

Thursday 8th April

We're off!

Sue

Everyone, except Erice, met at Wellington early in the morning, full of enthusiasm and ready to go. Graham and Jenny, Lis and Dave were all there to see us off.



We met up with Erice in Auckland and all our flights were on time and uneventful!

We had opted to stay at the hotel in the airport in Singapore and I think that everyone was glad that we were rapidly able to get a room and have an early night.

Friday 9th April

We've landed!

Bob

Pretty convenient that airport hotel at Chiangi.. quiet and within 50mts of a few places for breakfast stalls in the airport.. Recommended!

Arrived in Chang Mai late morning, and it was hot and quite humid. a prelude of the days to come! We had a welcome lunch at a local restaurant in LAMPHUN – 45 mins from Chang Mai where Lamphun FF had made a lovely big welcoming banner (8 mtrs by 0.7mtrs) for us (see photos later on).

Lamphun was established in the middle ages 700 years before Chang Mai and had plenty of history. So after lunch we were whisked off to a number of Buddhist temples in the town: ... Wat Phrathat Haripunchai Worama hawihau(1108); memorial of Phrangan Chammathewi(A lady developer of Buddhism) ; Wat Chammathewi(755AD); Wat Mahairan; Wat Sun Pa Yang Luang; Ku Chang and lastly Haripunchai museum(founded 1927.)



Some important things I quickly understood on that first day there.... Wat means temple and there are lots of them!; The heat was greater than I first thought; More temple trekking would have finished me!; Haripunchai was a Mon kingdom based in Lamphun before the Thais moved in in 1292 and they are all very proud of that heritage. The food and people were fabulous.

During the evening our hosts and Ian and Erica's hosts invited us to the opening ceremony of the New Year celebrations downtown where we met the district governor and mayor of Lamphun. The people were indeed accommodating and sincerely friendly, which was to last the rest of our tour there.



Saturday 10th April

OUR FIRST DAY WITH OUR THAI HOSTS.

Brian

Our hosts lived about 30-40 minutes away from Lamphun in a village which started celebrating the New Year [and the completion of alterations to the local Temple] with a Festival on the day we arrived and which continued on today. This celebration resembled an “open house” for our hosts as Ayut was the head of the village. They had a house well suited to callers and tables and chairs were set out in the adjoining open warehouse for all visitors to stop, chat and have a drink as they called to leave money for the Temple. The donations were put on the money tree or given to Grandma [Ayut’s mother] who sat in the shade in the front, presiding over a big silver bowl holding the envelopes.



After having the air conditioning unit drip water onto the bed for most of the night [we had to shift the bed] we woke early and were ready for the day at 7am. After a cup of [sweet] tea we had a walk around the village with Tu [aged 21] and Dok Dak [14], the English speakers in the family. After walking perhaps 500 metres Tu took me by the elbow and asked if I was tired...would I like to go back now? We were nowhere near tired and continued on our walk to see the market, meet Saithong’s mother, 2 “uncles” and visit the Temple, and to have a refreshing drink of coconut and mapang at a stall. Breakfast of fried rice, cucumber and spring onions [with tea] followed and by 10.30 the locals had started to visit.

Before lunch, Tu drove us to his farm [in the care of another uncle today], where he proudly showed us the 20 or so cattle beasts [used for their meat] and 3 or 4 horses in the open-sided barns. They also grew crops of longhans, mangoes, bamboo and lemons. The longhans are eaten raw, dried, and even pressed to make a type of honey.



During the rest of the day, we sat unobtrusively and watched the visitors come and go, with the occasional discussion with English speaking friends of the family. Food [including ice cream] was continuously provided by caterers, so we were well looked after. During the afternoon, we went for a walk around the village. This concerned our hosts as they thought we might get lost, but we had no trouble finding Grandma again ...and the temple. By this time the highly decorated money trees, with money attached, were being taken to the Temple by some of the locals. These really were something we had never seen [or thought of] before. The Temple grounds and surrounding streets were alive with people and very, very loud music coming from huge banks of loud speakers in many properties and on the back of many utes. We were thankful that our hosts did not think that music was necessary.



We were in bed fairly early as we go to the Temple with the money tree at 6 tomorrow morning. The water was off, so there was no shower, but we were able to throw some water over ourselves from the barrel of stored water.

Sunday 11th April

AT HOME WITH OUR HOST FAMILY

Judith

We woke to hear Tok Tak being woken at 5.30am. Today is the day the money tree is taken by every family to the Temple. We thought we were all walking-the temple is only 5 minutes away- and Oraphin [our host's sister] was to call for us at 6.am, but did not arrive. Grandma, Saithong and Tok Tak went in the ute with the tree, Tu had a hangover and apparently Ayut never goes, so Brian and I walked. Fortunately, the family had their mat down just opposite the Temple steps when we arrived, so we settled down with them on the ground. We were offered a chair, but [unwisely] declined. People were pouring in with their money trees - there would have been well over 1, 000, - all highly coloured with flowers and other decorations. The large Temple area was soon a riot of colour with a crowd of people, sitting, standing and walking around.



