

Thursday, 18 Feb - Surabaya

We landed in Surabaya, capital of Eastern Java, Indonesia at around 4 pm. It was great to be met by our friend, Ritta, and her friend Fini (aka Finfin) at the airport. Traffic was heavy with lots of motorbikes that wove in and out of lanes and sometimes travel 3 abreast in 1 lane! Peter noticed that Fini's driver drove on the line instead of in the lane. We later found out that this was to allow for motorbikes to overtake on his left or right side. We stopped somewhere with an intention of buying a local SIM card for my cell phone and gave up trying to cross the road. It was also tricky walking on the footpath (sidewalk) as there were lots of holes presumably for drainage as they get plenty of rain being a tropical island, as well as from wear and tear and collapse. The 4-star Hotel Santika in Gubeng, Surabaya is a modern hotel with English-speaking staff. Everyone is friendly, polite and helpful. We're looking forward to a great holiday.

Friday, 19 Feb - Surabaya

One reason for coming to Indonesia is to trace Peter's roots. With help from hotel staff who researched and found the new Indonesian name of the old Dutch-named street using archival sources, we found the address of one of the homes of Peter's mother when she was 16. We took a taxi to nearby the address (across the road) and went hunting, asking people and even the Police Station staff, who gave us the wrong info. Eventually we found the right house number. It is nearly completely demolished but the fence and the gate were still standing. It's on a tree-lined divided road with plants and trees on the island and 2 lanes each way. Having that island enabled us to more safely cross the road. We found out later that the island was previously a tram line. It's a nice neighbourhood except for the gaping holes on the footpath ! The staff in the real estate agency across the road helped us get a taxi to our next destination. Taxis are very cheap and nobody walks. It's much too dangerous (worse than Rio) !

Our next destination was the WTC (World Trade Centre) which is a shopping centre dedicated to technology. We finally got our Simpati SIM card so that we could make and receive calls cheaply in Indonesia. We had to go to another shopping centre to buy a wedding greeting card, which wasn't easy to find. It seems that Indonesians are not fond of giving out greeting cards.

Saturday, 20 Feb - Surabaya

For breakfast, we had various spicy Indonesian soups, noodles and desserts. We readily agreed that we could get used to this. There was also a Western station but it wasn't popular. Peter was the only non-Asian in the place. Everyone mistook me for and started speaking to in Indonesian. I had to say to them "Saya dari Filipin" (I'm from the Philippines). No Bahasa."

Another reason for coming to Indonesia was to attend Ferdhi and Sien's wedding. Without this invitation via Ritta, we may not have made it. Ferdhi, and his mother Ritta, are family friends through our boys from their high school days, from Greystanes in Sydney. It was great to meet Ritta's high school mates who remained very close in spite of the distance. Peter was smashing in his Barong Tagalog, the Filipino national costume for men, which he proudly wore even though he is "Belanda", the Indonesian term for Dutch. We had an easy day in the hotel in preparation for the wedding. We accidentally met Sien in the lift last night and again this morning.

The Pentecostal wedding ceremony conducted by the pastor from Sien's church went smoothly (given the emotion and religious fervor). Some of the hymns were familiar to me so I sang softly in English while everyone else sang in Bahasa. I was asked to sing 2 songs with the band during the reception without practice. It went smoothly with "My Guy" but I lost the band a bit when I went a note higher on the second half of the "Can't Take My Eyes Off You". The buffet food had a good selection even for a non-meat eater. We had fun singing karaoke after the band finished. Ritta's friends were friendly but they didn't speak English except for Diana and Bambang.

Sunday, 21 Feb - Surabaya

Mario picked us up at 9 am and took us to the Sampoerna Cafe to get on the Cultural Heritage Tour of Surabaya in a small bus, seating about 18. It was a free daily tour that showcased Dutch colonial architecture, popular with tourists and locals alike. We were the only foreigners in the early tour. Our first stop was the Youth Centre, which used to be an exclusive Dutch club where dogs and natives were forbidden. There was a traditional entertainment with plenty of slapstick comedy ala Three Stooges. The audience threw money to the actors, which they picked up as part of the show. We visited the Bank Indonesia museum - central bank of Dutch East Indies, which was beautifully restored with artifacts on the history of banking in Indonesia and a collection of currencies. There was a group of high school students that we're having a photo shoot in the museum dressed in what they called patriotic attire. Next was a visit to the Surabaya Town Hall where we learned of the history of Surabaya prior to the arrival of the Dutch when Raden Widjaya's troops defended the city against Genghis Khan whose troops tried to invade the city. This explains the symbol of Surabaya which is the crocodile beating the shark. We passed a number of colonial buildings, bridges, gardens and prison. The Kalisosok prison used to have up to 30 prisoners in 1 cell, which meant standing room only. It is now closed and has colourful artwork on its walls. The tour culminated with a visit to the House of Sampoerna Museum which was the residence of Liem Seeng Tee, an orphan that started selling food on the train and ended up founding Soetormo Cigarette Company that is the largest manufacturer of clove cigarettes, now owned by Philip Morris. Behind the museum was an art gallery exhibiting Japanese arts and crafts.

