BALI / SULAWESI TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE TRIP

SUE AND CHRISTOPHER

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My wife, Sue, and I decided to take a trip to Bali as part of Astronomy magazine’s solar eclipse tour, run by TravelQuest International. The Great Indonesian Eclipse would take place on March 9, 2016 and be visible from an island that is conveniently close to Bali, called Sulawesi (formerly Celebes). Once we were confirmed as tour members, we made flight arrangements to Denpasar, Bali. We’d be leaving at around 3:45 AM on February 29, 2016 from Dudley, MA, and landing in Denpasar Bali at 11:10 PM on March 1, 2016. Our flight plan took us from Bradley Field in Windsor Locks, CT, through Philadelphia, PA and Doha, Qatar on the Persian Gulf. We arrived early in Denpasar by around twenty minutes, went through customs and met the driver who brought us to our first hotel. Door to door, our trip to Bali had taken us around 31 hours.

**Conrad Bali and TravelQuest Tour**

The TravelQuest Tour started the next day, March 2, at the Conrad Bali in the Tanjung Benoa section of Bali on the southeastern coast. We arrived there at around 12:30 PM, were handed a welcome drink and shown to the TravelQuest check-in area where we met two coordinators and received our official welcome packages. Once our room was prepared, we were escorted up to the fourth floor by a baggage handler and brought into our very nicely appointed room overlooking the pool with the ocean view in the background. We had a comfortable balcony as well as a spacious living area.

We walked the grounds, wending our way around the huge, meandering pool down to the beach, where we stuck our feet into the warm, welcoming waters of the Badung Strait**.** After rinsing our feet off and re-donning our footwear, we made our way to the side of the property where we purchased a few locally-made items. We then stopped at a beachfront, thatch-covered bar for a glass of wine.

Dinner was buffet-style and we had no problem finding a great many offerings that fit with our pescatarian diet. After dinner, we went to the hotel bar and enjoyed a wine while speaking with a local Balinese waitress, at her request, about the eclipse. Despite my protestations, she was under the mistaken impression that I, along with many from our group, was from NASA and had been to outer space. I was eventually able to help Tari visualize eclipse mechanics using some bar-top items, but was unable to convince her that we weren’t from NASA.

**Temple Tours – First Day with TQ Group**

On the first full day of the TQ tour, we visited a couple of temples in the afternoon and enjoyed a sumptuous dinner at the Pan Pacific Hotel. Buses were assigned based on our TQ badge numbers, but that system quickly deteriorated into people just choosing a bus at random. There were four buses and we ended up on the last one. Instead of being labeled Bus 1, Bus 2, etc., buses were given bizarre designations like “1A Bus 2” and people needed to remember the choice that was made on that first day, leading to a great deal of confusion throughout the remainder of the ten-day tour.

The bus rides during the tour took us over very narrow and extremely busy roadways. The roads were barely large enough for two small cars to pass by each other, but all sizes of vehicle, from bicycles to motor scooters to large trucks traversed the roads, passing each other on both sides, occasionally tooting horns (in a friendly manner), turning at odd times; I was thankful that we heeded the advice of the travel guidebook to let the natives do the driving for us while visiting the island since Balinese drivers seem to anticipate each other’s moves quite well.

We arrived at the first temple, Pura Taman Ayun, and were given about an hour to walk around it, observe the ceremony that was taking place on that day and take photos. We viewed the ceremony and saw gamelan instruments set up on one of the platforms. We were lucky enough to see several performances featuring Balinese gamelan music, which is almost entirely unlike any western musical style, but very enjoyable once one gets accustomed to it and especially when accompanied by ritual dance.

The second temple that we visited that afternoon was Pura Tanah Lot, or “Temple of Land in the Middle of the Sea.” During periods of high tide, the temple looks as if it's afloat on the ocean. There were crowds of tourists viewing the sites, along with natives selling flying toys, postcards, fake flowers and even the opportunity to have one's photo taken with a seven foot long boa constrictor.

**Temple Tour, Rice Field – Day Two with TQ**

After breakfast on the second full day of the TQ tour, we headed out to Pura Ulun Danu Bratan, a temple that is by far much lovelier than either of the examples that we visited the day before. The grounds were well-manicured, the statuary was interesting and nicely accented with flora, it was situated on a lake, Lake Bratan, where there were water activities such as pedal boats and boat rides. There was also a temple ceremony with procession occurring in and around the temple area and paths. The participants in the ceremony were adorned beautifully and carried all manner of offerings, statues and other items on poles.