Oraphin eventually arrived and as her English is quite good she was able to tell us what was going on. After prayers[?] by the monk [hugely amplified], every family went forward to the table in front of the Temple with a contribution of cooked rice for the monk, using their hands, to fill many containers. More words from the monk and then a ritual pouring of water to remember those in the family who have died.

Well over an hour later [we had been on sitting on the mat all that time], the money trees were stripped and the money taken into the temple and we walked home for breakfast of chicken, mushroom soup and rice with tea [of course].

Tu, Tok Tak and her boyfriend then took us into Lamphun to the Temple where we'd started out with the tram on Friday. But this time we visited the stalls and the inside of the temple. Extremely hot!! On the way home we visited a large temple on the hill from where we had wonderful views of the surrounding country-side and stopped for lunch, really enjoying the Thai food. With the language difficulty, we did not learn a lot, but it was all very interesting. During the whole journey, the radio was turned up very loudly listening to the news in Thai!

In the afternoon we rested in the shade, close to the fan. There was confusion about dinner as we said when asked if we were hungry that we'd eat when everyone else ate. It turned out when ours was ready, that some had eaten earlier. Lack of language skills, does make things difficult! We finished dinner at 8 and came up for bed. No water again, but we managed to throw some water over ourselves to feel refreshed.

Monday 12th April

LAMPHUN, THAILAND

Ian

Left, belatedly, to visit the cluster of seven old, traditional, gray coloured wooden houses located down a lane off a main street in the centre of the city. All were built on tall piles, some of wood or concrete in poor condition, and several of the houses had shutters or latticed panels for ventilation on the upper parts of walls. A lady from one house came and "conversed" with us and presented Erica with a bunch of Jasmine flowers; very nice. Por, our host's daughter then took us, successively, on her motorbike to the bank where her mother, Jit, had a lottery sales stall. Jit then took us to the Pattaprapol Language School. As we were late no one was there, so we were taken to the bus at another location.

We were then driven to the Lamphun Tourist Centre for the Grand Opening by the Mayor of the Lamphun Songkran Festival. After the opening speeches our FF Ambassadors were invited to release minute fish from a large, water filled plastic bag into the adjacent weed and water lily encrusted river. When the ceremony was over we left the city to travel through the countryside to attend a traditional family merit function and dinner with the Wannatung Family at their impressive property, a large house and section. There, under trees for shade, a large extended family had gathered and had arranged many stalls serving different foods and drinks, excellent and tasty choices. As guests we were seated at a special table from where we could roam to sample and enjoy the food, and meet people.

After the delicious meal the Family Merit Ceremony started, with the some twenty elderly men and women to be honoured seated in front of a stage and adjacent to a large loudspeaker system.

They were ranked in an order of status with the women at the right hand end of the line, and were presented with ornamented bowls containing water sprinkled with flowers. Every member of the family circled past each merit elder to be touched on the head, shoulders and back with a water saturated spray of jasmine flowers. As honorary family members we were invited to participate, and I seemed to get an extra dabbling from many of the elders.



After the ceremony, at about 2 pm, we were driven to the Karen Tribal Village of Mae Kha Nad in the foothills to look at their weaving facilities and products in their community shop. Erica was not tempted as the items were too narrow or heavy. After a quick drive through the village we went to the Otop Village of Daun Laung at Amphoe Pasang with its cotton and silk goods. Much looking by all in the shops, with encouragement to buy suitable garments for the Buddha Parade tomorrow. Erica brought a cloche and I a colourful shirt. I saw a local with an iced cappuccino drink, and as I was very thirsty in the 45 C temperature I went and found the stall selling the drinks and brought one for myself, then one for Erica. Most of our group then purchased a drink. At the back of the shops Jenny and I found some looms with a lady busy on one. It was most interesting to see her working.

Back to the Language School where our hosts were waiting to take us "home". After a refreshing shower we spent half an hour with Por on an English reading exercise. She did very well, with only some minor vowel difficulties. At about 7:30 pm we left for dinner at our host's favourite fish restaurant at a typical open-sided facility on the roadside halfway between Lamphun and Chiang Mai. There, along with two of their friends, we had a delicious meal of grilled fish, octopus, bean noodles, lightly spiced salads, tofu and other local dishes. Dit, our male host, had brought a small bottle of Johnny Walker whiskey which, diluted with much soda water was his favourite drink. It turned out that the two lady guests were considering travelling with Jit to New Zealand in 2011, so we had much discussion on travel options. Their Thailand option did not allow them to go elsewhere at the end of the tour; they had to return to Thailand with the group. We are to look at other options for them. After meal we drove to a small upper class village near Lamphun to the house of one (Pook) of the friends, a simple, well arranged house as Pook works most of the year in Bangkok. "Home" to bed at 10:30 pm after a most interesting, informative and enjoyable day.

