \$325 Kim's

What do you expect me to say about these? They are literally the best thing I carry. Ever since I started traveling I have enjoyed keeping a jour-

nal. Sometimes more creatively than others. With the palmtop it lets me be as creative as I want. Plus I can easily transfer the information to my big computer and manipulate it in anyway I want. I could travel with my toothbrush, a handful of travelers checks and my Palmtop!

9. Binoculars 2 @ \$30 each

For this trip we didn't use them very often. On other trips I can see them being more important. We brought two pairs, I'm not sure if we need to travel with both pairs?

10. Headlights 2 @ \$15 each

These we used almost every night, especially for reading. It is a shame that they ate up our rechargeable batteries at such a fast rate. They really let us focus on the page or computer screen, and not on holding a flashlight just right. Probably a better alternative is the Mag-lite which uses nicads at a much slower rate. We have Velcro headbands to hold them. They don't work as well though, they just worked longer.

11. Pelican Dive light \$20

This was a very nice waterproof diving light that ran on 4 AA's. The same thing applies as with the headlights—it used up batteries too quickly. The light itself, I really love. It has a very narrow beam and would highlight things from a great distance. I used it to spot bats flying overhead, coconut rats up in the trees, and boats in the harbor. I really brought it along to use under water for a night snorkel but it never seemed to happen.

More in general, than specific there was very little that we brought that we didn't use and enjoy. Yet we need to cut out about 10 more pounds to make our travels easier and more pleasant. Just eliminating the tent would get rid of a lot of the extra bulk. On the plus side I was very impressed with our packs as I picked them up at Baggage Claim in Los Angeles. They were so very small in comparison to most peoples bags that I was hardly able to find them.



PETER
03/10/97
Palau Perhentian Kecil
Malaysia

THE MALASIAN WEDDING ANNIVERSAY

Today is Kim's and my first Wedding Anniversary. We have been together for 12 years, but last year we decided to make it official and permanent. After the ceremony was over, at the reception my best friend Mike said to Kim and I, "You know March 10th is a time that you guys always seem to be away on holiday. I bet many of your anniversaries will be in really exotic and romantic spots."

Well this is our first anniversary and he was right. What a wonderful spot to celebrate such a special occasion. We awoke yesterday to the alarm going off on my palmtop. I have it set to play a trumpet salute. I know it's crass, but it's the one that seems to wake us up. And it never ceases to make us smile. As it went off, I checked to see if it was perhaps a "Take Larium for Malaria Day," or a "Check the Plane Reservation Day." When I opened the cover it said, "Kim & Peter's Wedding Anniversary." "Hey," I shouted to Kim, "Wake up! It's our Anniversary."

"No kidding," she drowsily replied, "Lets spend a romantic day together. We'll celebrate by going over to the other side of the island, to Matahari's for fish dinner."

We started our day with freshly brewed Sumatran coffee and some Malaysian sweet biscuits. Afterwards we took our favorite swim from one end of the bay to the other and back. Along the way we ran into a trio a huge blue Hump-headed Parrot fish. The largest was over 3 feet long! We paused in our swim to watch them feed on the live coral. They had a parrot-like beaked mouth which they used to feed on the hard coral. We could see the large teeth marks that they left on the mustard colored coral after each bite. They seemed not

to pay much attention to us at all, and let us approach quite closely — close enough that we could see their beautiful multicolored scales. Later on we ran into a medium sized Hawksbill turtle, He was in about 15 feet of water and he too let us approach close enough to reach out and touch him, which at the last minute, I decided not to do. But my favorite spot was when we ran in to the Clown fish swimming in and out of the Sea Anemones. There were about 10 Anemones fairly close to each other. The Clown fish is usually a bright orange color with white stripes outlined in black. They seek out the stinging anemones to live in, I guess mostly for protection from the seas many predators. Somehow they are not affected by their poisonous protector. Each time I saw one I would swim down, hang onto a piece of dead coral and chase the little palm-sized fish with the tip of my finger, being careful not to actually get stung by the anemone. Each time I approached, two or three little guys would come out to see what the disturbance was. When I would reach out to tickle them they would quickly scurry back into the safety of their protector, only to dart back out again to see if I was still there. One little guy stayed out though, and he actually let me brush him several times with the edge of my hand. On my next dive I cupped my hand and he swam in and around it. As I started to rise to the surface he followed me a good way up the surface before abandoning me. What a treat I thought. Kim had seen the whole thing from the surface above. She was just as amazed as I was. She teased me that I had finally found a little friend to play with.