After the temple visit, we boarded the bus for a ride over to what was billed as the "most beautiful" rice paddy on Bali, located in Jatiluwih. That is a description with which I’d have to agree. We were allowed a little time to walk along the road and take some photos, following which we ate lunch at a restaurant overlooking the paddies, entertained by two gamelan musicians. As we walked to our table we were followed by two waitresses each carrying a coconut prepared for us so that we could drink coconut water during lunch. That was my first experience with coconut water, which is sweet and refreshing. I also had a first taste of a fruit, mangotine, which is subtle and delicious and nothing at all like a mango. On this trip we sampled numerous fruits with which I was previously unfamiliar, all unique and all tasty; everything is always in-season and plentiful in the tropics. There was a rice paddy worker with an ox that was plowing a nearby paddy.

During dinner that evening, back at the Conrad Bali, we were able to watch a show of Balinese dance called the Kecak (or Ketjak), also known as the Ramayana Monkey Chant. It was an amazing performance. I'd previously read that the performers not only learn all of the dance moves precisely, but that their facial expressions, hand and finger positions, and even eye movements are all carefully choreographed to the music. The dance itself, according to Wikipedia, tells a story of a battle from the Ramayana in which the monkey-like Vanara helped Prince Rama fight the evil King Ravana, and was developed in the 1930s.

**Ogoh Ogoh, Batik, Jewelry En Route to Ubud, Bali**

The next morning we found our bus, 1A Bus 2, and left for the Alila Resort in Ubud, Bali. Several stops were planned. The first was to witness various Ogoh Ogoh statues being prepared for the Nyepi (Balinese New Year) Celebration that took place this year on 3/8/2016. Nyepi itself was on 3/9/2016, the date of the "Dark Moon," which, of course, is the New Moon and coincided with the date we were off-island, visiting Sulawesi for the eclipse. The fact that we were off-island for Nyepi was fortunate as no activity whatsoever is allowed on Bali during Nyepi from 6:00 AM through 6:00 AM the following morning. No cooking, fires, driving of vehicles, use of electronic devices or even people leaving houses is allowed. We’d have needed to remain on the hotel grounds for the duration.

We stopped on our way to the Alila Resort at a small shop where batik artists and clothiers worked on looms and with small brushes to weave their own cloth, draw patterns on it, paint the patterns in with dyes and then cover the dyes with beeswax. We were able to watch the artisans at work, and then peruse the small shop for clothing, tablecloths and artwork. Many in our group, including my wife and me, purchased items from this particular shop.

Our next, and final stop, prior to arriving at our hotel, was at a jewelry-making shop; the Balinese are known for their jewelry, batik and wood carvings. We were again able to see the artisans at work before being led into a shop where we were told to "make a collection" with one of the employees, and at the end, to compare the best of the best to determine what our purchase would be. This process consisted of us being followed around by an employee with a 1'-square black tray on which was placed every item in which we showed interest. When we were finished browsing, Sue made her choice and we purchased the items.

The Alila Resort wasn't far from the jewelry shop, and we arrived, were given our welcome drinks and keys, and set out for our rooms. The property overlooks the lush Ubud countryside that is teeming with roosters and monkeys. There was no television in the room, and the bathroom had a shower with a glass wall overlooking the countryside to the rear of our room (there was an interesting block wall that made the shower area not easily visible from any pathways associated with the property, so privacy wasn’t much of a concern). The in-room coffee, as a side note, was the best that my wife and I have ever had in any hotel anywhere in the world: Balinese coffee with bodum-style French press.

**Rice Paddy Trek and Coffee Plantation**

The next day we went on an off-tour activity, a trek that included a picnic lunch. We went with another couple from the tour that also decided to avoid the buses that day. The advertisement for this Payangan Countryside Trek said “Enjoy approximately three hours of wonder as you walk through the lush local countryside featuring some of the most impressive rice terraces, rivers and waterfalls. …enjoy a refreshing drink of coconut milk direct from its natural source. The experience ends with a beautifully laid out sumptuous picnic in our private bale overlooking rice fields.” My wife almost wore her new batik dress for this trek based on that description, but luckily decided in favor of more traditional hiking attire at the last minute.

