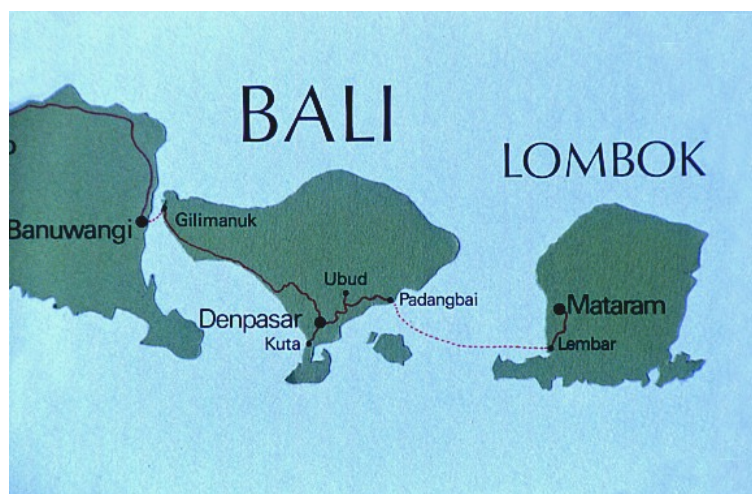


## PART THREE: LOMBOK



## 7 – LOMBOK



Saturday, 21 July continued

Apart from the calm blue sea and fine views of various islands (including Nusa Penida), the journey to Lombok was unremarkable. I had been told that it would take three and half hours to get there, but it took longer. I spent much of the time talking to various people: the Dutch girls who had been on the bus, an American and Canadian girl who were planning to cycle around Lombok, and two English girls who told me that they were speech therapists.

At last the island appeared in the distance and we slowly began to approach it. A few colourful fishing boats made the scene look more welcoming. Our arrival at the sheltered harbour seemed to take quite a long time. When we slowed down, I went to the shop, selected a couple of things to eat, and waved some money at the fellow behind the counter. As he made no effort to take it from me, I wandered over to a couple of German girls whom I had met some time ago and chatted to them. We were surprised to see each other again. I quickly ate my free lunch, spruced myself up and prepared to leave the ship.

Outside there was chaos with local drivers offering transport. We tourists battled our way through a sea of bodies, found the minibus that we needed, and off we went. I now found myself with a different group of people and chatted to an English girl for most of the journey. We drove along a quiet country road towards the island's capital: the quadruple city of Mataram, Ampewan, Cakranegara and Sweta. This turned out to be a very quiet, provincial place, in pleasant contrast to other cities that I had visited. As I knew that the island was far less densely populated, I was already beginning to enjoy it.

We stopped at the Perama office, where I was able to buy my return ticket for the 26th of the month. Then, with the help of a fellow on our bus, I jumped into a public minibus and set off for the bus station in Sweta. The young 'conductor' proved to be very friendly and the few other people in the vehicle smiled and talked to me. One man spoke very good English. Suddenly realizing that I no longer needed to be on my guard here, I relaxed, smiled and chatted to these delightful people.



The journey was short and we soon arrived at the bus station. I paid the 150 Rp fare and was pounced upon as soon as I got out of the minibus. A fellow seized my bag and lead me to a minibus bound for my next destination: Masbagik. He asked for 1,000 Rp but I told him that I would only give him 600 Rp – the official price that the conductor in the previous bus had quoted. Caught off his guard, the fellow instantly agreed to this price. I squeezed into the vehicle, more people were crammed into it, and minutes later we were off. Once again people smiled at me and I made eyes at a lovely little girl who was sitting on her mother's knee. It seemed to me that the local people here were the most handsome of all the people I had seen so far. A middle-aged lady wore a beautiful green blouse, which I guessed was made of silk, and a scarf was wrapped around her hair.

We now drove along a not very busy road through some pleasant countryside, similar to what I had seen in Java; in the distance could be seen the island's greatest mountain, Gunung Rinjani, with its summit enveloped in dark cloud. The journey was long and tedious until a man from Mataram, who had excellent English, began to talk to me. We stopped at a village as the motor was giving trouble, and while we waited for it to be fixed, a traditional Sasak wedding procession passed by, complete with a mobile gamelan ensemble. This was my first glimpse of the local Sasak culture (a combination of Moslem and other elements), which I had read about in my guidebook.

