

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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# Goodbye, evil spirits! - March 21, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

Up with the birds to see the dolphins from an outrigger canoe! We hustle back to Ubud with only a short hike to Gitgit Waterfall on the way. Tomorrow is Nyepi, The Day of Silence. Today is the day of chaos where every village has an evening parade where they carry a very large (paper maché?) Evil Spirit on a bamboo platform through the streets and (we think) eventually burn them. During the day the platform sits in the road creating even more headaches and detours for our fearless Benny. We lunched in Ubud at Café Wayan of *Eat, Pray, Love* fame. In the evening we braved the crowds and watch part of the parade here in Ubud. They

have LOTS of evil spirits to appease. -  
Karen

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### ***DETAIL***

[Gentle reader, two things: 1) some images may be inappropriate for younger viewers, and 2) apologies in advance for the length of this entry.]

Happy Spring Equinox! Today we have to be at the beach by 5:45 for a quick coffee and then off in a small boat to hunt for, er, look for, leaping dolphins. Last night I set my alarm for 5:00 am. At 5:30 I look at my watch. YIKES! We slept through the alarm!

At the beach we drink our coffee and chat with the people next to us, a couple from Melbourne, Australia. Apparently the Aussies come here a lot, as it's not too far or difficult, but very different from home. At 6:00 we march, single file, down towards our boat, way down the beach, we soon learn.

This is our first time walking on the black sand and, like a boisterous toddler proclaimed last night, it's soft. Soft, that is, until you reach the bands of small rocks (ouch, ouch). Wading out in the water towards our boat we feel the lovely warm water of the Indian Ocean. Each boat can carry five people plus the driver. We'll also be sitting single file, so you get a good view left and right.

The water is like glass as we head out. We've not been briefed on where we're going or why there might be dolphins. The pre-launch talk consisted of "Do you want a life jacket??" . The sun isn't up yet, but will be soon, albeit behind us. In our boat is the Aussie couple, Karen and myself, and a travel agent from Portugal. We talk with her about why she's here and where we've been in Portugal and how much we enjoyed it.

The swells are maybe 6", which is to say there are essentially no swells. A lone flying fish does an impressive arial display, traveling a great distance before re-entering the water. We see a frigate bird and a few jumping fish but no dolphins. The group of craft that left from our beach are maybe three boats. From other hotels, there are one or two dozen more. We're all out for the same reason.

Our 'captain' (a kid) has a cell phone and is in touch with other boats to try and find our elusive prey. Having had no information prior to leaving we surmise that maybe some days you just don't get lucky. You don't see dolphins. Borrowing from The Big Labowski, "sometimes you get the dolphins and sometimes the dolphins get you", or some such quote. To everything there is a season and this may not be our time to see the majestic aquatic mammals.

Still no dolphins and suddenly a great pod of them leaping and leaping, seemingly going after some school of fish. And like that all of the boats turn and head towards the dolphins, like platelets towards an open wound. We gather this is like the circle of life, on a somewhat smaller scale. The dolphins are looking for the fish, and we're looking for the dolphins.

And as soon as they appear they're gone. All our heads swivel left and right, looking for the dolphins and suddenly, THERE THEY ARE, OVER THERE! With each sighting, the two dozen boats turn and charge off in the same direction. After doing this for thirty minutes the captain asks if we liked it and if we've seen enough. We say Yes and Yes and head back.

We could make multiple stops on our way back to Ubud, but given the processions everywhere this afternoon, we limit ourselves to one stop, the Gitgit waterfall. We had debated whether to wear swimsuits or not, and ultimately opt for our normal shorts and shirts.

While hiking to the falls, Rina explains that the trees in this region are all clove trees. When in bloom (sadly, not now) the smell is heavenly. At the falls we're happy with our decision not to swim. The falls are towering and deliver an ungodly amount of gallons per second. Were we able to get under the falls we'd quickly be pounded to pieces. We enjoy them, instead, from a (somewhat) safe distance.

