

# West Papua Expedition

April-29-'05

It's again almost 4 months ago, but this morning I have the privilege to step foot on Thai grounds yet again. I am here for two nights mainly to meet with a few friends here in Bangkok and of course to enjoy the amazing nightlife this vibrant city has to offer. After being several months following the same weekly cyclis at countryside where nothing really happens, just to follow the same weekly pattern from monday to sunday, it changes my mood significantly as soon I arrive in this metropolitan **City of Angels**. It's a true different world in the Orient. Bangkok is a place you might want to hate or love it. I just adore this city for all its charms it has in common. After dozens of visits, still the city brings me joy and heaps of fun. The ice cold Corona's at Muzik Cafe taste delicious again. The live band at this place rocks till 1.00am (too early Mr. Thaksin) but above Radio City, another popular Patpong nightvenue with nightly performance of Thai Elvis and Thai Tom Jones, there's Lucifer Disco which is crowded till 2.00am. What a way to kick off this Asian Holiday again !

May-01-'05

This is undoubtly one of the shortest nights I ever have experienced. I ended up in my hotelroom at 4.40am this night and got to catch my flight to Bali at 8.40am. Wake up call was scheduled at 5.30am. I did'nt come to Asia to spend in Thailand throughout. Bangkok is a great place to organise further trips within South East Asia or further beyond. My destination this time is somehow unusual because not so easy to reach but that peppers the trip. I want to find my way to West Papua this time. Once onboard flight TG431 with destination Denpasar-Bali, immediately I fell in a deep sleep. I did'nt mind the breakfast onboard, I just want one thing....sleeping. Of course Bali is'nt unknown terrain neither to me after numerous visits in the nineties and most recently last december 2004. However, Kuta is a place that changes all the time whenever I come here. Shopping malls, disco's, bars, restaurants..., places come and go but these days Bali is definitely "hip" again despite the october 2002 bombing. There's a huge new shopping mall at Kartika Plaza - **Discovery Plaza, the only shopping mall with direct access to the beach** - as it likes to promote itself. While Maccaroni's is since 1996 one of the better Italian restaurants in Kuta, **Paddy's** reloaded attracts a hip crowd each night after 11.00pm. **Santa Fé, De Ja Vu** and **Double Six** are among my favourite nightspots so I frequented this places on a nightly basis while **Em Bar Go** seems to attract a younger crowd. One thing is sure: Bali has so much to offer that I always enjoy coming back here. Same as to Phuket in Thailand, it is one of my all time favourites since I decided to explore the planet. Not just for its nightlife but it is so rich in culture and pure nature. But perhaps the best part of the island is the people from Bali. Truly kind and loving to share their hospitality with foreigners once you become close friends with them. Anyway, I came to Bali now mainly to prepare my adventure to Papua. From Denpasar there is a direct flight (with short stop in Timika) to Jayapura in West Papua. The alternative is too complicated. I had a booking with Garuda from Denpasar to Jayapura done over the internet because this ticket is more then 3 times cheaper when booked in Indonesia then here in West Europe. Strange thing is that both bookings can be done with Garuda directly at their offices ! Once I had arrived in Bali, I picked up my Garuda ticket at Ngurah Rai International Airport, paid it and everything was done and ready to depart on may 4 at 2.30am.

May-04-'05

At 8.50am I finally arrive at Jayapura, the capital of former Irian Jaya, these days known as West Papua. My tour escort, being booked over the internet as well is not on time at our appointment. Dark skinned people with unwashed curly hair chewing betelnut, start gathering around me trying to make themselves understandable to this strange white-skinned fella.

After yet another 10 minutes waiting and preparing myself to get to the city center to find a hotel Berlinda finally shows up. She introduces herself as a Governmental representative of the Department of Tourism. I don't believe her.

