

4 – YOGYAKARTA AND MOUNT BROMO

Monday, 9 July

I woke early this morning feeling rather groggy after my short sleep. I took my time about getting up; later I went over to the restaurant, where I ordered an omelette for breakfast.

When ready, I left and began a leisurely walk towards the Sultan's Palace via Malioboro Street. I stopped at various shops to look at shirts and sandals, then finally, after trying on many pairs, just bought a pair of comfortable slip-on sandals for a very moderate price. I also looked for films for my camera, but did not see any for sale.

I stopped at the museum, which I thought might be worth a visit, but found that it was closed on Mondays. I spoke briefly to a Japanese girl, then walked on to the palace, where I could hear the gamelan orchestra rehearsing. While paying the entrance fee, I met a middle-aged lady from Paris, who turned out to be a very pleasant and refined person. As she was intent on listening to the rehearsal, we sat together at the pavilion where the gamelan orchestra was, and chatted mostly in French. As she spoke slowly and clearly, I was able to understand her most of the time. As she enjoyed the music so much, it was wonderful to be with somebody who was able to appreciate it to the full. I explained to her how the instruments were played. I mentioned that the French composer Claude Debussy had been enchanted by gamelan music when he had attended the Paris *Exposition Universelle* in 1889 – a fact that she already knew.

I had only intended staying for a short while, but in the end left when the rehearsal finished at half past ten. I said goodbye to the lady and walked back to my lodgings along the same route. I finally found a film and camera shop, where I bought some more slide film. I should have brought more from home.

I returned to the restaurant where I had a very filling lunch consisting of chicken soup followed by chicken cooked in coconut sauce with rice. The soup unexpectedly turned out to be a meal in itself. Despite my recent caution when it came to choosing food, my stomach was still giving me trouble, and once again I felt rather queasy after eating. However, I decided to go ahead with my plan to take a proper look at the temples at Prambanan, where the ballet performances were taking place. I threw a few things into my daypack, walked to the minibus stop, caught a bus and immediately set off.

I arrived at Prambanan a little over half an hour later, despite various stops and delays. I hopped out, started to walk towards the entrance and was approached by a *becak* cyclist who managed to persuade me that the entrance was a kilometre away. I told him that I could walk the distance easily, but as he persisted, I paid a small fee and hopped on to the pedicab. The fellow earned his money easily, for the entrance was just up the road!

At the entrance I bought a ticket and approached the three large and rather ugly Hindu temples, which I looked at properly when scores of schoolchildren and adults had left. I then wandered around. Although I did not care for this style of architecture, I was delighted to find myself in a sacred place that was so old and venerable. I could now appreciate the connection between these ancient buildings and the performances of the Ramayana ballet by studying the detailed carvings on the great blocks of stone; this time everything seemed to fit into place. By now there were few people about, for the ticket office was closed. It was pleasant to wander around the area as the light slowly faded.

At about six o'clock I left with some other people and walked the short distance to the theatre. I had planned to go in early, sit down and write some more of my diary. I bought a ticket, and inside purchased a bottle of water, a small packet of pastries, and a slice of cake. I also hired a cushion.

I now discovered that a few people had already arrived and were seated. I sat down and ate my light meal. Just as I took out my diary, I was joined by a French fellow who sat beside me and chatted. Once again I had to postpone writing my diary!

As on previous occasions, the performance started at seven o'clock with the familiar entrance procession and the illumination of the three temples behind. The action then got underway. This evening's performance was quite interesting. I was glad that I had decided to watch all four parts, for it seemed pointless just seeing one.

When it was finished, I left with two girls whom I had seen this morning, and who had been sitting behind me this evening. One was an American, named Maureen, and the other an Australian, named Karen. We went off in search of transport back to Yogya, and ended up travelling in one of the big coaches. A couple of folding chairs were produced and we were squeezed in. Anything was possible here! I chatted to Maureen, who was sitting in front of me.