After we finished our swim, we walked to the end of the beach to get a little breakfast. The restaurant was open on three sides. It was set up high on a rocky point so it commanded of view of both of the beaches and the ocean below. We had a pleasant breakfast of toast and eggs with iced Milo, a kind of chocolate drink, to wash it down. We both wished that we had brought our snorkeling equipment so what we could just go down to the beach. By the time we walked back to our little chalet, it had started to get really hot and we were

both just too tired to walk back. So we just hung around read, made delicious love and napped. Kind of just what a vacation is supposed to be all about.

After we awoke, we played a few hands of 500 Rummy, (Kim seems to have gotten obsessed with card playing on this trip!!) dressed and walked over to the other side of the island. All of the tropical sounds were out in full force as we carefully walked down the narrow foot path. We stopped a few times to see if we could figure out what and where the strange calls were coming from, but all of the creatures were well hidden from view. We had brought our snorkeling gear along thinking that the sea had calmed down enough. But it hadn't. It was a complete contrast to the flatness of the water on our side of the island. We had to content ourselves with bodysurfing, or really just getting bashed about by the breakers. We laid on the beach for awhile soaking up the waning afternoon sun.

We packed up our stuff and headed over to the Matahari Restaurant. We were too early to order their evening special so we just ordered drinks while we waited. Alcohol is almost nonexistent in this part of the Muslim world. You can get beer, but is always the most expensive thing on the menu. I would have liked a nice rum punch but instead we just contented ourselves with a fresh fruit juice drink. When 7 o'clock arrived we were the first to place our order. By then we were really hungry. We ordered the special, Curried barracuda, rice and steamed vegetables. It was delicious! While we ate, the large bats had come out in full force. We watched them swoop out of the trees and into the light to catch some tasty insect. All too soon dinner was over and it was time to walk home.

We had to use our lights to walk back to the other side. It was kind of spooky, but definitely very interesting. The sounds had increased with other new ones starting around each bend. We walked along slowly, partly to not stub our toes on the many roots and rock, (I have banged mine twice already since we arrived) but mostly because we were happy to just be alive in this part of the world.

We wanted to remember every sound and smell and vision so that when we were back home doing our work we could hopefully still recall a time when we had actually walked along down the jungle path on a island off the coast of Malaysia.

Back home, we opened all of our front windows, and laid down on the bed. We were lulled to sleep by the sound of the waves gently lapping at the shoreline. As we gratefully fell asleep, it was only 9:30pm, Kim said to me that Mike had been right this was indeed a First Wedding Anniversary that we would always remember.

PETER

03/14/97

Palau Perhentian Kecil

Malaysia

Today was one of those nice slow days that you hope you can have as your vacation starts to wind down. I had canceled out on our morning swim because I thought that I would be taking a snorkeling trip in the morning, but as I was the only one that showed up they canceled it for the day. Kim had already started her swim across the bay. I could see from where I was standing on the beach that she was almost to the other side. I raced home, got my mask, and jumped in the water. I swam the overhand crawl as fast as I could, knowing that I had to pace myself for a distance swim. It felt good to hit the water as it had already begun to get hot. And it also felt somewhat exhilarating to be swimming full out—easily. It let me know that all of the time spent swimming these past 2 months had paid off. I swam diagonally hoping to intersect her as she reached the end of the bay. I got to her just as she had turned around to come back. She was really surprised to see me. We swam together back to our hotel. Along the way we saw a stingray and the huge Hump-headed Parrot fish.

We only rested for a few minutes before we took off to the other side of the bay, this time on foot, in search of some breakfast. We ate at what has become our favorite spot, the Desa Jasmine. They have Japanese style tables set out under a

open sided building with a palm thatched roof. The place is surrounded by bouganville in all different tropical colors, and a large variety of other strange, but beautiful plants. We had mixed fruit pancakes and strong tea. After we had finished discussing, but not solving, the worlds problems with the proprietor and his assistant, we headed back to our hotel.