We picked Ritta up at the hotel after the tour and the four of us had lunch in the grand colonial Madjapahit Hotel, built in 1912 with magnificent decor, gardens and pool.

It rained every afternoon in Indonesia because it was the wet season. Ritta's friend, Monica, picked up Ritta and I for shopping in the Mirota batik shop where prices are fixed and very reasonable. It was raining when we arrived. Someone directed us for parking and helped us with an umbrella to the shop. Monica gave him a tip of 2,000 rupiahs (IDR). They are not employed by the shop but hang around outside shops, car parks and driveways to do this as a means of livelihood. Very enterprising ! Peter stayed at the hotel to chat to hotel staff, read and rest.

We love our junior suite on the corner of the 18th floor with its gorgeous views including (out in the distance) Suramadu bridge, Indonesia's longest bridge, that connects Surabaya to the island of Madura. We even appreciate these views from the bathroom as it is separated from the bedroom by a glass wall (a shade can be pulled down for privacy if we have guests). There's live music in the Lobby Lounge every night. The band invited me to the stage to sing after meeting them during their break. A quartet of self-taught musos with brilliant keyboard and clarinet players.

Monday 22 February 2016 - Batu, East Java, Indonesia

It was goodbye to Santika Premiere Hotel but we arranged for our great 18th floor suite to be held for us later in the week at the same price. The staff were all amazing, they helped so much with putting us in touch with the right places such as government offices to obtain permission to later visit the Internatio building where Peter's father and grandfather had worked both before and after the war of 1942 to 1945.

Peter used the hotel wifi to finalise the bookings for the flight and accommodation in Bandung for the end of the week.

Ritta and friends (Neneng, Joke, Angie, and Robin, Neneng's driver) picked us up to take us for a 2 night stay in Neneng's apple plantation in the southern highlands of East Java where the weather is cooler than Surabaya. The drive down was again amazing as an instruction in the pragmatic use of road space – lanes mean nothing except to remind you of your position, not to limit it. Overtaking is a matter of who can get there first. There's no such as road rage for cutting someone off. Motor-

bikes are at liberty to weave in and out. Cars allow for bikes to fill up spaces when waiting at lights or stalled traffic. Basically, whoever can get to a spot first has right of way and must be respected.

The plantation in Batu is about 125kms south of Surabaya. After travelling 100kms we stopped in the city of Malang, similar in size to Gosford in NSW, Australia, for lunch in a restaurant that served traditional sate. Peter and I had cap cay pronounced (chap chay), a vegetable and tofu dish as well as fish ball soup. Peter couldn't resist the tender chicken satays in peanut and chili sauce. He was transported back to childhood days when family celebrations included such delicacies.

We passed through the township of Batu where we stopped at a supermarket to buy supplies for the next 2 days. The least we could do was pay for these supplies. We then travelled through a narrow road that went up to the plantation. The road was cement at first then cobblestone or sand, with some steep inclines with awkward passings, fortunately only with motorbikes on the way up.

The 12 hectare property had 2 villas that each have 4 bedrooms. The setting was idyllic with various colourful flowers and all sorts of vegetables and herbs growing just outside the building. The 6 of us settled comfortably in one of the villas. Peter and I had the room with the ensuite. The water supply comes from a spring up in the mountains. We sang karaoke while Joke prepared a vegetable, tofu and noodle soup. There was maid helping too.

After dinner, Peter and I completed the crossword and jumble puzzles while Ritta and her friends watched a Turkish soap-opera dubbed in Indonesian with blurred low necklines and wine glasses, being censored as Islam is opposed to alcohol and promiscuity. It was amusing for us but we didn't say anything, not wanting to make Neneng feel uncomfortable. The earlier soap opera had all the actors crying while the next one had all the actors arguing. Peter noticed the dark heavy eyebrows – Turkish style.

It was raining when we arrived but cleared up after dinner and we enjoyed the crisp mountain air while watching the city lights of Malang and Batu.

Before bed, Peter and I had separate showers with water heated in a huge kettle mixed with cold water in a bucket, We then used a beaker to scoop the water and poured it on our head and body. The shower and toilet were combined so that the toilet got wet as we showered. The toilet was western style but with a hand-held bidet to clean our behind -- exhilarating in the morning with the cold jet. Soap was also within reach. There was no toilet paper and we used a small towel to dry. It was hard at first but we got used to it. It was good to see how the locals lived.