At our hotel we say Bye to Rina and Benny for two nights. Today is Tuesday and we're on our own until Thursday morning. Tonight is the parade of the Ogoh-Ogoh (Evil Spirit) dolls, followed by their immolation. Tomorrow the power and internet to every house in the country will be turned off for 24 hours. (Thankfully hotels are exempt).

It's too early to get into our room, so we head out for lunch. Hiking down Monkey Forest road we pass the wild monkey preserve from whence the road gets its name. Our map indicates that we're not far from the Monkey Forest Cemetery and we rationalize that's one way to preserve them. We see some monkeys but apparently our glasses and iPhones aren't worth going after.

We snag a table for two at Cafe Wayan (you know it if you've seen 'Eat, Pray, Love'). Lunch is good but despite multiple attempts none of our servers can say where the parade of Ogoh-ogoh's will go. We keep hearing "not by here". We arrived for lunch at 1:30 and are told we must be gone by 2:30. Not their normal hours, but the staff needs to join the festivities.

At lunch we chat with a lone American lady, about our age, seated nearby. She's an ex American Airlines employee who now lives in Hawaii. She was here a few weeks ago and saw the construction of all these ogoh-ogoh 'dolls' and knew she had to return for the fun.

After lunch we continued up Monkey Forest road to the soccer field and checked out the impressive and scary evil spirit dolls. We check in and get some more cash (just barely). Apparently every wanted money for the New Years celebration. Moved back into our same room we head out for the night.

The roads are already fairly packed. Some friendly police officers help us understand the route and we find a good perch. The parade's not for another hour but by then we figure all the good spots will be gone. Eventually the parade starts. It's dark now, so you can't see all that much. Most of the buildings are dark and there are zero street lights.

As each ogoh-ogoh doll is hoisted by the cadre of boys and men the crowd cheers. The doll makes its way to the big square and marches around. Stories are told over the loud speaker and growling and grunting sounds are made.

After a while we agree we won't see everything, so we squeeze our way home and have dinner at our hotel. Only hotel restaurants are open and only some of them, so our place is crowded and slow. Tomorrow's a big (quiet) day.

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## Photos



It's before dawn, but there's enough light for the iPhone. Our double outrigger awaits.



Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my... dolphins



Finally, we see them!



Sometimes they're right next to our boat!



Time to head back. Karen uses Scott as a backrest while our Portuguese Travel Agent gets some shuteye.



Gitgit Falls. This is as close as we're OK to get. The wind from the force of the water was amazing.



We see ogoh-ogoh prep work all the way  
back to Ubud



One of our 'more tame' Ubud evil sprits



Some ogoh-ogoh's you really have to wonder about.

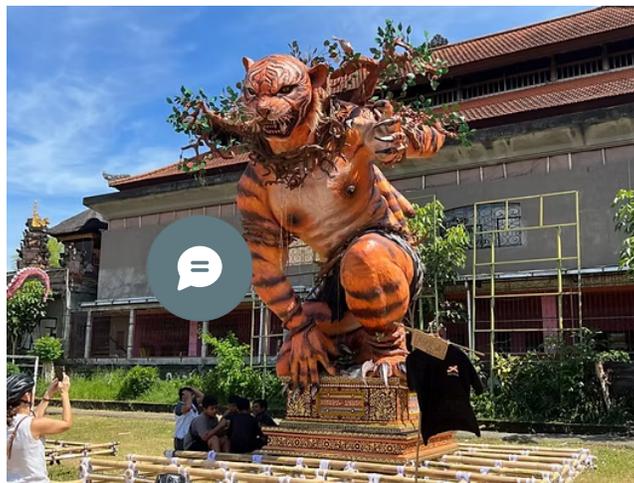


FARNSNIENTE 

A kid trying to imitate the evil spirit?



Time to call the ogoh-ogoh exterminator!!



Some of the bigger dolls require many dozen strong men to carry.



At night they're even scarier.



Happy New Year! Ogoh-ogoh "marching"  
off in the distance. People everywhere.

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