

Indonesian Journey of Discovery

20 August to 5 September, 2011

**John Sinclair's diary of an expedition with three friends
with special focus on Suluwesi and the Spice Islands**

Preface

This journey had its genesis in Kakadu one year when Terry Reece, a Kakadu tour guide and mutual friend of Long Nose and me, told us of his recent boat trip around the Suluwesi coast while we were cruising on Yellow Waters one memorable February dawn. Suluwesi as Terry described it sounded very enticing. His experience coincided with an increasing awareness of the Macassan connection with Australia that has been virtually ignored by most Australian historians and thus is almost unknown to most Australians. Even now the 230 plus years since British settlement constitutes only about half the period of history when Macassans were making annual sea voyages to Australia's northern coast to harvest trepan. They weren't minor expeditions either. Fleets of 100 or more vessels came each Australian summer to spend about four months living here. These annual visits had been going on for at least 400 years and possibly up to 1,000 years until the new Australian Federal Government prohibitively taxed it out of existence. Until then the Macassans, who were great traders, were selling the trepang to the Chinese.

My great mate, Ian Morris, (also known as *Long Nose*) was very aware of the impact that the Macassans had on Aboriginal culture through his long and intimate association with the people of Elcho Island, a major Macassan destination this made me determined to take him along.

As the years of planning extended there were other objectives that were added to the planned visit that had to wait until I retired. The first was to gain a greater appreciation of the contribution of one of the world's greatest biologists, Alfred Russel Wallace and a better understanding of the Wallace Line. Long Nose is the best naturalist I have encountered in my long career of knocking about the Australian bush. He is so special because he has an encyclopedic knowledge of reptiles, mammals, birds, fish, invertebrates and plants. He is the most multi-disciple how it impacts on the ecology of two outstandingly different biomes. Wallace spent more time in Ternate and the Moluccas than any other part of the whole South East Asian region and he also spent a lot of time studying and documents (as well as collecting) the wildlife of Suluwesi.

Another objective came with our increasing awareness of the richness and biodiversity of the marine areas and coral reefs surrounding Suluwesi. I first became aware of Bunaken but have since appreciated that this marine richness isn't limited to there alone. However, we decided that it was an essential element of Suluwesi that needed to be incorporated in the itinerary.

Our final objective was curiosity of the spice trade that had played such an important role in shaping the history of the globe and particularly in the patterns of European colonization which while not based on Suluwesi had its origins in the nearby Spice Islands.

We had both time and budget constraints and the earliest I could find a date that fitted in with both Long Nose's and my schedule was a short 18 days in August 2011. Our mutual mate Tokiko (Su) Dawson who had worked with Long Nose and me on many GO BUSH safaris did most of the research on the logistics of how four people could travel around and met as much of our three objectives as possible in the time available. The fourth member of our team was Wal Walker who was in the same Diploma years as me at Queensland's Gatton College from 1957 to 1959. I had first told him of this planned adventure at least ten years ago soon after Terry Reece had sowed the idea in my mind. At the time we were both living in Sydney.

That is how our group of four came to come to Indonesia.

Our Bali Day

Su and I left Brisbane left Brisbane early on Friday and went to Darwin where we stopped off to catch up with a few friends and renew acquaintance to a city we have become both familiar with and fond of. We hadn't been back there for a year. We had dinner with an old friend Greg Miles who has also shared many GO BUSH adventures with us and his Uncle Reg who is about 90 and was in Darwin to escape from the winter in Adelaide. As always we had a most interesting, stimulating and lively conversation that lasted until we got a phone call near 10.00 from Uncle Long Nose who had just arrived back in Darwin from a trip to Nhullunbuy in East Arnhemland where he and our mutual mate, Graeme Sawyer (aka Lord Mayor of

Darwin) had been guest teachers there for Science Week. When he arrived Su and I went on to spend the night at his home *Riyala*.

The four of us left Darwin mid afternoon on Saturday 20 August. We arrived in Bali in the evening. Rather than take the 6.00 a.m. flight to Makassar the next morning we allowed a day in Bali to avoid being too rushed with only a 12 hour overnight stopover.

Thus we had one full day, 21 August to see as much of Bali as was possible. We decided to avoid the Kuta and beach scenes without knowing that that very same day there would be the annual Bali Kite Festival, the biggest kite flying festival in the world held at Sanur where we were staying. Within an hour of arriving at our resort, Swastika, Long Nose had found and photographed a snake (much to the alarm of the resort staff) a frog, a lizard and a squirrel.

The next day we managed to see more of Bali in a day than most Aussie tourist see in a whole Bali holiday. The excitement began at first light with an early morning visit to the nearby beach to see what 90 percent of the tourists visit Bali for. It was interesting and we can appreciate why such a scene would attract them. However we had arranged for a driver from Swastika, Kadek, the shops selling many kinds of kites, the, to take us on an eight hour tour that stretched to close to ten. It began with us making our way through the Kite Festival traffic to see a Barong Dance. This performance is an unusual mix of ballet, opera and pantomime with a full gamelan orchestra accompanying this wonderfully unique entertainment. Next it was off to see silver-smithing in one village then wood carving in another. Then we drove on to stop for Luwak coffee at an Agri-tourist park where there had all sorts of tropical cultivated plants and crops from vanilla and coffee to a wide range of topical fruits.

We drove on further ascending a mountain to have lunch on the edge of a volcano (Batur) and overlooking a beautiful lake. This was followed by a visit Tampaksiring Spring, a Hindu water temple built around some natural springs. We followed this by going on to the Monkey Forest to see many Long-tailed Macaques. In the 24 years since I was last in Ubud the monkey population here has exploded to the delight (and because of) the tourists. I have woven this visit into a story for the kids. It was a wonderful and day full of wonder and interest and well worth the money. Few people would have seen and learnt more of Bali in a single day. It wasn't just the designated tourist stops. It was seeing the cultural life as we passed along, a vendor with a bicycle load of hats and baskets, the different crafts in different villages, the kite shops, the huge funeral procession. It was a day to remember.

Because Bali wasn't really on our Suluwesi adventure we didn't give it a Day number but started with our arrival in Makassar.

Day 1 Makassar

This morning started at 4.30 as we rose to catch the early Garuda flight to Makassar, Indonesia's fifth largest city and located on the SW arm of Suluwesi with a population of 1.5 million and seemingly almost as many motor cycles. We arrived to see a model perahu in greeting us on our arrival in the airport reminding everyone of the city's long and proud seafaring traditions.