Kim decided that she wanted to catch up on her writing. I wanted to see if it was calm enough to snorkel on Long Beach. So we again parted company. I walked through the jungle cover to the Long Beach and was pleasantly surprised to see that the surf had indeed calmed down. I walked to the end of the bay, put down my stuff in front of the Moonlight Cafe, and headed off into the wa-



The water was even clearer than I had expected

ter. The water was even clearer than I had expected. Out at the point, where it was 40 feet deep I could easily see the bottom. There were a lot of rocks and boulders, but also a lot of coral. In the deeper water there were some exciting looking coral heads, some as big as a house. I swam down to investigate. There was a profusion of tropical fish, some quite large, and they seemed very tame. Most let me approach really close and they seemed to pay very little attention to me. The parrot fish were the same colors that I had seen before, bright reds and greens and yellows, but they looked like they had been painted with a water color brush. One color ran nicely into the next. They contentedly

continued munching on some tasty piece of coral while I watched.

On one dive I spotted a lovely Queen Trigger fish. He also seemed to pay me no mind. He swam down to one of the huge clams that dotted the reef and took a nice sized bite out of one before it could close. He then started munching on bits of coral all around it. Little fish had begun to surround him, attracted by the tasty morsels of food that were now freely floating in the water. He didn't seem to like it very much and aggressively snapped at each of them. I was only a few feet away, hanging onto a piece of dead coral, while I watched the whole process take place. Suddenly he turned, saw me and with what looked like menacing eyes, started to come for me. I quickly surfaced. He followed. I retreated. He continued to follow me. Usually I am not spooked by the wildlife, but this guy had a look in his eye, and it said, at least to me, that he was not fond of me being in his territory. He followed me a good way back in to shore sometimes coming quite close when I was not swimming fast enough to suit him.

I was quite surprised that there was that much coral in an area that only a few days ago was good only for body surfing. The corals were so very delicate that I would have thought they would break apart in the heavy surge. Diving so deep I eventually had some sinus problems. I got a good sized pressure headache when I tried to go deeper than 10 or so feet. This coupled with the fact that I would probably burn my back helped me decide it was time to hit the beach. The ever present possibility of the "mean-eyed Triggerfish" didn't help either.

Back on shore I laid down in the sun to dry off for about 15 or so minutes. This is really not the kind of sun you want to "lay out" in. Some people do, but aside from it being very intense, it is just plain uncomfortably hot. The sun is almost directly overhead at 1:00 pm, which was just about the time it was. I looked for a shady spot under a coconut tree and laid my sarong on the sand. Yes, I have a sarong! After 2 months in Sumatra watch-

ing every boy and man wear a sarong at different times of the day I decided to take the plunge and buy one. I must admit it is quite comfortable. Especially after I have had my evening shower and I am feeling fresh and clean it feels really nice. Besides a good part of the men wear them on the island and a few of the foreigners have adopted the habit. It also make a nice beach blanket, and a pretty good changing room when the beach is filled with people.

I had brought a 1993 copy of the Utne Reader Magazine that I had borrowed from Matahari's. I alternated between reading an article and then watching all of the topless girls parading around on the beach. It was a tough job but I was only too glad to do it. As the sun started to set it was time to make the walk back to my side of the island.

Kim was waiting for me in our room and we did show and tell for a while. She read to me all of the things that she had written, and I told her about my experience with the aggressive trigger fish and having to keep an ever vigilant eye on all of the topless women. We ended our evening by walking up the hill to have a delicious chicken dinner. We both fell asleep exhausted by a good full vacation day.

PETER
03/14/97
Palau Perhentian Kecil
Malaysia

Today Kim and I took one of the many snorkeling trips offered around this and the large island of Perhentian Besar. This time I chose an operation that was on Long Beach. It's the busiest side of the island and I thought that we had a better chance of actually leaving. We did, and we left on time. Another young couple from the US went with us. There was just us four. Each spot was even more beautiful than the last. Although we didn't see much in the way of fish life, once again the coral was breathtaking. Every color of the rainbow was represented.