We got off together in the city centre and decided to have a meal. We walked to a nearby restaurant, where I ordered fried noodles with prawns and chicken; Maureen, who was tired and had a cold, only drank something and left early. As the girls had told me that Solo, the next city en route eastwards, was not worth visiting, I decided to spend tomorrow just relaxing and writing, then joining the girls in the evening for a meal that had to be ordered a day in advance.

On our way back to our losmens, Karen and I popped into the restaurant opposite where I was staying to look at the menu and speak to the lady in charge. She told me that we could order the meal tomorrow morning if we wished. The girls were hoping that a friend named Bob might join us; he would need to be contacted first. I accompanied Karen to her losmen, said goodnight to her, then returned to my lodgings, where I went to bed early.

Tuesday, 10 July

I woke this morning at about six o'clock, but got up at seven. I wrote a little of my diary and then went to the restaurant for breakfast just before eight. Fiona joined me and later Maureen and Karen, who informed me that they had decided not to bother about this evening's meal. After breakfast I returned to the losmen and handed in two pairs of trousers to be washed. I then sat in the courtyard and wrote my diary, finally bringing it up to date by about midday. I then started a letter to my parents, but stopped soon after one o'clock in order to have lunch. I walked round to a restaurant that I had been told about but had not yet tried: Mame's in Kembang Market. The dish that I chose – chicken in coconut sauce with rice – turned out to be too spicy for my liking and I could not finish it. I therefore chose a banana pancake as a dessert, which was quite filling.

I then left and walked around the block, doing a little bit of window shopping, and stopped at a pharmacy to buy some medication. Back in the losmen I completed the letter home and started another one to a neighbour. When I had finished it, I posted the two letters, then wrote some postcards for friends.

Later, when I spotted Josephine and Alain in the restaurant, I went over to join them. They were surprised to see me, for I had told them that I was going to Mount Bromo today. When I learned that they would be going to Solo tomorrow, I decided to alter my plans and go with them and stay there just for one day. We had a meal together; this evening I turned to the French grill section of the menu and chose the 'Steak Frites', which turned out to be quite good. At least it was a change from so much chicken!

When we had finished, we walked along Malioboro Street. Josephine and Alain wanted to buy some of the colourful shirts that were popular with the tourists. I bought one of them and couple of plainer batik shirts. We looked around a little more and finally returned to our respective lodgings.

Back in my lodgings, I let Fiona take my 'Teach Yourself Indonesian' book as she was interested in learning more of the language. I then got my things ready for the following morning, wrote my diary and went to bed.



Wednesday, 11 July

I woke early this morning after a good, refreshing sleep and got up just before six o'clock. By seven I had washed, dressed, written three more postcards, and was in the restaurant, ready for breakfast. Josephine and Sandra were at the table, but not Alain; Josephine now informed me that he was sick and so their plans would have to be altered. Having considered the matter for a couple of moments, I decided to go back to 'Plan A' and take the special bus to Mount Bromo today. As soon as I had finished my breakfast of toast and a poached egg, I left to send off my postcards and nip into the tourist information office. As luck would have it, there was a seat for me on the bus. The girl now told me that a ticket would cost 20,000 Rp. I reminded her that she had originally quoted me 18,000 Rp. When she said that this amount would do, I bought a ticket. This would leave us all free to do what we wanted to do. I did not mind skipping Solo as I had had enough of Javanese cities by this stage.

I then rejoined Josephine and Fiona, then later popped out, this time to buy some more medication for myself and Josephine, who would give some of the tablets to Alain. Back in the restaurant again, I took some of the medication for my dodgy tummy, paid up, said goodbye, and quickly removed my belongings from my room as some Germans were waiting to move in. I finally said goodbye to everyone and marched off to the tourist information office with all my luggage. I was actually quite sorry to leave this little corner of Yogyakarta as I had liked it so much.

I was not too surprised to have to wait some time until the bus arrived at about 8.45; nor was I very surprised to see the lovely Sheila getting on the bus. We moved up to the front, but took separate seats in order to give ourselves maximum space. I sat just behind the driver. We then had to wait for people arriving from different hotels nearby. The bus quickly filled up, but we were able to retain the two seats, one behind the other. We finally set off at about nine o'clock.

