

WORDS & PICS: Grant Purdue

ASIAN PARADISE

So, how do you chaps feel about our next overseas bike trip being to Borneo?"

This was the question posed by Warwick, one of the group of six mates who try and get away together on bike adventures whenever we can.

He had been trawling around the internet looking for sites offering unusual or exciting motorcycle tours and came across Borneo Biking Adventures.

We all thought it was a brilliant idea, but one that needed to be quickly followed up by each of us sneaking a Google search as to where the hell Borneo actually is. (The easiest way to explain it is if you draw a line from Perth heading north, Borneo is just over the other side of the equator.)

After reading several tantalising reviews and features included on the

Borneo Biking Adventures (BBA) site, along with a couple of emails back and forth with Terry, the owner of BBA, the lads knew it was a 'must do' and so set about trying to agree as to when we could all make it happen. This in itself was akin to herding chickens with cats but after a few false starts we finally settled on May.

BRUNEI BONUS

Our early morning flight from New Zealand provided us with a fascinating en route treat, a seven-hour stop-over bus tour of Brunei as part of the service offered by our carrier Royal Air Brunei. Brunei is a tiny nation wedged into the vast island of Borneo.

We then completed our journey onto Borneo with a quick flight to K.K (Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Borneo) where we were met by our host Terry Mills and

Kiwis end up riding bikes in the most exotic places. Take Grant Purdue and his regular riding mates. Earlier this year they flew to Borneo to sample the local roads and hospitality.



Grant and friends enjoying a welcome beer at the end of a long riding day (top) and the obligatory Tip of Borneo shot (above).



Ride HQ was the beautiful Sinurambi Lodge.

his side kick, five-times UK motocross champ Bryan Wade.

From the airport it was a 25 minute trip up to their amazing hilltop lodge, Sinurambi, which would be our base for the duration of the tour. We arrived just in time to settle into the excellent accommodation then watch a breathtaking sunset (one of many) while sipping beers in their Infinity pool and looking back over K.K. with its stunning golden sanded coastline and bays dotted with islands.

Next morning after wading through a massive three-course brekkie, Terry ran through a brief outline of some of the rides and trips they had planned for us. The riding options as to their style, terrain and numbers of days on the bike were open to discussion and the tour was then tailored to our requests.

Apart from a three-day trip down to Brunei, all our riding would be within the Malaysian-controlled region of Sabah. With one exception (take a bow, Bryan. Ed) our group is primarily tar-experienced riders so Terry planned our adventures around road rides, with some off-road work thrown in for good measure.

As we were to find out the range of both on and off-road riding opportunities available is staggering with all levels and styles of riding catered for.

Once the planning was over it was outside to familiarise ourselves with the Aprilia Pegaso 650s that Terry and Bryan utilise for their tours. The bikes themselves were kept in good order with nightly washes and maintenance courtesy of Bryan but we did experience a few reliability problems with most of them over the course of our tour.

Breakdowns were always covered by the fairly swift appearance of a replacement bike, but I was surprised at some of the mechanical problems we encountered with the Aprilias.

FUN & GAMES

The fun and games began the moment we left the lodge's gate in the form of the somewhat hairy five km ride down the driveway, if you can call it that. The first morning saw the bitumen babies among us more than a little challenged. It was a mad concoction of steep gravel, boulders, fist-sized rocks, portions of seal and pothole-rutted muddy surfaces.

We did all come to really enjoy riding up and down it over time, but if you weren't fully awake at the top, you sure were by time you came to its end.

From there it was out and onto the wonderful roads of Borneo. And what a treat! The roads and their surfaces are very well constructed and maintained. The traffic outside of K.K. is light and what little exists is extremely courteous with cars, trucks and buses regularly slowing and pulling over to let a bunch of Kiwis fly past.

After a quick fill at the local gas station we got to go and play on one of many outrageously dynamic hill passes that cover the island. Broad sweeping corners abound and seem to go on forever with roads that were often three lanes wide, although the wider roads did not truly matter as there was practically no one on them but us.

STUNNING ROADS

Terry waved us on to ride the 45 odd km pass at our own pace and with the local constabulary not seeming to give a toss, the only limitations were one's own self-belief and the top end of the Aprilias, with the ever warm tarmac ensuring the rubber stuck like glue at all times.

Getting into the groove was almost instantaneous, firing into some of the finest cambered corners that seemed to go on so long you would start wondering if you were going to arrive back on top of yourself. Needless to say the grins quickly spread to ridiculous proportions.