Our first stop was a small village where a festival was well underway by the time we arrived. There were many cars as well as countless scooters and motorbikes parked along the road and in the woods. The crowds were thick with local Balinese, some with offerings, some with goods for sale, some taking part in processions or rituals and others carrying roosters for impromptu cock fights. We witnessed a couple of temple ceremonies and a few cock fights (something I never expected to see!) before heading back out into the village to tour a house. Houses in Bali all contain a temple area (the head), a traditional kitchen and rice loft (the body) and an area for farm animals and waste (the legs/feet). A family graciously allowed us to tour their abode as our guide explained the setup.

After the house tour, we headed out to the rice paddies. The paths adjacent to the paddies were very narrow and consisted of mud and grass, often with parts of them breaking away into the water (along with our feet). We later found out that king cobras are frequent denizens of paddies and that the workers in the Balinese paddies enjoy the highest incidence of venomous snake bites of any group on the planet. I'm glad we didn't know that ahead of time. We witnessed a few workers tending the paddies and a few women walking through with offerings on their heads, most likely on their way to a ceremony. Our guide persuaded one local lady that was passing through the fields to stop and take photos with us.

After leaving the paddy area and encountering a temple where a ceremony had just finished up, we came across a steep and winding incline down some slick rocks, followed by some stone steps that were clearly not built to code. It then appeared as if the path disappeared, but our guide assured us that "this is the path" but to be careful and "hold onto the grass" on the way down so as not to fall into the yawning crevasses on either side of us. I decided these challenges were better negotiated doing "the crab," and others in our small group just slid down on their rear ends. Next, we came to a seven-foot long, one foot wide dirt pass on a sheer cliff with a drop of around 100' on one side and a "wall" of dirt around four feet high on the other. There was, of course, no safety railing or handhold of any kind here, and we were told to face the dirt and shuffle along the other dirt, again holding onto the grass.

A short time later, after a few more worrisome passes down steep inclines, we could see we were getting closer to the river. We were in a beautiful valley area around which were some buildings nestled in the foliage, one of which was a house and the other two having to do with the coffee plantation that was our ultimate goal. Our guide pointed the latter out and said that was indeed our destination, but it was on the other side of the river and very, very far up the cliff. Some in our group were beginning to flag a bit, and some groans were heard at this point. But soldier on we did, because it was either that or make our way back along the hazard-filled route we’d already covered.

Maybe fifty or so feet farther down we went, with a dangerous drop on our left and not much to provide purchase on either the path or to our right when we came to some running water that was coming out of a thin, maybe 1-1/2' cement U-shaped channel that crossed around 300’ over the chasm, at the bottom of which ran the aforementioned river. Our guide suggested that we could rinse our hands off there if we'd like because the water is very clean, and that we’d be crossing the river by walking along this cement trough. Looking at the thin ribbon of cement made not for human crossing, but to channel water, it began to sink in that this was a terrible predicament, but our guide, ever-optimistic and cheerful, smiled and said "no problem, you can hold onto me and we’ll go across."

Of course, this *was* a problem, but we didn't have much choice since backtracking out seemed like an even worse option. Our two companions decided to go first, or maybe they just did so because they happened to be nearer to Suara, our guide. He was in front, followed by our friends, one holding on to Suara’s midriff and the other holding onto hers. The guide showed how to place one’s feet on the corner of the channel "walls" and counted off steps: “one, two, no problem.” I took some photos and thought, "will these be the last photos of these people alive?" After a few minutes they were across, visibly shaken, and Suara bounded back over for us. I didn't even want to climb up on this channel, never mind go across it. But Sue climbed up and grabbed the guide and I somehow followed and put my hands on her waist. I was crying the whole way over, just like a little girl, and Sue was laughing at the absurdity of our situation. The guide was saying "no problem" and counting off steps. I stared down at the water flowing through the channel and concentrated on my steps, knowing that if I looked over the side of the channel at the river below, I'd surely lose my balance and fall over taking my wife and Suara with me. I decided then and there that if our trek was to take us back over this structure, I'd just build a house on the other side of the river and stay there forever. Luckily, all that remained was for us to climb up this giant hillside to the coffee plantation.

Once we climbed the hill, a waiter, recognizing Suara, ran after us and ushered us over to the picnic area that he'd prepared for us with a scrumptious-looking repast. The area itself was set up like a typical thatch-roofed structure with only a table in the rear (no seating). On the table was our lunch, consisting of bottled water, watermelon juice, salad with dressing, fresh fruits, a veggie sandwich with mayo and ketchup condiments, a bowl of mini-meatballs and a wedge of rich chocolate cake.