I could tell from the start that we were in for a rough ride, as the bus was quite dilapidated. It really should have been in a museum – or, better still, in a scrapyard! The noise of the engine was deafening, it moved sluggishly, and the driver seemed to have constant difficulty changing gear. I wondered if we would make it to our destination!

It was certainly a rough journey, and very a tedious and exhausting one too. We all took turns at nodding off and, when bottoms got sore, standing up. Despite the fact that all the windows were open and the fans were switched on, we were boiled with the heat. The scenery was not very spectacular at any point during the journey, and the road went through many small villages and towns.

We finally stopped for lunch at 1.30 p.m. The restaurant was noisy and the prices were inflated. I tucked into a bowl of chicken soup that contained rice, and drank a glass of iced tea. Sheila merely had a Coke, two bananas and some nuts. She had been eating apples on the bus. She seemed to exist solely on a diet of fruit!

I freshened myself up and we drove off again an hour later. The journey went on and on. I now sat beside Sheila, who either dozed or listened to music on her Walkman. At one stage during the journey we saw some huge mountains ahead – possibly Mount Bromo and others – then passed through a flat landscape that reminded me of the northern Indian plains. It turned dark at about six o'clock.

After what seemed like an eternity we finally arrived in Probolinggo at about eight o'clock and transferred to two minibuses. We then drove at a terrific speed up Mount Bromo to the last village named Ngadisari, where our journey finally came to an end outside a tourist information office. I followed Sheila inside and found her questioning a man on tomorrow's early morning bus tour to the viewing point. As eight people wanted to see the sunrise from the top of the volcano, we paid 10,000 Rp each and got our tickets. The tour would start at four in the morning.

We now looked for somewhere to stay and were conducted to a losmen by a local man. Sheila and I got a room containing two large beds for a very moderate sum – which was quite enough for the amount of time we would be spending in it! We left our bags in the room and went outside to a little *warung* (roadside stall), where we drank tea and coffee and chatted to some of the locals. Some men from Jakarta were making a film about the mountain.

Later we went off in search of something to eat. As the restaurant was now closed, I ordered *nasi goreng* (fried rice) at a *warung*. Sheila just ate most of a large mango. When we finished eating, we paid up and returned to the losmen. We retired to bed early but, as I was wide awake, I sat up writing today's diary and read a little.

Thursday, 12 July

I woke at some ungodly hour of the morning and more or less stayed awake; Sheila and I were chatting in the dark when my alarm clock went off at 3.30 a.m. We rose sleepily, washed, dressed, and were out in the square waiting for our jeep just before four o'clock. I grabbed a cup of tea while we waited. As the sky was clear and we could see a magnificent array of stars above us, it looked as though we had an ideal morning for a dramatic sunrise.

At last the jeep arrived and we were ready to go. A French family clambered into the back, where there was just about enough room for them, and Sheila and I squeezed into the front. Off we bumped along the cobblestone road until it petered out altogether and we were driving over what I think must have been volcanic ash. In the darkness we could just about make out the crater and its steaming centre. We then drove up to the edge of the crater and followed a narrow road to a viewpoint on a nearby hillock. We had to stop briefly at a spot where another jeep had got stuck; once it had been successfully got going again, we continued on our way.



Mount Bromo

We finally came to a halt at the official viewing point. As it was so cold and windy, we decided not to go up the steps immediately, and sat in a little hut near a fire, sipping hot drinks. Sheila was shivering as she was wearing so little. Once we saw the sky starting to brighten, we walked the short distance to the top, where we found hundreds of more people. The sunrise was very spectacular and beautiful. The view looking down to Mount Bromo's crater was most impressive: the crater itself was huge and contained two small conical hills, one of which was emitting a dense cloud of steam. As the sun rose from behind a low bank of clouds, the scene brightened and I was able to photograph it.

