

Humanitarian Trip to Kupang, West Timor

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Tucked in a forgotten corner of the Southern Hemisphere, lies West Timor which is one of the poorest province of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. This political region went through a tumultuous history under Portuguese and Dutch colonial rule and served as a shelter for refugees during the East Timor occupation by the Indonesia Military.

Last December, we had the privilege of visiting this beautiful province on a humanitarian trip. The trip was coordinated by a well-known former SIA pilot, Captain Budi Soehardi, who managed Roslin Orphanage. According to Captain Budi, the family was moved by God to set up the orphanage after witnessing on TV the horrible scenes of hungry orphans during the East Timorese crisis in 1999. Using his salary as a pilot, he set up a home for orphans displaced by the war, supported them in their education, and most importantly, he and his wife took the role as parents to them. It is no wonder the children affectionately address Captain Budi as 'Pak Budi'. Pak Budi went as far as to support the children beyond high school education. Many of them graduated from universities and one of the orphans even went on to become a medical doctor. In 2009, Captain Budi won the *CNN Heroes Award* and was honoured for his sacrifice and love for the children.

During the trip, we were housed in the simple but comfortable homestead set up by Captain Budi in Kupang, the capital of the province.

On the first morning, we drove over to the orphanage to visit Pak Budi's lovely children. We arrived drenched in a heavy downpour and were greeted by the scene of children full of laughter and joy, running out and dancing in the heavy rain. Apparently, they were bringing umbrellas for us.

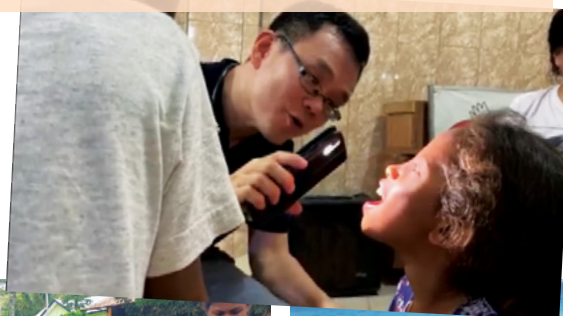
During the visit, the volunteers set up various stations to teach the children handicraft skills. With the assistance of my children and the nurse in our team, we also provided development and dental screening for the children and youths. As it was near Christmas, the children were also blessed with Christmas gifts and a mini Christmas celebration. One of the ladies in our team taught them hymns in English. At night, we were serenaded by the children with a performance of beautiful singing in Bahasa Indonesian led by Captain Budi. I would later learned that these talented children were once invited by our ex-President, Dr Tony Tan, to perform at the Istana. Though unfortunately, the visit did not materialise due to various reasons.

In the few days that we were there, we were able to visit two of Captain Budi's ongoing projects: "Living Lab" and "Reservoir of Love". According to Captain Budi, their first piece of land was a waste land which was barren and dry. But by faith, he attempted to grow vegetation and rice on this dry land. Miraculously, he succeeded to find water on his first try when other villagers

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Taking their developmental and dental screening at Roslin orphanage with the assistance of an Indonesian volunteer



Village school at Kolbono



Kolbono Indian Ocean

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At Reservoir of Love with Captain Budi



Living Lab

had failed previously. This well provided all the water that they needed to irrigate the rice and up till today, they are self-sufficient in rice. At the “Living Lab”, we were treated to many kinds of exotic fruits and vegetables which are harvested in different seasons. During our visit there, he has also started on plans to export various countries a special herb plant by the name of “Moringa” which has been touted as the superfood in the traditional Indian diet. A few years ago, he was further blessed by the American company Coca-Cola, who funded the building of the ‘Reservoir of Love’ for him to transform another piece of waste land into an oasis.



The children serving the village’s school kids

The following day, we embarked on a 4-hour road trip across West Timor to the remote villages in the mountains at Kolbano. After three hours of driving in the dizzying heat of the Indonesian summer (the archipelago has similar climate to Australia, their nearest neighbour), we were relieved to stop by the beautiful beach facing the Indian Ocean for a toilet break. We saw the local children playing happily in the sweltering heat by the beach, making human models with the seaweeds. Our children joined them, and we were moved by the simplicity of their joy and creativity.



My daughter tries out the Sasando (musical instrument)

The first village we went to belonged to a native tribe that welcomed us by their traditional greeting by rubbing noses. We were honoured as important guests with a traditional ceremony of tribal singing and various speeches from the elders. During the ceremony, we were also presented with handmade ornaments by their village head and elders. After the ceremony, we immediately went down to work to set up our medical station to treat and screen the villagers. Many of them were seeing a doctor for the first time. They came with various ailments but nearly more than half of the adult patients had elevated blood pressure. Unfortunately, we have limited medication that we could provide, and

the villagers and elders were given lifestyle advice and simple medication. We attended to more children than adults in the second village, and many of the children were malnourished and had various skin ailments. They were provided with our donations of vitamins and creams. The other volunteers also treated the villagers and their children with a sumptuous meal. Each child was also given a set of waterplay toys to instill the importance of bathing and cleaning. Apparently, many of the children in the mountain have limited water supply, and will not bathe or brush their teeth regularly. As we finished seeing the last patients, we played and interacted with the children as we enjoy the cool mountain air and beautiful sunset, wondering how life can be so idyllic and joyful in this part of Indonesia. We ended the trip with a sumptuous dinner of Bakar Ikan and serenaded with their special traditional musical instrument, *Sasando*. For us and especially our children, we left Kupang with fond and touching memories of our little adventure there. The night before we left, Captain Budi informed us that he was just given a fully equipped “mobile clinic”. In the near future when we come back to this beautiful place, we will then work with their local medical teams to continue serving the villagers and children.

We were glad that we managed to complete this trip last December safely. Although we looked forward to our next visit there, it may be a long while before we will be allowed to travel safely again.

For those who are interested in finding out more or going for a trip there, you can access the YouTube video of our trip at <https://youtu.be/g04iRvZ4GiM> or email me at drectan2@gmail.com

