

## Bragg June 2019 Trip to Singapore & Indonesia

Fifteen hours and 50 minutes of flying time ... a “good” flight time according the purser aboard our Boeing 787 flight from San Francisco to Singapore. Fortunately, we had burned countless air miles so at least we could *enjoy* the long flight in business class ... and it is a long flight: we both watched 3 movies, had two meals plus snacks, read, napped, etc.

Our final destination, the *Pelagian* live-aboard dive boat associated with the *Wakatobi Dive Resort* in Indonesia lay beyond Singapore, but a stopover in Singapore made sense for a number of reasons ... it would give us the opportunity to:

- Get over at least some of the jet lag associated with flying 14 time zones ahead of our usual Denver time; and,
- See and experience some of the many wonders of Singapore that we’ve heard/seen about from others as well as such movie/TV shows as *Crazy Rich Asians* and *Street Food*.

After four nights in Singapore, we’d fly on to Indonesia, specifically the island of *Bali*, where we’d spend another four nights visiting that Island before finally settling into a week of diving in the *Banda Sea*.

### Singapore

This city/island state, officially the *Republic of Singapore* which achieved true independence only in 1965, is only about 279 square miles in size and has a current population of nearly 5.9 million. In comparison, Rhode Island (the smallest US state) is 5 ½ times larger at 1,545 sq miles and yet has a population of only just over 1 million. Bottom line: Singapore has to pack a lot into a very small area – its solution has been to build vertically, hence Singapore’s great skyline ... only some of which is shown here ... and it’s at its most impressive at night as Singapore really likes to “light things up”! Note: Singapore is actually comprised of 63 islands – 62 small offshore islands surround the main one.

In thinking about the best way to describe our time in Singapore, several themes emerged so I’m just going use them to help describe some our experiences in this quite amazing place ... in no particular order ...

A Mixture of Cultures: The fact that Singapore has four official languages: English, Malay, Mandarin Chinese, and Tamil (an Indian language), says much about the blending and merging of cultures and peoples who now call Singapore home. It also means that those foreign language-challenged among us can easily make our way around this fascinating city.



*Some of Singapore's skyline*



*Part of the view from our hotel room at the Mandarin Oriental upon our arrival*

The history of modern Singapore starts in 1819 when a trading post was established by *Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles* and the *British East Indian Company*. [Note: unfortunately the iconic *Raffles Hotel*, birthplace of the *Singapore Sling*, was undergoing a major renovation so we couldn't enjoy its historic ambiance.] Prior to the arrival of the English in Singapore, there were many indigenous Malays living on the island under the *Johor Sultanate* (a hereditary seat and the sovereign ruler of the Malaysian state of Johor); traditional ethnic Malay were practicing Muslims.



*The Sultan Mosque in the Arab Town area*

*Tamil Muslim* traders from southern India pioneered the settlement of Serangoon in northeast Singapore in the early 1800's. More substantial Indian migration occurred from 1819 to World War II, when both India and Singapore were under British colonial rule. These immigrants, many of them Hindu, came to Singapore for a variety of reasons including unrest and instability in their homelands.



*Sri Mariamman Temple, Singapore's oldest Hindu temple, established in 1827*



*British-colonial style National Gallery & City Hall buildings in European Town area*



*In front of the Thian Hock Keng Temple in the Chinatown area*

Singapore became a British *colony* in 1824. An early map of the colony shows three ethnic residential areas: European Town, Chinatown, and Arab Town. Apparently, these divisions were not strictly enforced and eventually the concept of different ethnic zones was abandoned, but historical architectural distinctions of each district are still noticeable today. Our

first morning in Singapore, we took a guided walking tour of these areas – a great introduction to the city.

Chinese *coolies* were early immigrants to the island, driven by poverty in China. “Kuli” means *to hire* in the Tamil language, with “coolie” being the anglicized version. They mainly provided hard physical labor; apparently it was a common sight in early Singapore to see coolies carrying gunny sacks filled with commodities near the Singapore River. The first wave of coolies arrived during the period 1823-1891; subsequent waves arrived in 1910-11 (when Singapore became a “free” port) and a final wave in 1926-27. These Chinese immigrants were mostly men. However, in the early-to-mid 1930's, quotas on male Chinese immigrants resulted in a wave of female Chinese immigrants who became known as *Samsui women* as they were mainly from the Sanshui district of Canton province in southern China. These mostly single women wore red headdresses to identify



*Depiction on Samsui women on history of Singapore mural in Chinatown*



themselves to one another (large groups of them usually lived together in cramped shared accommodations). Many found work as general laborers in the construction industry. *Samsui women* were part of the wave of Chinese female migrants, numbering about 200,000, who came to Singapore between 1934 and 1938.

The current ethnic makeup in Singapore's *citizen* population is approximately 76% ethnic Chinese, 15% Malays, and 7% ethnic Indian making up the majority of the population. Citizen and permanent residents only make up about 70% of its actual population; non-residents make up the other 30%.

A great benefit of these multiple cultures is the outstanding cuisine of the island. *Hawker centres* abound in Singapore – there are well over 100 of them. Hawker centers were set up as a more sanitary option to street-side vendors; instead of mobile food carts, permanent stalls in open air buildings are provided for the hawkers and either common or stall dedicated tables and chairs are provided for customers. This concept has totally eliminated street hawkers in Singapore and make sampling the cuisine options easy and VERY affordable ... there are not many places you can enjoy a Michelin-starred meal for around \$3! Our tour guide also pointed out that since the average “home” in Singapore is only about 950 sq feet, Singaporeans usually get together/entertain outside their homes so inexpensive meals are a necessity. [Note: our guide also mentioned that the Singapore government builds and subsidizes housing for many of its resident citizens; it assigns housing in the same proportion as its ethnic mix so its housing is culturally mixed.]



*A Michelin-starred hawker stall sign*



*Steve & I at one of the Hawker Centers*



*Enjoying some Tapioca Cake, a popular snack in Singapore*

One of the best things about the *hawker centres* is the “No Touting” rules; this means that you can casually scope out

all the various options with no fear of anyone yelling at you to come and try their place (note: the *Satay by the Bay* food court at the *Gardens by the Bay* does NOT have such a rule and boy, was it annoying to try to eat while having to listen to the constant sounds of the vendors extolling their products).



*Sign in a Hawker Centre*

The foodcourts in the basements of the many shopping malls in Singapore are another great option for quick and cheap meals. We ate several meals/snacks in them – satays, steamed buns, fresh fruit drinks, and baked goodies from the huge selection at various *BreadTalk* stores were some of our favorites. Our tour guide



educated us about the etiquette of “saving a table” in food courts/hawker centres: place a small package of tissues on the table you want to claim, then go off and get your food and you’ll find that table still empty and awaiting your return!

