

Malang Revisited

We'd been planning to go to Ijen for the Nyepi long weekend, but a perusal of web sites indicated that seeing much, at the end of the rainy season, was pretty much a lottery. We had not been to Malang since before the mud flow started, so we decided that we deserved a night at the Tugu hotel.

We followed the toll road as far as it went, and were diverted off it at Porong, at one edge of the mud lake. The traffic was doing a right hand turn to follow the roads around the embankments that have been constructed. However, the Indonesian spirit of pragmatism was alive and well. A plethora of grimy motorcyclists were displaying small signs which indicated that, for a small fee, they would lead you through the "jalan tikus" (literally, "mouse streets", but meaning back streets) to the connecting road to Malang and other places south of Surabaya. (The traffic that didn't pay faced a potentially-two-hour trip to the connecting road.)

We negotiated a price of Rp30,000 (~ AU\$4) and headed off. Near the beginning of the 20-minute journey, our guide picked up a friend, who, with languid arm gestures, indicated potholes, corners, small children and any other hazards. At most corners there were men who expected a small handout, which our guide gave them. It was pretty tragic to see large numbers of houses demolished, in anticipation of the spreading mud flow.





It took us more than two hours to reach our destination. We checked into our delightful room and then proceeded to the restaurant, for a late lunch. In the afternoon we grabbed our brollies and went looking for an antiques shop to which we had been given the directions. It was very impressive, but full of knick knacks, such as glasses, crockery, etc., whereas we were looking for furniture.

We came back to the hotel, and went to the spa for "treatments". We were told to put on some very skimpy, paper underpants. Luckily, we had a sarong over us most of the time. My massage and Helen's "mandi lulur" were excellent.





In the evening, we had a bottle of chianti outside our room, and then headed down the back corridor to the "L'Amour fou" restaurant. We each had a ice, heart-shaped pizza, and shared a desert.





The next morning, we walked around the town, ending up at the bird market. We noticed that there seemed to be an unusually high number of geriatric becak riders. One poor old soul was being helped by a policemen to get moving, but didn't look like he would get far. The bird market was interesting, but depressing. Birds and animals were displayed in appallingly small cages.

After breakfast we sat outside our rooms and Helen read while I listened to the arrangements of some songs, on my iPod. Helen went for a walk around the hotel with the camera, taking pictures of the amazing collection of antiques.





We checked out and headed up the road to Batu, looking, unsuccessfully, for a shop that made traditional pots. It began to pour, and we realised that we must have missed the turn off to Seleкта. We found it, after asking at a police post. We were ripped off Rp25,000 to enter, because you now have to pay for the “amusement park”, whether you want to enter it, or not. We went straight to the plant and fruit/vegetable stalls. Helen bought two flowering plants, and then we purchased some Batu apples and local veggies for dinner later that evening.

The road we chose to follow down the “hill” took us to near Singosari, and we played “dodgem” with the cars and buses to Pandaan, where we stopped at Barang Lama (“old things”) antique shop. The owner, Bob, remembered us, even though we hadn’t been there for a while. We bought an old gamelan drum, on a stand, for Rp 750,000 (< AU\$100). We got to the former tollway entrance, where another motorcyclist offered to guide us around the mud. We were surprised that he took a different direction to the day before, and even more surprised when it only took about 10 minutes. We were on the toll road five minutes later, and had an easy return to Citra Raya.

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