Unlike Bali where there is (or was) just one culture, Makassar has four indigenous cultures, Macassan, Bugi (the most numerous and probably the main sailors to Australia in the past) the Madanese and the Torajans. In addition to the first three that were probably in the perahus to Australia, there were most likely also Bajo, the Sea-gypsies who live outside Makassar in housing always over the water.

On our arrival we were met by a driver, Safar, who would drive us everywhere we needed to go over the next six days. Safar's first task though was to take us to meet our contact person in Makassar who was coordinating the first six days of our Suluwesi visit was a man called Mursalim but better known to us as Dodo.

We learnt about Dodo from reading blogs on the web and, when we couldn't get a response from others we had attempted to contact we turned to him. Dodo turned out to be as good or better than the reputation we gleaned about him on the net. He is a real "fixer" and managed to juggle organizing our itinerary, even rearranging it quite substantially on the run while carrying out his day job at a Makassar power plant.

This dynamic 49 year old had dinner with us each night in Makassar and entertained us and anyone else in the restaurants with his conjuring tricks. We couldn't recommend him too highly in helping foreigners accomplish their objectives in Makassar. He spoke excellent English (learnt through Radio Australia) and has boundless energy, spontaneity, networks and enthusiasm. He is absolutely reliable and helped us avoid many needless expenses.

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Our first day in Makassar was to see the sights of the city. There weren't a lot. The old Dutch relic, Fort Rotterdam, was interesting but almost all of it was closed while it was undergoing extensive renovations. I saw some wonderful paintings of Makassan perhaps here and purchased one plus a model for a total of R300,000 (\$36). Apart from that the most interesting part of our visits that we were guided around the port by a Bugi (or a Boogeyman as I was scared of as a gullible child). He was Tasman the Sailor, named after Abel Tasman who may well have sailed for Australia from this port. I plan to use Tasman when I return to

Makassar to get a better appreciation of the seafarers who still use the same type of craft as there used for centuries to sail to Australia. Tasman gave us his Email as: tasmansailor@yahoo.com

On leaving the fort we went to Chinatown for lunch. It seemed to be one part of the city where obtaining lunch during Ramadan wasn't a problem. However obtaining parking was and this was our first real experience with the role of "ogres" as they are called here who help facilitate the traffic movement and parking for an honorarium.

We had another item on the agenda in Makassar and headed off to see a Museum. This former Sultan's palace was all locked up and nobody could be found nor were there any signs to tell us that this was closed for Ramadan. It was like the Islamic schools that were also closed up in Makassar during Ramadan although they were still operating in Toraja, a Christian area of Sulawesi. However having had an early start for the day in Bali (4.30) and having had a very full day in Bali before flying to Makassar, we were happy to return to the hotel early.

Ramadan has presented a few problems. Many restaurants don't open during the day, it isn't easy to have Happy Hours and one is much more conscious of the constraints imposed by religions.

Day 2

Bantu Murrung National Park and the Makassan Port area

I have previously had a little experience in Islamic countries. However, in Thailand, Malaysia and Bali, there were other religions being practiced - Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism, so it didn't have the same impact as arriving in Makassar where Islam is so dominant and at the height of Ramadan, the month of fasting. This morning at the Hotel Pena Mas it struck me when the room next door must have been occupied by an Islamic family who all had to beep and have eaten before sunrise. Other reminders are the wearing of the hijab by the women and the head caps by the men. At our Makassar hotel there was a painting from the 1900s of many women in the fields and not one wore a hijab. Now they are common and seem to be coming more so.

Our second day in Makassar, we met another member of Dodo's team, Irene, a 22 year old dentistry student from Toraja who was keen to sharpen up her English and interact with us. She led us out to Bantimurung National Park an area once identified by Alfred Russel Wallace for its biological richness, especially its diversity of butterflies, over 200 species and in prodigious numbers.

Bantimurung is a beautiful area of karst including waterfalls and caves. Alas the numbers of critters and

species has alarmingly declined since Wallace first drew it to global attention. Still it was a pleasant spot and after walking to the waterfall and one major cave where we photographed many butterflies, we headed off to the Dream Cave. This was a real challenge for a 72 year old as we plunged into the unknown. After a daunting climb, traversing 500 netted through interesting rainforest we reached the cave entrance. Here we plunged onto the dark unknown. It wasn't realized that this was over 1,000 meters though negotiating a very precarious passage but it yielded some interesting observations of whip scorpions, cave crickets and spiders, bats and frogs all of which excited the Intrepid Guide.

Feeling exhausted and hungry we made our way back towards Makassar when Safar pulled into a restaurant where we enjoyed the most diverse array of dishes we have ever been presented with in a matter of minutes. Then came the most memorable experience of visiting the port with its most stunning display of perahu of all shapes and sizes and such an infinite variety of activity and smells. We used up volumes of camera space snapping away and trying to envisage large fleets of similar vessels defying the top end cyclones and making their way annually down to Marege and back.

From there it was but a short sojourn to the nearby fish markets where the products of the sea were being unloaded, displayed, sold and packed. Again it was a colorful display of something so culturally different in the way our two cultures do business although maybe the marketing of fish is less different than some other markets.

After a day spent in Makassar seeing the port and the fish markets and experiencing the traffic chaos in the fifth largest city in Indonesia. There are one and a half million people and the number of cars on the poor road system is increasing at the rate of 10,000 annually. But that isn't as critical as the number of motor-cycles. There must be at least half a million motorcycles that seem to be ridden for a large part of the day. They seem to have no rules weaving between cars and truck with margins of centimeters, sometimes just mere millimeters.

We had zoomed down to the port on a tollway which was a relief from the traffic congestion and had forgotten about the traffic until we had to negotiate it at peak hour and it was over an hour to make the short run from the port to the hotel.

Day 3

The drive to Toraja

Alas today we were without Irene and it was just Safar, our driver who spoke very little English who accompanied us for the journey to Tana Toraja. Dodo had persuaded us that we should amend our schedule to leave Makassar a day sooner than planned to allow more time to explore Toraja. It was excellent advice and we were ready at 8.00 am to set off. In fact to my astonishment we left five minutes ahead of time which is contrary to one of ULN's most sacred habits. It is only 328 kilometers from Makassar to Toraja and we were skeptical that it could take a whole day. But take a whole exhausting and uncomfortable day it did.