Tuesday 13th April

Erica

Up at 6.30 for 9am start, but left at 9.45 and were driven to Pensiri Thai silk shop. The ladies had a good look around, and I was interested in material for a blouse but found the material too heavy but beautiful. Most of us only bought silk tissue holders.

We were next taken to the Thai Sam Noom shop. We were served sweets and a very sweet lemongrass blue tea made from a blue flower, which I liked. We all made a sweet made with sticky rice, coconut milk which was wrapped in banana leaves ending up in a rectangular shape, some more rectangular than others and steamed. We took some home to our hosts but they didn't care for them very much.

Lunch was provided of a noodle dish more sweet blue tea, pork balls and sticky rice, and then time to join the Buddha parade.

Bought Jasmine flower wreaths for wearing around our necks which were extremely pretty but didn't last too long in the heat.

We paraded down the main street up near the front of the parade and it wasn't long before we were soaked by water which was thrown over us and everyone else by adults and children. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the experience except when we received ice cold water. After about 2 hours we peeled off the parade and went and sat on some steps in the sun to dry off and wait for our hosts to pick us up. Good advice not to take our cameras etc as we were soaked to the skin including the police and anyone who lined up on the side lines.



Dinner, as usual we were taken to a restaurant, different one each evening. Several of the host's friends joined us for dinner. Left with Por and Pang (our host's children) for home and quickly to shower and bed.

Wednesday 14th April.

Joy

Today we met at Pensri's school and boarded our bus for the day's adventures. With Pensri and Narong as guides we travelled mainly on a wide new highway, first stop The Elephant Conservation Park where the highlight for me was to see the younger elephants twirling hula hoops on their trunks. Very sweet indeed! Large and small had their turn in the spotlight, balancing, playing games, painting, and then there was the feeding frenzy. The number of bananas and corn cobs bought from the stalls that those elephants tucked away was amazing. Then, for some, came the elephant ride and compulsory photo. The most uncomfortable, jolting ride ever taken. Visions of long distance travel in the long ago filled me with pain in every joint and I was grateful my ride was short.



Back in the coolness of the bus and on to a buffet lunch in a delightful Lampang hotel with air conditioning and music. Bliss. Until the Karaoke Kids started.

Waiting outside were horses and carriages and a sedate ride around the streets gave great viewing of the ceramics the city is famous for and an idea of layout and feeling of the history of the place.

A visit to a ceramics factory enticed most to open their wallets. There was the high class shop with air conditioning and a seconds/budget shop without it! A teapot and matching cups were my special treat, a curse from the moment I bought them until I got home - when it all became worthwhile. A china necklet and earrings also loved did not survive the trip.

Tonight Jenny and I were to provide the meal. Our hosts Toy and Tom who had the neighbours' children in tow took us to McK - a sort of upmarket McDonalds where steamboat style food was chosen for us. The extended family who we had travelled with all weekend were there too and across from us no less than Bob and Sue with Pensri. The firm photographer took photos, making sure both children and adults were satisfactorily posed and as we left presented us with vividly framed copies. An all time memento – and great advertising. A McK house with all of us tucked happily inside.

Home to check the internet and the luxury of an air conditioned bedroom - by now we had realised that setting it at 26oC prevented us sleeping in a Wellington gale. Another great day.

Thursday 15th April

Jenny

Our host, Tom, produced breakfast about 8am – an absolute feast: a noodle and prawn dish, pork steam buns, red bean paste buns, green mango slices and fresh longans.

This was a very special day for the Thais, the culmination of the Songkran festival.

After breakfast Tom took us to a nearby temple to show us the cultural side of Songkran, very busy and very colourful. Inside the temple people were sitting on the floor facing the Buddha, each with a bowl of marigold petal water, waiting for blessings from the monks to begin. Outside there were families planting bright paper banners in the sand, and others putting marigold petal water on the seven small statues lined up on a bench, one for each day of the week.

From there we went to the nearby Forest temple, a peaceful contrast, mainly green and white and almost deserted, with yellow laburnums and statues of laughing elephants lining the drive, and ponds filled with white lotus flowers. Our hostess Toy had been there since before 7am, preparing and serving food for the monks.

Because they knew we were interested in textiles, Tom and Toy then took us to the home of their friend Lakana who has developed a business making machine and hand embroidered household linens which are sold throughout Thailand.