The whole picnic lunch area overlooked the valley through which we'd just trekked, an impressive site. We all took our time with lunch, discussing the day's adventures thus far. After we all finished up, we gathered our things for the last push up a couple of more flights of stairs to the coffee plantation for our tea and coffee tasting.

Our pre-planned tasting comprised ten or so different teas and coffees, all identified on an accompanying placard. We were given the option to add on a “luwak coffee,” made from beans eaten by a luwak and then recovered from its excrement. A luwak is a Tasmanian-devil-like animal that purportedly carefully chooses which beans to ingest. We were able to see one of these animals, but were warned not to go too close as it is aggressive in nature.

**Painting School Stop**

On the way back to the Alila resort, we made a stop at an art school where a master teacher was to explain the creation process of traditional Balinese artwork paintings and drawings. The master artist also explained the story behind the various scenes depicted in the paintings. It turns out that students, although it was Sunday afternoon, were present working on some of the artwork. The school is set up like a traditional Balinese house with several of the areas of the “head” portion of the house given over to displaying finished artwork. We chose to purchase a smaller painting with frame and our companions chose two larger works without frame. A percentage of the sales went toward the running of the school and a percentage to the artists and their continuing education.

**Ubud Center**

We arose before sunrise, enjoying some of the outstanding espresso provided in the room, then headed down to breakfast for 7:00 AM. We'd determined that we weren't going on the temple tour with the group, opting for a trip into Ubud center to do some shopping at the Market and to see the Ubud Palace. After breakfast and before we left for Ubud center, I was sitting out on the back deck writing an update to this report when there was a minor incident with a group of monkeys that came over the roof from the front yard and onto the deck, surrounding me. I calmly, without any sudden movements, left the deck and went inside the room to wait with Sue for the monkeys to move along. I directed a facial expression at the lead monkey in response to one that he made to me, mistaking his gesture for a friendly greeting. This caused him to become somewhat agitated and aggressive, and the group of monkeys to linger, but things eventually calmed down and we were able to leave the room safely and head to the lobby area where we met up with a few others for the van ride into town.

We shopped and bartered for a little while but quickly found out that we’d rather just see a price tag and pay the amount listed. Bartering is sometimes accompanied by high pressure sales, and we really didn’t know what things are worth. We were told to just cut whatever the first given price was in half as a start to the bargaining, which we did for the most part, but it mostly just made us uncomfortable and we went back to the hotel to relax for the afternoon.

**Trip to Palu, Sulawesi**

The next morning’s flight to Sulawesi took us over several small islands, only one of which was seemed to be inhabited. Sulawesi is currently pursuing a goal of increasing the island's reputation as a tourist destination with a concentration on diving. Over the last few years, Sulawesi has been preparing for the TravelQuest group’s arrival and stay on the island. Someone dubbed "Ms. Tourism" was named and made an appearance in front of our hotel. We were given police escorts during our travels, the government in Palu arranged for a special afternoon excursion for our group that included a parade in our honor, and everywhere we went there were welcome dances and ceremonies. At our post-eclipse dinner, the mayor of Palu made an appearance and gave a small speech, and the vice president of Indonesia joined us at the eclipse viewing site for totality.

We landed a few minutes ahead of schedule in the small Palu airport. We made our way out of the gate area and down to the baggage claim and saw a most unusual sight: crowds of airport workers, locals, military and police were gathered, snapping photos of us, smiling and asking for "selfies" with us. There were a couple of musicians playing welcome music and we were asked to pose for a group photo. I don't know about any of you readers of this report, but this was my first celebrity-status experience. It was somewhat overwhelming.

**Hotel Santika**

The entire route to our hotel, the Hotel Santika (our group was split into two hotels for the stay with two buses going to the Hotel Santika and two buses going to the Mercure Palu Hotel) was lined with locals witnessing the procession. Children were jumping up and down, waving, and everyone was smiling and waving at the buses. We all, of course, waved back, snapping pictures of this unbelievable spectacle. Disembarking at the hotel after our fifteen-minute transfer, we entered the lobby and were greeted with a dance of welcome by several dazzlingly dressed females. We were then led into a ballroom where we were to be handed our keys and were given welcome drinks and greeted by another ritual dance.