Anyway, we had to do some administrative work before I could connect to my inland destination **Wamena**. In the first place everyone who wants to visit West Papua needs a **Surat Jalan**, a special travel permit provided by the police station. It is known that there are often armed conflicts in the region and that is exactly why visitors need a special permit. Journalists or people with other purposes besides tourism are simply banned from West - Papua. After I paid my Surat Jalan at the local police station, I bought my domestic tickets for both Wamena and Biak and then quick back to Sentani airport to catch my connecting flight. My escort guide has made a serious mistake and my flight has been departed already. No problem, western people seems to have priority on all flights (we bring the dollars to support local economy) so I got the last flight to Wamena after I paid 300.000 rupiah to the driver for my transfer from airport to city center and back to the airport. Here I encountered the first corrupt way of treating tourists as 300.000 is a huge amount of money to Indonesian standards. Well, I paid and took off to the **Baliem Valley**

On arrival, I noticed a huge spitbowl in the middle of the "*arrival hall*" filled with red stuff. Locals enjoy to chew betelnut so their mouths are bloody red. The bowl as well. I had booked the Nayak Hotel but after my inspection of the room, I decided to check out the best available place in town, The Baliem Pilamo Hotel. I paid 280.000 rupiah a night in deluxe room, comparable to a 2-star hotel.

May-05-'05

The first day in the Valley starts chaotic as negotiation to find a local minibus that has to bring me to Kurulu district to visit the village of Jiwika.

After about 1 hour bouncing in a metal box on wheels, we arrive at the local police station where I had to get a permission being stamped at my Surat Jalan. My tour escort informs me that she forgot my Surat Jalan ! Back one hour of bouncing to Wamena, pick up the Surat Jalan and yet again on the way to Jiwika. After wasting a lot of time, we finally arrive at 11.00am in the village where I have my first contact with the local Dani people. This meeting makes me forget the troubles which has happened this morning. Women wearing just some kind of grass around their waist are fighting to pose with this stranger for the photoshoot. Children ran to me, while I open a bag of western candies which I brought along all the way from Belgium. In no time the content has disappeared while the women are begging for cigarettes.



Escorted by hordes of local women and children I arrive at the compound where I meet the village chief, Mr. Yali. The chief is easy to be recognised as he's wearing a necktie made from small shells. From Kardi, my local guide, I learn that Yali was invited by a group of officials from Japan who visited the site a few years ago. Nothing special you would think but if you see how these people live here in very basic thatched huts with literally no facilities compared to the ultra modern Japanese lifestyle. I try to imagine when Yali arrive in Tokyo wearing nothing more than his **Koteka** (penisgourd) and some feathers to decorate his mushroom-alike hairstyle which looks like being drenched in black oil.

Other villagers are very pleased to welcome me into their community as well. One of them takes my hand to guide me, crossing a suspended bridge, our entire colourful company continue the trip until we arrive in the next village.

To reach the compound, I have to climb some kind of innovated ladder to get over the bamboo fence which encircles the compound. I guess this is to keep pigs out of their property. After my acrobatic movement to get over the fence I see three big thatched huts. The one centrally located services as the kitchen while on the left of the inner court is the female hut. On the right is where the men share their nights. The same ritual here again. Acceptance by the entire village, shaking hands, sharing smiles and making group pictures. I promise these people that I will return tomorrow to have a pigfeast.

Today's trip continues to Sekan Mountain where the Baliem Valley Resort, run by a German is located. To reach this place where I am looking to fill my empty stomach is not going the easy way. What would have been a decent minibus in a previous life, these days nothing more than some metal trash on wheels is supposed to bring me all the way up to the off road tracks to Sekan Mountain. After about 2 hours of traveling, ready to climb the first meters up, the engine give up in the middle of nowhere at about 3.00 pm in an open space with no shade to hide for the strong sun. The young driver, probably used to the problem, seems to know what is happening. Hitting some engine parts with a strong piece of wood makes the engine talks again. This unusual rhythm repeats every 2 or 3 kilometers sometimes crossing partly broken wooden bridges where I had to get out of the metal box on wheels giving instructions to the young driver to cross his way over the planks. This keeps going for some time until I told him to return back and forget about my Sekan Mountain adventure. Well, an adventure it certainly was.

I can't understand why my Jayapura tour escort has organised a trip with this kind of vehicle. This track is pure off-road great for strong 4x4 vehicles.

After a while when we finally arrive back at some paved track, the metal thing gives completely up as if it knew that he brought us far enough to find another box on wheels. Anyhow, my driver managed to stop another sort of trashy metal piece on wheels. I can't switch until I paid full fare to the first driver, nevertheless I still have rented the vehicle for yet six hours ! In addition, I need to pay an extraordinary amount of money to get onto the third rented vehicle this day. Yey again another discussion starts but the only options seems to pay otherwise I might get stuck here. My guide wants to bring me to an alternative destination just to heal some of her mistakes. Although, I have never heard about the place, I agreed and on we go...