From there we drove to their home village near Lamphun. First we briefly visited their home, concrete downstairs and old style dark timber upstairs. Tom's parents lived just around the corner and there we saw a traditional family blessing ceremony for the New Year. The parents were seated on chairs and their children, all in their 20s and 30s, sat on the floor, out of respect. A present of food was given to the parents who then blessed each 'child' with marigold water, and a brief prayer was said. We then moved on a couple of streets to the house of Toy's father for another blessing ceremony. Toy's father taught us the Thai phrase 'chock dee na' which means Good luck.

Once we were back on the main roads we found there was still water being thrown at the cars, but rather less than on preceding days. We were driven to the Tweechol Botanic Gardens near Chiang Mai but on the road to Chiang Rai. Lunch was a delicious buffet and we had a quick visit to the museum with some history of the Lanna people including the padded silk vests onto which mothers sewed magic writing to protect their sons in battle – they would have offered little protection against the swords that were in the display case beside them! It was a lovely surprise to meet Maureen and her host family on the shuttle bus that took us on a tour of the gardens. There were animals and birds, real and topiary - and plants in an amazing variety. Joy and I later went back to spend a happy half hour walking and investigating the medicinal shrubs in one area.

Then it was home for a short rest in the cool of the air-conditioning

In the evening we arrived about 7.30 at a hotel in Chiang Mai to join the group for our farewell dinner. We sat with our host families and were served a meal of typical northern Thai dishes including tom yum soup in a steamboat. During dinner a DVD of photos taken during our stay was shown, causing lots of reminiscing. This was followed by performances of traditional dancing and of Thai boxing. Our songs, particularly the rendition of the canoe song, were well received, and the hosts joined us enthusiastically in a repeat of that. There were speeches and gifts to each club, presentations of certificates to all, and a sharing of farewell songs. A fitting occasion to end a very enjoyable and memorable visit.



Friday 16th April

Verena

Bob, Sue and I stayed with Pensri in what she called the Village. About 25 km outside Lamphun. After an interesting breakfast of noodle soup without chillies and some sweet juicy mangos we were off to Pensri's Language School in Lamphun where we met up with the rest of the group. The walls in the entrance room of the school were full of photos from other friendship force group that had been hosted by Lamphun FF. Some of us bought some tops with the logo "Friendship Force International Changing The Way You See The World"



Then it was off to the Hotel For some special tea we stopped at the "Airport Plaza Supermarket. What an exquisite display of fresh foods and veggies.

Installed in our room, we went out looking for a post office. But it was closed as the "New Years" celebrations were still going. A small lunch in a Café and then back to the Hotel, where we enjoyed a relaxing swim in the pool.

In the evening we had to look at the market just down the road. It felt like hundreds of stalls with all imaginable goods. Maureen's back was troubling her so she had a sit-down massage and then it was back to the Hotel packing the luggage for the next three days.

Saturday 17th April

Maureen

The first day of our independent tour of Northern Thailand at the end of our Friendship Force, Lamphun hosting.

Having enjoyed a night at the very pleasant Chaing Mai Plaza Hotel, where the swimming pool had met all my expectations, I along with my fellow Friendship Force members were ready to go adventure hunting again.

At 7am we boarded a large, comfortable bus and drove north to an elephant training park. The park was not as developed as the one we had visited with our Lamphun friends but I personally liked this one better. Some of the elephants were quite young. I felt more comfortable with that show. It was not as Disneyland-like as the last park. Jeanette was very brave as she allowed an elephant to lift her to a sitting position on his trunk. Definitely not for me!! After the show, the elephants moved forward to the audience and used their trunks to search out for money. I had not put any money in their trunks. Those elephants were not giving up easily if no money was forthcoming. Next thing, I turned to find an elephant behind me, his trunk a searching. Did I get a fright!



By 9.25am we were back in our air conditioned bus. We enjoyed a comfortable tour and climbed up a winding road until we reached a fertile area where rice and lychees grew. Midday saw us at lunch, then at 1.30pm we arrived at the Kok River. Here another adventure began.

We all packed into motorized long tail boats heading for a three hour trip up river to Chiang Rai. We constantly waved to many Thai people bathing or fishing in the river. We even collected a few splashes aimed at us from them, all in good fun of course.