There is a new highway under construction from Makassar to Toraja. We were told that it is being funded with Australian foreign aid. It has been under construction for three years to date and it was predicted that it would take at least another three years at the present rate of progress to complete. Unfortunately while it looks promising with lots of steel reinforcing and 30 centimeters of concrete. It is being built in such a patchwork way that it was painful with nowhere more than a kilometre was there any completed section and in-between it was worse than any other main road I have experienced anywhere.

Makassar and the coastal plain is dead flat and very low lying. A tsunami here doesn't bear thinking about. It poses problems for the drainage of the city but it allows easy construction of rice paddies that lined either side of the road as we headed north for the first 150 kilometres. What was surprising though was the amount of aquaculture being carried on also on this coastal plain. In many places the rice paddies and the aquaculture ponds were intermixed in a patchwork. It was intriguing and dotting the landscape grazing on the remnants of the recently harvest rice crops were Bantang cattle all tethered in the fields. The backdrop of the steep and high limestone mountains running parallel to the highway etched the edge of this very intriguing coastal plain.

One of our objectives for this trip was to see the boat building carried out along the coast by the Bajo people. The centre of shipbuilding is about 200 kilometres southeast of Makassar and it seemed impossible to see it. However Dodo thought that there was a good chance we could see an operation on our way to Toraja. It was a forlorn hope though. About 150 kilometres north we pulled in to a port where we could see the Bajo boat building villages, but like most Bajo (sea gypsy) communities they were on off shore islands. We didn't have time to pursue this and get to our Toraja destination. So alas, and somewhat disappointed we pressed on without seeing this important aspect of the Macassans connection with Australia.

Ascending the mountains from the dry coastal plain the countryside surprisingly turned from brown to green even though this was still the dry season. The whole landscape was almost entirely an unnatural human shaped environment but here and there were some elements natural to Australians including some he uses such as Melastoma, white cedars.

Ascending the mountain two things became obvious. The first was that there were plantations of teak occurring wherever the land wasn't arable. The second observation was the reduction of litter. The volume of litter reduced as we gained elevation.

Another observation was the emphasis given to the building facades. The contrast in the appearances and even the materials used in the front of the buildings compared with the sides was dramatic, reminiscent of the Queensland (Maryborough) houses that only oiled the back and side weatherboards while adorning the fronts.

Day 4

Toraja North

Our guide for our two days and three nights in Tana Toraja was Yulius Tandirerung, a 45 year old Torajan man with very good English, sharpened up by his work in the tourist industry in Bali. Yulius wasn't married until he was 31 but not he has four children and is struggling to give them the education they deserve.

We can highly recommend Yulius as a guide for anyone wanting to have good insights into the very rich Torajan culture.

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Today in Toraja the most unforgettable activity was attending a Torajan funeral. There were about a thousand people attending this very high class funeral in Andulan where there were to be celebrations over the next five days for a rich couple that died two years ago and their son who died about seven months ago. Over 50 buffalo as well as countless pigs were to be slaughtered in the processes of this very colourful ceremony that we were privileged to witness at least part of. The wedding and funeral ceremonies are very large parts of Torajan culture and are almost as distinctive as their architecture with their houses built in the shape of the perahus. The ceremonies persist despite the conversion of more than eighty percent of Torajans to Christianity at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. It is a very strong culture and quite fascinating.

Caste and hereditary class systems and needs much further consideration. Although it seems unfair in that it perpetuates inequality, it also needs to be recognized

that it establishes order and stability in the social systems and prevents chaos and anarchy such as we get in the absence of an established and accepted order. The more I reflect the less critical I am of hereditary status and authority if it is exercised with a healthy respect for the public interest.

Our photos captured much of the spectacle of the occasion but it was so spectacular because it was a Simbuwon ceremony. Simbuwons are the high caste Torajans which raises a whole number of questions about I have previously had a little experience in Islamic countries. However, in Thailand, Malaysia and Bali, there were other religions being practiced - Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism, so it didn't have the same impact as arriving in Makassar where Islam is so dominant and at the height of Ramadan, the month of fasting. This morning at the hotel it struck me when the room next door must have been occupied by an Islamic family who all had to beep and have eaten before sunrise. Other reminders are the wearing of the hijab by the women and the head caps by the men. At our Makassar hotel there was a painting from the 1900s of many women in the fields and not one wore a hijab. Now the hijabs are common and seem to be coming more so.

After the funeral we went to a restaurant with a spectacular outlook across kilometres of paddy terraces stretching right down to Rantepao, the largest Torajan town. Unfortunately the low cloud and misty rain didn't allow us to fully appreciate it. However, Long Nose wasn't disappointed as he photographed a Harrier hunting over the fields and made other exciting bird observations. Then after lunch we walked down the road passing many tombs chiseled out of the basalt by hand. They were like family vaults with many protected by effigies of the deceased. With the Torajans now being mainly Christians, these graves/tombs are also marked by conspicuous crosses. A more recent development has been the creation of large stand-alone family vaults as an alternative to chiseling away to spend half a life preparing for death.

When people die it may take a couple of years to coordinate the large funeral, especially with the huge diaspora of Torajans throughout Indonesia and abroad. So on death the body is cleaned and dressed and pumped full of formalin and kept at home as a "sick" person. Such houses are then denoted by a white ribbon near the entrance. They are only regarded as being dead as the funeral becomes imminent. The old couple whose funeral we attended had been dead for almost two years.

Day 5 Toraja South

Yulius was there and smiling at 9.00 am but before we set off to explore to the south of Rantepao, Su and I tried out the most widespread form of public transport

in Toraja, the betor. This is a three wheeled version of the motor, bike but instead of the passengers sitting over the two wheels behind the rider/driver (as with Thailand's tuk-tuks) the rider sits over the motor and the front is converted to carry two (although sometimes more) passengers. It is daunting sitting with the tips of one's toes only centimetres from the road and sometimes almost as close to the vehicle in front. However they are cheapens widely used. They mainly seemed to be used by women and for carrying kids to school. That is better than Aussie mums using the family 4WD for the same purpose. Still the vetoes are economical to run, maneuverable, and cause much less traffic congestion in the crowded and narrow streets.