By the time we had all stopped at a designated roadside cafe for morning coffees, Terry arrived to find six very excited lads, all panting like puppies and desperate to get back out there.

Our first day's adventure was curtailed somewhat by late afternoon rains on the range road of Mount Kinabalu itself, coming down with such force that it served as a reminder we were indeed in the tropics. The cloud came down too and we were in total pea soup fog, just able to make out

the tail light of the bike/car in front and not much else.

After a quick stop we kitted up in wet gear to avoid getting too cold, then it was a wet but warm ride back to the lodge with all of us praying the rains had not reached the driveway to the lodge. As luck would have it we basked in wonderful sunshine for the last 15 minutes of the ride.

I could go on and on about our days out on those fantastic roads. Suffice to say with the package of roads, surfaces, corners, great scenery for those who cared to look, lovely warm temperatures and outstanding food, it dawned on all of us pretty early on in the tour that we had arrived in motorcycling nirvana.

Terry, his Sabah-born wife Rose and Bryan made sure we got to experience a lot of what Borneo has to offer. We found ourselves exploring gorgeous pristine white and golden sanded deserted beaches, (yes we did get to go out and carve up the dunes like a pack of school boys!), tea and palm tree plantations, an orangutan park, rain forests where we saw elephants in the wild just 10 metres away, amazing local produce and fish markets, snorkelling and riverboat cruises along with wonderful overnight excursions to Sandakan and Kudat.

TRIP TO THE TIP

On our trip up to Kudat, which included a visit to the northern tip of Borneo, we were treated to staying in Persidons Lodge, a beautiful three-story home which has been built on and into a gigantic volcanic rock that forms some of the house's walls, the foundations and even the sides of the swimming pool.

On the second to last day of our trip, Bryan threw in a challenging off-road day that certainly took me out of my comfort zone. We tackled rocky ridges, deep mud, river crossings, rutted clay paths and very steep hill climbs followed by lip-biting descents and all on the somewhat heavy 650s fitted with road orientated tyres. Everyone made it through



Happy chaps stopping to enjoy the view (top) then Mike handing out gifts to local school kids, Persidon's Lodge, built on – and in – a massive volcanic rock and finally, one of the many magnificent sunsets seen and photographed on tour.

the day, some faring better than others. Warwick and I both bounced off our brand spanking new bikes. No real damage was done to either men or machines, save some damaged pride. By the end of the day, having taken as much advantage as I could of Bryan's on-going and very knowledgeable tutoring, I was having the time

ill-fated expedition down to Brunei for a couple of nights. It was exceptionally hot and we had to deal with a total of 18 passport checks there and back, so lots of waiting around with endless rounds of gear off, gear on exercises.

HARD TO LEAVE

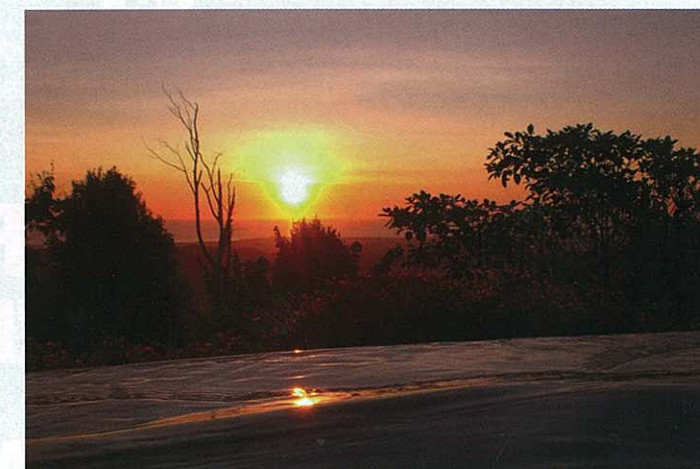
Once more we were treated to some truly exception of food while there, with the added novelty of Brunei being totally dry. To overcome this when we dined out, we had to be shut away from all the other restaurant patrons, hidden behind special panels so we could enjoy sneaky drinks on the sly. Unfortunately the riding to, from and around Brunei held nothing to excite us.

It really was hard to leave Borneo to return home. It is such an idyllic spot with utterly charming people, beautiful beaches and lovely scenery. With the outstanding food and excellent accommodation the group had enjoyed, we all came away knowing that we had experienced one of the best motorcycle tours one could wish for. Even now my heart still skips a beat just thinking back to those heavenly roads. **KR**



of my life. It really got me wishing that I had my trusty XT250 with me as I believe I could have gotten so much more from the day on a lighter bike.

Just to prove that nothing can be totally perfect we did experience a somewhat



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