It is about 5.00pm already when we have to stop at a military control post.

The soldiers dressed combat style at the checkpoint are requesting cigarettes from me. While I know that I have given all to the local Papuans, I act as I am looking in my backpack for fags. I can't do anything else then tell them I ran out of smoke. The soldiers gave green light to continue my trekking. After a few kilometers of trekking through knee-height foliage, I am told to watch out for snakes living in this area. "Thank you" I replied and could not do anything then forward our journey every now and then being stopped to greet a local who extensively want to shake my hand, making a strange noise sounding like wah, wah, wah, wah, ([see video here](#)). Yet again, after making more acrobatic movements to cross small running rivers over tree trunks and rocks, we arrive at another village where people seems to have been intouch with the western world

before. Children are wearing oversized t-shirts with Beckham or Ronaldo prints while their mothers also wear some cotton here. Strange but I don't see a single male in this village. Children are yet again following me every step I make and do clearly enjoy my visit by sundown. At last we arrive again at some point where our minibus is waiting for my guide and myself.

This is the end of a day with several highlights definitely during village visits but also some downsides because of pricedeals which were promised but not accepted at the end. As a result, heavily discussions with Miss Berlinda are common whilst service is far from good. I am lucky that I charged a second (local) guide, Kardi from Wamena who was helpful, kind and concerned throughout the day. Already by now, I know that I have to get rid of my tourescort from Jayapura who is nothing more then a money swallower taking advantage of the situation to be able traveling around paid by this silly tourist. On arrival at the Baliem Pilamo Hotel, I take a shower and proceed to the hotel's restaurant, considering the region a good place to have your diner.

When I just sat down a minute, an attractive foreign lady about my age, walks inside and immediately we get to know one another. She's Canadian who worked in Bandah Aceh after the Tsunami hit the region. Right now she's traveling around a little bit before she will return to Canada which is her home. After we figured out that we are neighbours in the hotel (she stay's next to my room), we decide to share tommorow's tour for the pigfeast in Jiwika.

Berlinda, my tour-escort, who still is hanging around at the hotelgrounds is facing dark clouds with thunder when I informed her about this. Anyway, Nina and I agreed that we will rent a 4x4 jeep tommorow for the daytrip to the feast. The agreement for the price is just 100.000 rupiah which is doubtfully a bargain for this type of vehicle.

May-06-05

A very decent 4x4 Kijiang jeep is waiting for us this morning in front of the Baliem Pilamo Hotel untill we finished our breakfast. I can't get it why we could have this kind of car for such a good deal today. Nina and I are surprised and amazed.

Our plan for today: visit the Dani tribe for the second time, today to join a full ceremony with pig feast. Therefor, the first thing today this morning is going to the market in Wamena to buy a reasonable looking black pig. That is ofcourse still alive. Again, some discussion with Berlinda our tour escort, because the closed deal yesterday was in fact that we should pay 330.000 rupiah for the pig feast which included the animal. Anyway, we don't want to spoil the day and decided to pay the pig at an additional cost of yet 200.000 rupiah. After all it is not that much money to western budgets, but it is the principle that our female tour escort yet again changed her mind from the initial deal. It is visible clear that Berlinda is not really happy with the company of Nina, my new tourmate. She is literally against her all over which is of course complete nonsense for a tour agent.

Not a bad word said about Kardi, our local guide from Wamena who is again very helpful throughout. Loaded with our driver, Kardi, Berlinda, Nina, myself and our young black pig, the jeep is filled with a truly international and diverse company to be heading for yet another different people, the Dani tribes of Papua !



Our arrival at Jiwika district is in one word "impressive". To me it is still a mystery how Yali, the village chief could get all the way on top of a bamboo made look-out tower, some 10 meters above the valley floor. Totally traditionally dressed, that is with exception from his penis gourd and necktie made from shells, naked. His head decorated with colourful feathers, the forehead painted with black oily stuff while the rest of the body is covered with white painted spots.