Our first stop out of town was a place where they were (or he was as it seemed to be only one man) was prefabricating essential parts of Torajan buildings. Under a shed roof stood the main body of a Torajan storehouse (granary) without any of the elaborate adornment and superstructure. It was available to be dragged on to a truck to be installed and adorned elsewhere in situ. The man though was working on carving out and binding together strips of split bamboo that became corrugated tiles for installing in the roofs of these fascinating Tongkonans. They were done in such a way that no nails or steel needed to be used in construction.

Next on the agenda was a stop at a wood carver, who was sculpturing an effigy, very accurately to a photo of a deceased person according to the instructions provided by the family. It was all done with a heavy jungle knife and carved out of jackfruit wood which is the wood used by the Balinese woodcarver to make "Kumbartcho's" name plate. This wood carver learnt his trade based on living with another woodcarver for 26 days. The intuitive skill was enormous.

The eye of the woodcarver was matched by some men we saw working placing a new roof on a Tongkonan a little further down the road. Here with the most rudimentary equipment they were shaping long breadboards to be use in the renovation. There was one chainsaw, one planing (hand-held) machine and dozens of bush knives. They got the boards fashioned creditably and in remarkable time. We didn't stop to see the board placed but the scaffolding like all the scaffolding we saw in Indonesia would never past any safety inspectors in Australia.

Our next destination was a small kampong, Rante, with an interesting cemetery or rather a memorial park adjacent to it. Limestone columns were standing out of the ground to indicate the death of some important person. However, even here the placement on the slope and the height of the column allowed was ranked.

The most intriguing aspect of Torajan culture though was the fact that inheritances from a deceased estate were not determined by a formula (e.g. eldest, male,

etc.) or by parents (e.g. favorite of parents) but rather by the community leaders who observe the emotional, financial and physical support provided by the children of the deceased and distribute the estate sometimes unequally between siblings based on these observations. It seems a much better system than having a court determine who is entitled to what and moreover, the decisions are final and binding. Alas though the problem still exists of now having too many children and the size of the estates to be distributed keeps shrinking as Toraja faces the same population explosion being experienced throughout the world.

There had been a recent tragic accident in the village of Netolo. An eight year old boy had fallen out of a guava tree and been accidentally killed and there was a funeral for him in progress. The family was connected to Yulius so were invited to join this funeral, our second in two days. It was a really interesting and most enriching experience to observe how the support of families and friends helps overcome grief from such tragedies. In fact the emotional support from these lavish funerals was inestimable and the role they played in reinforcing family bonds was also invaluable. An example we saw was the creation of some decorated houses to celebrate the boy's death. Because the boy hadn't a house of his own the villagers had made up two fabulous decorated houses for his spirit to reside in. They happened to be at the Kampong of Yulius's father and we were admiring this most impressive Tongkonan we had seen when Yulius advised that it was his father's.

We strolled a few kilometres down the road from there rarely out of the site of a kampong and observing the pace and purpose of Torajan life before going on to the Baby tree graves. Although this custom has ceased since the advent of Christianity the old practice was to open a hole in the trees similar to the vaults in the rocks and let the tree grow around the baby's remains so the baby lived on in the tree. One reason the practice may have ceased is that there are now few large accessible trees left in Toraja that could now serve the purpose.

Moving on passing the preparations for an imminent wedding we arrived at a cave where in the past many bodies had been deposited. The cave is now full and new places have to be found for the deceased. However we could see dozens of human skulls, old disintegrating coffins and the effigies mounted around the cave. A little further on though we saw one solution to the critical lack of cave space with the King's Tomb. The last king of Toraja and his queen are deposited in a vault high on a limestone cliff face with their vault marked by their effigies, prominently displayed.

A little further on we visited an orphanage to hear a bamboo orchestra and the children sing and dance for us. It was more disturbing than entertaining and left us with uncomfortable feelings. The instruments though were interesting and finely tuned. It was just a pity that we didn't leave with happy and uplifted feelings

because the children didn't exhibit the same joy of life the children that had accompanied us though out the day had exhibited.

Back in Rantepao after making a few souvenir purchases while making our way back to the hotel we were drawn to a huge crowd in the civic centre and investigated the situation. It turned out to be what we in Australia would call an Eisteddfod and we observed the keen competition between the choirs of thirteen schools seeking to be the best. It was the first day of the event and other events for solo singers, speech and drama and dancing were yet to be held. That was uplifting and took away in part the sadness we had experienced at the orphanage.

Day 6 Rantepao to Makassar

It was raining as we made an early start for what turned out to be a nine and a half hour journey retracing our steps of Day 4. There wasn't much more to not except that we asked Safar to stop at a particularly dramatic limestone bluff for a photo opportunity. It wasn't until we left the vehicle that Safar sought leave to visit his family. We had requested him to stop right outside the home of his father. It was quite an attractive village that had extensive plantains of mulberry trees, presumably to support a silkworm industry since that had all been manicured to enable the picking of fresh leaves.

We made a different lunch stop where the highway and the sea ran as close as it could be. However one restaurant had managed to establish itself between the road and the sea at Arrumbula. It was a welcome break and a feast of freshly cooked fish and rice in a very memorable setting.

There was some hiccup in booking back into the Pena Mas Hotel at Makassar but we settled in and ended up having dinner again with the ubiquitous Dodo who, having given us a ride in a community bus and a walk through the intensely crowded shopping mall on a Saturday night, made the most memorable highlight of our stay the ride back to the hotel with each of us in separate beaks. Becaks are the equivalent of pedal powered rickshaws. We had seen many in Makassar but were unable to negotiate a ride in one. Dodo spontaneously arranged it. Negotiating the crowded traffic around the shopping malls was amazing but then the return to the hotel evolved into a race with each of our riders (or peddlers or drivers) trying to prove their prowess in a race to the hotel. It was pure fun.

Day 7 Ternate

As we awoke at 1.30am to be taken by Safar to the Sultan Hassudin Airport to catch a 4.00 a.m. flight to Ternate, I wondered why, when Suluwesi was the major

focus of our explorations, that we were including Ternate in our itinerary at all. This leg had proven to be more difficult to organize than any other part of the tour due to language and communication difficulties as well as an absence of any contacts. We had tried to include other parts of the Moluccas, including Komodo and Ambon, and we had tried to use the Indonesian shipping service, Pelni, to visit them but all proved to be incredibly difficult to impossible because of the schedules (or lack of them in the case of Pelni) and the constraints of time and budget. Ternate proved to be the most accessible of all of the Moluccas to fit in with our itinerary.