The boy telling me about the tour told me



Another couple joined us

that we stopped in 4 spots on 2 islands. It turned out to be only three. I think that he was counting the lunch break we took in the village as one of the spots. It didn't matter to us. By 3:30PM when we finished our tour, we all felt that we had more than gotten our moneys worth. It was 15.00 ringgits (\$6.09 US)!

Kim and I returned home slightly sun burnt, but feeling so good we didn't want to spoil it by going out to dinner. So as it began to get dark we dragged our Thermarests down to the beach to watch the sunset. We brought a fresh ripe pineapple to munch on for dinner. Three island children played in the water on the beach right in front of us. From their unabashed curiosity I could tell that even though they lived here they had not had a chance to sample that many pineapples. But what they had tried they knew they liked. They stood silently at a respectful distance away, as I cut up the juicy yellow fruit.

When I held out a slice to each in turn, they shyly walked over and accepted the piece. As they walked away and sat in the sand in front of us I could tell they were excited. They ate all the way down to the skin and then they sucked on it for a while. After flinging the rind into the sea, they ran off down the beach whirling and jumping as they went. They were obviously putting on a thank-you show just for us, but I also think they were just filled with the youthful exuberance of a another good island day.

We laid down on our mats and looked up at the sky. Fortunately the generator was still not working, so our part of the beach was in darkness. The moon was only half full, but it lit up the whole beach and ocean with a nice soft silvery cast. The stars were out in full force and we tried to spot as many of the constellations as we could. Kim, of course did much better than I. We watched the moon slowly sink into the ocean and then thought it would be a good time to return to our room for



We took our mats down to the beach for our last night

some dinner. It consisted of peanut butter and banana sandwiches and lime with water. By then we were too tired to even play a round of gin rummy so we laid down on our comfortable beds and fell instantly asleep filled with thoughts of just a few more vacation days left

PETER
03/17/97
Mersing, Malaysia

Oyvey!, what a day we had today! We started out catching the ferry over from Pulau Perhentian

Kecil at 8:00am. One of the dive-master's wife from Perhentian Divers had her birthday today and he made her a very special Birthday cake complete with candles. He insisted on everyone in the restaurant having a large slice. Before Kim and I understood what the story was, we had politely refused to enter the Iguana Restaurant where the party was to be held. Kim had gotten food poisoning there on our second night. We were protesting by not eating there again. Each night we walked by to go to another place. It was always filled with laughing happy people enjoying their meals, but we always went somewhere else. Hey, we have principles too! But once we found out what the occasion was for we just couldn't refuse. Nor could we refuse to eat the Birthday cake. It weighed in at about 10 kg. Afterwards, it sat in our stomachs like a lead weight.

I worried about having so much heavy sweet food in my stomach as we hit the high seas, but it was calm all the way back to the coast. I apologized to Roland for being so hesitant about going to the Iguana, and then told him why. He told us that the same thing, food poisoning, had happened one night to he and his wife.

Back on the coast we found a Taxi to share with a Japanese/Malaysian guy also going to Kuala Terrengganu, our next stop along the coast. Half-way there he stopped at a roadside stand and bought a bunch of ground up fish made into sausage links and then steamed. He proudly gave Kim and I our very own bag. Kim ate a good part of hers while we watched him swallow link after link. I just couldn't do it. I told him that I would have to save mine till later because I couldn't eat in a moving vehicle. He just laughed at me while he ate another one. Kim whispered to me that it tasted just like I thought it would. Like ground up boiled fish.

It took about two hours to get to Kuala Terrengganu. It was once again much bigger and more sophisticated than we thought. We had the cab drop us off at the Tourist Agency. It was right in the middle of town. They gave us a map and

highlighted some of the activities that we could do in a day. They told us that there was an express night bus to Mersing, which was about 2 hours by bus from Singapore. So we hiked over to the bus station, bought a ticket, and left our packs behind the counter. We then went off to explore the city. By then it was 1:30PM and of course very hot, but we still walked our butts off exploring the sights.