As soon we made our appearance in the valley, Yali start screaming around to call the villagers together. From all corners of the valley, the indigenous people with black skins and curly hair, weaponed with arrow and bow, others with dangerously looking spears came right in front of us. Of course, this is all part of the welcome ceremony. This is just a mock war to represent real war between different tribes. Formerly the Dani were often involved in wars among tribes. Even a very simple incident may



cause a war.

The most common reasons to result a war are stealing women, usually one's wife. War was an immediate part of Dani life. Every Dani alliance was constantly at war with at least one of its neighbouring alliances. Every Dani had seen friends and acquaintances dead or dying from spear wounds and arrows.

Anyway, this is definitely the highlight of my West Papua expedition.

The Baliem Valley is officially called Jayawijaya, adopted from the name of the district. The valley floor is inhabited by these Dani tribesmen which men wear the so called **koteka**, a penis gourd functioned to cover the vital thing only as little as possible. They also usually decorate, especially in certain events like today, their head with beautiful parrot feathers and the nose with pig tooth. A more expensive accessory is a shell tie that used to be worn only by the chief.

After the mock war, I am guided by the Dani's to their compound where the women are chanting to welcome us. They wear grass skirt and beautiful, sometimes colored, string bark. they most live in primitive way of farming by growing sweet potato. From the earlier life the Dani have been very skillful in farming by building simple irrigation. In most places women work harder, either in the garden or in the "kitchen", than men. They work with fire-hardened digging sticks to plant or harvest sweet potato. In working they use only primitive tools. The presence of stonebladed in their culture makes it almost obligatory that the culture to be called Stone Age. The Dani still widely practised untill in the 1960's.

One of the most interesting parts of Dani way of life that still exists until today is the pig feast, a festival that used to be performed in ritual and sacred ceremony. When on a wedding the Dani celebrate the party by performing the pig feast as the essence. The Dani pig feast may well be the most important ceremony, relative to its culture, in the world. One's wealthiness is also counted on how many pigs he owns. Man may get married when he can present pigs he owns. Anyhow, that is not the reason why I brought a pig today. In earlier life women fed pig babies with their breast - a few still do today.



Our pig is slaughtered the traditional way with arrow and bow. Yali pulls his bow and shoot the arrow right into the heart of the unfortunate screaming black pig. It is then placed on open fire to be barbecued. Meanwhile, the women preparing sweet potatoes in a open pit (picture). The

pig has been on the fire for just about 15 minutes when the Dani find it well-prepared and ready to be cut open and eaten as a whole, nothing to be wasted. Nina and myself are very hungry after the hike to the valley but we kindly thanked the Dani for their invitation to join lunch.

It is time for us to make a second attempt for the Sekan Mountain. Yesterday, I could't make it due our poor vehicle. This time, I'm proud to tell Nina that we can have a delicious lunch at the german-owned Baliem Valley Resort which according my resources offers great scenery over the Baliem Valley. It should'nt be a problem with our strong Kijiang jeep to get there.

Yet again, it is not Berlinda's idea to go to Sekan Mountain. According to her the way up to the Sekan mountain is inaccessible due to a broken bridge. However, I demand the driver who we hired for the entire day after all, to proceed our way up there.

Kardi and our driver clearly understood what I meant and started the strong 4x4 engine to depart for the remotely located Baliem Valley Resort where we supposed to have our lunch.

The jeep crossed several wooden bridges, none of them broken and after yet another 2-hour off-road adventure, the Baliem Valley Resort or Werner Resort\* as it is locally known for, is finally visible on top. The view is indeed breathtakingly beautiful, but the resort looks surprisingly silent. Except from a guard, there's not a single human to be seen around the resort grounds. We can only enjoy the stunning views for a couple of minutes, without being in the possibility to fill our complaining stomages.

We decided to continue our trip to our final place of interest, a rope hanging bridge across the Baliem River located at Sinatma.

Once arrived, honestly spoken the bridge dissapointed us because Berlinda did'nt brought us to the most spectacular one, which hangs just inches above the wild waters of the Baliem River gorge.

No problem, we were both hungry and wanted to take a cool shower in the basic comfort of the Baliem Pilamo hotel before we wanna take our dinner finally after our skipped lunch.