After a pleasant journey, during which various people got on and off the minibus, we finally arrived at my destination: the town of Masbagik. My English-speaking companion got off with me and together we haggled with the driver of a traditional *dokar* or horse and cart, and finally agreed on 500 Rp for a journey to the village of Lendang Nangka.



*Dokar journey*



I hopped into the cart with my luggage and off we set along a narrow but very pretty road lined with trees and with fine scenery all around us. We left the town behind and clip-clopped our way into the countryside, passing many people who stopped in their tracks to shout ‘hello’ to me in a genuinely friendly manner, smiling as they did so. I concluded that at last I had discovered the real Indonesia: Indonesia as it was and should be. I felt tremendously happy to be among these delightful people.

It took some time to reach Lendang Nangka; when we did, my arrival at the village proved to be a major event for the locals. At last we stopped near the losmen recommended in my guidebook: Radiah’s Homestay. I stepped down from the *dokar*, paid the fare, and was directed up an alleyway to the place, where I was received most courteously. It turned out that Mr Radiah had gone on a pilgrimage to Mecca – most of the people here seemed to be Muslim – and so his delightful son Samsul welcomed me first in Indonesian and then in excellent English.



*Street in Lendang Nangka, and members of the Radiah family*

I was shown into a cool, basic room, invited to sit down, and given tea to drink. I was introduced to the young man’s sisters and his cousin, who were all lovely people. I signed the guest book and learned that there was an English girl staying here. It came as no surprise to learn that few tourists found their way to this place. (On the bus I heard myself being referred to as ‘the tourist’.)

Next I was shown to my room: a very basic one with a double bed and a mosquito net. Here I was able to wash and refresh myself.

After I had relaxed a little, I wandered outside for a walk and was joined by Samsul's cousin, who informed me that all the people here were Sasak. We wandered through the narrow alleyways and I was brought to see the local blacksmith. The equipment was basic and the craftsmanship was crude but adequate. We walked out of the village towards the fields, where we met the young man's uncle, then returned via the local mosque, where we could hear the call to evening prayer blaring from a loudspeaker. When we reached the main street of the village, we met some friends of my guide – all young men – and I was invited to play their guitar. I entertained them with a couple of Beatles songs, then listened to a chap who played the instrument quite well.

We finally returned to the losmen, where I produced my diary and sat down to start writing it. At this point the 'English' girl, who turned out to be Welsh, walked in and we got talking. The young lady's name was Rhiannon. We had a long and interesting chat while the family prayed in the next room for Mr Radiah's safe return. Rhiannon had fallen in love with this place and its people, and spoke about them enthusiastically.

Soon after seven o'clock, Samsul brought in an excellent meal consisting of a huge bowl of rice with three dishes of vegetables and tofu. We stuffed ourselves as we were both hungry. After Rhiannon had casually mentioned the word fruit, a plate of fresh pineapple was presented to us. The two of us talked for a good while until Rhiannon decided that it was time to go to bed. At this point I went to my room, where I wrote my diary until after eleven o'clock, then went to bed.

A very pleasant and rewarding day. I was looking forward to my brief stay on this island and now wished that I had given myself more time to see it!

Sunday, 22 July

Although it had been a little cold during the night (I had taken Rhiannon's advice and had piled on as much bedclothing as possible), I slept well and woke to the familiar sound of the noisy call to prayer from the nearby mosque. I got up soon after 6.30 and had breakfast with a rather subdued Rhiannon, who was now writing her diary. The meal was traditional: Sasak cake with coconut flakes sprinkled over it, then some pineapple. I divided my time between eating and reading my guidebook.

At eight o'clock a chap with a motorbike arrived to take Rhiannon off on a tour for the day. At around the same time, a young member of the extended family named Funk, who had told me that he would bring me around the place by motorbike, also arrived. I finished washing some clothes and was ready shortly afterwards.

I jumped on the back of a Yamaha bike and off we set westwards. The light at this hour of the morning was magical and I wanted to stop at every turn in the road to take photographs, but there seemed to be no way of stopping Funk. Mount Rinjani was now clearly visible to the north. I wanted to take a photograph of it, but my driver clearly was in a hurry to get somewhere. The countryside around here looked fabulous. Maybe it was not quite as dramatic as it had been in Bali, but it was very beautiful. Because of the speed at which we were travelling along the bumpy road, I attracted less attention than yesterday, but still people shouted 'hello' to me.

