



Travel Stories by Amaru & Suzanne



The Perhentians...just what we needed!!

by Amaru & Suzanne, May 12th 2006

So after our stay in Penang we decided that we needed a holiday, so we purchased a combined bus and boat ticket to the Perhentian Islands on the other side of the country. The only reason for purchasing bus tickets was that there were no direct flights to our destination. Ah well, the bus departed at 9pm and would arrive at 5am the next morning, before boarding a boat over to the islands.

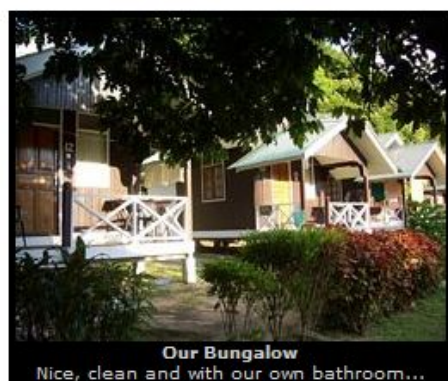
Just before we got on the bus we remembered that we had read somewhere that there aren't any ATM's on the islands, so we made a quick dash over to one and withdrew some cash.

The bus ride wasn't too bad, even Suz survived it. During it's 8 hours we got one stop for refreshments etc. We both managed to get a little sleep during the ride, most of it thanks to our seasickness tablets which gave us a drowsy side effect. Don't think that was enough though, the thing is that the bus driver thought of himself as a rally driver so we kept waking up all the time, mostly when he was making turns in which you almost thought that the bus would flip over...

When we reached Kota Bharu at 4am we had to change buses for the last hour....at our destination we had to wait for around 15 min before the Boat company opened up their store. Next to the ferry there was a mosque and while we were waiting they had their morning prayers, you know, a guy singing prayers over the microphone to the whole town. This was a bit hard to handle at 5.30am, however it was quite amusing when he got a coughing fit during his prayer.....without turning the microphone off....after the attack he continued for about another 30min or so....



The boat ride over
A fast boat and 30 min later we were there.



Our Bungalow
Nice, clean and with our own bathroom...

Now to the boat, the manager arrived and said that the slow boat would be departing at 11-12....hmmm....we asked about the fast boat and that would leave in 45min. We asked and for 10 ringits each managed to get upgraded to that one.

A Danish girl that was waiting there with us asked us if we knew of any ATM's on the islands....we told her that there wasn't and she had to arrange a taxi to drive her 15min away to the nearest ATM. While she was away the boat arrived and we all boarded, her bag was still there so we told the boat people to watch out for her and then we left (hopefully she made it to the islands as well later on).

The boatride was 30min, when we arrived a smaller boat picked us up and took us to the beach of the bigger island (there are two of them and the smaller one caters more to budget backpackers). Now, our first impressions of the island weren't what we were expecting, we had heard so many stories about "Paradise" and such that we had pretty high hopes (not that it was bad no, but nothing like we hadn't already seen on this trip). Anyways, we went in search of a place to stay and at the second place we checked we decided to stay (the first place was called Paradise resort.....not, the bungalow were quite shabby).

After having checked in, changed outfits and eaten breakfast we went in search of a nice beach, after walking for about 5min we did find it.....Paradise, or as close as we've been to it at least. It was a half moon bay with crystal clear waters, brilliant white sands and virtually no people.

We jumped straight in.....the water was so clear that you could almost mistake it for a pool, we swam around for a while and just enjoyed ourselves.

I had heard that the islands were supposed to have some good diving and decided to find out for myself if that was true or not. After checking a few different diveshops I ended up choosing the one on "our" beach, that way Suz could be in the water or the beach relaxing while I was away on the dive. I talked to the guy in the diveshop and he got me on a dive that very same day (I hadn't really slept all that much the night before but diving is diving) together with 3 other guys, a very small group.



All in all I did 4 dives during the 5 days that we spent on the island, two of those included wreck dives. The best part about these dives was the fact that they weren't very deep (so we could spend longer time under the water) and they were very close to the island. The worst part was that the visibility wasn't as good as the one in Thailand. But I still managed to see lots of new corals that I hadn't seen before, lots of lionfishes, clownfishes (yup....more Nemo), a few bamboo sharks and much more. The wreck dives were very interesting as well, I had never done that before and it was quite odd to be swimming next to a huge ship under the water.

Anyways....Our days on the island were almost identical. We slept in, had brunch, spent some time at the beach, I went diving and then in the afternoon we sat down and had a cold drink while reading our books

(we couldn't just sit in the bungalows at this time since the electricity was turned off between 4 and 7pm and without the fans they were too hot). At night we tried some different foods, BBQ one night, Pizza the other, local dishes and we finished up with a Buffet dinner at an exclusive resort, the buffet was crap to say the least, basically what we want to say is that the food on the island was the only bad experience that we had. It was just very simple and often tasteless. After dinner we would go out for romantic walks on the beach....which usually would be followed by an icecream.

Another thing about the island that we noticed early on was the wildlife....there were plenty of monkeys, Monitor lizards (big ones, up to 150cm long), squirrels and....huge spiders, Suz's favourites.....the first time she saw them she almost jumped ship and left the island....well, not quite that bad but close enough. At the end of our five days she was a tough girl though and could almost handle looking at them.....from a distance.