Back at our hotel, yet again another long and noisy discussion with Berlinda came into development as our previously negotiated car hire price comes out to be seven times the initiated deal ! This being the drop that overloaded the bucket, immediately I demanded my tour-escort cq trip-operator to end her accompany here since I don't see any reason to use her services further more. The exchanging of words ended up in a screamingly loud discussion from her side, something which during the past 15 years of worldwide traveling, I have never experienced before. It shocked me so much, that I want to get rid of her right away on the spot. She asks for an additional 800.000 rupiah for her "services" apart from the 700.000 car hire. That being said I was happy to pay and get totally rid of her by now.

Looking back from the moment she picked me up too late at the airport until now, she has literally done nothing. It is Kardi the local Papuan guide who helped me throughout with both explanations and instructions. For Berlinda this was just a touristic trip as it was to me with only one exception, everything being paid for her by this western visitor. That being said and another experience richer, I would like to take the opportunity to warn possible travelers to use Papua Explorer Tours, a fake organisation run by a women from Jayapura called "Berlinda Bungapon".

Bottom line: I had a great trip with exceptional new experiences during my contact with the loving Dani peoples. Traveling to the region is quite easy to do on your own without being trapped by "agencies" who often are asking for out of this world high prices.

Ok, West Papua is not a cheap destination because most goods are imported, but keeping an eye of what you're doing can save you huge amounts still.

I took a flight from Denpasar - Bali to Jayapura and paid 260 Euro round-trip. The ticket can easily be reservated at any Garuda office online. You can pick up your ticket on arrival in Bali and pay it just then. Once in Jayapura, buy a ticket with Air Trigana for

about 40 USD round trip to Wamena. There are usually 4 flights a day to Wamena, if weather conditions are ok.

\* Werner is the first name of the German owner of the Baliem Valley Resort.

Early in the morning, I'm leaving the Baliem Valley for my next destination in West Papua province. Nina decided to travel along with me to Biak where the main purpose of my visit is to go snorkeling at the Padaido Islands. I heard that these islands own very rich sea gardens with typical fish that rarely found in other seas. Together we departed with the second flight to Jayapura, hoping to be able to have a connection the same day to Biak. We don't want to waste a day in Jayapura.

On arrival in Sentani airport, both of us are ready for a nice lunch and we think the Sentani Indah hotel owned by Merpati Airlines would be a good choice. At this time we still have no idea if we could have a connection to Biak. My ticket is actually scheduled for May 9, two days from now. Also I got another ticket with Berlinda's name on it since the plan was that she would have been escorting me throughout my Papua adventure if everything would have been going well. With her ticket, we will try to let Nina fly so that I don't waste any money. After we finished lunch, I noticed Merpati air crew at the hotel lobby. I think this might be the right person who could inform us if there's any flight available yet today for Biak. According to this crew, we won't have any problem to use these tickets for us today but the problem is that today's flight is fully booked already. With our minds already in Biak, this is a real boomer and we are willing to try everything to make it today still to Biak.

We decided to try our luck and went back to the airport where we noticed immediately that we would have a big chance to leave today. This is a typical example of Indonesian bureaucracy. You better check everything 2 or 3 times from different sources before you believe anyone or make important decisions. Minutes later we're on the small plane, Nina using Berlinda's name and changed travel dates for both of us. No problem.

After some hotel checking, Nina decided to stay at the Titiwaka Hotel, a simple but decent and popular hotel while I had a pre-booking (for different dates) in the Arumbai Hotel which is definitely the best available accommodation in town. It has the only swimming pool on the entire island while the location can't be better in the centre of Biak Town within walking distance of the major places. Top of the bill was the unexpected 50% discount which was on offer just this month.

Today it is Saturday which means to me: Tasting of local nightlife ! After a very nice dinner at **99 restaurant** where one can choose between Small, Medium and Large each time you go for a fish plate. I had a crabsoup and a "small" fried fish since I came alone. Even the Small size is way too big for me but it is one of the best seafood meals I had in time. After dinner, I am told that **X-Box** is the place to be on Saturday nights. I have no idea what is inside but its exotic name made me curious.

Once inside the dark place, I noticed a small bar where I sat on a stool and ordered my first cold beer since long. For those who want to know... X-Box is a popular Karaoke bar, Indonesian style. One after another are singing(?) slow songs. It makes me feel sleepy and I hardly can keep my eyes open.

