

# riding

## east timor

Chris Grogan checks our northern neighbour out ...

Photos by Gary Fielder

I first became aware of the East Timor ride by email from Dave at Timor Adventures ([www.timoradventures.com.au](http://www.timoradventures.com.au)). After much persuasion I got a friend, Gary to join me on this "interesting" trip. The word "interesting" was to come up several times later. Dave met us at Dili airport and he took us to our first base in East Timor, the Hotel California (such a lovely place). It turned out to be a very nice hotel, rooms good, en suite, and a bar, regrettably no pool) We were introduced to the other participants John and Margot from Darwin, Bill and John from Melbourne and Annie from Perth.

We were ferried off to Tiger Fuel to collect our trusty steeds, 160cc Honda Megapro, and, yes, we sort of thought what you are thinking now. 160cc? Trust me, they were the right bikes for the job. Timor Leste (East Timor) is part of an island with a spine of mountains and we were going to tackle these on the mighty Mega Pro, so would soon find out what they were made of ...

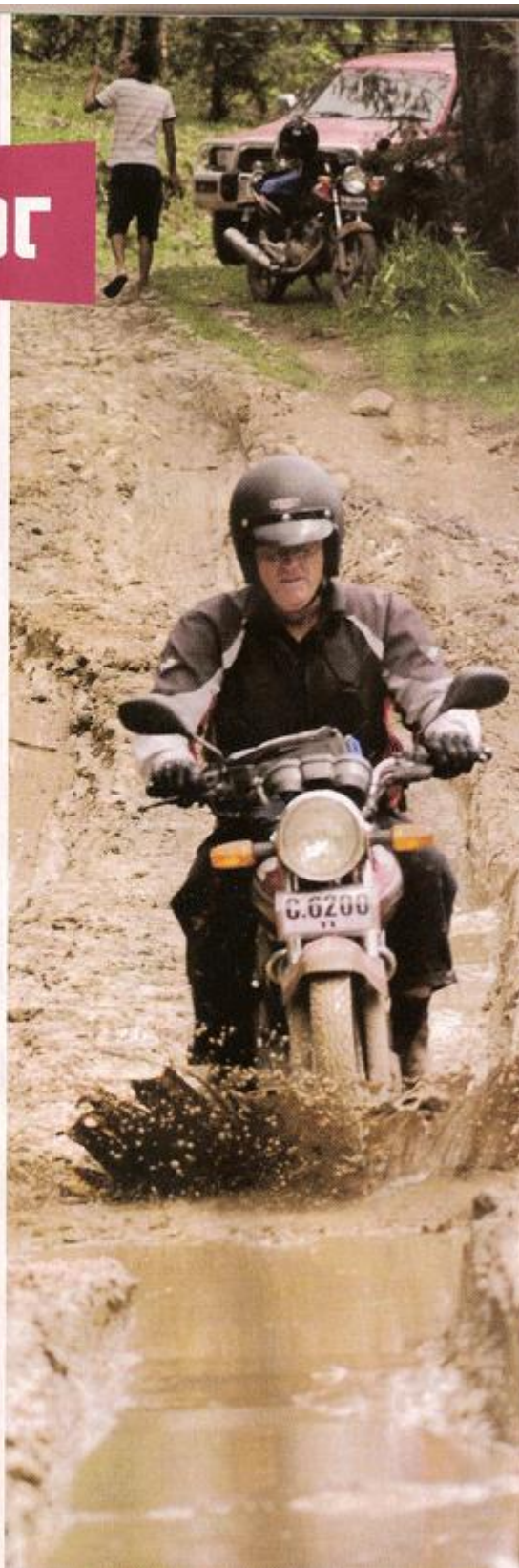
Next morning we were to head off early but other persons' plans got in the way. The Tour de Timor bicycle race was finishing along the straight in front of Hotel California and the local law enforcers were not having a bar of 8 motorcycles getting in the way. When we got away we rode over the first hill, bit bumpy, then on to red rolled dust ... this is it then, a bit of dirt road?

How wrong we were! Stopped off at Dollar beach for a swim then onwards and upwards to Baucau on roads with interesting obstacles - pigs, piglets goats and kids, chooks and chickens, dogs and pups and the occasional water buffalo. Not bad accommodation, cold shower, so we headed for the local beach. The yellow sign had a picture of a crocodile on it and some foreign words so we ignored it until someone noticed a large log heading at speed towards us. We freaked out, got out and stayed out.