We came to a stop in the little village of Loyok, where I was brought into a small shop that sold a good selection of pretty baskets, boxes and bags made from woven bamboo and cane. Although everything looked nice, there was nothing that I particularly wanted; nor could I think of anybody I knew who would want anything here. Fortunately the two young men in the shop were not the least bit pushy about selling me anything. However, instead of walking out empty-handed and disappointing them, I bought three little bracelets at just 500 Rp each.

We drove off again and stopped in the nearby village of Kesik, where we walked through a small bamboo forest. I presumed that this was where the basket makers got their bamboo. We were accompanied by a small group of people, mostly children; tourists seemed to be a great novelty here! Once again there were cries of 'Hello mister!' from every corner of the village.



*People in Kesik*

Once we had seen the place, we hopped back on the motorbike and drove eastwards to Pringgasela, a village where traditional Sasak weaving was practised. I was received very courteously by a young man who welcomed me, told me a little about the place, and led me to a small, dark room in a building where a woman was working on a sarong or blanket, using a very basic wooden loom. As there were delicate geometric patterns along some of the coloured stripes, the work was very slow and laborious. I was told that an elaborate piece could take three months or more to complete.



*Sasak weaving in Pringgasela*

I took a few photographs and was brought to another little building, where I was invited to sit down and admire the young man's collection of elegant sarongs. Although I realized that he was hoping that I would purchase one of them, he never once mentioned



the word 'buy' – all he wanted to do was to show me what he had produced. So far I had not encountered the 'hard-sell' technique used in Java and Bali. Even though I was given tea and later something to eat, I did not feel at all under pressure to buy anything.



*Wrapping up my sarong at the workshop in Pringgasela*

It was obvious to me that some of the sarongs were quite special and had taken many months of meticulous work to make. I saw none of the gaudy colours and designs that were normally aimed at the tourist market; the sarongs displayed before me were decorated using restrained colours. When the young man pointed to the finest of the lot, which I quite liked, I asked him the price purely out of curiosity. The normal price, he told me, was 30,000 Rp, which shocked me as this seemed to very expensive by local standards. I was assured that as these sarongs were made for special occasions and not for everyday use, they were therefore more expensive. I sensed that the fellow was being sincere and not chancing his arm. He said that he would consider a discount and suggested 27,500 Rp. I jokingly suggested 25,000 and he dropped his price just to 27,000. As I quite liked the sarong, I decided to buy it as it would be a nice souvenir. As I only had 20,000 with me, I gave it all to him and promised to pay the balance to the boys in my losmen. We parted on excellent terms.

I now took a walk around the charming little village. A crowd of giggling children followed me through the narrow alleyways; I stopped now and then to chat to them and watch various women working at looms. The place was quite a maze, but I managed to make my way back to the main street and the little shop. I went inside, sat down for a short while, collected my sarong, and we left shortly afterwards.

We now drove back to Lendang Nangka, the village where I was staying. Just before we reached it, the motorbike ran out of petrol. Fortunately, we did not have far to walk and I reached the losmen by about eleven o'clock. I now relaxed for a while, read a little and took a few photographs. I then joined a roomful of young people to watch television; they only had one channel from Jakarta and were watching a pop music programme. It was very pleasant to be among these youngsters, who all smiled at me. The girls were all quite pretty, especially Sarah (a member of the family), who had been smiling at me quite a lot.

Later I was called to lunch, which was quite tasty. I relaxed afterwards and sat outside at a table, reading and chatting to various members of the family. I planned to go off for a walk in the afternoon, but decided to wait for a while as it was very hot by now.

I sauntered out later and headed off in the direction that we had taken this morning. Unfortunately it had clouded over by now and the light was very dull, which meant that I could not take many photos. However, I did stop to snap some shots of people who saluted me. I went up to a T-junction, turned left, passed through Rungkang village and headed for Kesik. Just before I reached the village, a chap stopped and offered me a lift on his motorbike. I hopped off at the village and turned the corner for Lendang Nangka, where the my losmen was. Shortly afterwards another motorcyclist stopped and offered me a lift to Radiah's Homestay. As I was beginning to get a little tired and as it had started to rain, I accepted.

Back at the losmen I set about writing my diary, but there were several interruptions. Sarah sat herself down beside me and did her best to talk to me in English. She had finished school at the age of eighteen; she was now twenty, had no boyfriend, and hoped to get married. Perhaps rather stupidly I told her that I was thirty-five and single.