A stop at a village above the river saw us climb the bank to be met by a woman who had a small shop in the front room of her home. She had a freezer, powered by what I do not know, (solar power (Editor)), and we were able to buy much welcomed cold drinks. Our guide informed us that these villagers were drug addicts and that their ancestors had arrived from Burma 100 years ago. Young boys followed us up to the village. One looked my way and constantly poked his tongue in and out at me. I asked where the girls were and was told they were down in the river. The guide suggested that we buy sweets for the children which we did. I walked out of the shop with two packets of sweets. The tongue-poking boy ripped them out of my hand. I was quick enough to grab one packet back to share with the other children. I think we were all glad to leave that village with a huge pile of alcohol bottles lying on the dark earth and a pig wandering round. One thing I was surprised at was a group of lovely red lilies growing out of the dark brown, hard packed earth with not a blade of grass in sight.

I asked myself "Why did the guide take us to that village?" After a climb down the bank we were back in the boats. I enjoyed the trip up river, often trailing my hand overboard into the water. We passed many locals who were all on holiday enjoying the waterway. At one spot the amount of people relaxing in the water must have been in the hundreds.

In the late afternoon we arrived at the Chiang Rai boat landing. When our bus arrived we were all aboard and on our way to our hotel.

Another adventurous day was over and I went to sleep wondering what adventures would the next day bring.

Sunday 18th April

Erice

Left Hotel at Chiang Rai 8.30am. The temperature being a little cooler as 389 ft above sea level. A few facts and figures given that the area had a pop of 1.3 million and 90% of tourists visit Chiang Rai. It is cheaper shopping across the border in Burma where there is no tax. A lot of rice grown here otherwise economy depends on tourism. We stopped at the small town of Mae Sai where there numerous stalls, Jade items being a popular purchase.

Continued travel by bus for 40 kms of wide dirt road (road works) to the Golden Triangle. Here we enjoyed lunch at a very nice restaurant where we were able to photograph Laos and Myanmar (Burma) while standing in Thailand. We saw a giant golden Buddha built to commemorate the Queen's 72nd birthday. Across the water in Laos we could also view a huge casino built by the Chinese. From there we then travelled some distance in two 4wheel drive trucks to visit a tidy Hill tribe village and made a brief stop to view tea growing.



Our next stop was the Chinese village of Measa Lang to enjoy tea tasting with 5 different teas offered. Most of us took the opportunity to purchase vacuum packed tea at a reasonable price to take home. From the village it was a 40 minute hilly trip back in the trucks to reach our coach and then the drive back to hotel, arriving approx 5.30 after another full day of sightseeing. The hotel pool popular that evening.

Monday 19th April

Chiang Rai to Chiang Mai

Sue

Before leaving Chiang Rai we went to visit a famous local temple, Wat Phra Kaew. This temple is famous because of the discovery of an emerald Buddha behind a wall in a pagoda of the original temple. The original was claimed by the king and sent to Bangkok but a replica was made to replace it.



On the outskirts of Chiang Rai we visited the White temple, Wat Rong Khun. This is a modern temple complex made, not for worship, but as a piece of architecture and a tourist destination. The artist, Chalermchai Kositpipat, built the temple with his own money and incorporated many different and thought provoking pieces of art. Photos were allowed everywhere except in the main temple where he had an interesting mural of a devil with pictures of George Bush and Osama Bin Laden in its eyes. Apparently this was done as a protest against violence, so that these two protagonists can look each other in the eye with kindness not hate.



By the bridge leading to the main temple is a pit of skulls.

On the way back to Chiang Mai we stopped for coffee at an interesting café called Cabbages and Condoms Inn. The owner is using the proceeds from the café to finance development, especially family planning and AIDS, among the hill tribes of the area.



Tuesday 20th April

CHIANG MAI TO KUALA LUMPUR

Brian

We left the hotel at Chiang Mai early to get the 7.30am flight to KL. We all wanted to change our money, but Ian cleaned the bank out with his request for Malaysian currency! However, it was all sorted out at KL airport, where there was no problem about currency conversions.

We were met at the KL airport and taken to Concorde Inn, with fairly spartan rooms but which were quite adequate for our purposes. A city tour was suggested [at \$40 pp] but as it would take 5 hours found we couldn't fit it in, in the time available, so we spent the afternoon at the pool-the water was very warm, and it was a pleasant way to spend the rest of the day.

We all gathered before dinner to celebrate Erica's birthday [in a few days' time] with Ian shouting drinks all round- "Thanks Ian" Oh... and Erica!as it was a good time to get together before going on to the Indonesian exchange.

After dinner we all had an early night in preparation for our 4 am start tomorrow.



Wednesday 21st April

KUALA LUMPUR TO YOGYAKARTA

Judith

An early start as we were up at 4am to have breakfast in the dining room. Stood in a queue for 45 minutes at the airport to check-in and on arrival at Jogja, paid \$US45 each for a visa.