While on the subject of Singapore’s multi-cultural nature, I would be remiss to note the impact of American culture on the place ... some examples:

- The nightly light-show at the *Supergrove* at *Gardens by the Bay* (more about this area later) was accompanied by 1980’s American disco music
- We saw references to American pop culture icons on a variety of products being sold
- American brand stores are highly visible in Singapore’s MANY shopping centers, including: Victoria’s Secret, Calvin Klein, Chicco, Guess, Marc Jacobs, Nike, and so many more. Shopping is a major activity in Singapore, especially for many tourists. Just along Singapore’s famous *Orchard Road*, there are 30 shopping malls and countless boutiques. In total, there are over 100 shopping malls in Singapore, filled with high-end brands and boutiques. We saw several folks pulling a suitcase behind them to presumably carry all their purchases (as they didn’t really look like they were just arriving or departing tourists).
- The *Parkview Square* is often affectionately referred to as *Gotham Square* or the *Batman Building* because it bears a striking resemblance to Gotham City. The *Atlas bar*, a marvel of Art Deco decor resides in the building’s lobby and boasts the world’s largest *gin* collection.
- Speaking of Batman, we saw the *DC Comics Café* at several locations.



*A great place for savory and sweet options*



*Steve & I at the Atlas Bar in the Parkview Square building  
(aka Batman Building)*



*Me and Batman outside DC Comics Café*

Transportation/Movement of People: We managed to get ourselves around Singapore by any number of methods and observed so many more manners of transport ...



**Airborne:** Besides all the aircraft arriving and departing at Singapore's *Changi Airport* (19<sup>th</sup> busiest in the world and rated as the "World's Best Airport" in the world for 7 straight years -- it is huge and beautiful, complete with lush landscaped areas and lots of shopping opportunities), we also experienced some other airborne crafts, including:

- F15s: a couple of these VERY loud fighter jets belonging to the Singapore Airforce buzzed us several times one morning
- Helicopters: we saw several out over the main harbor area
- UFO: while not technically aloft, the UFO-shaped "new" *Supreme Court* building of Singapore (opened in 2005) seems to *hover* above the city
- Singapore Flyer: this giant observation wheel (Asia's largest) is also not technically airborne but while towering 540 feet above the sea it gives you a great view of Singapore – a night must-do to take in all the lights of the city!
- Singapore Cable Car Sky Network: a gondola-style cable car, the network provides an aerial link from *Faber Peak* (a hilltop park) on the main island of Singapore to the resort island of *Sentosa* across the Keppel Harbour. We started atop Mount Faber, after oogling the views from the "Peak-a-loo's" -- bathrooms with floor to ceiling windows with views of the arriving cable cars and *Sentosa*. Most of the attractions on *Sentosa* didn't hold any appeal to us (yep, we skipped *Universal Studios*, *Madame Tussauds*, the aquarium, etc.) but the 360 degree views from the cable car gave us a good perspective on the surrounding areas.
- Chairlift: While on our cable car ride over *Sentosa*, we passed over the "Skyride" attraction which is basically folks riding on a chairlift, wearing helmets, and moving horizontally over the island with a safety net underneath. For skiers like us, a not very unusual means of airborne transport but obviously a more novel means for many others.



*"UFO" Atop Supreme Court Building*



*Singapore Flyer*



*Cable cars between Faber Peak and Harbor Front*



*Bumboat on Singapore River*



*Chinese "shophouses" along the Singapore River - location of the original trading port where the "shop" was on the ground floor and the "house" above*

Singapore are chock full of boats of all sizes and shapes – container ships, tankers, private yachts. We took a narrated "cruise" on the *Singapore River* on an iconic "Bumboat" which used to ferry cargo at its historic trading port. These bumboats, now outfitted with quiet, battery-driven motors, are also used as water taxis. Crossing the Singapore River are



several historic bridges, including the *Cavenagh Bridge*, built in Glasgow, Scotland in 1869 and then shipped in parts to Singapore where it was reassembled by convict labor. Opened in 1870, is the oldest bridge in Singapore that exists in its original form.

Perhaps the most recognized “boat” in Singapore is the 1,120 foot long concrete one that sits atop the 3-tower *Marina Bay Sands Hotel*. Also known as the *SkyPark*, it is a three-acre area that includes swimming pools, gardens, jogging paths, restaurants, and a nightclub. A 54 floor elevator ride takes you to the SkyPark. We had a nice dinner there our last evening in Singapore – the real treat was a bird’s eye view of Singapore as the sunset faded and was replaced by the nightly brilliance!



*“Boat” atop Marina Bay Sands Hotel*

Some of the other boat types we encountered included *dragon boats* practicing in the bay and *sampans* (flat-bottomed wooden Chinese boats) on the “canal” inside the *Shops at Marina Bay*, a luxury shopping center. The canal is fed by rainwater that fills the outside *Rain Oculus*, an eco-friendly installation comprising a 72 ft-wide acrylic bowl. Each hour over 22,000 litres of water per minute is released from a skylight two storeys overhead, making for quite an impressive waterfall.



*Sampan boat on canal in shopping center*

Have I mentioned it rains quite a bit in Singapore? Its annual rainfall is over 92 inches and it rains an average of 167 days per year ... so be sure to bring an umbrella (we did and used them for both sun shade and the rain!). Hence, the rainwater-filled canal.

**Mass Transportation:** Singapore has excellent and inexpensive mass transportation via its *MRT (Mass Rapid Transit)* trains, its *LRT (Light Rail Transit)* trains, and its extensive bus system. Bus fares typically range from just over \$.50 up to \$1.25 while MRT fares range from \$.60 to \$1.50, for a single trip journey when paying with an ez-link card (tourist fare cards are available).

*Sign seen inside MRT Train:  
note the final prohibited item:  
No durians ... in case you don't  
know, durians are type of  
tropical fruit which have a  
VERY strong and rank odor  
that permeates its spikey  
outer shell*



*Speaking of durians ...  
the durian-shaped roof  
on the Esplanade  
Center, a performing  
arts center*

	
No smoking	No eating and drinking
Fine \$1000	Fine \$500
	
No flammable goods	No durians
Fine \$5000	

**Cars, Taxis and Grab Cars:** Private cars, taxis and *Grab Cars* all compete for space on Singapore streets. Given the cheap mass transit options (and limited parking in downtown areas), we often didn't see a lot of traffic on the roads though we did get caught up in some traffic jams in the area of *Orchard Road* (all those folks getting to the shopping centers) as well as leaving downtown at the end of a work day. *Grab* is a Singapore-based ride application available for use on the island. Steve downloaded the app before we left home and we found it an inexpensive and easy way to get around. Note: the music playing most often in our *Grab* cars was rock-n-roll. We also saw a few *Grab Food* motorbikes and/or scooters used to deliver people foods from their favorite places.

**Pedestrian Movement:** Sidewalks are narrow in the older part of town (Chinatown, Arab Town, etc.) and more generous in the newer part of town. Escalators are abundant as one would expect with so many shopping centers around. And, since it rains a lot, pedestrians who don't want to get wet (or to avoid the heat & humidity) may have the option of instead taking the underground *CityLink*. Ok, so technically this walkway is a shopping center and is Singapore's first subterranean mall but more importantly it links to several different MRT stations and other shopping centers which allowed us to stay dry while journeying back to our hotel one afternoon during an absolute and sustained downpour.



*CityLink and its subterranean connections*

**Miscellaneous Means of Transport:** Motorbikes, so abundant in other parts of Southeast Asia were not so apparent in the downtown area but seemed to be more popular in the outer areas (we saw huge motorbike parking areas coming back in from the Sentosa area and when we headed out of town to the zoo (more about the zoo later). Motorized scooters are heavily regulated – we saw one rider being questioned by the *Auxiliary Police* (they are officers vested with the same power, protection and immunity of a police officer of corresponding rank and are licensed to carry firearms; however, they are full-time employees of companies known as auxiliary police forces, and are not directly affiliated with the Singapore Police Force). We did see a few bike riders, mostly on the “trails” around the *Gardens by the Bay* area where they joined a steady stream of joggers (most of whom looked hot and sweaty!).

