

Four Village Walk

by Peter Efford



One of the best things to do at Pondok Saraswati is to go on the four-village early morning walk.

This is about 7 km in a loop out from Silungan through our adjacent village, across to Mas and then back along the canal. Except for one stretch it is all on quiet roads with an occasional motorbike or car. Good walking shoes or sneakers are essential.

You can buy water on the way I usually step out at 6am, as the sun is just a glow over Mt Agung. This is when the Balinese set about their daily routine.

There is much to see and do. I usually count the range of animal and birds that I see. Some of the unexpected have been squirrels, once a monkey and a one metre eel like fish, which caused quite a struggle for the two elderly men who caught it!

Very thick and slimy. There are plenty of lizards, frogs, water birds and domestic animals. Have seen some snakes, but only later in the day when it is warmer... two sorts, a pencil thin grass snake and a brown canal snake that eats frogs, both quite harmless.

I've now made many friends along the way so there is a lot of Pagi [good morning] and 'where are you going'... Jalan Jalan? So very friendly and polite. My best friend is Ketut who tends his rice field and is learning English and Japanese. He is very excitable and has no trouble communicating with his very limited vocabulary.

I bought him a new phrase book the other day as the one he had was from 1920 and had phrases like 'They shalt not assume this posture'. Ketut is also studying Reiki and is keen to know more. I had the honour of tea in his compound on my last morning and met his wife and family.



Then there are the kids. On the way to School all neat in their brown and white uniforms, school pack on their back and carrying a brush to clean the School before lessons begin.

I go past a primary school, which obliges every kid to say good morning to me as I pass... deafening delight. Then there are old men put out to sit, women at their warungs and the countless field workers, woodcarvers, temple decorators kids and dogs, all needing a hello.



Once I got caught in a downpour that lasted for three hours, sitting on the Warung bench watching it flood down the street. There was much concern for my well being, so we had sweet coffee and nursed babies.

I managed to use up my entire 20-word repertoire of Bahasa. When it still did not let up I was invited around the back, [umbrella provided] to witness the dispatch of a pig, all trussed up and awaiting his fate in the rain.

This entertainment over and with more rain, it was decided to find someone who could speak English to see if I was worried about not being able to get back to Pondok.

It was decided I was, so they commandeered a truck that was delivering rocks to take me back. Profuse farewells and thanks.

Mostly I go with other guests and the time flies with great talks and distractions. Sometimes by myself I get special treats like photographing the plants, flowers and faces.

How generous the Balinese are with their morning! Back to Pondok, order breakfast [two fresh eggs and garlic toast] and then have a hot shower before it arrives.

Its 8 .30 am by now, time for a post brekkie nap to contemplate a massage later... I've walked so hard to earn it!