Being a bit disappointed of the place, I walk around the block in 10 minutes to Mapia Club (located at the same Mapia Hotel). It is pitch black outside as I try to find my way to the establishment. I didn't notice a huge hole in the pedestrian about 1 square meter along the whole width of the walkway. Almost, almost... just on time I could avoid the open sink.

The Mapia Club is my style. It is packed with locals, dancing and drinking, and every now and then there's even an english song finding its way through the terrible sound system. Being the only foreigner, I feel like being watched from every corner. There are not that many tourists in West Papua, let alone Biak. Immediately I have company to talk with.

May-08-'05



Yesterday, I already made a deal to hire a boat with Lexi who works for Biak Diving Center. By typical outrigger canoe we find our way to the open ocean with destination **Rurbas** and **Owi** islands for some snorkeling. Together with Nina to share the cost which is 550.000 rupiah for the day.

Padaido slands group consists of Ouri, Supiori and Rani all offer spectacular diving and snorkeling arena. There used to be a luxurious diving ship based in Biak serving tourists to dive insurrounding islands but unfortunately it has recently with drawn from operation due to less visitors.

Only certain tour operators such as Biak Diving Center have diving equipment to rent. No lodgings applicable in the islands so that the only place to stay overnight is at the local people's house or your own tent. It is necessary to bring your own food material and other equipment during the tour.

We noticed a great diversity of colourful fishes. Bright blue, yellow angelfish and many other species. On Rurbas island is also a beach where I found beautiful and bog shells. Even a perfect shaped giant clam.

Our wooden outrigger moves further over the smooth blue ocean for our next destination Owi Island where again snorkeling is the main and only activity. There are no facilities on the Padaido Islands. If you need to change, it is behind a palm tree. To complete a perfect day, on our way back to Biak a school of dolphins is following us for a while. According to Lexi, a unique event rarely seen here.

I had a perfect day and I feel good here in Biak. There's nothing going on but at the same time it has such a charm because of the lack of tourists. Everywhere I go, I'm greeted by locals young an old.

May-09-'05

Today, Nina and I want to rent a car with driver to visit the Natural Reserve, hoping to see some tropical birds or any other wildlife. The manager of the Arumbai Hotel can arrange a car with driver for me at a hourly rate of 50.000 rupiah. We plan to go to Supiori which is at the other side of the island, some 4 hours one-way by car but the drive will take us through lovely villages and greenery. Also, we plan to visit the Nature Reserve which is in the same area of Supiori.

Because our destination is 4 hours one-way we will be driving on unpaved roads most of the time for 8 hours at least. We decide to go anyway. Shortly after our departure, we are driving through green foliage, sometimes between palmtrees, crossing wooden bridges while the drive goes from one to another **kampung** - Indonesian villages.

Children are welcoming us everywhere we want to make a short stop for a picture. We noticed children walking on side roads everywhere we go. Our driver drives dangerously fast and very often we have to tell him to reduce speed.

Most of the time the road is like a rollercoaster, not being able to see what is on the other side of the hill. Often we climb up a hill to decend shortly after. This keeps going



for long through foliage of all kinds only cutted by the road we're on. On both sides little kids are playing right on the roadside. Throughout we have to attend our driver to reduce speed. We are afraid something might happen. In countries like Indonesia, it is always the foreigner who will be blamed for a possible accident, even he's not driving the vehicle. That is a written law ! In one of the villages a young puppy is playing on the road untill it is hit by our car. We stop to check and there's nothing we can do for the poor young dog. Villagers are surrounding our car. Our driver who is of course compltely responsible of this incident tells us that we have to pay 10.000 rupiah to the owners of the dog. 10.000 rupiah is less then a dollar but we refuse since our driver is the one responsible. Some discussion starts and I paid to be able to continue our long journey ahead.



A little later we arrive in Warsa, nothing special apart from a nice waterfall were we will take a short break. We took a few pictures from the falls and some people doing laundry in a shallow small river after we asked permission. As appreciation for the picture, we gave the women 5000 rupiah for the picture and walked back to our car. An elderly came after me holding a guestbook under his arm. I wrote my name and adress inside. He told me to pay 100.000 rupiah for the pictures taken from the falls !!! Of course this is complete nonsense and we step inside the car. Shortly after, a bunch of people are all around our car and there's a lot of Indonesian discussion among them. We tell the driver to proceed the trip which he refuse. Our notable hired man is co-operating with the locals and we were told if we refuse to pay he has to bring us to the police station. Because Nina's travel permit is not 100% approved, we are ready to pay 10.000 rupiah but the problem is we don't have smaller notes then 50.000 rupiah. Of coourse nobody has change. We pay the 50.000 and continue our trip yet again.