**Singapore & Nature:** Although its skyscrapers are likely its most visible elements, Singapore hasn't forgotten to celebrate Mother Nature and her creatures ...

The *Merlion* is the official mascot of Singapore, a mythical creature with a lion's head and the body of a fish. The original 27 ft high *Merlion* statue on the banks of the *Marina Bay*. The name *Singapore* comes from 'Singa Pura' which means Lion City in Sanskrit and 'Singam oor' which means city of lions in Tamil (an Indian language). Supposedly a Sumatran prince landed on Temasek (Singapore's old name) and saw a Lion which is called 'Singa' in Malay. Lions have actually never lived on the island, but it makes a nice story.

*Gardens by the Bay*, a nearly 250 acre site built on reclaimed land, includes two cooled glass-domed conservatories, multiple individual themed gardens, event and dining spaces, connecting waterways, lakes, aerial bridges and the showpiece, its *Supertrees*.



*The Merlion, Singapore's mascot*



The *Cloud Forest* conservatory is both a *cool place* to experience and literally a “cool” place to visit on a hot day. Inside we explored tropical highlands amidst orchids, pitcher plants and ferns from the cool-moist *Tropical Montane* region. Here we also encountered the world's tallest indoor waterfall at over 98 feet and descended through the surreal mists of the *Cloud Walk* and *Treetop Walk*. Interspersed within all the plant life were wonderful wood carvings and other pieces of art, often quite whimsical/fantasy-based.

We next visited the *Flower Dome*, the largest glass greenhouse in the world, which has a changing display of flowers and plants from the Mediterranean and semi-arid regions. The *Rose Romance Garden Trail* was on display during our visit. As in the *Cloud Forest* dome, various artwork elevated the plant displays.

*English rose garden inside the Flower Dome*



Within the downtown area, we didn't see many animals though we enjoyed watching an eagle soar over the *Marina Bay* area a couple of times. For a closer animal encounter, we headed out of downtown, via a shuttle bus, to the *Singapore Zoo* for its well-known *Night Safari*, the world's first nocturnal zoo. There, we joined hoards of other tourists for an eventual nighttime tramride (after waiting in a long, snaking line) to get glimpses of several nocturnal animals in very minimal/no light conditions. We also did some animal viewing via the walkways which were a lot less crowded.



*Sign inside a Flower Dome ladies restroom – a reminder to visitors from other parts of the world who may be only used to squat toilets, not sit-down ones*



Of course, we had to check out the *California Garden* area of the Flower Dome (citrus trees, manzanita, California lilac, a grapevine arbor, etc). The more unfamiliar and thus more seemingly exotic plants of the *South African* and *South American*, *Baobabs* were a bit more interesting to us.



*One animal sighting in Singapore: Steve holding dried Geckos at a traditional Chinese medicine shop*



If you're looking for some "green" in Singapore, in addition to its parks and greenspaces, be sure to check out the *vertical gardens* on buildings in the downtown area. I should also mention that nearly all the roadways we saw were nicely landscaped ... flowering bougainvillea, frangipani trees, palm trees and more added green and color!

***Singapore and Lights:*** It seems Singapore has a fascination with lights. At the palm-shaped *Museum of Art & Science*, we enjoyed the mesmerizing "Future World" exhibit which married digital technology with art and science.



*Parkroyal Hotel with vertical garden*

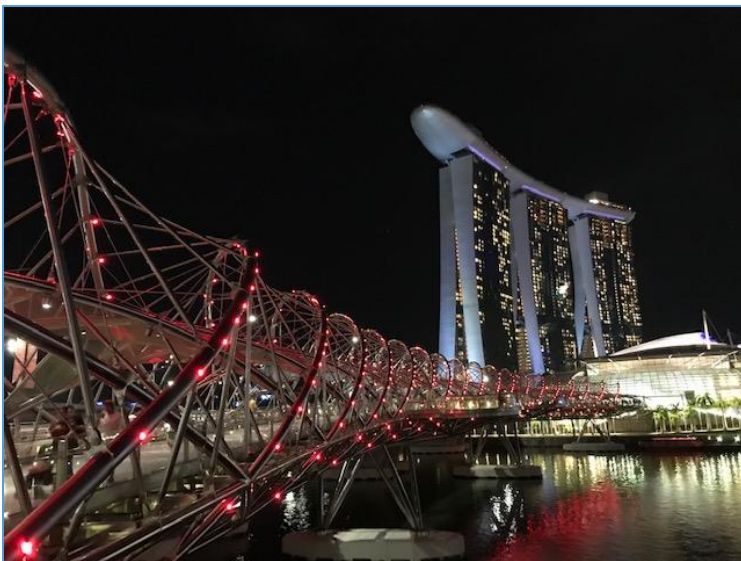


*Steve and I inside curtains of dazzling LED lights at the Future World exhibit at Museum of Art & Science*

A wonderful mix of modern and historical, Singapore really shines at night when "cooler" temperatures bring out the locals and the tourists to enjoy a dazzling display of lighted buildings and various light shows.



*Palm-shaped Museum of Art & Science*



*Double helix pedestrian bridge across Marina Bay*



*Supertrees at night in Gardens by the Bay*





*Singapore Flyer and Pyramid building (aka Millenia Tower)*



*Looking down on Supertrees & Supergrove from the Skypark*

Our Singapore visit exceeded whatever expectations we both had ... we'd both highly recommend a visit if you happen to be passing through the general Southeast Asia area. Our jetlag was nearly a thing of the past by the time we took the 2 ½ hour flight southeast to *Indonesia*, our next destination.

## Indonesia



Our time in *Indonesia* is best described in two parts: our time on the island of *Bali* and our time in *Wakatobi*.

**Bali:** The island and province of *Bali* is just one of the over 17,500 islands which comprise the country of *Indonesia*. While only 15<sup>th</sup> largest in physical size at only 288 sq. miles (the biggest islands include *New Guinea*, *Borneo*, *Sumatra*, *Sulawesi*, and *Java*), *Bali* is 5<sup>th</sup> in terms of population density with a population approaching 4.5 million.

We arrived at the *Denpasar Airport*, Denpasar being the capital city of Bali. Upon exiting our plane, we were greeted by representatives of the *Wakatobi Dive Resort* as well as a gentleman who facilitated our passage through customs (we were immediately whisked through the "crew" line; Steve arranged for this service through the Wakatobi concierge after reading that customs could be a pain). The Wakatobi reps gave us the rundown on our departure plans for Wakatobi in 4 days-time and then handed our luggage and ourselves over to our prearranged transport to our home for the next 4 nights, the *Ayana Resort and Spa*.



The drive from the airport to our hotel almost immediately presented a variety of contrasts between Bali and Singapore; the structured and controlled sense of Singapore was replaced by a more chaotic feeling as we were bombarded with a cacophony of movement, sound and visual stimulation. The roads were crammed with motor vehicles and motorbikes performing a noisy and never ending ballet of trying to get just a bit ahead of the next guy. The often lavish decorative elements of Hindu-related architecture/design proudly adorned the buildings lining the roads (Bali is nearly 84% Hindu). And, unfortunately, the discarded trash of its population also lined the roadways.