There are a number of fascinating features about Ternate that have been confirmed by our visit here to justify the problems we encountered. Firstly, there was the incredible connection with Wallace. Just being where he was when he laid out his theory of evolution and sent his thoughts and papers on to Darwin was itself inspiring even if we can't be certain of where Wallace was staying when he did this seminal work. Wallace was based for four years in Ternate and so it provided a strong incentive to come to this place to see what kept him here for so long.

Then there was the fact that this small volcanic island produced many of the spices that became the motivation for European powers to begin their explorations of the World and their many colonizing adventures and even wars. It was the ambition to find a way west from Spain to India and the Spice Islands that led to Columbus sailing to and discovering the West Indies as distinct from the East Indies. Ternate has been the centre of wars to gain the wealth and power resulting from the Spice Trade for 500 years. It has been invaded in turn by the Portuguese, the Spaniards, Dutch, British and Japanese. They built forts and left relics and parts of their language but the Moluccans were never really conquered.

We wrestled our way out of the tiny congested airport at 7.30 am and looked for a taxi. Fortunately we were found by a taxi driver, Adam, who spoke a little English and took us to our Hotel, the Boulevarde, where we were able to book in at 8.00 am and go straight to our rooms with no fuss. While Wal and Long Nose tried to make up for their sleep deficit, Su and I wandered the very colorful markets along the waterfront just near the hotel. They were really bustling and provided many insights into the lifestyle of this island and it's people. We couldn't get lunch even at the Shopping Mall over the road where KFC as were every other restaurant and food outlet was close due to Ramadan but we managed to get lunch at the hotel.

We had negotiated for our English-speaking taxi driver, Adam to return after lunch to take us on a tour of the island. He started the tour at the Sultan's Palace. We felt privileged to be even able to gain access to the inside of the palace where we were not able to

photograph without permission. We were browsing the contents of this treasure chamber when an old man, the high priest, Haji Muhammed Saleh, who came out to greet us. He did not speak English but luckily there was another visitor there, a filmmaker, Heru, who was doing research for a movie. He acted as an interpreter and then we were really privileged. The upshot was that I was able to take some photographs of the Haji and some of the precious exhibits in the museum including Portuguese armour and we all received an invitation for a royal audience with the king next day at 10.00 am.

Adam then took us on a slow drive around the island where we saw the neat and tidy housing the people and the lack of farms. There were two highlights of natural beauty. One highlight was seeing the attractive beaches on the other side of the island. We were able to walk along and identify many plant genres familiar to us. It was reminiscent of Cape York. Long Nose was really enthused. Then we went to see a spectacular diatrema lake. It was much larger than Mt Hypipamee (the Crater) on the Atherton Tableland and a real highlight.

A most memorable day finished with an adventurous dinner at an impromptu street market on the other side of the great mosque where the locals ate to break their Ramadan fasts. One thing we had noted was that there were no pigs on this predominantly Islamic island and very few cows, but there were a lot of goats so Wal ate goat satay while we others selected our fish and saw it cooked. Also during threat we had observed a number of Timor ponies and this excited Long Nose who has been working on a project tracing the origins of these horses in Australia for many years.

Day 8

An Audience with the wise Sultan of Ternate and visiting Tidore

We had anticipated a relaxed late start to the day because our appointment with the Sultan was at 10.00. Adam had proven to be a gem allowing us to get a great appreciation of Ternate in a day and giving us the benefit of his local knowledge even if his English was limited. We had suggested he meet us at 8.00 and he suggested that he would meet us at 9.30. As it turned out the times were not mutually exclusive. It was further made difficult in our incorrect reading of the time. However we did manage to get to the Sultan's Palace in time for our appointment.

We were greeted by the Haji and the Sultan's son (one of a number) and seated us on the terrace where his Excellency soon greeted us. It was a most pleasant and informative meeting. We heard of His Excellency's evacuation from Ternate by Australian Z Force commandoes in the dead of night in 1943 and the Royal family being taken to Australia in 1943 on General MacArthur's orders. There they lived at Wacol outside Brisbane where they were part of the Netherlands Indonesia Government-in-exile. It is a part of

Queensland history that I am sure few Queenslanders or Wacol residents would be aware of. However apart from his very fluent English the Sultan had a very intimate knowledge of Australia, which he keeps updated through regular visits and contacts.

it would be impolite to report all of the discussions that stretched comfortably over an hour and a half and ranged from the extension of the Ternate Airport to receive 747s and the proposal to open a Wallacea Museum in Ternate to commemorate Wallace's work to the need to increase tourism and other exchange between Indonesia in general and Ternate in particular with Australia.

The Sultan may now have reduced *de-jure* powers but his *de-facto* powers through his status and personality remain undiminished. He has a seat in the Indonesian Senate and serves on various legislative committees including Education.

We left the audience being most impressed by his wide knowledge and his wisdom. He is a most perceptive man who is interested for achieving as much as he can for his community that has been served by Sultans for over 800 years. My audience with the Sultan has made me much less judgmental about the exercise of hereditary power. It seems that having a person who has received leadership training from birth and having a system of certainty and impact understanding of relative roles in our society isn't at all a bad thing.

We returned to hotel and changed to more casual gear and I stepped outside briefly to photograph the huge and ornate mosque over the road that woke us with the 5.00 am. That was when I ran into a couple from Bundaberg who had just-arrived in Ternate on their catamaran yacht. They couldn't stop to talk as they needed to clear customs. They were relieved to learn that Ramadan fishes at midnight and things then go back to normal. For example, we had seen nobody smoking at all in Ternate and this was a sharp contrast to Toraja where tobacco and cigarettes were currency and given as gifts at the funerals. We were late to learn that this was only because everyone went without cigarettes for Ramadan. Midday eating would return to the menu and children would go back to school. However before all of that the next day, Tuesday was a public holiday and a great celebration. The Sultan invited us to be his guests at the Palace but alas we wouldn't be in Ternate for the festivities and instead in Manado which is predominantly Christian society so I left with a feeling of how the celebrations were taken. I did know that there were a lot of fireworks sold ready for the event. We also received an invitation from the Sultan to stay in his guest house when return to Ternate and after seeing the beautiful house and its setting in the bush I am wondering when and if it is possible to return.