We heard the local swimming pool was open, freshly filled from a cascade, no chlorine, excellent deep pool built by the Portuguese, so that seemed a better option. That evening we had a meal at a posh Portuguese Restaurant, a few beers and off to bed for an early start to head for little coastal village, Com.

Somewhat more simple accommodation this time complete with mozzie nets. Quite a substantial jetty at Com as it was a major port in a previous life. This is where we first came across the Timorese version of a filling station. A row of 2 litre clear plastic water bottles filled with dirty looking water on a flimsy rack turned out to be 'benzin' or petrol, when the rack ran out there was more stored in the bedroom! Interesting.

Next morning we left the main road, which at least tried







to have some tarmac to hold the potholes together. The potholes are not the sort you are familiar with, the road can suffer subsidence for several metres, drop say, a foot, and then break up. That aside, no pretence of surfacing occurs on the back road out of Com to the inland and the rocks do their very best to unseat you.

This road was eventually to lead us to Tutuala then Jaco Island, the most Easterly part of Timor Leste. Some of the less experienced and more sensible of the group (the Ladies) opted to do this part in the 4WD backup vehicle and arrived bright and breezy. We had a short boat trip to the island for an hour or two, bit of snorkelling over the coral, then back to the lodge for tea. And what a tea! Fresh caught Barracuda, fresh made bread and salads and the customary, compulsory beer or two. Beds were under Mozzie domes and the 'facilities' including the mandi shower were out back.

What's a mandi shower? Well if Hugh Jackman can tip a bucket of water over his head in the film 'Australia,' so can we, we've got the bodies, eh? That's a mandi.

After the beach days it was back to Baucau where we were ready for another swim in the pool, which was closed. Next day we headed into Vivequeue to a local school to donate some much-needed books to the teachers. The kids were very polite and respectful and gave us a rendition of a local song.

Back to Baucau, for the night, then straight to Dili in preparation of our Western leg into the real mountains. There are lots of opportunities to research what happened to the unfortunate people of Timor during the Indonesian invasion and withdrawal and we had a look through the local museum dedicated period.

The next day we headed west to Balibo and Maliana, rolled up to our new lodgings, and had a chuckle ... coupled with some trepidation. Its name was Hotel Risky!

Markets in Maliana are very varied with all sorts of home grown or made products on sale, so we ate well in preparation for tackling the next interesting bit, Ainaro to Hato-Buillico, and on to Mount Ramalau (2997M, that's higher than Kozzy)

I didn't use the word 'road' did I? There were bits missing. Like half the road had ... gone ... There was 3 feet left for the intrepid biker but don't go too close to the edge, it's about 400ft to the bottom. Then there's the interesting mud hole, about 60ft in length and about 2ft deep all the way and the bikes have only got 16" wheels.

We all got through but the boots and Draggin' Jeans will never be the same again. It took us one and a half hours to complete the 15km! Hato Buillico was quite remote and food had to come up the track with us, although there were some veggies supplied by the locals.

Next morning it was a 5.30am start to slog up to the top on foot, 3 hours up, 2.5 back. Back down to the Honda test track, dropouts, potholes, mud holes and onto, what's this? Tarmac? Yep, even with the occasional truck eating potholes it was biker's heaven. The nice old Portuguese Pousada at Mabuissse was our final night out on the road, we did a bit of local shopping and turned up a bottle or two of Portuguese wine to wash down our feast before our ride into Dili next day.

A brief stop off at Dare at the memorial to the Aussie

“... some tarmac to hold the potholes together.”



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diggers and their efforts in Timor during WW2 and we were nearly in Dili. Lunch first, then to the bike wash, as the bikes were a tad mucky. After the bikes were safely back home we had some free time and cold beer was in the freezer at Hotel California. The tour directors Dave and Shirley shouted us the farewell dinner in a Chinese restaurant in town and that was it. We checked out of the Hotel California and left, contrary to the Eagles song of that name.

All in all, a great trip, no shortage of challenges, mountains, valleys, tropical jungles, river crossings. The beds okay as was the food, bikes outstanding,

organisation absolutely without fault, so I would recommend the trip to any experienced motorcyclist. I will now have to qualify that statement.

If you are a rider who only cruises the highway, you would have difficulty with the conditions. I think experience on smaller bikes off road on farms and rough tracks really should be a pre-requisite, though Dave has never asked for that, but the riding is nothing like you would find anywhere else ...

**Words: Chris Grogan #20541**  
**Photos: Gary Fielder #40108**

