



An Accidental Adventure!

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MAKASSAR, the sixth largest city in Indonesia and the capital of South Sulawesi, was never on my list of places-to-see-before-I-die. However, I knew there had to be good reasons for SilkAir to start flying thrice weekly to this city I knew little about, and jumped on the opportunity to visit as a team member of a SingHealth-University of Hasanuddin collaboration.

Days start early in Makassar, with full daylight and street activity beginning at 5 am. There is no time difference between Singapore and Makassar, so it was challenging to get my engine going at such an unearthly hour. Both my trips there were made during the wet season, which runs from October to May. It was my very first time in a place with 100% humidity (according to the Apple weather app)! The showers were so sudden and heavy that the lecturers in the university auditorium were completely outdone by the sound of the rain. Meanwhile, the dry season runs from June to September. I can only imagine the heat in this period, as we were already perspiring like horses in November and February. When in Makassar, always dress light and comfortable.

Eat eat eat

Our packed programme didn't allow much sightseeing, but I was informed by the Vice Dean that Makassar is well known for culinary tourism, and not conventional tourism. Indeed, that was a very useful nugget of information that motivated our team to enjoy our end-of-day adventures at various eating spots. The cuisine in Sulawesi is different from those of Java and Sumatra, not just with regard to the raw ingredients, but also in the methods of preparation.

One has not been to Makassar if one hasn't indulged in the amazing variety of seafood available here. The *kudu kudu* fish deserves special mention, and we were lucky to savour this delicious cousin of the puffer fish at Apong, a popular seafood restaurant. It is found in deep waters only in Makassar, and nowhere else in the world. Its flesh tastes just like chicken. The boxy fish has a thick leathery jacket which someone in the team contemplated making a clutch bag out of!

Crabs and prawns are also plentiful, and it will take a few meals to sample all the different versions – black pepper, chilli, salted egg yolk, soya sauce and garlic. Prices



Photos

1. Losari beachfront at sunset
2. Kudu kudu fish which tastes like chicken!
3. Grounds of Fort Rotterdam
4. Boat sculpture at the waterfront
5. Pancake from London Terbul – sinfully delicious!
6. First floating mosque in Indonesia

were reasonable and fairly consistent throughout the main seafood restaurants so we knew we could “go forth and order”. *Otak-otak* is a common starter at these eateries. I would describe the local *otak* as thick, springy fishcake wrapped in fragrant banana leaves, and best eaten with a mixture of chilli and kaffir lime. Truly delectable and definitely whets one’s appetite for the seafood feast to follow! We relished it at almost every dinner!

Fish curry and fish soup are must-tries. These use a salmon-like fish with many bones, and I would be extra careful when partaking in them. (One may be somewhat reassured to know that there are many hospitals with proper emergency departments in the city, in case of the unfortunate event of a foreign body in the throat.)

Forget plain rice. Go for *nasi goreng merah*, which is rice stir-fried with tomato sauce so that the whole dish is crimson. The Vice Dean commented that *Nelayan*, a cosy restaurant near M-Regency Hotel (where we put up), served the best red fried rice in the city. I could not agree more!

Staying near the sea allowed us to take strolls along Losari Beach. The Makassar sunset, which happens at about 6.30 pm, is as breathtaking as that of Gordon Beach in Tel Aviv and Psalidi Beach in Kos, Greece. I only got to witness it just once (that’s how late we ended each day), and it was a sweet and memorable ending to that hectic day – I would love to watch it again on my upcoming third trip! It

takes about 40 minutes to walk from the hotel end of the waterfront to the end featuring the first floating mosque in Indonesia, which was out of bounds to visitors, but we managed to see austere busts of important people from Makassar’s history lining its exterior.

Once the sun drops beyond the horizon, seaside activity is dominated by stalls selling *pisang epe*. Let me explain further. Small palm-sized bananas are smashed with wooden blocks and grilled over charcoal. Syrup (chocolate, durian, strawberry, coconut – just to name a few from the long list of flavours) is then lathered over the bananas and a generous sprinkling of grated cheese completes the snack. Try three bananas for 10,000 rupiah, which is about S\$1! Forget about the calories just once.

Don’t miss London Terbul, a chain famous for pancakes. Choose from tiramisu, strawberry or pandan as bases for the pancakes, and top half of it with chopped chocolate like white Toblerone, Nutella, Ritter Sport, Chunky Bar or SilverQueen. The other half comprises grated cheese. I must say the mixture of partly melted chocolate and cheese tasted so sinfully delicious, that I had to resist going for a second helping!

Shop and see

For history buffs, Fort Rotterdam is a gem to visit, to gain more insight into Makassar during Dutch rule. The entrance of the fortress is marked by a statue of Sultan

Hasanuddin on a horse in a stately pose. Saunter along the canal, climb the fort walls and explore the tunnels. Museum La Galigo, sited in one of the numerous buildings within the fort grounds, charged a token 5,000 rupiah for admission. I found it well worth the ticket price, and spent more than an hour browsing the numerous exhibits. It explained the series of bold red words displayed at the Losari waterfront: the Bugis, the Makassar and the Toraja are the three main tribes in Makassar. The Toraja region is renowned for coffee, widely available in the numerous gift shops facing the Losari waterfront, so you can pick up some boxes as souvenirs. Also check out the passionfruit cordial which was so fruity and fragrant – they were packaged with pretty handwoven baskets, perfect as gifts! The shops were also well stocked with all sorts of *kacang* produced in the area, such as cashews and peanuts. These were of excellent quality and became popular requested items from the department secretariat.

Once over dinner, I quizzed the Vice Dean about batik (thinking I was in the best place to stock up for smart casual dinner outfits), and she imparted to me another interesting fact. The Bugis tribe in Makassar produces silk, not batik. Unfortunately, we didn’t see it in the few stores we visited, and I hope to get my hands on some silk fabric and garments next round. We did manage to shop at Batik Keris, a popular Indonesian batik brand, which has a large boutique in Trans Studio Mall. Trans Studio is the newest and biggest mall in

the city, with loads of eateries, upmarket shops like Guess and Louis Vuitton, and also Carrefour. The mall houses the third largest indoor theme park in the world, and we spent a couple of hours trying out the rides on a quiet Saturday morning. Admission fees were about S\$20, and we had a 1-for-1 discount with a promotion so it was a steal! If you are visiting with young children, this theme park would be a fun place to while away at least three hours.

In addition, there are several other notable sights, such as the Malino tea plantation, Takapala Waterfall, Bugis silk weaving and Bantimurung National Park, which require driving out of the city. I recommend those who want an unconventional holiday to consider touring Makassar. ■



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