After lunch again at the Hotel Boulevard were picked up by Adam and on eye-ful the speedboat harbour. Here there were dozens of vessels all touting for trade. Finally Adam selected one of the many that all seemed to be powered by Yamaha Outboard motors. All seemed to have two but some had four. They may need a back up at times because the islands are surrounded by very strong currents. Our little vessel landed us on Tidore in a matter of minutes and there we were met by a mate of Adam's who took us on a tour of Tidore for the next couple of absorbing hours.

Tidore has been a rival to Ternate for centuries. They are almost like twins, both being dominated by very volcanoes. The Tidore volcano though is currently relatively quiet while we watched the smoke and ash exude from Mount Gamalama and we were warned that it wasn't safe to ascend. Testimony to that was the burnt out area near the summit of Gamalama. However Tidore is slightly larger than Ternate and has a slightly smaller population and so the per capita income seemed to be higher (at least based on our assessment). Both islands have Sultans and there have been alliances for centuries between these two and two other nearby and sometimes rival Sultanates.

The greatest satisfaction though in Tidore was to see the three key spices - nutmeg, cinnamon and cloves. They all grew naturally on the side of the mountain (although the nutmeg grew lower down). There was a wonderfully steep mountain road we took to cross the island and at times we doubted that our little vehicle would go up. It did and it was arch afternoon. As I stood studying the cloves and cinnamon trees growing together in a forest, I wondered how these two species helped shaped the course of European history in the most dramatic ways.

There were a number of things in common between these two sultanates. The most obvious is that no rice was grown on either island. Because of the porous volcanic soils it seems impossible to capture and store water so paddies are not possible. The main staples grown were cassava and corn. Apparently all of the rice has to be imported on to the islands.

So we had arrived in Ternate with no contacts, no fixed plans and a lot of uncertainty and yet we filled it with two very interesting days rounded off by again going to the night market for a local dinner.

Day 9

Ternate to Batuputih

With our plane scheduled to leave at 7.30 we ordered the wake up call at 5.30. It arrived at 3.30 and I was packed and ready to go before realizing the hotel had made a mistake. However, I didn't get comfortably back to sleep and was out of whack for the rest of the day. The situation was made worse by arriving at the airport at 6.15 only to discover that the aircraft was two hours late and we were locked into an interminable wait

without being able to leave an airport we couldn't get access to. However eventually we took off and went back in time to arrive at Manado where there was no one to greet us due to the plane rescheduling.

Eventually all was sorted out and we were taken to Batuputih where we found we had been relocated to Mama Roos. Alo and Ateng were our naturalist guides and as the afternoon started to cool off they took us on a walk through a coconut plantation and where they were making palm sugar and palm wine but where we also saw a number of birds.

We walked back to the village and watched the last light fade away while we were on the beach before making our way back to our very basic resort. After dinner Alo and Ateng showed us movies made of wildlife being filmed incidentally while a film crew was documenting the Black Crested Macaques. The images of the snakes and birds had Long Nose in particular salivating and determined to be out early in the morning to capture images of as much wildlife as possible.

Day 10

Tangkoko National Park

We woke at 5.30 ready for an early breakfast and to be on the track to discover as much wildlife- animal and vegetable, as it is possible in a day. We weren't disappointed. Before the day was half over we had seen an incredible array and display of black macaque monkeys, a most spectacular hornbill, woodpeckers, two different kingfishers, cus-cus, squirrels and more as well as lizards, (several skinks and the flying lizards) butterflies, plus many interesting plants. It was a relaxed and well timed and very gentle forest walk led by Alo and Ateng that allowed us to see so much.

We returned to the Black Macaque Research Station by the beach where we ate a leisurely lunch and waited for the heat to go out of the sun. I had never planned to spend the whole day in the forest and was more than satisfied with what I had already seen. So after photographing an oxen cart that I had never expected to see I mounted Ateng's motorcycle as his heaviest pillion passenger and was taken back to the home stay while Long Nose, Su and Wal were keen to add to their list of sightings.

My relaxing afternoon allowed me to get my diary entries up to date and for me to recover my energy in this tropical retreat.

After getting the diary up to date, I wandered down to the beach of Batuputih. It was a hive of activity with fishermen preparing to go out to sea for a night's fishing. Judged by the number of boats, all with outriggers and lights rigged to shine into the water, I assume that the target of the catch are squid. Most of the outriggers seem to rely on a dugout keel as a base built up with boards to provide more freeboard. I saw boats in all stages of construction and repair including

some new logs being converted to dugouts and a strange craft on the beach that looked to be nothing more than floating scaffolding with a galvanized iron shed on top. This may be for some aquaculture venture similar to pearl farming. (It turns out to be the basis for a fish farm to support big nets slung below in which small pilchard sized fish are raised.). Children romped in the small breaking waves. It was a very relaxed setting but as I walked back I noted fishermen setting out for the night with lanterns and a flask. Also on the way back to the home stay I saw a very interesting new hull being finished next to the church made entirely with new sawn timber and plywood.

I am surprised at the size of Batuputih. It hardly appears on the map, yet I was told it has a population of 4,362 people and occupies an area of 78 hectares. The Indonesians keep very up to date census figures with the number of occupants for each household indicated at the front. That would make this small village as big as many as some Australian country towns such as Roma or Goondiwindi yet this village. One thing I did note as I walked on the beach is that there is now a relatively new two metro Hightower thick cement wall between the beach and the village. I assume that this is a response to the devastating Sumatran tsunami a few years ago. I wonder now if they may think of lifting the height after the Japanese tsunami.

Also noted on my walk was further demonstration of civic pride with every fence in the village adopting a uniform paint code. On Ternate and Tidore these themes are so well carried through in each suburb/village/neighbourhood even extending to the construction style and the planter boxes lining the streets. Another feature not so appreciated was the thumping ghetto blasters where even in this small village one sound system so loud that it can be heard virtually all over the village and some of the vehicles, particularly the microlets with younger drivers can be heard approaching from up to a mile away.

After dinner I joined Long Nose and Alo and Ateng on a frog hunt. I thought that it was unlikely to yield much given that it was the dry season and as we walked through the village and then waded upstream it seemed as if it was going to be unproductive. Then we started seeing frogs, frogs that were so tame that even I could get reasonable photographs of them as well as butterflies and other critters. It was worth walking in my crocs full of volcanic gravel just to have this experience. I now know what sustains Long Nose's enthusiasm

Day 11

Tangkoko and Tasikoki Wildlife Sanctuary

Once more we were out of bed before the sun rose and after a hearty breakfast of scrambled egg and mushrooms, we headed out in the car towards Bitung as

the sun was rising behind the two brother volcanoes. It was very pretty but we didn't stop until we arrived at our destination at the top of the road. Here we saw many wonderful birds including a new species of Kingfisher for Ateng because it has not previously been officially recorded in Suluwesi. The most stunning birds I saw were the Suluwesi Goshawk and the Black napped Oriole. We heard Tarsiers as we had driven out making their secretive early morning calls but the sounds of the birds around the hillside were more rewarding.