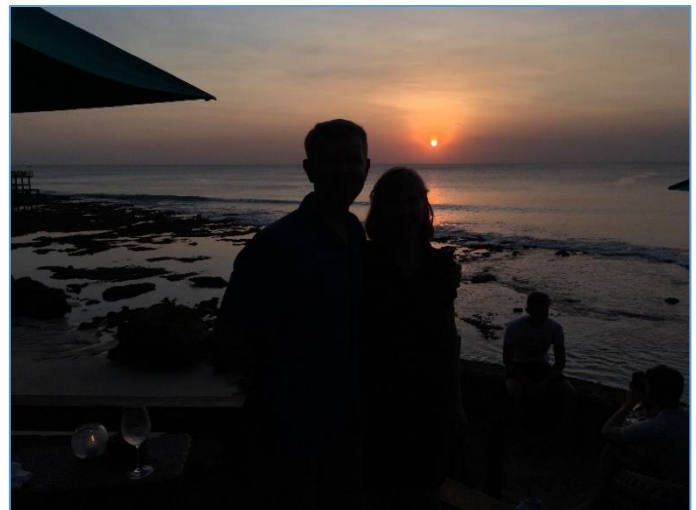
After settling in to our very nice Bali-décor inspired room at the *Ayana Resort and Spa* (we discovered later that the place was originally the Bali Ritz Carlton), we celebrated our first night in Bali by enjoying the sunset, a drink and some tapas at the fabled *Rock Bar*, located on natural rocks 45 feet above the Indian Ocean at the base of the resort. We had the option of either walking down the stairs or waiting in a fairly long line for the “inclinor” (an elevator on an incline) down to the bar – we chose to walk. Later, when back topside, a gelato was just the right finishing touch to the evening.



*Our lovely Bali-decor inspired room at Anaya Resort*



*Steve & I awaiting sunset at the Rock Bar*



*Sunset over the Indian Ocean in Bali, from the Rock Bar*

When researching “things to do” in Bali, several UNESCO World Heritage sites were mentioned so we had arranged for a full day tour of them. Thus, we met up with “Apple” from *Tours by Locals* the next morning who would be our driver and tour guide for the day. As our hotel was in the south part of the island, we’d have a long day of driving & sightseeing ahead. Before reaching our first UNESCO site of the day, we had a couple of intermediate stops – the first was the home of Apple’s sister-in-law’s family where his wife worked with that family to make and package incense sticks -- the use of incense is a traditional and ubiquitous practice in almost all pujas, prayers, and other forms of Hindu worship.



*Incense sticks in production*





*Hindu offerings*

Before journeying on, we checked out some colorful cocks just hanging out in front of a neighbor's house under baskets. Cockfighting, though technically illegal except when it is part of a Hindu ritual, is nevertheless very popular in Bali ... we saw countless baskets with the birds throughout our travels in Bali.



*Colorful cocks under baskets*

A stop at a local market consisting of many small vendor stalls was up next, where we marveled at the variety of fresh fruits & vegetables, meats, rice & noodles, etc. for sale as well as other non-eatable goods. We sampled a sweet tapioca-based dish with a variety of sticky rices (steamed in banana leaves) and topped with freshly grated coconut and a cane sugar dizzle. A woman seamstress working on a foot treadle sewing machine (i.e., human-powered) caught my eye as did the beautiful Balinese lace and batik fabrics her stall featured.



*Freshly grated coconut to top tapioca & sticky rice treat*



*Checking out rice variety and other items for sale*

We next visited the *Jatiluwi Rice Terraces*, named a UNESCO world heritage site in 2012. The terraces that make up this area are fed water by the traditional *Subak* irrigation system, a method preserved for centuries and passed down through generations. Watching workers harvest the rice using traditional methods was quite interesting, especially when they pulled out their smart phones to make a call.



*Jatiluwi Rice Terraces*





*Harvesting rice by hand & using a smartphone*



*Rice being dried*



*Rice being weighed*



*Steve & I at Jatiluwih Rice Terraces*

After a lunch overlooking the rice terraces, we continued north through the strawberry growing area of Bali – a surprise discovery for us -- we had some at breakfast one morning and at least the ones we ate were poor cousins in taste to fresh strawberries grown in California.

The picturesque *Ulun Danu Bratan Temple*, situated beside beautiful Lake Beratan, is part of the *Subak* irrigation system recognized by UNESCO. The temple was built in 1633. Lake Beratan is known as the “Lake of Holy Mountain” due to the fertility of this area. With an elevation of over 3900 feet, we enjoyed the cool mountain air.



*Steve & I at Ulun Danu Bratan Temple on Lake Beratan*



We left the scenic mountain area to travel back towards “town” to the *Taman Ayun Temple*. Here we had to don sarongs to cover our bare legs before entering this royal water temple. Additionally, the temple rules say women who are menstruating are not allowed to enter the temple.

Hindu temples in Bali are called “puras.” Puras are designed as an open air place of worship within enclosed walls, connected with a series of intricately decorated gates between its compounds. These walled compounds contain several shrines, meru (towers), and bale (pavilions).

There are many different types of puras in Bali (water puras, mountain puras, sea puras, puras dedicated to various deities, and many more types). Due to the large number of puras built in Bali, it is sometimes called “the Island of a Thousand Puras”. In addition to its many community/public puras, each Hindu household also has its own pura or “shrine.” As one drives along a road in Bali, each house along the way sports its own shrine in a front corner of the property, often decorated. When the number of these shrines is combined with the number of puras/temples, the total exponentially increases – they are everywhere!

Speaking of roads in Bali ... most are *officially* 2 lanes and often quite narrow. In reality, the 2 lanes become 6 lanes with each lane containing a flow of motorbikes on the left



Steve & I at Taman Ayun Temple



Portable gas pump on wheels

and right of the lane with a car/truck in the middle. Along many of the roads you’ll see an interesting phenomenon: *official portable gas pumps* and *unofficial gas in liquor bottles*. Since the number of permanent gas stations in Bali is relatively low, *portable official gas pumps* (with either one or two grades of gas) provide many additional “locations” to fill up. Taking gas supplies even closer to more consumers involves the display/selling of  $\frac{3}{4}$  liter of gas in used 1 liter alcohol bottles – don’t think this practice would pass US safety regs!



Gas sold by the 3/4 liter used alcohol bottle



We ended the very long day with a late al fresco Italian meal back at our hotel. Near the end of our meal the sounds of the nearby pool waterfall and gentle ocean breezes were rudely interrupted by a nearby young woman screaming very loudly at her male companion for several minutes about how “you always do this to me” and such ... the commotion had the entire restaurant, including staff, feeling quite sorry for the guy before eventually she stalked off and he snuck away.

The following day, Kenny was our driver/tour guide to explore the areas near *Ubud*. The town of Ubud, in the uplands of Bali, is known as a center for traditional crafts and dance. The *Batuan Temple* was our first stop of the day. This ancient structure dates to the 11th century and is embellished with intricate stone carvings. Here, we were again required to wear sarongs for our visit as we were both wearing leg-revealing outfits.