After a day or two we started to look for the possibilities of going to Redang Island. We knew that they usually had pretty good packages with everything included. What we didn't realize was that that weekend we planned on going was a long weekend for the locals. This meant that the prices skyrocketed to almost the double what we were expecting. So, we just decided to skip Redang Island this time and do it on another trip. Ah well....so we had to stay on this beautiful island a few more days.....it was tough!!



So this led us to the Internet cafe on the island (not cheap) where we checked our emails quickly and also booked Airplane tickets to Kuala Lumpur (no more long bus rides for us).



Clear waters...
....almost like in a pool.

Late on day three we realized that we had to budget a little bit, we were sort of running low and there aren't any ATM's.....it all turned out fine, we just stopped having expensive meals and had plenty of money to spare, we just limited ourselves to 2 meals a day (and icecream...).

We also checked out the smaller island to see what it was like. Most people coming from mainland choose to stay on the small island, but once we got there we quickly realized we made the right decision in staying on the big island. After 3 hours or so we had enough and went back to our island and our beach.....much better.

Another exploration that we did on our second last day was that we went to the other big beach on our island (we had to trekk through the jungle for about 20min to get there). This beach contained a few luxury resorts as well, but still we could say that we made the best choice. We simply stayed at a mid-range priced bungalow but had only 5min to the best beach the island had to offer.

Our last day we took the boat back to mainland at 8am and then a taxi to the airport in Kota Bharu. We now had around 5 hours to spend before our flight left (what is it with us and the 5 hours at the airport....come on!!). This was one of the most boring airports we had experienced, it didn't even have an ATM which we really needed by now.

During our wait I sewed my bag (yes Mrs B, I can sew, Suz thought you'd like that) since it had started to fall apart (the back part where the shoulder straps are). Just before we checked in we spent our last money on two bottles of water.... and then we just had a few coins left, not even enough for one icecream.....

To summarize this part of our trip.....we had a fantastic time, the beach was great, the water warm and clear, the people really nice and the dives were great as well.



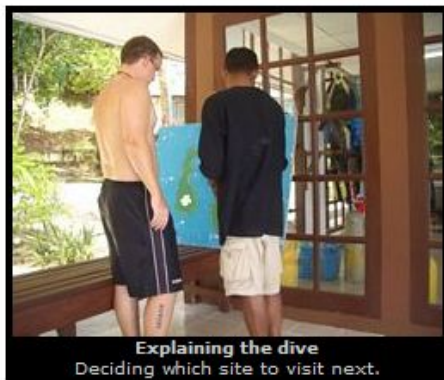
Relaxing
Yup, can't get much better than this.



Look at my tanline!!
Good excuse when the bikini is falling off =))



Both of us in Paradise
Our obligatory photo...



Explaining the dive
Deciding which site to visit next.



All geared up...
...so let's go diving!!



Let's go diving
The crew I went diving with...



A nice flower....
....under the water?!? Still pretty though.



A Lionfish
Aren't they beautiful...



A Shark...
...tiny one I know, but still.



A Stone fish
Yup, better not step or touch that one.



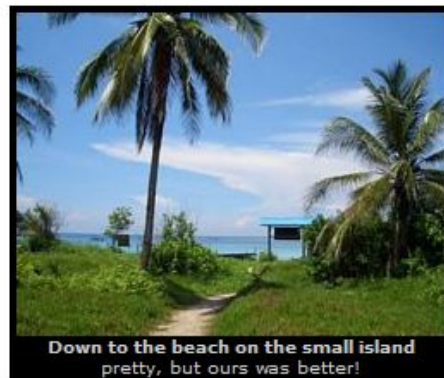
Different...
haven't seen this kind of coral before...



A sea star of a sort...
Haven't seen that one before either.



At the ship wreck...
...plenty of fishes around here as well!





One of the monkeys on the island
We even saw mothers with their offspring.



Monitor Lizards are quite big and this one
was on the path while I was walking down



Huge spiders, did I mention that Suz was
miles away when I was taking this photo??



"How are you doing??"
...hmmmm, well, I'm good at least =))



Sunset as seen from our chalet
ahhh....can't read my book now though =)



Let's trekk to the other beach...
...and see what we can find.



The other beach...
...not bad, but too many corals in the sand.



Snorkeling groups
Millions of asian snorkelers



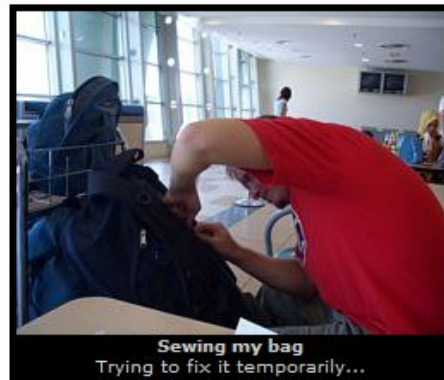
Snorkeling groups
They like their life jackets!



Our last sunset on the island
At least for this time...



Back at mainland
Time to catch a cab to the airport.



Sewing my bag
Trying to fix it temporarily...



Only another 3 hours to go...
waiting outside, the aircon was really cold!!



The airport was packed!!
We could hardly get to the counter...

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