

Fae Morris - JAVA

Many years ago, my husband and I had a holiday in Bali and Java. We arrived early in the day stay in a beautiful boutique hotel in Yogyakarta. We had flown from Bali that morning. Our plan was to view the sunrise from the volcano north of the city. We were later to find that the volcano, Batau, was several hours away.

At around ten o'clock that night, we were picked up by the tourist operator in a small white Ford bus and driven through the night at high speed. As we drove, we heard the call to prayer echoing through the hills and trees. A memory not to be forgotten. Around two o'clock in the morning we arrived at a resort high up in the mountains. Lights were on all around the building, fifty young Chinese Indonesian men milled around the entrance to the resort. It was obvious they had been waiting for these Australians to join them.

Several young Gypsy-like short Indonesian men came with their Timor ponies ready for us to ride up to Mt Batau. Ken was given a young quiet pony and I was given a much older bony mare with a small leather saddle. We rode off together into the night. The ground sloped down towards a ravine, it was hard and stony. My horse kept slipping and at times falling when stepping on horse manure and smooth black stones. I wasn't happy with my mare. When we finally arrived at the volcano, the young owners of the horses took the reins and led them away while we climbed a hundred timber stairs to the rim of the volcano. We stood waiting for some time until finally through the clouds the sparkle of the sun shone through, lighting up the sky now pink with billowing white clouds against the blue of the dawn morning sky.

I kept thinking about my unfortunate mare and after we had viewed the sun rising, I decided I would ask the leader of the owners of the horses if I could have his horse to ride. He was reluctant to heed my request then finally allowed me to mount his horse. Almost immediately, my horse started bucking all over the hard volcanic rock which surrounded the base of the volcano. I managed to stay on the horse as it continued to throw me off. Fortunately, I had learnt to ride as a child, however, it had been many years since I had ridden. This spectacle delighted the young men as we were the only people in the group who were from another country. The young Chinese Indonesian men from Jakarta were there celebrating Chinese New Year. My horse continued to buck. Meanwhile, these young men who were having the time of their life flicking the rump of Ken's horse with a leather whip. Ken, who unfortunately had little experience of horse riding was hanging on for dear life as his horse bolted across the plateau.

Ken was tossed from side to side, he was terrified. Finally, he started shouting out at the men.....Ssssstop, Stop, STOP or I won't pay you. Both horses settled down. It was now obvious to me that they had been whipping my horse, too. We looked at each other, unbelieving. Why were we doing this, we were in our fifties. What were we

doing in the middle of the night with all of these people...we could not stop laughing about our plight. Our adventure in Java.