

My jungle adventure

AUGUST 4, 2016

Yesterday we left Melaka and drove up to Taman Negara stopping off at the elephant sanctuary (should be named a conservation centre but am not sure why it isn't!) on the way. The drive was uneventful – although we have entered the realm of squat toilets (they were the clean alternative) so here's to working out the thigh muscles for the rest of my trip!

Arriving at the elephant conservation centre you are presented with a display about elephants and a short video about how they rescue the elephants. It's clear the aim of the centre is to educate Malaysian children about the elephants rather than 'save the elephants' with a repeated message that human activity had encroached on their natural habitat and not the other way round. The video was difficult to watch as you can't help feeling something is wrong with the obvious distress in the elephants at being tranquillised and chained to be moved to Taman Negara (or the centre if they are ill or injured) but then how else do you move such a creature?

After the video you get the opportunity to see the elephants in the centre. These are most likely to have been orphaned or otherwise deemed unable to survive in the wild in their own. You get the chance to feed them in their pens and then others are paraded in front of the audience being ridden by the staff. Lastly these elephants are taken down to the river where you see them getting a good scrub to wash away all the dust. These elephants are trained and tame but the centre is quick to tell you these elephants are used to help reduce others with an elephant much more likely to follow another elephant calmly. There was just something about the whole experience that didn't feel right – another example of the uncomfortable tourism I wrote about last year? I'm off to see the orang-utan's soon so we'll see what that's like. Oh and before you ask, yes you can definitely smell the elephants before you see them!

Leaving the sanctuary, we carried on to Kuala Tahan to catch the 'ferry' across to the Muhiara resort Taman Negara. I say ferry. I mean motor boat for 10 people! Now everyone knows how keen I am on boats so I went in the first one so I couldn't know what was coming! Was a ridiculously short ride so even I coped!

Once across we were greeted with cold towels (sheer bliss) and a cold tea and honey drink. By this time I was learning to embrace the sweat. No need to pay for a sauna here. The humidity is a killer and you soon end up soaked through – lovely image that isn't it! But just think of all those toxins I'm getting rid of.

After dinner it was time for a night walk in the jungle. Intentionally going out to look for (poisonous) spiders, scorpions and other such deadly things does seem a little odd. On setting off being told not to touch anything is never a good sign! I quickly realised that while being in a rainforest is absolutely amazing, I'm really not an insect person! Returning to the complex, time for a Sprite (yes, the warm weather means I'm drinking Sprite like there's no tomorrow) before bed.

This morning gave the opportunity to explore the rainforest further and actually see where you are going...much better! Setting off behind our guide he stopped along the way to point out different plants with medicinal properties and how to tell if

something can be eaten by humans (basically if a monkey eats it chances are you'll be fine but it might not taste very nice! If a squirrel eats it, you can't! Look at me the intrepid hunter gatherer!). After some more spiders along the way and a stop off to have my photo taken by a buttress root (I am such a geography geek!), it was time for the canopy walkway.

Dripping with sweat to the extent my sunglasses kept sliding off my nose and with sweat soaked clothing (I really hope you get an image of true disgustingness here as that's the reality and you soon learn to live with it), I went up the walkway. Now this is the type of thing I usually have no issue with. Walking along a rope bridge suspended 50m above the ground...easy...but wait...you usually have a safety harness! It was quite amazing walking along the walkway (until the metal ladder going down that swayed and meant that my usual method of don't look down would no longer work) inside the canopy of a rainforest. I've drawn diagrams of them at school, written essays about them at university and then taught students how to draw the diagrams as a teacher but none of that quite prepares you for the scale of the real thing. Only problem is very few pictures taken as that would have meant taking my hands off the ropes!

After the walkway we walked slowly back to the complex for another Sprite and lunch. This afternoon's excursion was upriver on a boat. What a surprise that I decided reading my book would be much better!

Tonight is our last night in the jungle as we're heading up to the Highlands in the morning. I would like to say that I wish I could stay for longer but these two days have confirmed what I already knew...I'm not a creepy crawly, hunter gatherer, sweat-loving girl! If you could give me the rainforest, which is beautiful, without the creepy crawlies and a nice not humid 21 degrees or so then I'll be there! But then I suppose it wouldn't be a tropical rainforest! Oh well, no signing up to a Bear Grylls jungle survival adventure for me!