

LOUISE TUCKWELL



# JUNE IN JOGJA

*This is the winning story in our travel writing competition. CHRIS MAHER recounts a leisurely visit to Indonesia.*

I MET TOTO quite by accident. He was having his dinner at Mama's, sitting by himself and watching the Wayang Orang on the television. Wandering in without my glasses, I mistook him for a man

I had met in Bali; so halfway through saying hello I had to stop and apologise. "You thought I was Made," he said. "A lot of people mistake me for Made." I knew Jogjakarta wasn't the biggest ▷

city in Java, but I was still surprised to think that he knew who I'd mistaken him for. We shared a couple of beers and I found out that he was an art student, studying batik and television, and that he eked out a living selling shirts which he designed and made down in the bird market.

A couple of days later I met him again, as I was squatting down in one of the well-swept but narrow lanes that run in a network behind the main streets. A bent old lady was selling satays. Carrying her pots of sauce and a burner on her back she would wander around the lanes until someone stopped her, then she would set up her makeshift kitchen in the gutter and prepare a meal.

Toto sat beside me and showed me some of his shirts, which had such vitality that I immediately bought one, forgetting for a moment my budget and my basically miserly nature. He told me that he could teach me how to make shirts like this and I accepted his offer.

The bird market is a raucous and energetic place, dominated by the yellow of the bamboo cages and the dust from the dirt roads. It lies past the end of the Jalan Maloboro, and it signals the end of the relative order of the commercial district as it fades into the chaos of the residential area, amid the ruins of buildings that have witnessed the passing of many eras. One of the many colleges is situated nearby, which, together with the university and the ancient monuments, give Jogjakarta its reputation as the cultural centre of Indonesia.

For three days Toto and his friend Manel gave me and some other travellers an introduction into the secrets of batik. We drew our white shirts and singlets tightly over boards and painted on designs using the roughened ends of sticks, after first having waxed the areas to remain white with little bamboo tubes. The traditional paints were more expensive and less colour-fast than the new German dyes, and Toto had been forced to keep up with the changes.

I made two shirts and a singlet. The singlet had special significance for me because of the work I put into making it, and because of the praise it received from the artists. They worked long days, but there was always time to sit and play guitars, or to stop and have a chat over a harsh *kretek* cigarette. We would discuss the difficulties and joys of living in Indonesia or Australia while we waited for the sun to change the colours of the dyes, or for the boiling pot to free the wax from the shirts.

On the last day, Made turned up and so any doubt I had about our coincidental meeting was removed. We had a graduation party that night in what must have been about the only disco in Jogja. Everyone was in such high spirits that you'd have thought we had just

finished a four-year course. It took a little convincing to get the DJ to play something that had been recorded after the '60s, but when he did the dance floor came alive with locals and foreigners alike.

When we were finally thrown out, a group of us headed up to the ruin of the old mosque. We climbed up the remnants of ancient steps to the prayer room, now covered with weeds and grass, and took in the magic of a clear Java night. The mosque had once had a

roof, but during a rebellion the Dutch had bombed it, more to smash a symbol of the people's identity than for any military purpose. One young local, full of an evening's drinking and political discussion, stood on the parapet and yelled at the city below, "I am a communist!" caring not if Suharto himself could hear: an echo of the indomitable spirit which had seen the people through years of colonial administration.

It was late by the time I began walking ▸



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# TRAVEL

## COMPETITION WINNERS

*Good Weekend* received more than 700 entries in its travel writing competition. The winning story appears on the previous pages. The winners are:

**First prize** (20-day fly/cruise holiday for two to the great cities of Asia with Pearl Cruises and Qantas): Chris Maher, Redfern, NSW.

**Second prize** (cultured pearls valued at \$750 from Prouds): Adrian Plaskitt, Hornsby, NSW.

**Third prize** (pearls valued at \$250 from Prouds): Sandra McMahon, Essendon, Vic.

**Highly commended:** Joanna Johnson, Port Melbourne, Vic; Bob Hillman, Batemans Bay, NSW; Keith Dallywater, Ingleburn, NSW; Frances Digges, Paterson, NSW; Kerry Lannoy, Carlingford, NSW; Elva Rush, Mansfield, Vic.

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back to my *losmen*, but the streets were alive with the spicy smell of food and the bustle of celebration.

Ramadan was in full swing, and as Muslims can't eat or drink during the daylight hours, it is the night time when the city begins to live.

I sat on a blanket on the footpath and shared a meal with a family. It was breakfast for them, a last chance to enjoy some nourishment before the rigours of the day began.

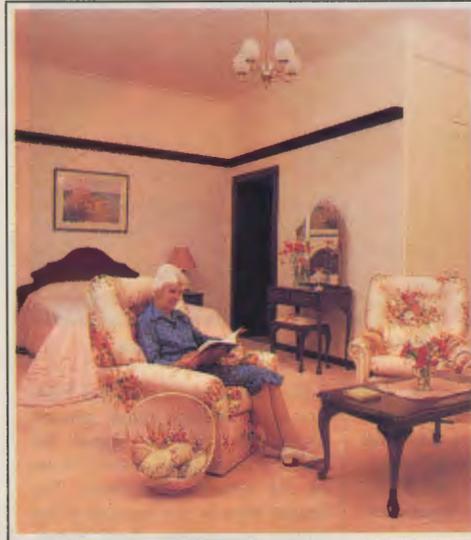
For me, though, it was supper. I could

take the lazy option of a traveller, and sleep the morning away.

Only this year, in Bangalow on the North Coast, I was teaching some Melburnians how to play Rugby League. As I ducked under a tackle, a hand grabbed my singlet and it fell in pieces from my back.

My last physical reminder of Jogjakarta was gone, but the beauty of the town and the warmth of the people will live on in my memories for many years to come. □

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