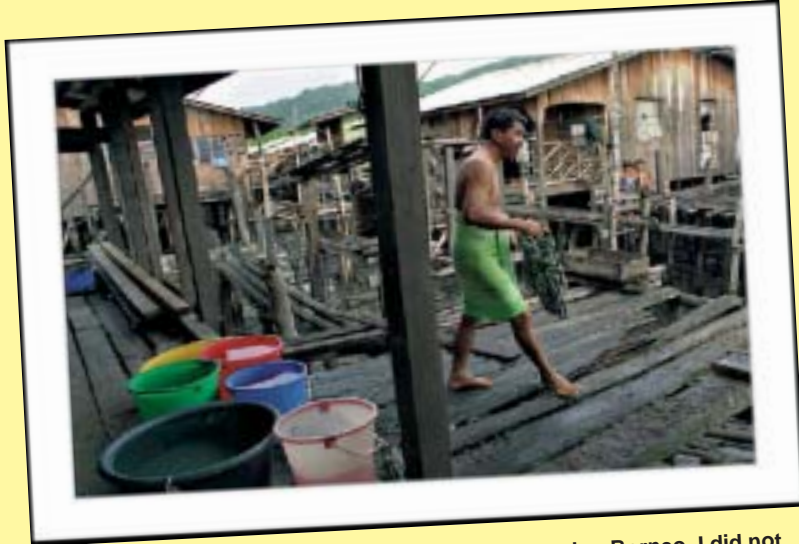


By JONI LEE-JAMES

# Penimbawan Water Village



**W**hen I booked my first overseas trip: destination Borneo, I did not put much thought into what I wanted to encounter. Now that I have returned from my first travel adventure, I'm proud of what I gained from all of my experiences.

Upon arrival in Sabah the first thing that struck me was the people. It was apparent that the lifestyle was dramatically different to my own in Australia - I know now that we are a very fortunate country. The people of Borneo live a very modest life but the thing that struck me is that they are somewhat shy of tourists. However when you show them a sign of friendliness, they will return the gesture ten-fold. This was when I was determined that my first holiday would be spent with the populace, not on visiting the local attractions. I wanted to know all about these people and their culture.

I had been to a couple of water villages over the duration of my stay but the last trip, a day before my return home, was to be the most memorable of my entire holiday. I travelled roughly 45 minutes from Kota Kinabalu to Tuaran. From Tuaran, my guide from Borneo Native Homestay, Conrad and I took a short ten minute boat trip to the village. The only way to come here is to charter a local boat or perahu by one of the local village men. On the way I was engrossed with picturesque scenery from dense jungle to the outlook of Mt Kinabalu from the calm waters.

We arrived at Penimbawan Water Village, a Bajau stilt village north of Borneo. A genuine fishing village built above the water in a secluded cove. As we slowly cruised Conrad ran past the history of how the original bamboo huts built many years ago are still lived in today and how the majority of the villagers are fisherman.

We leisurely walked the rickety planks that meandered through the village. As we ventured past each home, we watched as the women tended to their routine chores and mother their children. The kids were curious of their visitor and furtively took a peek. Those more adventurous came out to perhaps initiate some contact with me to which I wholly engaged.