The downtown portion was fairly compact. We looked first for a restaurant, because we hadn't eaten anything since the birthday cake. But look as we did, we couldn't find anything but Nasi and



When we arrived we could smell the buffalo shit

Mei Goring. We were not up to fried rice or noodles again. As we were about to give up in disgust, we found an A&W Root Beer place. "Hurray!" we shouted. Food we can recognize

Our bus left at 9:00PM. By then we were exhausted. It was the biggest, fanciest, most luxurious bus I have ever been on. There was video to watch, a bathroom, and we even had swag curtains in all the windows. Kim slept the whole way till early morning, but I stayed awake trying to catch glimpses of the towns as we passed through them. It dropped us off in downtown Mersing at 3:30AM in the morning. Surprisingly, there was still a restaurant open. It even had people in it. Kim was so tired that she wanted to sleep on a park bench just off the square, but I had spotted a lighted up motel sign just up the street. I left her there and said that I would go inquire. The guard for the hotel

was sound asleep, but I heard noise coming from the adjacent restaurant. I looked in and there was only one man there, an American. He told me that he had a place that had some chalets for rent about 15 kilometers from here. If I wanted to he would take us there when he finished his meal. He said that they were 15.00 ringgits per night and they were right on the beach. I walked back and told Kim what I had found and before long this guy pulls up in an old Toyota car.

On the way out (it took about 30 minutes)



All of the grass huts were laid out along the beach

he pretty much told us his whole life's story. California born, living here since the 80's, he got this place with his now ex wife. When they divorced her lawyer kind of screwed him out of the place. With the ownership in so much question he just kinda let the place run down. Oh great, I thought to myself, I wonder what we're getting ourselves into. Finally we pulled into his place I could immediately hear and smell the sea. I could also smell what he told me was water buffalo shit. He said he had tried everything to keep them away and had finally just given up.

As Tom opened the door to the first chalet it fell off the hinges. He said that as he had plenty and as they were all unoccupied we could just pick another one. The next units door worked OK, but

it didn't have a mosquito net. There was a pretty good breeze coming off the sea so we told him that it would be fine. At that point we were really bushed. Sleep came easily and quickly.

In the morning we awoke to a small settlement that was just about what Tom had told us. All of the little grass roofed huts were laid out right along the beach. The beach itself was flat and wide and had dark gray sand. The ocean was also flat, with many small islands just off the coast. Tom had told us that there was pretty good snorkeling just off the coast, and from the look of it I could believe him.

I went for a nice long walk along the beach. The beach ended in some hills covered with dense jungle. When I hit the end I turned into the jungle and walked along till I hit another beach. There were even more islands just off the coast. On my way back I startled some wild pigs. I don't know who was more frightened.

Throughout the day we talked a good bit with

Tom and he told us all about his future plans to try to start an eco-tourist research center on one of the islands. He seemed slightly starved for intelligent conversation. We also talked a good long time about his upcoming purchase of a computer. He was probably the most knowledgeable person I ever met knowing so much about a computer without ever actually having owned one. He told me it was because he had read everything about them he could get his hands on.

The next morning he drove use back into Mersing were we caught a bus to Singapore.

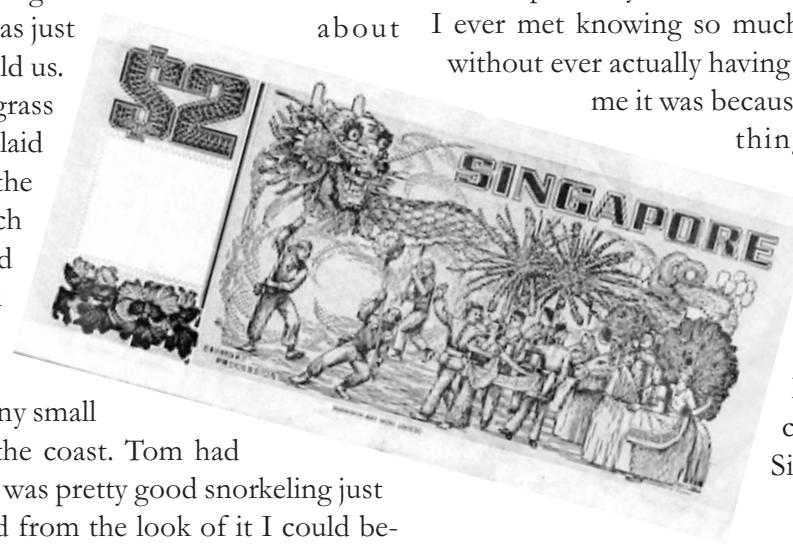
PETER

03/20/97

Singapore Airport

Just finished a Haagen Das bar and a cup of cappuccino. Kim and I split the order, but it still came to over S\$8.00 (\$6.83 US).