*At Batuan Temple*

Our next stop of the day was a *silverworks* in the village of Celuk where we watched craftsmen/women work silver in a variety of techniques. I found a silver-embellished cowry shell pendant on a silver chain that appealed to me ... I asked Steve to purchase it while I took a bio break. Once he got over the shock of its 1.6 Million Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) price tag, the transaction went smoothly after being shown a US \$ cost of around \$119 ... with an exchange rate of approx. 14,083 IDR to \$1 US, it takes a little time to get used to paying for things in such large numbers.

Neighboring villages (all now just one large area of sprawl) were renowned for other crafts such as stone carving, wood carving, furniture making, etc. As we drove around, it was fun to see the workshops and their goods displayed right along the roadsides. Some of the large stone and wood carvings looked fantastic but heavy – not something to tuck into a suitcase.



Ubud was teeming with tourists and shops. Kenny dropped us off at a local “crafts” market for a stroll through stall after stall of mostly touristy items. After taking a quick look we instead opted to grab a cold drink before meeting back up with Kenny for the short drive to the nearby *Monkey Forest*, owned and operated by the village of Padangtegal. It is a natural forest sanctuary that is home to over 800 grey long-tailed *macaques* (a type of Old World monkey). We enjoyed strolling through the well laid out forest trails and watching the antics of the monkeys, who are well fed, but quite curious about their human visitors ... a fun place to spend a hour or so.



*Macaque monkeys at the Ubud Monkey Forest*



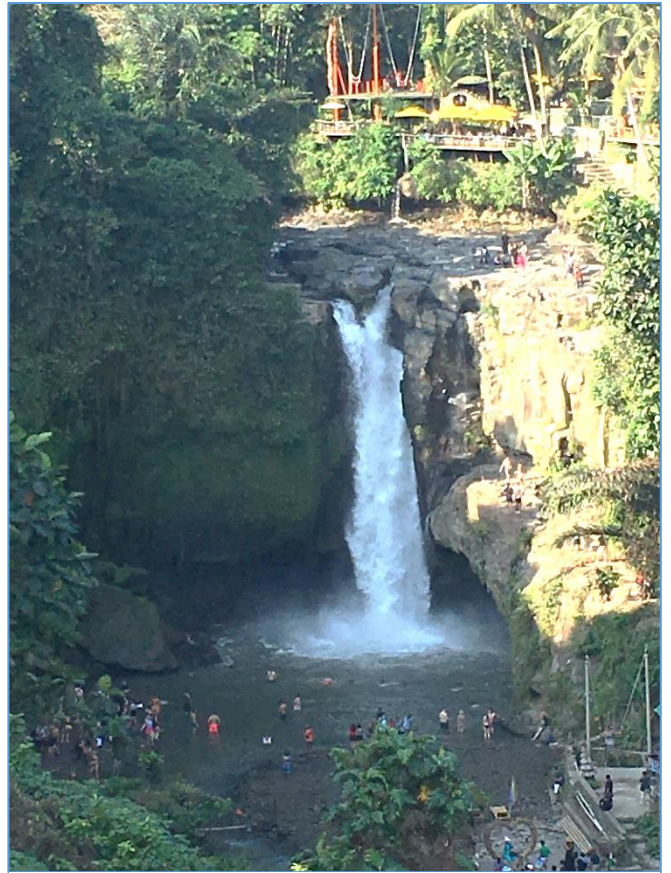
After some lunch we headed to the nearby *Tegalalang Rice Terraces*. These rice terraces are NOT a UNESCO World Heritage Site but instead have become a very touristy area. The individual family owned terraces now compete with one another for the all mighty tourist dollar (ok, tourist Indonesian Rupiah) by offering a variety of jungle swings and snack bars. The hillside overlooking the rice terraces is chockful of terraced restaurants with loads of tourist shops along the road as well. The tourists were certainly out that day, including us!

*Terraced restaurants overlooking the Tegalalang Rice Terraces*





A peaceful waterfall seemed like a nice change from the crowds at *Tegalalang* but unfortunately it was not to be. *Tegenungan Waterfall*, about 50 feet in height, is surrounded by lush vegetation and also by a restaurant/bar blasting music so loud it could easily be heard over the sound of the waterfall itself. Just over 100 steps and a short path takes you down to the popular bathing pool. There are some fun balancing rock sculptures down river of the waterfall (and some very silly signs for selfies). After climbing back up the 100+ steps an ice cream bar was my reward.



*Tegenungan Waterfall*

*Balanced rock sculptures downstream of Tegenungan Waterfall*



Speaking of “selfies” ... both in Singapore and Indonesia we became painfully aware of the phenomena of “Selfie Queens” or SQ’s as we called them. These usually quite young women, artfully dressed and styled to the max in terms of hair and make-up, would strike a pose and have their picture taken – sometimes as a true selfie (i.e., they actually took a photo) but more often the photo was taken by their “selfie sherpa.” The gorgeous location/historic monument/tourist attraction/etc. that comprised the background of the photo was obviously a distant second to the subject “queen.” At the *Jatiluwih Rice Terraces* one selfie queen had her selfie sherpa running a drone to get shots of her! As it appeared most of these women had fake eyelashes of some sort, my signal to Steve of an approaching selfie queen was fluttering my eyelashes at him.

After another long day of seeing the sights, we were greeted back in our hotel room by this charming little fellow on the right ... dressed in traditional native attire, including the *Udeng* headdress. That evening we took the resort’s trolley shuttle to the sister resort, Rimba, and enjoyed dinner at one of the restaurants there.

The next day we enjoyed a leisurely breakfast (while watching a local iguana swim in the dining-side water canal) and even spent some time down by the pool – under a shade structure of course! I enjoyed a much-needed Balinese-style massage (stong pressure using palms and thumbs) at the resort’s spa and then joined Steve for a healthy lunch at the Spa Café.





Mid afternoon we had our final Bali tour ... our driver/guide took us to the oceanside *Uluwatu Temple*. This temple sits above the Indian Ocean on a cliff. It is also known for its aggressive monkeys who will gleefully try to snatch anything and everything they can from visiting humans. We watched one little fellow skillfully reach into a young woman's backpack (after jumping up on her back) and begin to pull things out from under its closed flap. The trail was littered with pieces of eyeglasses and sunglasses that had been snatched from their owners.



*Uluwatu Temple*

After walking the clifftop and admiring the temple's spectacular setting (and steering clear of the marauding monkeys), we made our way to the temple's outdoor amphitheater. We were there to see a sunset performance of the *Kecak* fire dance. Due to the popularity of this event, we had to arrive an hour ahead of the performance time and make ourselves at home on the tiered concrete steps/seats. To help pass the time we chatted with a young American man sitting next to us who

now lives in Bali with his American wife and their young baby – he was saving seats for his wife, baby, and visiting in-laws. Once the inlaws arrived we quickly discovered that the father-in-law used to be a partner with Ernst & Young in Cincinnati (Steve and I both worked at EY) and that he had worked with one of our good friends, Sharon Moulton, who had worked at EY Cincinnati before transferring to the EY Denver office where we became acquainted ... small world! It was also the 2<sup>nd</sup> time that we've accidentally run into folks far from home that knew Sharon (the time before was when we were standing in line at the Manila airport in the Philippines).

