

# Teaching Healthcare, Halfway Across the Globe...

## -The Country-



Bali is one of the 13,466 islands that makes up the nation of Indonesia. A nation which is 4<sup>th</sup> for being home to the most amount of people, all of whom are from hundreds of different ethnic groups, cultures, religions, traditions, languages and histories. Like many developing countries, Indonesia has been forged and built by colonisation carried out by Europeans, who themselves were driven by trade, but has been independent from Holland since 1945.

I learnt all of this from a book named 'Indonesia, Exploring the Improbable Nation' that I had picked up by chance, and the story of this bizarre and unique country intrigued me so much, I decided I had to go and see it for myself.

## -The Island and It's People-

Bali itself is predominantly Hindu, although whilst travelling around the island we occasionally would drive past a mosque or purchase fruit on the roads from women in hijabs. In our local village of Penestanan Kaja, everyone was Hindu and lived in homes which were traditionally structured to have a central open courtyard which contained a temple and a four poster bed placed on a granite stone platform. Every morning and night this home temple, like the pavements in front of every front door, would be draped in offerings of flowers, food and incense. The four poster bed plays a vital role, but only twice, in the lives of every Balinese hindu; it is the bed in which you spend your first night after you are born, and your last night after you have died. The people of Bali, like the other islands of Indonesia, speak two languages; the national language of Indonesian and their local language of Bahasa. Whilst out in Bali we would often speak in Bahasa to the locals, and after teaching the children I became very confident at shouting 'Diam!' (Silent) or 'Duduk!' (Sit down).



## -The Project-



My project consisted of one induction week and two weeks of teaching. The purpose of the induction week was to immerse us in Balinese culture, which involved; walks through local towns, markets, sacred hills, monkey forests and rice paddies, lessons in Bahasa, Batik painting, cooking and religious offerings, as well as attending a Hindu water ritual. My favourite part of the entire week was the water ritual; standing alongside hundreds of people in a pool of crystal blue water up to my waist, watching fish of all different sizes and colours flashing between my legs and the material of my pink sarong, the cultural dress required to be worn in all temples by both men and women, we all walked one at a time up to the series of stone fountains from which freezing cold fresh water tumbled, to place our offering on the stone and wash our heads 3 times at each fountain, except for the final 2, these are saved for the dead who are washed one last time before their cremation.

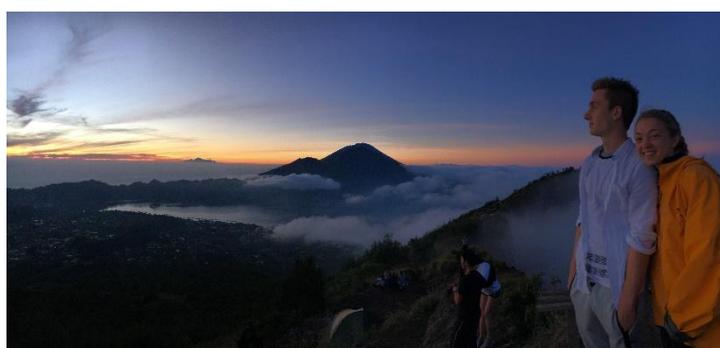
When we arrived for our first day at the school in the village of Petak Kaja, after an hour of driving through rice fields and planning our lesson on how and when to wash your hands, we had no idea the challenge we were about to face. We pulled up next to the school to have around twenty children all between the ages of four and twelve years, jumping around the car and cheering, and as we got out of the car they were holding our hands and jumping up and down shouting ‘My name is Kadek’, ‘My name is Mita’, ‘My name is Widiya’. The children were tired after a long day in school, and as a result of which, they were hysterical. I was teaching grade 5 pupils aged between eight and eleven years, and was paired with Lucas, my boyfriend who also studies Medicine at Barts and who I had convinced to travel with me on this opportunity of a life time, to share our healthcare knowledge with the children of Bali.

Unfortunately, I hadn’t realised that the children of Bali really didn’t speak very good English and definitely weren’t interested in the seven steps of handwashing or the components of the healthy food wheel, they just wanted to play musical chairs, eat ice cream and get a colourful sticker from us.