Unfortunately Tangkoko is being whittled away by the people making incursions to gain more land for their slash and burn agriculture and as resource for timber for the boat building at Batuputih. There is also the opportunistic hunting for monkeys cus-cus pigs, flying fox and goodness knows what else. Already these forests are much depleted on what Alfred Russel Wallace saw. Cassowaries have gone and probably many other larger birds and animals as well as many other habitat dependent critters.

Then Alo was inspired to take us to the Tasikoki Wildlife Rescue Centre somewhere southwest of Bitung on the coast. This 20-hectare reserve was funded initially by a philanthropic organization intent on animal welfare. It was initially very well endowed but as the funding dried up the fine facilities have gradually deteriorated and the foundation now running it needs to rethink it's mission. I was surprised by the number of Corellas that were healthy and kept in cages. These are not native to the area or even Indonesia and can never be released. In the meantime the numbers of Corellas (that keep multiplying) are devouring space and resources that might be better applied. While I applaud the efforts being made by an army of volunteers, all of whom pay to work at the centre, I left with a very uneasy feeling about what was being achieved.

Just as we left Bitung heading back to Batuputih it started to rain. It got heavier making the road so slippery that one heavily loaded truck couldn't ascend the steep bitumen road. Rails (birds) were bathing in roadside pools and the air was turning fresh and cool.

After a pleasant relaxing lunch and a siesta Alo again took us exploring the river in the hope that the rain might have brought out frogs, but none were found although the nocturnal chorus was predicted to be strong. So we less adventurous left Long Nose in pursuit of frogs and snakes while Alo took us down to the wharf to explore the beach and waterfront.

I learnt slot ore about this village which is now accommodation an overflow population from some nearby islands, has 14 churches, three elementary schools, one Junior High School and one Senior High School but not one policeman. As a result there is nobody to enforce laws n sounds so that the ghetto-

blaster that thumped near Mama Roos Homestay all night has some immunity.

August 17 is Indonesia's national day and the government decrees that everyone will tidy up their home and paint their fences according to the local government's code. Batuputih fences are mainly pickets with the top ten centimetres a uniform blue and the lower metre being white. We also saw more of the boat building and gained a lot more insight into the economy and the lifestyle. The rain has abated but is predicted to hang around for another day or two. This suited Uncle Long Nose who was more than happy to go out exploring for frogs again. His brief foray yielded a Tarsier, two lizards and a couple of new frogs.

Day 12

Minahasa Highlands and to Bunaken

Alo has negotiated to take us to meet the boat to take us to Bunaken. Thus we had breakfast at 7.00 am and left soon after 7.30 in a slightly larger and more comfortable car that Alo had borrowed for the day. Six of us and all of our luggage were loaded aboard.

Our first stop was Wahruga, which is a Christian cemetery, which has also become in part a museum. Square stone graves or sarcophagi carved out of solid stone used for Minahasan people for burials for centuries seem to have demanded more labour and effort even than the Torajan tombs because a square rock is carved about a metre by a metre and about 1.5 metres tall. It is then hollowed out to form the sarcophagi. After the deceased is placed inside in a crouching position the tomb is sealed with a very heavy and elaborately adorned stone top weighing hundreds of kilograms. It is mystifying how these tops could have been hoisted into place. However these sarcophagi have been gathered from around Minahasa and planted here as a reminder of a culture that failed to survive the conversion of the people to Christianity

Our next stop was the Japanese caves carved into the side of a mountain adjacent to the road. It turns out that the caves were built for the Japanese war effort by the locals who were not welcoming the Japanese. However it enabled Long Nose to explore and photograph swiftlets, a gecko and a skink all occupying the caves.

Then it was through some of the richest soil and most productive farms and through forests with gullies where lots of *Angiopteris* were seen to reach a parking area from where we proceeded on t the summit by foot. Mt Mahawu rises to 1,311 metres and has two shallow pools of water in the crater. The rim afforded us a good view of the steaming and recently erupted vent on nearby ominous and smoking Gunung Lokon. Also on the rim we were able to observe and photograph some interesting pitcher plants and just below at the car ark area we added to the growing forest by planting two Gemlina trees and making a contribution to the cause.

To get to Mahawu we saw the richest and most extensive vegetable garden I have ever seen. The main vegetables grown were acres and acres of carrot cabbages handspring onions but there were many other things growing on the sides of the hills overlook Lake Tondano that we soon descended to have lunch at a restaurant over the water. This huge lake is 600 metres above sea level seems to be almost one large aquaculture farm. It was a grand lunch and then it was on to Watu Pinawetengan to observe a stone of that has unified the Minahasan people for millennia

Our final destination for in Minahasa was Danau Linow, a small sulfurous lake where sulphurous steam was erupting from the ground around the lake despite much being harnessed for terms energy generation. We had a rest and coffee there before confronting the peak hour traffic between Tomahon and Manado.

It took an hour and a half to make the 25-kilometre journey down the winding road descending to Manado and then negotiate our way through the chaotic traffic to the harbour. Happily the toreros journey was enriched by one of the most stunning sunsets I have seen and our glimpses of the smoking Mt Lokon. Our challenge at the harbor was to find a boat to take us to our destination at Bunaken, Sea Gardens Resort. Luckily Alo was able to negotiate and get us a boat to take us right to the door whereas arrived at 7.30.

Mama Roos wasn't where we had intended to stay at Batuputih but we have no regrets that we were changed to there. The accommodation is very basic but it is well located and we were most impressed by the quality of the guides and service the experience of the guides our stay so rewarding.

Mama Roos Contact details:	
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**Day 13
Idling on Bunaken**

It is hot and steamy in the middle of the day on Bunaken when we are not in the slight breeze. Bunaken is almost on the Equator (less than 2 degrees North) and the sun is due to be directly overhead within a few weeks if not within a few days. Still the weather is balmy as we noted last night travelling out to Bunaken by boat on a very placid sea with the fairyland of Manado lights surrounding the harbour and us at first and then fading into the distance as the small craft approached Bunaken.