After cramming as many people as possible into the amphitheater's seating tiers and sitting addition folks on its floor, the performance troupe was left with only a small circular stage area and a narrow pathway from the periphery. The Kecak fire dance is performed without instruments; instead a chanting, clapping, chorus of over 3 dozen men provide the "music." The story line involves a prince's wife being kidnapped by an evil man – the prince & his brother, along with help from a monkey king and his troops, eventually subdue the evil man and the two lovers are finally reunited right after the setting sun.

*Kecak fire dance at Uluwatu Temple*







Places we visited in Bali

Early the next morning we started the 2<sup>nd</sup> and final part of our Indonesian adventures: diving Wakatobi.

### Wakatobi

A Wing Air charter flight took us, 20 other folks, 2 flight attendants, and lots of cargo from the Denpasar airport on the island of Bali to the Marrango airstrip on the Wakatobi island of *Tomia*. The 2 ½ hour prop plane flight allowed us to see some of the vast island chains and atolls that make up Indonesian, many of them punctuated by volcanos rising from their shores.

The name *Wakatobi* comes from combining the first 2 letters of the names of the 4 largest islands that make up the area (it has a total of 143 islands of which only 7 are inhabited): Wangi-wangi, Kaledupa, Tomia, and Binongko. *Wakatobi National Park* is a marine national park established in 2002. Since 2005, the park is listed as a *tentative* UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The national park comprises over 5000 sq miles of which nearly 3,500 host tropical coral reefs. Wakatobi has the highest number of reef and fish species in the world. The islands form the largest barrier reef in Indonesia, second only to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. Thus, our reason for being here: scuba diving the wonders of Wakatobi!

Our home base for a week of diving would be the *Pelagian*, a live-aboard dive boat which is part of the *Wakatobi Dive Resort* located on the island of Tomia (hence our flight to this island). The Wakatobi Dive Resort was built from scratch, it



Atolls seen from air on flight from Bali to Wakatobi island of Tomia





*Wakatobi Dive Resort on island of Tomia*

After enjoying a nice lunch at the *Wakatobi Dive Resort* we transferred, via boat shuttle to the *Pelagian* where we quickly unpacked in our very spacious cabin (there are only 5 cabins), complete with ensuite bathroom, accessed via a private staircase. The *Pelagian* is often included in the top ten list of liveabords in the world and it is easy to see why! This was luxury diving indeed.



*Our cabin for the week*

generates its own power and its own fresh water. They built the airstrip on which we landed to make the resort easily accessible (previously only accessible via a several days trek overland and via local ferry).

The 119 ft long *Pelagian* boasts a crew of 12 to pamper its maximum guest count of 10. For our week aboard, there were only 9 guests, 7 of which were divers with the other 2 being snorkelers-only.

*Pelagian live-aboard dive boat*



Our fellow guests for the week hailed from around the world:

- Leif and Magne, 2 male friends from Norway; they were diving with rebreathers which meant when we spotted them below us there were NO bubbles coming up from them – a bit weird
- Garth and Rose Mary. husband and wife from South Africa
- Yasuko, woman from Tokyo
- Jeff and Dottie, long time partners from San Diego, California; they would only be snorkeling

The guests were divided into 2 subgroups: each assigned to a dive master and specific inflatable. Our subgroup included:

- Steve and myself
- Yasuko
- Ramon – the dive group divemaster
- Jeff & Dottie
- Judith – the snorkelers



*Your dive equipment is placed on the inflatables at the beginning of the week and stays there so easy on & off from the mother ship*

Ramon and Judith, a delightful married couple from Barcelona, Spain, also served as the week's "cruise directors," so they oversaw the guest's total experience for the week.



On a beautiful coral wall, we had a late afternoon “check out dive” – our first of 18 dives for me, and 23 for Steve. A couple of our fellow divers, specifically Rose Mary and Garth, did not participate in the check out dive as they were not feeling well; they originally “thought” it was food poisoning from one of the earlier flights but when first Leif, then Magne succumbed to the same illness about 24 – 36 hours later it was quite apparent that it was a nasty virus instead (Garth and Rose Mary had dove with Leif and Magne in the past so some hug-greetings had occurred when they reconnected at the Denpasar airport). When subsequently Dottie and Jeff came down with the same nasty bug another 24 hours after Leif, the rest of us (including all the crew) were sweating bullets hoping we would somehow avoid the plague, which fortunately the remainder of us did.

We quickly fell into the daily *Pelagian* routine:

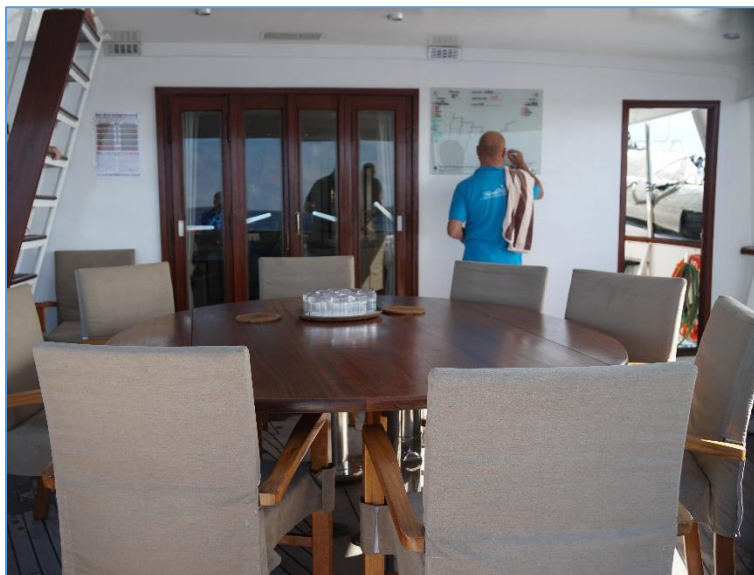
6am – Light continental breakfast available self serve

6:45am – 1<sup>st</sup> dive briefing/1<sup>st</sup> dive

Before each dive, the crew places your neatly folded wetsuit/booties on the back deck in sun; you gear up there before the dive briefing and then depart the mother ship via a zodiac which takes you to/from the actual dive site.

As you come back aboard after each dive, someone immediately takes your “hot beverage” order. Along the sides of the ship are hot water hoses; there you take off your wetsuit/booties, hose off yourself and your gear (wetsuits are left hanging on the railing and a crew member takes them up to the sun deck and hangs them up to dry). Then, awaiting you on the back deck is your personal post-dive towel (dried after each use by the crew), a steaming, scented wash cloth (straight from the microwave) which feels great on your face/neck and the hot beverage you requested (hot chocolate, tea, coffee, etc).

8:30ish – Hot breakfast served to order (Indonesian fried noodles, an overeasy egg, fresh tropical fruit and yogurt quickly become my standard order). At the conclusion of breakfast, the menus for the daily’s lunch and dinner were presented and your custom order was taken -- changes, substitutions, and completely different menu items were encouraged as providing chef-prepared gourmet meals is an important aspect of the service provided. Juices, milk, and hot beverages available at all times – as are the candy bowl and cookie jar!



*Ramon prepping for dive briefing on back deck*



*Getting ready hot breakfast*

10:30am – 2<sup>nd</sup> dive briefing/2<sup>nd</sup> dive



*Pelagian's galley is quite well appointed – perfect for turning out delicious gourmet meals!*

12:30pm - One's pre-ordered custom lunch is served! Sodas are available at all times though they do cost extra; a self-marked “tally” of sodas drank is kept next to the self-serve refrigerator.