We actually thought it was cheap after spending the night in Singapore. These people are crazy! The price that they pay for their stuff is amazing. I thought that San Francisco was an expensive city, but this one takes the cake. After looking around the city for a reasonable room we just gave up in disgust. First, I walked around on foot. Our guide book showed a bunch of cheap Chinese hotels along a certain strip. I left Kim with the baggage at the bus stop and walked around trying to find one of them. After a little less than an hour I returned not having found a single one. I told Kim that I thought that we should just get into a cab and tell him that we were looking for a reasonably priced hotel. something around S\$50.00. Out taxi driver told us that all of the cheap hotels that were listed in our book had been razed to make way for new construction. The one he recommended turned out to be about \$75.00S (\$52.00 US). It was



The cheapest \$75 hotel in Singapore

a lot more than we wanted to spend, but at that point it was getting late and we decided to "Just Do It!"

It was kind of bare bones. Something that might cost \$25.00 in the states, but this was Singapore. We gratefully dropped off our packs, took a shower and hit the streets. We pretty much wanted to get the most out of our stay in Singapore, so we wound up walking until 9 PM. We found Singapore to be an extremely clean and high tech city, but the people were the least friendly that we met in Southeast Asia. They seemed to have everything that we had and more. Cell phones were everywhere. New cars, high-rise buildings and Mercedes' were even more abundant than in the states. There were tremendous numbers of parks and green spaces. Each one was filled with neatly landscaped trees and flowers. I had wanted to see if I could find some computer equipment cheaper than the states. We found that the Funan Shopping Center held 10 stories of computers stores filled with all of the things we had in the states. As the prices were equal to or even slightly higher than in the states I didn't buy anything, but seeing it was a real trip.

By the end of the evening we were dead on our feet. Back at the hotel we fell asleep as soon as our heads hit the pillows. We said that we wouldn't be able to go anywhere in the morning because our leg muscles seem so sore, but somehow we found the strength. We wound up going over to

the Singapore Museum of Art. I had read that they had an E-Mage interactive computer art show. They did and I was not disappointed. It was in a small room. It had a touch-screen computer console in the middle of the floor, and a high-definition, large screen on the wall. There were some high quality speakers which played a kind of New Age music. You could basically see any art that you wanted from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. It was really cool and we easily entertained ourselves for about an hour. The rest of the building had a beautiful and interesting collection of art. It isn't for nothing that Singapore is billed as "Disneyland with the death penalty."

Finally we had to say to ourselves that this was it. It was time for us to leave this part of the world, and travel the two days that it took us to get home. The bus ride through the city to the airport only reinforced our view of the city. It was very, very green. At one

point there were so many miles of bougainvillea trees that Kim remarked that if the rest of Malaysia was destroying their rainforests and the Green Peace people were blaming them for depleting the world of oxygen, than Singapore was surely making up for the lack with all these plantings.

Everything went smoothly at Singapore's Changhi Airport and we found that with the S\$30.00 departure tax and a few Haggen Das bars we were soon completely out of foreign currency.



Disneyland with the death penalty

CONCLUSION

Peter

03/21/97

In the air on the way to Chicago

CONCLUSION

Well, what do I think of our Far East trip now that it is over? One thing I know is that 3 months was not enough time to explore the wonders that exist in that part of the world. Six months would have been a more reasonable time, but even at the end of that I think I might be still making the same statement.

Sumatra was like nowhere else in the world I have ever been. It was a trip that constantly required all of my inner resources when traveling. The bad roads, the poor drivers and the huge distances required to get from place to place, made traveling all the more difficult. The people were the best and the worst part of the trip. The worst being that there were just so darn many of them. There was always somebody in our face. Your waiter thought nothing of just sitting at your table while you ate. The neighbors were always curious and hanging around. The constant shouts of "Hello Mister" as we walked around in a strange town often grated on our nerves. In the end I think it was our lack of the language, Bahasa Indonesia, that really limited our getting to know the people of Sumatra. Many times I would have loved to say that we were just really tired and needed some quiet time just to ourselves. Instead, many times we had to be rude to them, either by just plain ignoring them until they went away, or by saying something short and inappropriate like "Salamat Jalan!" (Have a pleasant journey). Don't let the door hit you in the butt on the way out!