Tuesday 23 February 2016 - Batu, East Java, Indonesia

Breakfast was sumptuous with huge avocados, muesli that's produced in Bali, Indonesia, yoghurt and morning a tea. After breakfast, Joke showed me around the vegetable and herb gardens while Peter went around the plantation taking photos. I then played scrabble with Joke and Neneng. I won with a comfortable margin but I was pleasantly surprised that Joke and Neneng could play it even though Neneng's English is not well developed.

We then set out and had lunch in Warung Bok Sri in Batu where they served fresh gourami fish from the tanks. It was sad to see them being clubbed to death after they were scooped out before they were cooked but it's more humane than cooking them alive.

We went to the shops outside the Treehouse Hotel and then considered going into the Eco Green Park where they have exotic Indonesian birds but it started to rain so we decided against it and went back to the apple plantation. We encountered a truck on the narrow road back to the plantation. Our driver had to reverse 300 metres to the nearest clearing to let the truck pass. We spent the afternoon learning to play rummy from Neneng and Joke who are experts. It's a great game of chance and strategy and requires quick thinking. Dinner was a buffet of Indonesian dishes plus salmon teriyaki prepared by Joke.

Wednesday, 24 Feb - Batu, Surabaya

Another sumptuous breakfast, games of rummyo (we're getting the hang of it) and scrabble (won by Peter) and photos around the gardens and it was time to leave the fresh air of Batu. We stopped for lunch in a popular restaurant that specialised in fried chicken although Peter and I had fried tahu (Indonesian for tofu). It was a smooth drive towards Surabaya except when it started raining buckets when we got closer to Surabaya. The heavy downpour caused flooding the highway and streets in Surabaya. Ritta's nephew sent her pictures of submerged cars. It took us 5 1/2 hours to travel 125kms with the last 2kms taking 1 1/2 hours to get to Neneng's house in Graha Family, an exclusive gated community with mansions built around a golf course. We were thankful for the dinner that her husband organised with the maids for us when we arrived. Her husband and son welcomed us. The mansion was like a setting for a glamorous to series with its impressive foyer with a painting on the ceiling that looked as if it opened to the sky (Neneng commissioned a painter to paint the Sky with birds flying), massive doors, high ceilings and a swimming pool that has spring water trucked from Batu. There was all a tree stump with roots that had carvings and turned upside down to form the base of a coffee table with a glass top – impressive ! We chatted briefly with their son Ronald who was working in marketing to develop brands for maximum sales appeal in Indonesian society. It was good to get back to Hotel Santika Premiere Gubeng where we had a room waiting on the 16th floor – the same room that Freddie and Siem had, No. 1603.

Thursday, 25 Feb - Surabaya

Back in style at the hotel, we decided to swim in the pool before breakfast as we were both putting on weight with all the delicious Indonesian food that we have been enjoying. Another friend of Ritta, Bambang, and his wife Ani, picked us up after breakfast. We felt very privileged to be driven around Surabaya by a retired 2-star Admiral in the Indonesian Navy. Our first stop was the office of Internatio where Peter's father worked as a tea buyer. Peter had tried to organise with the Tourism Office to get permission to visit the premises but on the day we were not able to because the owner was ill and could not be reached. We visited the reception of a part of the building that seemed to be used as a warehouse and took photos of the building.

Next stop with Bambang was Jalan Komering where Peter's mother and other women and girls were imprisoned by the Japanese during WW2. Like the other house in Jalan Dr Soetormo, it's in the process of being demolished. It was emotional for Peter. He's not sure if the house in Jalan (Jalan or JL means street) Dr Soetormo was his mother's family home before WW2 or a detention centre for young Dutch women for Japanese sexual abuse. The house in Jalan Komering was a prison. The Japanese moved the prisoners to large houses around Surabaya before moving them to Semarang which we will also visit later in the trip.

Bambang and Ani then took us to Bon Ami restaurant that served western and Indonesian food. We had nasi goreng while Bambang had fish and chips. Next was Peter's father's old family home in Jalan Porong. We didn't have a house number but had a 40-year old photo of the house from the archives in Holland. Peter found what he thought was the most probable location of the house. It appeared that the house had been either rebuilt or extensively renovated. More information may be available from the archives in The Hague in the Netherlands but we had no time to obtain this.

We enjoyed the view from our room on our last night in Surabaya. We could see from our room at night the bright lights of the Suramado bridge, the longest bridge in the Indonesia, which connects islands of Java and Madura. Because we had a corner room, we were able to see the sun rise from one window and set on the other window although we couldn't take a decent photo of the sunset because we're either late in coming back to our room or it was raining and the window was wet and that window was tinted. Unfortunately there was a loud disco party going on at Carols Pops in a nearby building and Peter had to change rooms to be able to sleep. The hotel staff obliged.