2:30pm – 3<sup>rd</sup> dive briefing/3<sup>rd</sup> dive

Post dive savory snacks await you on the back deck! Need anything – just ask! As I usually didn't do the 4<sup>th</sup> dive, my post-3<sup>rd</sup> dive routine included asking for a plastic glass filled with ice so I could take it and a soda to the sun deck to lounge

4:30pm – 4<sup>th</sup> dive briefing/4<sup>th</sup> dive

7pm - Night dive IF anyone wants it; except for the one day that a few folks chose to do a night dive, we and our fellow guests instead choose to have a 7pm dinner (otherwise dinner happened AFTER the night dive which meant it happened quite late) – our group were ready to enjoy our custom-ordered dinners at 7pm, often accompanied by a glass of wine or bottle of beer (or two).

8:30pm-ish – Nightly briefing on what to expect tomorrow and often an “educational” short video (check out the “True Facts” series of videos on YouTube for some fun and illuminating short takes on various ocean creatures and other animals).

Bedtime – personal choice but with an early start each morning, it seemed most of us weren't being night owls, at least for this week!

Our week of diving in Wakatobi was all about “smaller stuff” as well as the gorgeous and abundant corals – their colors, shapes, and textures, all adding up to some amazing sights underwater. Trying to describe the visual beauty of a vertical wall alive with corals in a rainbow of stunning colors is impossible for me to do. The *Latipu Wall* off the small island of Karang Kapota was especially memorable – the incredible spectrum of its coral's colors -- shades of purples and pinks, orange, goldenrod and more were just magnificent in the afternoon light.

Just some limited highlights (note: all pixs are from the web as Steve did not bring his underwater camera on this trip) ...

- *Denise's Pygmy Seahorses*: these little guys & gals can, at maximum, reach about 9/10<sup>th</sup>s of an inch in length. The ones we saw were usually closer to about 5/16 of an inch. They live in seafans of basically the same color as they are so they can be hard to spot. It was fascinating to watch them unhook their tail from the seafan, float up or down in the water, and then reattach themselves to the seafan with their tail. On the web checkout a great video of a male of the species giving birth – all filmed on the Wakatobi Dive Resort's house reef – amazing stuff.



*The sun deck*



*Table set for a dinner*



*Denise's Pygmy Seahorses*



- *Bubble Coral and Bubble Coral Shrimp:* the aptly-named Bubble Coral is home to a colorful but tiny shrimp (about ½" long).



*Bubble Coral Shrimp and Bubble Coral*

- *Anemonefish and Anemones:* we saw all types and sizes of anemonefish and their hosts, the anemone. Nine species of anemonefish can be found in the area including Clarks, Orange Fin, Orange Skunk, Pink Skunk, False Clownfish, and Percula Clownfish. The anemones themselves are varied in color and size – the brilliant red ones were especially beautiful but so were the purple/electric blue, yellow, and pink ones! It was easy to just hang around an anemone watching the busy anemonefish as they dart in and out of the anemone's stinging tentacles (these are used to capture small prey animals (anemonefish have the ability to acclimate to the stinging cells of the anemone). When you see an anemone all balled up you know it is busy ingesting its prey.

*Anemonefish and Anemones*



- *Juvenile Midnight Snappers:* these cuties don't look much like their grown-up selves but they are fun to find hiding among with corals.



*Juvenile Midnight Snapper*



*Adult Midnight Snapper*

- *Anna's Chromodoris and Other Nudibranchs:* while we saw a variety of nudibranches, Anna's were most abundant – on one dive a party of 5 of them were in a 6" to 8" square area. These very colorful sea slugs are usually between 1" and 2" in length.

*Anna's Chromodoris*





- *Fire Dartfish and Two-tone Dartfish*: named for their “darting” movements, these hover over their dens (holes in the sand) and then dart back to safety inside when they feel threatened (e.g., when a large black mass of a diver approaches).



*Fire Dartfish*



*Two-tone Dartfish*

- *Mushroom Coral Pipefish*: The mushroom coral pipefish is only found among the tentacles of the anemone-like long-tentacle mushroom coral. At most, it is just over 3” in length

*Mushroom Coral Pipefish*



- *Some other standouts*:
  - *Leaf Scorpionfish* -- look at these very weird guys but don't touch as they are very poisonous
  - *Crocodile Fish* – there's no question why these prehistoric looking fish are named after their amphibious brethren
  - *Hairy Squat Lobsters* – not much meat on these ½” creatures which are also known as *Barrel Sponge Crabs* (though they are not crabs) because you find them on barrel sponges!
  - *Various other shrimps* – including *Peacock Shrimp*, *Spearing Mantle Shrimp* and *Squat Shrimp*



*Peacock Shrimp*




*Hairy Squat Lobster*

- *Assorted Cast of Tropical Fishes and Creatures*: we also enjoyed the usual cast of butterfly (including saddled, racoon, pyramid and ornate) and angel fish, moorish idols, bannerfish, trumpet fish, porcupine fish (including the *Masked Porcupine*), trigger fish (including Red Tooth, Clown, Indian, and Picasso species), boxfish, garden eels, moray eels, and the very occasional turtle and small shark.

We had hoped to do some “muck diving” while in Wakatobi but the conditions were not right – a recent storm had stirred up the bottom silt making visibility difficult (muck diving usually takes place where at glance it might appear to be a desolate, often volcanic, sandy bottom but one often rich in weird and wonderful marine life). Speaking of visibility ... the waters of Wakatobi were not the always the desired crystal clear with seemingly endless visibility; instead, the usual visibility for us was approximately 100 feet.