These same people were also some of the best and most memorable parts of our trip. They are without a doubt the warmest, most friendly and wholly moral people that I have ever met. Their belief in Islam shows up in their everyday life. They don't preach and they don't criticize the fact that we eat meat, dress "provocatively" and don't have much of our own faith left in God. They quietly do their good deeds as a way of life. Their morals seem to be an integral part of their everyday life.

We were there for most of Ramadan, and we never met a man, woman, or child who complained about fasting for a whole month. It was really hot there. They were crammed into the same mini-buses that we were for hours on end. Sometimes the heat was so oppressive I thought that I was going to faint. They didn't eat from sunup to sundown. They didn't even take a sip of water. Young, old, man, woman it was the same -- they never complained. One young boy explained it to me like this, he said, "You know Muslim is a religion for the poor. We fast because it reminds us that while we can eat, there are so many who can't. And besides it is good to cleanse the body. It makes us feel strong and good." Throughout this long month, they always seemed cheerful, never morose. They did this all the while praying 5 times a day. I never even heard one teenager say, "Ah shit! It's time to pray again!"

Malaysia, on the other hand, had slow comfortable air-conditioned buses to everywhere. Cell phones, computers and nice cars were a norm. Same people with more things and a much higher standard of living. Watching the veiled Muslim women eating and working at McDonald's was something I will not easily forget. Did we get treated as well there? There was a difference, but I'm not sure that I can put my finger on it. They were just as warm and friendly, but they were not as insistently curious. I guess what I'm saying is they were not as "bothersome." Life had an easier flow. They had their own lives, and so they were not so insistent on getting to know ours. But whenever we engaged them in conversation they were just as warm and genuine as the Sumatrans.

Singapore is another matter all together. These people live in one of the cleanest, most high-tech

cities I have ever been in, but something is missing. Some people say that there is no soul to the city. People ignored us completely, and when we did engage them in conversation they were short and even a little curt. It was probably as safe, or safer than it was in Indonesia and Malaysia, but the people had a cool, almost distant look in their eyes. As they walked by on the street, they looked through you, not at you. They always seemed to be in a hurry to get done with you and to, I guess, move on to the next person or thing.

Three different looks at the Asian culture. We learned a lot to be sure, and I think that we came away better people for it. Would I have done the trip if I knew how it was going to turn out like it did beforehand? I don't think so. I am more an adventure/vacation sort of guy. I am, however, glad we did it. You bet I am. It was a dream come true. And not always are all of our dreams perfect — not all of our dreams are even realistic. But I think a dream left undone is like a life un-lived. It isn't the outcome that matters so much as it is the doing of the thing. We have learned and grown a whole bunch, plus I think, in the down times, Kim and I were able to actually figure out one of the many meanings of life — at least for us. We now have a new plan for the future, but we're not going to tell you. At least not yet. You'll have to wait until the next book comes out.

Kim
12/21/97
Conclusion

After editing the text we have written for the gross spelling and syntax errors, I have been able to reflect from an even better distance on what this trip has meant to me. My journal reflects a whiny side of my nature that I might not have wanted to disclose to anyone publicly, but it is all laid out here in black and white. I have also seen myself in retrospect with a new personal perspective of my response to food -- or its absence...wow, did I panic!!!

I would not trade any of it, but like Peter, I am not sure how quickly I would jump back into the same type of trip. I was humbled by my frailties and reviewing my responses to them even took the humility a step further. Equally humbling was the presence of all the people who became part of our days and experiences there -- their purity and simplicity touched me deeply. I was in awe of how beautiful this could be and it continues to inspire my efforts to re-create my own life.

Returning home, I fawned over my incredible material comforts at the same time that I lamented my attachment to them. Did the trip re-create my life -- Big Time! Do I love that -- you betcha! Hopefully you will enjoy the sharing.



We return home to greet our waiting subjects

THE END