Earlier I had noticed a young lady lying on the bed in another room and had thought that it was Rhiannon, but now a man appeared and joined her. I could hear the couple speaking French, but discovered shortly afterwards that they were from Belgium. The man told me that he had been to Ireland several times and had loved it. He was particularly interested in our traditional music. He chatted to me for quite some time, then Rhiannon returned from her motorbike trip and joined us, along with her driver. She had had an enjoyable though tiring day.

Later we were called to dinner. Rhiannon and I had our meal together at the table outside; the Belgian couple ate indoors. Later they came outside to join us. We chatted for a while and I left to take my tablets and wash my teeth. I rejoined my friends, then returned to my room to wash my hair. I borrowed Rhiannon's shampoo to do this as I had left mine in Bali. I noticed that young Sarah seemed to be hanging around close to my room nearby; she in was in the sitting room when I emerged later. I noticed that she had been crying. She leafed through her dictionary and pointed to the word for 'fever'. She then requested my address and asked me to send her a letter. She begged me not to forget. I then realized that I was the cause of her 'fever'. She excused herself; I went outside to write a little more of my diary, went indoors to continue and she reappeared bearing a plate of sweetmeats: chunks of tasty tapioca and little glutinous rice cakes. I shared them with Rhiannon, who joined me to write up her diary. Obviously feeling awkward by now, young Sarah left; I then noticed that she was hanging around outside.

When I had finished writing, I wandered outside and found little Miss Lovesick sitting at the table, alone. Although I had my book with me, I sat down and talked to her. At one point I took out my watch to see the time and she looked at it. She then asked me to give it to her 'for memory'. When I said no, she asked me if I had a Walkman. When I again said no, she suggested that I buy her one in Mataram. She was a cheeky little minx, but she had great charm. I finally left her, said goodnight, and went to bed.

Monday, 23 July

Having not slept particularly well, I was woken at 6.30 a.m. by the usual racket and by about seven o'clock I had washed and dressed. After a breakfast of cake and bananas, I washed a shirt, hung it out to dry, then went off for a quick walk in order to savour the magical early morning light. As usual, I attracted a good deal of attention from the local people!

I was back and ready for today's motorbike tour at eight o'clock. I greeted Sus, my driver for today, who outlined the route that he would take before we set off. We drove to Masbagik, where we stopped to buy petrol and oil. Before we started the journey proper, I gave him 11,000 Rp for the fuel and his services today.



We now sped along the main road westwards to a town named Kopang, then turned on to a narrower and quite bumpy road that brought us southwards towards Sukarara. Although pleasant, the scenery in this region was a little bland. We stopped briefly at my request so that I could take a photo of some workers in the fields. We were heading downhill now from the foothills of the northern mountains to the flat southern plain. The farther south we travelled, the drier and hotter it became; the vegetation and crops here had visibly suffered from the heat.

Before we got to Sukarara, we stopped at the fairly large town of Praya to drink some tea at the house belonging to Sus's sister. She turned out to be a pleasant young woman with a child. While the tea was being prepared, I wandered out to the road, where a crazy youth approached me and talked a lot of nonsense. Across the road, a group of women of various ages were calling to me. Thinking that they wanted me to take a photo of them, I walked over to the house, but was conducted inside and invited to sit down. I was asked if I wanted to drink some '*kopi*' (coffee – I had noticed that the letters *p* and *f* were frequently interchanged here). I explained that I had been invited to have tea in the other house and so, after I had spent a few minutes with these kind people, I excused myself and returned to the house that Sus had brought me to. While I drank a glassful of over-sweetened tea that his sister gave me, the lady from the house across the road came to see what was keeping me. As soon as I was finished, I followed her back to her house and was given a small cup of coffee and a plateful of bananas. Sus joined us while I chatted, sipped at the strong coffee and ate one overripe banana. This was my fourth this morning!

After we had stayed for a respectable amount of time, we excused ourselves and prepared to leave. The lady and her family tried to make us promise to return and have lunch with them. I was quite taken aback by their friendliness and hospitality.