We were met by some of the hosts at the airport. Brian and I were looked after by Verena's host, Sri, and Butnaryo, the school driver. Sri teaches English at the school at which our host is the Headmaster, so we had no language problem there. We were driven to the school, taking a round-about route to show us rice fields [and Butnaryo's pink house] accompanied by lots of horn tooting at the many motorcycles on the road. At the school we were introduced to another English teacher and the pair of them showed us around the classrooms, introducing us to many of the students and teachers. The students were encouraged to talk to us which they did with some enjoyment.



We met our host, Suharjo, in his study and then sat outside talking to another teacher who was setting up programmes to help teachers with the English language. After more class visits Sri and Butnaryo drove us through out of the city to a restaurant for lunch. "Did we want to sit on the floor or at a table?" we were asked. Sri was pleased at our response of a table, please! We had an excellent meal with many dishes - all very tasty. The view was of rice fields in various stages of growth- apparently they are able to grow 3-4 crops each year around here.

Back in the [school] car we drove around stopping for photos and calling at the house of a friend of Sri. This home was built entirely of teak with 4 huge pillars in the big central room. The owner very proudly showed us the cow, worth about \$NZ 4,000, with its calf, in the backyard. Despite saying we would be going to one later in the week, we still visited the local batik shop.



Arriving at our host's, in the heat, we were glad of our air-conditioned bedroom, with en suite. Even though the bathroom had no hand basin there was a large bucket into which water dripped constantly, and we did have a flush toilet! In the bedroom we found fruit, bread, bottles of water and a water cooler which also produced hot water for tea [always sweetened when given to us]. We assumed this was for breakfast, but next morning, before 6.30am [after eating bread and bananas in the bedroom] were invited out to another meal! We always left home about 6.30 as we were hosted in a village about an hour out of town.

We had been given something to eat by the daughter of the house on arrival which we imagined was the evening meal, but an hour or so later were called to dinner. It was an excellent meal with many dishes. Due to the language difficulty, with no-one in this relatively shy family having a good grasp of English [and our Indonesian being non-existent] the family were reluctant to eat with us, so we generally had our meals on our own.

Thursday 22nd April

City Tour

Sue

Today was a day for sightseeing around Yogyakarta (Jogja for short).

The first place that we visited was the Sultan's Palace, a very grand place built in 1756 and still used as the home of the current Sultan, who is also the local governor. The complex is made up of several buildings including a large hall that is used for celebrations 3 times a year. We were fortunate to be able to hear some of a concert being performed on traditional instruments.

We then moved on to the Water Palace, also belonging to the Sultans but no longer used. It contains three bathing pools and, apparently, the sultan used to watch his wives, concubines etc playing in the water and select which one he wanted to take to bed for the night! There was space under his bed to light a fire but I would have thought that he wouldn't have needed it (due to the hot climate!)



We also got to see some Batik making here.

After lunch we went on to visit a Batik factory, a puppet making workshop and a silver factory. Most people were tempted to buy something in at least one of these places!

In the evening we went to see a very good live performance of the Ramayana Ballet, a traditional Hindu story of Rama, his wife Sita and her brother Laksmana and the triumph of good over evil. The costumes were beautiful and the story was well performed. There was an excellent sequence of acrobatics involving the Monkey God Hanuman.



Friday 23rd April

Bob

Today we are off to see THE replica left by early Buddhists in Jogja (ie local nick-name for Jogjakarta) - probably in Indonesia- namely Borobudur. A world heritage site, it is a Mahayan Buddhist monument dating back to the 9th Century. It is both a shrine to Lord Buddha and a place of pilgrimage.

The monument comprises six square platforms topped by three circular platforms, and is decorated with 2,672 relief panels and 504 Buddha Status. A main dome, located at the center of the top platform, is surrounded by 72 Buddha statues seated inside perforated stupa (A structure containing Buddhist relics and human remains.).



Situated 45kms outside Jogja in a very seismically active area, it was damaged by a big eruption in 1007 with further damage from seismic events in the years that followed. Finally it fell into disuse in 14th Century with arrival of Islam and was buried underground and partly overgrown until Raffles rediscovered it in 1814 and restoration slowly took place. [for more on this <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borobudur>]

Pilgrims should walk around each level 9 times in clockwise direction. For some reason none of the group were interested in doing this though most of us got to the top. (Wonder if it was the heat!?). Steps up the monument were not well designed they were both high and narrow! So it was quite a feat all the way up. Those of the group with walking issues showed amazing and impressive determination in doing this walk.

We had a 'bus lunch' and returned to Jogja for a formal greeting with the mayor, who was delighted in receiving the letter of greetings and gifts from Kerry Prendergast. We all had a photo taken including Doctor Adam (President Jogja FF), and then it was back to our hosts -in our case 'the hostel' - for a cold shower and rest in the air conditioned bedroom. Jogja cooler than Lamphun but still 33deg, however the humidity was more the issue here!