We spent the first few days with children running rings around us, walking in and out of the class, shouting at each other and us, jumping out the windows, eating sweets, leaving early, demanding stickers and chocolates, and occasionally being extremely rude to us. As a result of which, by Wednesday I was almost crying into my dinner at the volunteer house as I confessed that my teaching experience was turning into a huge disappointment and that I evidently was not gifted when it came to working with children. However, after a long silence, the other volunteers who had also travelled long journeys from the U.S.A, Portugal, Wales, Scotland, France, England, Holland and Canada, began to admit that they were having the exact same experiences, which gave me a huge feeling of relief!

Myself and Lucas decided that night that we needed a plan of attack, some way of arming ourselves and gaining control over the class. The next day we arrived at the school with stickers, a seating arrangement, wordsearches, new Bahasa translations like ‘Tidak!’ (No!) and ‘Satu Per Satu!’ (One at a time!) and a coordinator from the organisation called Yani, a Balinese man who spoke perfect English and had been assigned to us after hearing about how out-of-control our class was. We walked into the class, and I made a list of everyone’s names, which I later learnt off by heart, as Lucas put a word search in front of each person and told them how to find the words and their translations, whilst Yani either translated for us or stared down the ring leaders.



By the end of the second week the class was completing at least three worksheets a day with games in between to blow off their extra energy.

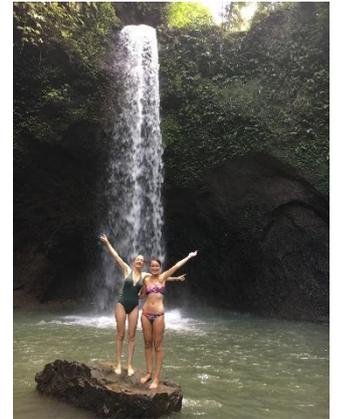
Furthermore, by the end of our project we definitely had a better rapport and more control over the class, which I feel was down to both Yani being able to talk to them in Bahasa, and myself and Lucas going to the effort to learn more Bahasa and learn each individual child’s name so that we could single them out to either

make them feel special and praise them or to discipline them and alert them that we were disappointed in them.



Overall, teaching healthcare was extremely difficult because the children's English ability was very poor, so we could only stick to very basic topics such as hand washing, food groups and names of food, parts of the body through the song 'Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes', and useful health related translations like; doctor, nurse and hospital. However, the more we repeated the topics through worksheets and class activities, the greater the improvement we began to see, until I would point at an illustration and a child would shout out 'X-ray Miss! X-ray!'

The experience was completely humbling, I had arrived at the school planning on changing the world and teaching advanced first aid to my class, but instead ended up leaving the school with a lot more respect for teachers across the world, being more confident at working with children, and realising that sometimes, for a Balinese child to be able to recognise the key words from 'my chest really hurts, I think I need an ambulance to take me to hospital' it's enough to make a huge difference.



#### -The Leisure-

All the volunteers made the most of their free time in the mornings and at the weekends, and we were often leaving the volunteer house at 5am to travel to a holy temple, waterfall, coffee plantation, hot spring, market or swimming pool. Not only this, but a few of us took on the challenge to hike the northern Volcano, Mount Batur, at 3am in order to see the sunrise appear from behind the distant mountain Agung at 6am, whilst eating boiled eggs that had been cooked in the volcanic steam. All of these sights and experiences were breath taking, but what made it all the more memorable was doing it alongside the other volunteers, and having the opportunity to get to know so many people from so many



different backgrounds. For three weeks we travelled, ate, slept, laughed and cried (from laughing) next to a politics student from Glasgow, a student from Canada whose parents had immigrated from Poland, 6 Mormons including 4 from Utah, 3 from Las Vegas and 1 from Canada, a Physiotherapist from Wales, three Portuguese friends who work together in management, a secondary school teacher from Scotland, a recruitment specialist from Portsmouth, and so many more.

This was an incredible opportunity, and I will always be grateful to the organisations (Green Lion Bali and IVHQ) who made it possible, the people I met who made it so enjoyable and QMUL for helping me fund it.



Robyn Eldred.