*Weavers in Sukarara*

We set off again and after a while reached Sukarara, a traditional weaving centre where the techniques for weaving had been handed down from mother to daughter for centuries. Having read about this village in my guidebook, which spoke highly of it, I now found it something of an anti-climax. We stopped at a weaving centre, where I photographed the weavers and had a quick look at some of the finished work. It was soon apparent that everything here was geared up for tourism. Afterwards we stopped to look in a shop nearby, where I examined some woven sarongs, but they looked gaudy by local standards. This time I had a good excuse for not buying anything, as I had not

brought enough money with me. After we left, Sus admitted that the blankets and sarongs were not as good as the ones made near where I was staying, for they were generally exported to Bali.

Without stopping to look at the village, in which there was little else to see, we drove on towards Rembitan and Sade, two more Sasak villages. At about 11.30 we stopped, for Sus was feeling hungry; he had not eaten any breakfast this morning. We sat down at a *warung*, where we had quite a tasty bowl of rice, vegetables and a hunk of grisly chicken. I paid for both of us and we set off once again.



*Houses and a rice barn in Sade, near Rembitan*

It was quite a distance to Rembitan – much longer than I had imagined it to be. At last we reached the village: a wonderful collection of quaint, traditional Sasak buildings, constructed of woven bamboo strips and roofed with dark thatch. The houses were clustered around the sides of a small hill and more could be seen on the top. It turned out that the ones at the bottom formed the little hamlet of Rembitan, while the ones on the top comprised that of Sade. Sus drove his motorbike up the side of the hill along a rough track and we then climbed up some steps to the delightful tiny village of Sade. I had seen nothing like this before; it was very charming and I felt that it was like stepping



back in time. Fascinated, I wandered around the crude dwellings, photographing them (the people did not seem too keen to be photographed). I then came across one of the characteristic rice barns built on stilts. I noticed that some of the other buildings had the same style of thatched roof as the rice barn. Facing the barn was another one, though it was built in a different style. Sus told me that the first one I had seen was for a girl and the second one was for a woman, though I did not know what exactly he meant.



*The mosque in Sade*

Outside one of the little houses a woman sat weaving. I was then introduced to a man who brought us to a most unusual mosque with a massive roof of thick thatch that swept down almost to the ground. The tiny doors were opened and I was allowed to take a photograph of the interior, but not to enter.

After I had gazed around the village one more time, we signed a visitor's book, wrote some comments, then left at our leisure. It was very reassuring to learn that this unique village had been carefully preserved and would never be altered. It seemed that few tourists came here; sadly, the tiny community looked very poor.



*Houses in Bedus*

Delighted to have seen this place, we left and continued our journey. We now travelled eastwards through a pretty region, though the land looked parched and poor. We also passed other tiny Sasak villages with houses made of bamboo and thatch. We stopped in one of them, Bedus, where I took some photos and walked around, much to the



amusement or bewilderment of the local people. In one house I saw a lady at a loom and an older woman at a spinning wheel; in another was a lady who had begun to weave a long, ceremonial scarf that was used for winding around the waist of a pregnant woman. Sus explained the technique, which was interesting, and told me that this item would be sold somewhere in Lombok for a high price. Outside the house I noticed tightly-wound coils of bamboo, which Sus explained were used either as pillows or in the construction of traditional bamboo houses.

Satisfied that I had seen everything here, I got back on the motorbike and off we went again. We passed through Mujur and now headed towards the east coast. The land here was like a desert. Across the deep blue sea could be seen the coast of Sumbawa Island on the horizon; we stopped briefly at Kuang Wai to have a better look at it.

We next passed through Keruak and headed for the fishing village and beach of Labuhan Haji, but stopped at a place where salt was being produced from the seawater. At a little village, which lay between us and the sea, I had a look at some bamboo and thatch houses on stilts. This, Sus explained to me, was not a Sasak village. As I walked back, a young boy spoke to me in English and asked me for some money as he was hungry. I ignored this request as he seemed to be rather cheeky.

We now drove to Labuhan Haji, but did not stop there. Instead we swung around north-westwards and came to a halt at a little village about four kilometres farther on. It was quite a primitive place and the local children, who had obviously not seen many tourists before, came running out of their houses to take a look at me. I was now brought into a simple dwelling and introduced to Sus's uncle. Feeling hot and sweaty by now, I asked if I could freshen myself up with some water. As a bucket had to be lowered into a well to draw up some water, I felt a little guilty for causing so much trouble.

Back in the living room again, I was surrounded by a large extended family, mostly consisting of children. More children had congregated at the door and window in order to have a look at me. Everything I did was observed closely; any hint of a smile on my face resulted in broad smiles from my spectators, all of whom displayed wonderfully white teeth. Some of the girls and ladies giggled when I smiled in their direction.