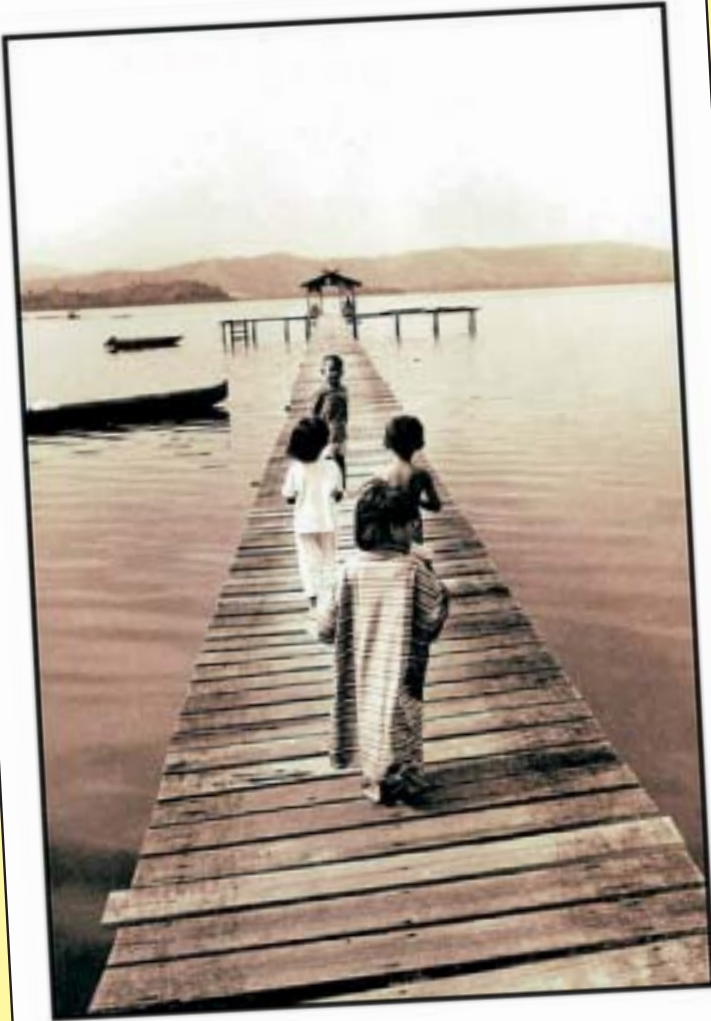
I was warmly welcomed into the Kendupa family home where three generations live. I was immediately drawn to grandmother who appeared to be grinding something in a small bowl on the floor. She exuded personality and seemed to have an interest in me. There were several children in this family, the youngest a twin daughter whose sister had unfortunately passed away. Everyone seemed to be fascinated with me but not as much as I was with them. Their home was minimal, but large. Trophies garnished one side wall. We all gathered on the bamboo floor and chatted - Conrad was my translator. I shared a local cigarette called kirai with grandfather as grandmother occasionally touched me to grab my attention and affectionately smiled. A number of other villagers came to the door to see what all the fuss was about. I learned more about the family and got to know them all.

After about 30 minutes we moved on with our visit. I could easily have spent a longer period of time with the Kendupa family but I dare say I would have worn my welcome with all my inquisitiveness.

What I found most intriguing about this village was that what I saw in one afternoon encompassed the life of these remarkable people. All the insignificant chores we go about in life such as bathing, cooking, washing clothes and going to school was happening all in natural view for all to see.

I was next introduced to the Jaukal family. When I first arrived, I was welcomed by the men of the house, which included father, sons, uncles and cousins. I was advised that the women were not only preparing lunch for me, but they were also a little shy. As everyone was fasting, I felt guilty that they were going to all this trouble for little old me.

After a short period, an attractive young lady appeared from the



kitchen with two plates of BBQ prawns, curried vegetables and rice accompanied by two sauces all served on silverware. Conrad advised me of the protocol for eating with my fingers and how to scoop with my thumb into my mouth. Fortunately I mastered this quite easily.

Once I finished my meal the girls finally emerged from the kitchen and I tried to engage in conversation with Stephanie and Fatimah who are Mr Jaukal's two young daughters aged 14 and 20. After about 20 minutes, to my surprise, Stephanie started speaking in English and told me that they have a new teacher at their school teaching them all English. The other family members made fun of Stephanie and her ability to communicate with me. Her older sister Fatimah appeared to run the house whilst their mother was out at work. I'm immediately drawn to both sisters who were both stunning.

Again, it was time to leave although I could quite easily have spent a week with my new friends. Stephanie, her brother, cousin and all their little friends walked with me to the end of the jetty to farewell me. I promised to send all the family snaps I'd taken and return in the not too distant future.

It was an absolute honour to take this tour and meet the two families. I will certainly travel back to Sabah and hopefully meet up with them again. After all, I promised to return with my Mum. What a wonderful community.

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