Saturday 24th April

Ian

Up at 6 am after hearing the usual Mosque call at 4 am and food seller chimes from 5:30 am. Had a boiled egg and sweet bread (purchased from a seller) breakfast by ourselves as usual, and saw Riyawan (stepson) leave for school at 6 am, then Tantri and Mita (step daughters) to their hospital jobs at 6:30 and 7 am respectively. At 7:30 Ambar our male day host drove us to the Yogya FF Office where we chatted until the bus left for our school visit. Drove through the usual suburban mixture of houses, businesses, paddy and crop fields beyond the outskirts of the city through the usual ribbon development to the Pderet Senior High School in Bantul Regency.

At the school we were greeted by the headmaster, many staff and students, some in attractive traditional dress. After being seated at tables in a reception room we were welcomed by a song and dance group, and a speech in good English from the headmaster. He commented on the 2006 earthquake which destroyed and damaged some school buildings and villages, and killed some 60 local people. The school has 500 students, mostly Muslim with some Christians, about 60% being girls, 23 teachers and 11 support staff, and full facilities including a mosque and student support. All classrooms were labelled in Indonesian and English.

After a traditional dance by five girl students Bob replied to the welcome and we sang Pokarekareanna. Following another dance by three girls with fans we had refreshments of sweet tea, peanuts and bananas. We were then taken individually around the school by senior students, who spoke reasonable English, and staff. I went into a classroom teaching the Koran and said a few words. Saw many students practising emergency procedures, a compulsory activity since the earthquake. The facilities were very good though, unfortunately, most of the classrooms lacked students because of a school holiday. Back to the reception room for an excellent lunch which included a tasty drink, Satany, made from the bark of a forest tree. Told it was very good for digestion.



Bob gave a very good thank you speech after which we left to drive to the Meripa Volcano and its National Park. Practically continuous buildings for the some 30 km to the park, with a gradual climb up the lower slopes of the Mt Taranaki- Egmont like volcano. Many houses had a European architectural look, a reflection of the Dutch colonial period and the desire to have cooler living conditions. We stopped at an observation site where we were fortunate to have the cloud peel away from the summit of the volcano so that we could take good photos. The volcano last erupted in 2006 and was emitting small plumes of "smoke". Some interesting flowers in the area, along with long-tailed birds and monkeys.

Continued to the Kalirang National Park at the end of the road where there was an impressive collection of stalls. Had to pay 20,000 rupiah for entry to the park, and our FF guide, Sono, also paid for parking and entry at several places. We walked up a rough cobbled path to a waterfall where Bob had a paddle. Some of us then carried on up the path up a spur through the jungle, but did not get any good views. Saw plants similar to some in New Zealand, including ferns, Lycopodium and tree ferns. Took care going down the slippery, cobbled path and steps. Once again much litter everywhere. Back at the waterfall we were surrounded by students from Madang Island, east Java, who were very keen to have photographs taken with us.

It started to rain as we left the park, and we returned to the FF centre largely by the same route, from where Ambar took us "home" to shower, wash clothes and talk to the three young adults. Digma, our day hostess, Ambar and their children, Andre and Neira, arrived at 7 pm, then went to purchase special food for the meal that we were providing for the two families. We had a very tasty selection of food; barbecued duck and dishes of shrimp, bean noodles, Chinese vegetables and others, including a spicy dish for them. Mita cooked the sticky rice. Very casual seating with the families preferring to sit on the floor, while we were on a sofa with small tables.. At the end of the meal Erica brought out our limited range of gifts for presentation. They all chose items, and were most interested in the book illustrating New Zealand farming, which created much discussion. They had never tasted liquorice so the sweets disappeared quickly as they were liked. A delightful friendly evening with much talk in Indonesian and English.

Sunday 25th April

Erica

Anzac Day – Awake around 4am to the call to prayers. The mornings are always lovely until 8am, the weather heats up to very hot and I start dripping again.

The bread man rings his bell at 6/6.30, so breakfast of soft white sweet bread and jam and coffee. Sometimes boiled egg or fried rice. Always interesting to sit outside on the porch as people passing in the narrow street each day selling goods and a small stall opposite our gateway selling vegetables.

Our household was made up of “father”, “mother” in the USA and 4 “foster” young adults. The 4 young adults looked after us very well and eager to speak English. Being Sunday the 2 girls went to visit friends on their motorbikes.

Farewell Lunch

The Farewell lunch was held in the “foyer” of a private home. Many people had been invited who didn't appear to have anything to do with FF. We received a certificate and Bob gave a speech of thanks. Plenty of water, juice, tea was provided and then we were entertained by a group of young girls in traditional costume. Each dance was long with many movements to remember, followed by young boys, then a joint dance by both groups. This was enjoyed by all.



