

Singapore and Malaya

First it's Customs and we see the 'long hair' signs all over the room. "Long hair is" and together with four diagrams we are educated. 'Long haired youths will be attended to last" nothing like a welcoming committee to boosts ones confidence. With a load of advice to get my hair cut we are permitted entry.

We walk through Singapore with our packs, lots of people and bright lights. This city obviously never sleeps. All shops are open and the people are out. Chinese, Malays, Indians and Europeans, a crazy mix. At last I find my Aunties place – we are obviously not welcome, maybe my hair is too long and she has become well educated so far as hair goes. We decide to leave next day and find a place to sleep. Travelling is 90% bed getting, 9% food getting and 1% seeing.

We find a private youth hostel, friendly people, a great place with many young travelers. It took a long time to find, in and out of sleazy Chinese hotels. This place has lots of rules and dorm sleeping – so much for married life.

Singapore is hot, too hot. We spend the day hours sleeping and come out at night like night animals as the sun hits the ground.

Sunday April 1 1973. with our warden and a lot of other kids we get to go on a skin-diving trip. There are real buses, then into little motor-boats. Slowly we plough past huge ships to a little island. Here is the so called 'coral reef'. Many people go in but immediately begin to drown! There is a incredible current. I noted this earlier because I could see fish fighting it and the weed flat on the bottom. So we throw the life buoys overboard much to the boat owners' disgust, and against his

will. Still some people are flapping, now 200-300mtrs away and going out fast. There is a strong tidal pull over the reef so I swim out and jamm my feet on the coral. I grab people and tell them to stop panicking and stand on the reef like I did. Too bad for our feet! The boat circles and picks most up. Still one girl is alone and going fast. I swim her to shore. Who's the bright spark who thought this up?

Ten PM. No curfew here, instead coffee and biscuits on the lawn. Naturally everyone turns up and we turn in. A girl from London has brought a fur coat!

It's passports and customs again, the Malaysian border. We walk through on foot then take a local bus to Jahor Baharu to the road north and try hitching. At last we get a ride with a Chinaman, then after this another lift takes us to Kuala Lumpur. Its evening and the streets are really crowded. We thank our drivers and search for English speaking people who can tell us how to find the youth hostel.

The roads are as good as home but the traffic is suicidal. We prepare ourselves for death at any moment. Taxis, (Mercedes sedans) are cheap and popular, the drivers are maniacs. Hurling at breakneck speed to get to a destination and get a return fare endangers every vehicle, including ours.

The scenery is mile on mile of rubber plantation, beautiful trees which gives the impression Malaya is covered by young forests. It also reminds us of the demand for this product. The other trees are palms for palm oil. There are many palm roofed cottages with steep roofs and houses on stilts. We have to be careful not to hit the Malays who are walking on the road. Such an accident would bring

immediate death to our Chinese hosts we are told. The Malays and Chinese are not on friendly terms.

We had dinner with some friendly Indians. They sang songs from their own country with one playing rhythm on the table-top.

Another day, another road and we pull into Butterworth . There is an Australian army base here. I help a guy lift adding machines into a bank then we take a ferry to Penang and find a hotel to stay. The hotel is popular and we bump into a group of travelers we met in Indonesia.

Georgetown is a great place to see, many English speaking people here. It was a British colony. We visit the museum and take a walk around town. There's many good Chinese food shops. A good way to eat is move from stall to stall nibbling at this and trying a piece of that. Love those Chinese pancakes, also crazy about chilled pineapple hunks or pawpaw.

We spent two days on the beach at Batu Ferringi(a fishing village two miles from Georgetown), sandy beach under swaying coconuts, a great way to relax. The huge yellow sun drops into the sea, fishing canoes with long prows against a purple sky. Beautiful cool nights with a sea breeze, a great relief after a humid day. We relax in shorts and sit chatting to other travellers. Later we head off to a little Malay eating house back inland among the trees and enjoy rice cooked in coconut milk with fish and tea. Very very cheap - \$1.50 for two. Slowly we recover from sore feet, cuts, colds and sore ears. Our 'landlord' brings a huge chunk of custard apple and we hoe into it spitting out large black seeds.

Tuesday March 10th. We are heading north by train. We hit the border by 11.30 am and decide to head to Bangkok non-stop. We change to a Thai train at 2pm the crowded carriage starts to move and we find seats near some English kids. We are not looking forward to the trip.