

MALANG—

A CITY IN JAVA



I stood outside the Tugu Hotel in Malang, pondering which becak (cycle rickshaw) driver I was going to use for the day. All of them were sporting tennis ball sized calf muscles, however half of them were asleep, which is no wonder because their work is hot, physical and strenuous. As I stood at the front of the becak line, miraculously, like dominoes, they awoke from their dozy daytime slumber one by one and sat upright, ready to vie for the business. Soon enough I was whisked off to see the sights of this fair city.

Malang is the second largest city in East Java, with a population of 1.2 million. It has a cool mountain air climate and is ringed by breathtaking highland scenery. As you go

by pedal-power down the small streets and back roads, you encounter stately old colonial Dutch homes, mostly built in the 1930s and 1940s. We cut down a series of green-leafy back streets between Jalan Semeru, Jalan Welirang and the main boulevard, Jalan Ijen. It was a perfect escape from the heat and noise of the main road and I felt myself drifting into another world of imperial times when Indonesia was under Dutch rule. These historic homes, many beautified by cloaks of colourful bougainvillea, give an air of rich elegance to the old city of Malang, and indeed Jalan Ijen, the most prestigious street in Malang, is known locally as "millionaire row" with houses fetching well over the United States one million dollar mark.



My next adventure was on foot and surprisingly only a three minutes walk from my downtown hotel, positioned at the main roundabout and next to the city hall. I was able to cut down a narrow lane to Bird Street and discover the very interesting local market, Pasar Bunga, which branches to the left for birds and to the right for bunga (flowers). Many varieties of birds are for sale at the market including parrots, rare and exotic birds and brown owls plus animals including rabbits, guinea pigs and snakes. Live-feed wriggly worms and strange-looking insects fill large troughs and if you look for a small gap between the densely packed shop fronts, you can catch a great view looking out over the patchwork of rooftops which hug the side of River Brantas, that threads and weaves its way through Malang's many kampungs (villages).

An amble through the flower market, which packs a plethora of houseplants, watering cans and beautiful flowers, is a delight to the senses of sight and smell.

On the way back to the hotel I was intrigued by the maze of tiny gangs (lanes) and asked my becak driver to stop. On foot, I went exploring the other world of Malang, the community kampungs, where tiny run-down houses sit between very old Dutch worker's cottages and cross a network of Dutch canals. I felt like I had discovered an oasis in the middle of the city.

Next, I headed off by car into the mountains to explore the Wonosari Tea Plantation on the slopes of Mount Arjuno. After thirty minutes, I arrived at this sprawling 700 hectare plantation, which was first planted in 1910. The tea bushes are still the original bushes planted by the Dutch and produce tea to this very day.

There are over 500 workers at the estate and I stopped and talked with Ibu Tiani, who has been leaf picking since she was a young girl. "I live in Gebug and I have been picking since 1980," she told me, "I work six days a week from 6am to 3pm. I am an experienced picker and on average I pick around 50 kg of leaf a day. In rainy season I can get up to 75 kg," she said adjusting her heavy sack strapped across her back. "I would like to work in the tea factory but I keep turning down the offers. It's not good money. I make better money, picking."

Ibu Tiani's mother worked as a picker and her children also pick for a living. She was a very happy soul and explained to me how she works in a group with 12 women and one man, "He helps with the heavy lifting work,"

she explained.

The tour through the tea factory was fascinating. It's a 24/7 operation and I was surprised to discover the 10pm to 9am shift is the most productive. The leaves are picked fresh every day and end up in the drying racks. When they are half-dry, they are processed over night. The process from bush to bag is pretty quick. Huge sacks of graded tea filled the factory storeroom, with the high-grade tea labelled for export and low grade destined for tea bags and the local market.

Malang is a great destination for a getaway weekend and staying at the Tugu, the delightful art and romance hotel of Malang, allows you a bit of luxury after discovering the many treasures of the city and surrounding mountains.

*Story by Stephanie Brookes
Photos by David Metcalf*

Stephanie Brookes is a travel writer and blogger with tales from Indonesia and beyond. www.travelwriter.ws

David Metcalf (masterclass photographer – Garuda) runs half-day photo tours in Bali and specialist photography/cultural tours in Kalimantan, India and Alaska.

David's next tour, called **Orangutans, Wildlife & Borneo Adventure** is a wildlife photo workshop tour to see Orangutans on the **20-27 Nov, 2014**. David will explain camera settings and improve your photography skills. Bring any type of camera – if you have I-pad or I-phone that's OK. David also offers half and full day photo tours of Bali. See trip advisor or web for reviews from past participants. www.davidmetcalfphotography.com