When the sun climbed higher and shone brightly over the mountains, people began to leave. Once we had seen enough, we walked down to the jeep, waited for the French family and set off. We now drove down into the crater, where the surroundings looked like a moonscape, and stopped at the base of the small conical hill, from which the sulphurous steam was billowing. We walked up a rough path, refusing countless offers of horse rides, and reached the very top by means of a steep set of steps. From the top edge we looked down into a deep opening, at the bottom of which was the fissure from which the steam – and the dreadful smell – was escaping.



Crater, Mount Bromo

Sheila and I did not delay long here but quickly descended to the jeep, where we waited for the French people. At last they came and we drove back to the village. It was so convenient being able to do all this sightseeing in such comfort!

We now set about finding some breakfast. I had a very tasty bowl of *soto ayam* (chicken soup with rice and some vegetables) in a clean little restaurant. I also ate two *pisang goreng* (fried bananas), which were delicious, and drank a bottle of Sprite. The lady who served us was extremely polite and pleasant.

As pressure was being put on us to take a bus down to Probolinggo, Sheila and I returned to our room to pack our bags and depart. We were not at all sorry to leave this dreary losmen!

At nine o'clock a minibus crammed full of people, including the pair of us, went tumbling down the mountainside. The scenery here was very beautiful indeed and the little villages that we passed were quaint. I wished that we could have stopped and seen the place better. However, I was very tired by now and kept dropping off to sleep.

At last we arrived in the noisy and scruffy town of Probolinggo. When we got out of the minibus we were immediately pounced on by a hoard of *becak* cyclists. After a few moments of confusion, Sheila and I squeezed into one and we were whisked off to the bus station, despite the fact that we had been told that there were no public buses straight to Denpasar in Bali today as it was a public holiday. However, we were not brought to the bus station, but to a tourist information centre. Here we were told that we could not travel by bus directly to Bali, but only to the ferry port here in Java. For 7,500 Rp we could travel to the port in an air-conditioned coach with reclining seats. As all of us were too weary to arrange anything else, we bought tickets and sat down to wait for the coach at 10.45 a.m.

When the time came, we were escorted across the road to the bus station, where we discovered that there were not enough seats on the coach for us all; we would have to wait until the next coach came at 11.30. We all trooped back to the tourist information centre and waited again. I turned down the volume of a ghetto blaster that was playing some dreadful pop music – it was noisy enough without it, for the din of traffic on the road outside was deafening.

We finally boarded a half-empty coach soon after 11.30 and we set off shortly afterwards. The comfort of the soft seats, the air conditioning and the adequate legroom were positively decadent! It was very pleasant driving along by the sea for a change; the

scenery around here was very pleasant and the area looked quite prosperous. In the distance could be seen more massive volcanic mountains farther inland. Sheila fell asleep, with her head on my shoulder, which was very pleasant; I dozed off now and then but did not sleep as much as I would have liked to have done.



We drove for about three hours and finally came to the ferry port of Banyuwangi at about 2.40 p.m. I limped out (I had slipped and fallen on the top of Mount Bromo) and followed the others. Sheila kindly bought the two tickets. As the ferry was packed, we had difficulty squeezing past the cars with our rucksacks on.

At last Sheila and I found a bit of space at one side of the ship, overlooking the deep blue sea. Beyond was the island of Bali, looking very pleasant in the bright afternoon sunshine. I was looking forward to seeing Bali, as by now I had had enough of Java. Travelling such long distances in the heat and being squeezed into narrow seats between people was becoming quite tedious; by now I wanted to settle down in a quiet place and relax! I had decided not to go with the others to the beach resort of Lovina on the north coast, but to go straight to Ubud, the cultural centre of Bali.

I left Sheila and the bags briefly to go hunting for food. I simply bought two pastries wrapped in plastic. I munched these for my lunch and ate one of Sheila's small oranges.

At three o'clock we set off across the short distance of water towards Bali and I advanced my watch one hour forward. My journey across Java had now finished.