We went over the road where there was more room for the adult dances from East Java (reog ponorogo, name of dances). A variety of dances from young warriors with 2 “elderly” men who trained them, magician, dances that looked like “hip hop”, girls on make believe horses and 2 men with huge head dresses covered in peacock feathers and a tiger head. The men must have been very strong as I couldn't move the head dresses off the ground. I think we were very lucky to have seen this particular display of dances.

Lunch of many dishes, always sticky rice. A little dancing by us and others and home for a rest. We were picked up at 4pm to go to a market by our hosts, sister in law and brother in law. The market turned out to be a modern mall which was packed with people. A well known Indonesian singer was mobbed by people and cell phones trying to get photos. The music was so loud no singing was heard.

Down the escalator with the trolley to the grocery store. The escalator held the trolley so it couldn't move into anyone else, most impressed. The grocery department looked bright, very well displayed and great choice of food. Ian bought 2 bags of apples for each of our families. Dinner for us was always around 8pm, shower and to bed.

Monday 26th April

Jeanette

Erice and I arose at 6am and ate a cooked breakfast prepared by Mrs Masito, our hostess who we met for the first time that morning as she and her husband had been away at a conference since our arrival, (we had been well cared for by their adult children who lived in the same very large and spacious house-actually two houses joined together). Mrs Masito was a gracious lady and had been up since 5am preparing breakfast-a Javanese meal. Erice and I left our host's house at 7.45am to join our group at the home of Dr. Adam. We bussed to Prambanan Temple at 8.20am together with three students of the English language whom Sono, our guide, had invited. He wanted assistance with "minding" us. Also, the students would be able to practice their ability to speak English.

Prambanan Temple is situated about 17 kilometres from Jogja and consists of three main temples surrounded by a number of smaller ones. The temple is an inheritance of the Hindus and was built about 50 years after Borobudur in the 9th century. Likewise it has world heritage status. The word Prambanan means "a lot of priests". The 3 main temples from west to east are named. Brahma honours the god of Brahma, the creator of the universe. Inside a statue of Brahma has four different faces symbolizing the four directions of the wind. Shiva, the tallest temple, houses an image of Shiva, the god of gods who was adored by the ancient Javanese. On the side of this temple, the legend of Ramayana is depicted in stone relief. The 3rd temple. Vishnu, honours the god of the same name, the protector of all living creatures. In stone relief, the legend of Krishnayana is told.

I was very impressed with Prambanan because of its ancient history, its survival through several major earthquakes and its supreme location with the active volcano, Mt Merapi, smoking in the background.



On the walk back to our bus the pathway led through many stalls where clothing and other items similar to Borobudur were sold but unlike at that monument, the sellers did not hassle us for sales.

At 10.45am we left for the beaches, climbing up into the mountain range and travelling south. Our three students practiced their English speaking skills during the one and a half hour journey. We passed through lush forest and crops of tapioca, bananas and coconuts. Ian informed us that the soil consisted of lava rocks, very porous with both white and dark colouring and unable to retain water. This meant that crops were hard to grow and water had to be trucked in from Jogja. We arrived at Baron Beach, the first of the three visited. I saw women sifting through the sands and separating pieces of coral which were then bagged ready for sale. At the next beach, Kukup, one of the students came back with some snails (maybe crabs) in a plastic bag. Their shells had been painted in various designs; they were alive and moving vigorously! He planned to place them in a glass bowl! At the next beach, Krakal, some of us swam, others paddled. I saw a pile of shells leaning against a shed. They looked like turtle shells. On the way to and from the beaches we passed many villages. People were working in the fields, selling produce at stalls and laying roads. Our guide said these villagers were among the poorest in Java. We arrived back at Dr Adams at 5pm after a full and interesting day.

Tuesday 27th April

Erice

This was departure day after experiencing 3 weeks of trying heat and different culture but a fascinating trip.. Another very early start and farewell to Jeanette at Jogykarta airport. An hr flight to K.L. and then 6 of us returning to Singapore airport.

A small panic shortly after arrival at Singapore (after going through customs) when Ian discovered he had left his diary on the plane. He was not allowed to re-enter plane but fortunately a staff member retrieved the precious diary.

As we had some hours of waiting before evening flight to NZ it was decided to take the offer of a free 1 hour bus tour of Singapore while in transit. We had checked in our luggage by this time. After all the form-filling and official stickers on our shirts it was once again through Customs. Here we were dismayed to find that officially we had already been out of transit without leaving the sprawling airport! It seems the act of leaving one area and checking in at another point was the reason. After being escorted to another official Customs desk and passports once again checked we were able to enjoy a very well presented tour of the city. After freshening up with showers and a light meal we were ready for boarding the uneventful flight home.