It was good to establish our surroundings on Bunaken in daylight. Sea Gardens Resort is mostly hidden from the sea by a wall of tall mangroves with just a boat passage between the reef and the shore. The water is shallow and we understood why the Sea Gardens vessel

"*Honesty*" couldn't get out to collect us in Manado last night. Su and I went for a walk to explore the shores behind the mangroves and a bit of the nearby forest before returning for a pleasant breakfast of banana pancakes.

This was followed by a snorkeling venture. We swam out through the gap in the mangroves, across the sea-grass beds and then overs me leached coral in shallow water. I was starting to feel that these reefs were suffering the same fate as so many coral reefs globally when we reached the edge of the tidal flats where the corals crowded every square centimetre in the densest display of coral I have ever seen. It was wonderful and well worth the discomfort of squeezing into swimwear and paraphernalia I need to go snorkelling. We are looking forward to discovering more and we have booked a snorkeling tour tomorrow.

Since then it has been a very quiet and lazy day. Just a cent little while ago we were given great proof of this being the land of smiles. Coming out from a splendid lunched observed and heard Sonja and some of the staff gathered in the shade of a mango tree play and singing the sweetest music. The intriguing base was provided by a single string instrument attached to an oversized tea chest beaten with a stick to provide an authentic double bass sound to accompany the guitar and singers.

After a siesta we set off to explore this small island with a population of 3,000. It was interesting especially sampling an ice-cream. Its centre was liquid and once I bit into the hard outer chocolate coat, it exploded over my face as if I had been hit with a cream tart.

The village was all excited because there was to be a big wedding and it seemed as if more than half the island population was preparing to join the celebrations. That was all there is to report from a lazy day on a tropical island in Indonesia for today.

**Day 14
Snorkeling on Bunaken**

Our schedule was for a snorkel tour and at 8.00 punctually our guide and boat master, Franki, was there ready to take us to our first snorkeling venue, the reef off Siladen. it was more relaxed and more beautiful than yesterday and I was impressed. Although the coral was quite rich and diverse I did miss many of the other features of reefs we see in Australia such as clams' crabs, worms etc. Still it was nice drifting with the current and then having the current turn and take us back to the boat like a returning boomerang,

The same thing happened with an even stronger current at our next destination off Bunaken about a kilometre north of Sea Gardens. Here we were also becoming aware of the absence of large fish although a few more were seen here than at Siladen. With that at about 10.30 we were satisfied and thought what good value for money we had had but then Franki announced that

he would take us out again at 1.30 for another snorkel on the other side of Bunaken.

After a fabulous lunch we waded through the mangroves at low tide to join Franki who took us to the best destination of the four we have snorkeled here so far outside the mosque on a huge drop-off. There were more fish although few large ones which isn't surprising. We arrived at our snorkel spot to observe one local boat blatantly ignoring the no-

Fishing in this protected Marine Park. That and the distractions of the flotsam and jetsam floating out from Manado were distractors from an absolutely fabulous spot and very enriching snorkeling experience.

The day began fresh and almost cloudless making the smoke from an urban fire in Manado all the ore conspicuous as it clouded out the smoke coming from Lokon that has become more visible over the last two days. Last night a resident even commented on the increasing glow emanating from it at night.

Day 15 Return to Australia

There isn't a lot to tell about this day except that we decided to go for one last snorkel of this very rich reef before setting off on the five legs to get us to Darwin. It started inauspiciously for me because my mask strap snapped just as I was about to swim out to the reef adjacent to the resort leaving Su and Long Nose to go on their own. They independently returned attesting to having seen the best reefs they have ever seen. Sea Gardens at Bunaken is well named.

Then it was a series of waiting for the start of each leg — the boat into Manado, the frantic car ride to the airport where we arrived in very ample time, the flight to Makassar then the flight to Bali and finally the flight to Darwin to round off a most memorable journey of discovery.

Reflections

We left Australia with four principle objectives:—

- * To gain a better appreciation of the Macassan connection with Northern Australia;
- * To gain a better insight into the land where Wallace developed his Theory of Evolution that changed the basis of biological sciences;
- * To explore one of the areas of our small planet with the greatest marine biodiversity;
- * To visit the Spice Islands that so influenced the history of colonization of the world.

We accomplished all of that each to our own satisfaction although Long Nose would love to spend more time exploring the wildlife. He had ambitions of discovering as much as Wallace if he could although sadly Wallace would find only a fraction of what he

saw in the early 19th Century if he returned to Indonesia today.

We also gained much more in many unexpected ways. We gained a greater appreciation of Indonesia and it's people and their rich and diverse cultures.

There were additional impressions though that are inescapable. The most obvious was the teeming and ever expanding population. Seeing rice paddies disappear to allow for more housing for the burgeoning population was depressing and it seems nobody wants to see that there are limits to growth and that populations cannot continue to grow exponentially. Already some populations are overflowing home islands and there is both government sponsored and spontaneous transmigration going on in Indonesia but no apparent program for family planning.

I was particularly impressed by the many rituals to help the different cultures cope with death, grief and trauma. Although there is an absence of counsellors and psychologists Indonesians seem to be mentally healthy and well adjusted. The understanding of and respect for everyone's role in the scheme of things was evident wherever we looked from working in the fields to repairing houses. People just went quietly about without anyone barking instructions on what and how to do anything. Even in the chaotic traffic people remained calm.

It is obvious that Indonesians generally are not as wealthy as Australians. However, the index of happiness though doesn't depend on wealth as evidenced by our experience in Northern Suluwesi, *The Land of Smiles*. While Indonesia is clearly overpopulated the population as a whole is very self-reliant and seems to be more resilient to survive any crisis that Australians.

The sad thing to observe though is the natural environment has been pillaged and ravaged. The wildlife that remains is clearly at risk as opportunists take cus-cus and other animals from the forest for the dinner table and the larger fish from the marine park, and the larger trees from the little remaining forest for building boats and houses. Wallace would be appalled and so should we be but it will continue as long as the population grows.

Indonesia is so well endowed with volcanoes. Rather than being destructive these have endowed these tropical islands in a high (and generally reliable) rainfall area with some of the richest soils on earth. It is sad that, like Australia, these resources are being stretched beyond their sustainable capacity.

We came away with a appreciation of the history of this region which in itself the basis for better understanding of the rich and diverse cultures of this region.