I was now offered sugared tea and a plateful of pink *jambu* or Java apple, a fruit that I had not yet seen or tasted. I was a little apprehensive about trying one as I had seen flies on the fruit and an ant was crawling around inside one of mine, but politeness demanded that I taste it. I was careful about removing any dirty or rotten bits. It turned out to be quite palatable.

We chatted and relaxed for some time as we were both tired by now. We finally left just before four o'clock and headed westwards, to the large town of Selong. We now passed through a lush and prosperous area, which was quite a contrast to where we had just been. Selong turned out to be clean and spacious. Sus was on the lookout for another member of his extended family and eventually found him in a fine modern house. I was now introduced to a well-fed, well-dressed man who spoke good English and led us into his comfortable but plain living room. Here we sat on soft, comfortable chairs and relaxed. I chatted to the man and later was invited to watch a traditional Sasak wedding which, as luck would have it, was taking place in the house next door.

When I went outside and sat down among the people, something was beginning to happen. A small and reduced gamelan orchestra of drums and gongs was hammering away at full belt; a couple of drummers stood with large barrel-shaped drums and banged away, sometimes loud and sometimes soft. Two long carpets had been placed on the ground; on one of the carpets were seated a number of colourfully-dressed men, headed by a man wearing a sarong, a traditional headdress and a western jacket.



*Wedding ceremony in Selong: drummers, the bridegroom's father, and the 'negotiator'*

Suddenly a procession of men appeared at the gate of the house and slowly made its way in. Apart from the leader, all the men wore light-coloured shirts, headdresses and sarongs, and each bore a bowl containing some money. They now seated themselves on the other long carpet. The music stopped and, using a couple of microphones connected to an amplification system, a ritual bargaining session for the dowry now began. I was

informed that the man who headed the group of men bearing the money, and representing the bride, was a professional ‘negotiator’; the man at the head of the other group was the bridegroom’s father. The former had a lot to say – and chant – and the bargaining went on for some considerable time. At the doorway of the house stood some beautifully-dressed women with various presents.



*Parade in Selong*

A little while later, somebody pointed to a parade on the road outside. Believing that it was part of the wedding ceremony, especially as some of the ladies went out to join in, I went out to photograph it. It too was a colourful event. I became puzzled, however, when groups and groups of young people passed by, bearing flags and banners. A band played and music blared from a loudspeaker on a van at the front. Swept along by the crowd, I had walked quite a distance by the time I finally managed to speak to some English language students from a local university, who told me that the parade had something to do with today’s Muslim public holiday – which explained why it had not been possible to change money. It was just pure coincidence that we had stumbled on both ceremonies in the one day!

Much to the amusement of the onlookers and people in the parade, I walked back to the house. By now the bargaining had been successfully concluded and the people were now shaking hands with the bride and groom, congratulating them. The bride and her mother were in floods of tears – probably a mixture of ritual and real emotion. My host made me join the queue and I too offered my congratulations. The married couple looked mildly surprised to see a foreigner in their midst!

After this we were invited back into the house next door, where Sus’s relation treated us to a meal of rice, meat and vegetables at about 5.30 p.m. When we had eaten our fill and had drunk some water, Sus and I rose to leave. We thanked the man and his wife and drove off. The road outside seemed to be clear by now, but when we turned a corner we encountered the procession once again making its way through another street. Sus therefore had to alter his course.

We now left this fine, prosperous city, passed through Pancar and in no time at all arrived back in Masbagik. The sun was now rapidly sinking and it was becoming chilly on the motorbike. At Masbagik we stopped and I bought some print film as I had used up all my slide film. This was a nuisance, for I would now have to get the prints redone as slides when I returned home.



We soon arrived back at the losmen in Lendang Nangka, where I got Sus to write out our itinerary. I then went to my room to wash. Shortly afterwards, Rhiannon and I were called to supper. Because I had already eaten, I only picked at some bits and pieces. Afterwards Rhiannon and I walked to the crossroads with Samsul, the son, to buy a few things. We bought a large bottle of water between us and I got two more batteries for my camera's flash unit.

Back in the losmen, Rhiannon retired to bed as she had caught a cold, and I stayed up until about eleven o'clock writing my diary. When I began to feel sleepy, I put it away, climbed into bed and fell asleep immediately. It had been quite a fascinating day.