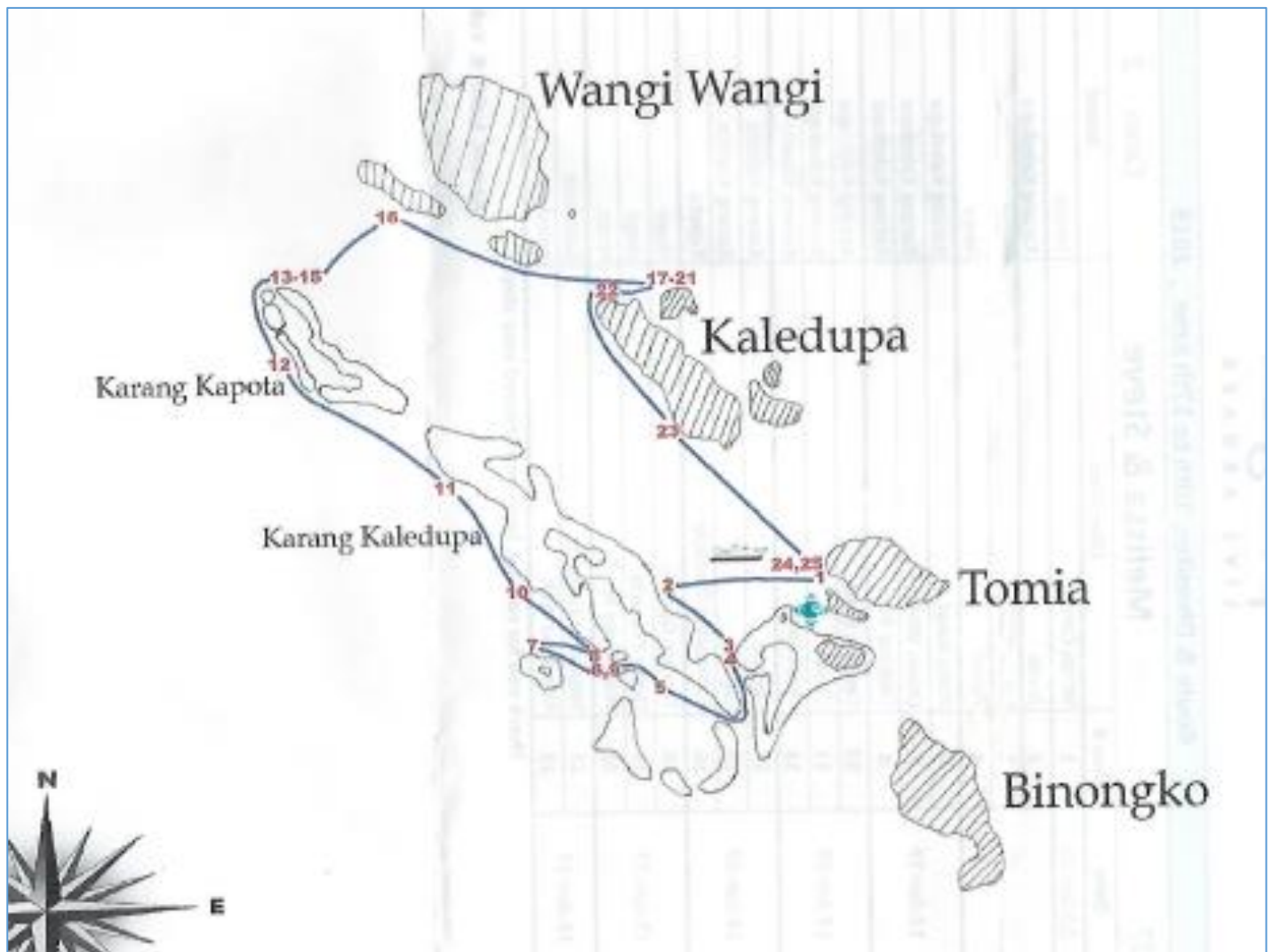


The table to the rights shows the dive site names/locations we dove in Wakatobi. The map below provides some geographical info on where these dive sites are located within the Wakatobi area.

 <b>pelagian</b> LIVE ABOARD			
Route & Divesites, 10th to 17th June , 2019			
P37	<b>Melissa &amp; Steve</b>		Cabin 2
Date	Dive #	Dive Sites	Island
10-Jun-19	1	Waiti Corner	Tomia
	2	Blade	Karang Kaledupa
11-Jun-19	3	Inka's Palette	Sawa
	4	Pastel	Sawa
12-Jun-19	6	Pintu Barat	Karang Kaledupa
	7	Otiolo West	Karang Kaledupa
	8	Tanjung Bury	Karang Kaledupa
13-Jun-19	10	Tanjung Baru	Karang Kaledupa
	11	Likuen	Karang Kaledupa
	12	Latipu Wall	Karang Kapota
14-Jun-19	14	Lagoon	Karang Kapota
	15	Lagoon	Karang Kapota
	16	Fishmarket Pinnacle	Kapota
15-Jun-19	18	Terrace Garden	Hoga
	19	Outer Pinnacle	Hoga
	20	Hoga buoy Nr. 7	Hoga
16-Jun-19	22	Neptunes Garden	Kaledupa
	23	Kaledupa Wall	Kaledupa

Thank you for coming, hope you enjoyed your stay.

Ramon, Judith & Ketut





Besides the incredible scenery below its water, the Wakatobi area is also home to some interesting sights above the water. The area has been home to the *Bajo* people for hundreds of years. The Bajo, also known as *Sea Gypsies*, live their lives on and from the sea; they build their houses over the water on stilts, use boats as their main form of transportation, and work as fisherman.



*Sea Gypsy Village*



*Sea Gypsy Fisherman cleaning his catch*

Our week aboard the Pelagian came to an end seemingly all too quickly for so many reasons. The last night aboard, the group raised glasses of mojitos to our time together. Steve and I had a more personal toast as well: to our 30<sup>th</sup> and final scuba diving trip. We had been talking for some time about bringing our scuba diving adventures to a close for a number of reasons:

- On nearly all those trips I invariably ended up with an ear infection, even while on antibiotic ear drops throughout a dive trip. Steve had also begun to experience some difficulty with ear equalization while diving.
- When we looked at dive locations we hadn't yet been to, there was usually a very good reason for us not doing so (cold water conditions, strong current conditions, etc.) And, unfortunately, climate change and human impact are not being kind to earth's oceans – coral bleaching and the impact of plastic waste are just a couple of well-known negative impacts.
- Our personal "bucket lists" associated with diving had been more than fulfilled, and from so many perspectives. During our time in Wakatobi, Steve celebrated his 600<sup>th</sup> dive while I exceeded 450 dives – well beyond any imagined number 20 years earlier when we were first certified. Each and every one of those underwater journeys allowed us to insert ourselves into an absolutely amazing world of creatures great and small, living in often astonishing habitats, all bound together in a patchwork of color, texture, movement, and sometimes sound. We have been so fortunate to *safely* experience so much diversity and beauty that we wanted to "go out on top"!





Earlier I mentioned that Steve had not brought his underwater camera with him. However, he had brought the GoPro to take underwater videos which he did on almost every dive he made. Each night he transferred the day's video to his MacBook laptop computer. So, a funny thing happened on the way to the forum, oops, I meant airstrip ... After our last night aboard the Pelagian, we and all our luggage were taken via water taxi to the Wakatobi Dive Resort. While we enjoyed a buffet breakfast, the staff would transfer our luggage to their water shuttle which would take us to the airstrip. As we were just finishing eating, a couple of staff came up to us carrying one of Steve's suitcases. Long story short, during the transfer process on the jetty it had been placed on its 4-wheeled base, decided on its own to make a run for it, and ended up taking a swan dive into the sea! The only thing that never "dried out" properly was the MacBook Pro with all the dive videos on it (once home Steve investigated possible recovery options but ultimately decided a minimum \$2000 price tag for "possible" recovery of the files wasn't worth it). The Wakatobi Dive Resort folks took immediate responsibility for the situation and couldn't have been more apologetic and professional – they ended up wiring us money to replace the damaged laptop. Steve and I figured that if a diving-related incident had to have occurred, a laptop being damaged rated quite low on the damage meter.

The 44 hour trip back to Denver was long but mostly uneventful ... midday charter flight from Tongia airstrip to Bali, hotel day room in Denpasar airport, evening flight to Singapore, a few hours sleep and a shower in a "transit hotel" at the Singapore airport, a 16 ½ flight to San Francisco, a much-welcomed shower and change of clothes in SFO's United Club, final flight into Denver where we landed just before a summer thunderstorm let loose which closed the ground operations for about 1 ½ hours (i.e., getting luggage off planes) ... so the time we ended up waiting for our luggage to arrival took longer than the flight from SFO to Denver. Bottom line: safely home after a great adventure!

*Sunset over the Banda Sea in Wakatobi*