While the nature gets more beautiful behind every curve we ask ourself where the driver will bring us. We are about 5 hours away from Biak Town now but no sign of any nature reserve to be seen.

Then all of a sudden, the driver stops the car in front of a military post. "We arrived" he said. I try to explain our driver which english is very poor, that this is not what we requested. We did'nt want to see soldiers, I told him but tropical birds. Probably pretending that he does'nt understand me, he lift his shoulders.

It is 3.30pm now and we need to get back to Biak town soon because without illumination on these tracks, we try to imagine how dangerous it would be. Myself, I did'nt care much. I had a nice drive through nature while visiting local villages every now and then. I like that. But Nina, that is a different story. She is very dissapointed indeed so I prepare myself for a unpleasant drive back to Biak town.

After yet a few long hours, we finally arrive in Biak exactly 8 hours after our departure this morning. According our deal, we have to pay 400.000 rupiah. Of course, the driver wants 700.000 rupiah. I smile this time, giving him 400.000 rupiah and proceeded to my room for a shower...

Because I arrived two days before my initial plan here in Biak, I would like to return to Bali two days earlier as well. When I noticed a proffesional looking travelagency, I walked inside and ask for possibilities to fly to Bali on the 11th of may. Promptly I am answered that the only flight is tommorow or I got to wait till the 13th. Well, tommorow I like to spend another day at the Padaido Islands because coming here for just two days is not really worth the flight I thought. It looks like I got to wait untill the 13th.

After yet again a delicious dinner at "99" restaurant, I found my way back into X-Box to enjoy a couple of beers again. But before I approached the entrance, I noticed illuminated airline sings a bit further which was clearly another travelagency. Nothing to lose, I step inside and make the same request as I did earlier today with the other ticketing office. To my surprise, it is not a problem at all to fly back to Bali on the 11th and even had a perfect connection without wasting time in Jayapura. Yet again, this is a typical example that you need to double check things at different sources before make

final decisions.



Later that night I managed to get to X-Box again for a few beers. Suddenly another foreign guy comes to sit next to me on the bar and we start to conversate. "Hi, I am Timon" and shook his hand. Since one rarely see foreigners here besides yourself, it might cause the reason why he promptly want to talk with me, I thought. "I'm Eddy" I replied. After an hour or something, the guy ask me where I came from. "Belgium" I replied. "Belgium !?" he surprisingly answered with a questioning tone. "Yep, Belgium". "Gosh ! I am a Belgian too !" his eyes wide opened. "Are you flemish- or french speaking ?" he then asked. "I am from Antwerp, so flemish is my native language" I said in flemish. Unbelievable but Timon lives some 20 minutes away from my home all the way back in Belgium. Besides Nina, who I met in Wamena before, Timon is the second foreigner I met and since Belgians are well-known in Europe as heavy beer drinkers, we decided to keep our culture high.

### May-10-'05

With a hangover from last night, I woke up a little late after being an early bird for the past week or so. I had an appointed with Timon going together to Bosnik beach trying to find a fisherman who's willing to bring us by boat to Ureb and Masurbabo Islands, another cluster of coralreefs nestled in the midst of the Padiado Group. After bying some fried bananas & bottled water, it is about 11.00am already when we all step on board for my last trip here in Biak. Snorkeling was yet again superb in the shallow waters of coralreef and our day ended back in Bosnik just before sunset, a perfect way to end my West Papua adventure.

I had requested a wake call at 4.00am this night to get on time for my flight. However, I woke up myself without having any phonecall from the front desk. It was 4.20am. I quickly packed my stuff and went downstairs to the reception to get my transport to the airport and noticed that the responsible guy who should have called me at 4.00 was in dreamland himself. When I told him, "this is your wake-up call" he opened one eye, closed it again and that was it. Be informed, bring your own alarm to Biak. A few hours later, I landed in Bali again where I stayed 4 additional nights before I made my way back to my second home in Asia.... Phuket - Thailand.