Dinner that evening was in the ballroom and talks were given on the eclipse by Richard Talcott, our celebrity on the tour (he's a senior editor of Astronomy magazine, which I've been reading for around 37 years now). There was also a talk about photographing the eclipse and the latest weather prospects by another speaker. The chances for clear skies were put at around 50%, but the speaker was nonetheless "optimistic."

**Eclipse Day**

We were awake, as usual, well before the wake-up call and had coffee and tea prior to leaving our room for the lobby. There were boxed breakfasts waiting for us, consisting of a muffin and other pastry and some fruit. There was some coffee available for the bus ride, as well as tea and other liquids. I chose a tea, Sue a coffee. We'd also taken some water from our room, which is complimentary at all of the hotels in this region of the world, it seems. The bus ride was again accomplished with police escort and we were issued security badges since the vice president of Indonesia would be accompanying us for totality. The setting was a school sports field. We (Travel Quest and Asia World groups) had our own tent set up with chairs (plastic, but covered in cloth for our comfort), there was a review stand in the center for the VP and his staff/associates, and there was another tent for other VIPs. Locals lined the fences.

We were told that there would be five toilets set up for our use, but instead, there were zero. This is not a good situation early in the morning, and we were informed that toilets were instead set up along the road in mobile vans. Again, they weren't. Finally we were told that a local household would allow use of its toilet, which turned out to be true. To get to the toilets, we needed to exit through the security gate and be escorted down the street to the local house. I was with one of the first groups to go over, which was fortunate because there were only two stalls in the house, and I was eighth in line. When my turn came up, I walked to the door, opened it, and was surprised and somewhat shocked to see a non-flushing hole in the ground that was installed for the purpose, the sides of which had contoured areas for one's feet so that one could squat over the hole without slipping. Toilet paper was available and there was a large barrel with a scoop inside of it for pouring water into the hole for "flushing." I finished with my business and walked out of the door to the sight of a line that was then around thirty individuals long.

Making my way back to the field I went again through security and walked over to Sue to report on the situation. I suggested that she go right away so that she'd be able to return to the field prior to First Contact. This she did and was back with around fifteen minutes or so to spare.

I'd fashioned a crude device for use with my binoculars: I folded over the provided eclipse glasses to form the two lenses into one that was wide enough to cover one lens of my binoculars. I placed the lens cap over the other lens and held the folded contraption tight to the barrel before aiming my device at the Sun. It worked quite well, magnifying the view eight times (8X). Many individuals had solar scopes, including hydrogen alpha scopes (the best kind), that they were quite happy to share with everyone during partial phases. Having attended the annular eclipse in Reno a few years ago, I chose not to wander around looking through scopes since I'd done so at the much smaller event previously, and partial phases are similar for both types of eclipses. I alternated views through my binoculars and using the higher quality solar eclipse glasses that I'd purchased previously for Sue and me (one pair each). At this point, I'd mention that one of our fellow eclipse travelers decided to put his provided eclipse glasses on and look through his binoculars at the Sun. This should never be done, as he found out when the concentrated rays of the Sun immediately burned holes through his eclipse glasses. Luckily his reaction was fast enough to save both his binocular optics and his eyesight. One must always cover the primary lens with proper protection prior to aiming an instrument at the Sun.

First Contact happened right on schedule and the "bite" was visible just a couple of minutes later through my adapted binoculars. This was followed by the "long wait" to totality, which was scheduled for 8:38 AM local time. During the partial phase, we occasionally made note of how shadows were becoming sharper and colors more defined. With around ten minutes to go, it was getting to be like twilight and the crowd was quieting down in anticipation.

I'd seen many photos and read countless descriptions of total solar eclipses over my decades of reading Astronomy magazine, and knew what was going to happen in an academic sense. I wasn't prepared for the excitement of actually witnessing such a spectacle, however, and when totality was imminent I was hyper-focused on the Sun, or the rapidly-shrinking sliver that remained visible. I removed from my binoculars the makeshift solar glasses lens and the other lens cover just as the Diamond Ring effect happened, which was astonishing, and I thrilled as "Bailey's Beads” appeared, just like I'd always read that they should! Then...Totality!

The Sun's corona was stunningly beautiful, with magnetic lines of force clearly visible. The orientation of the poles was at around ten-o'clock and four-o'clock with the corona arcing gracefully from there. Along the ecliptic I briefly glanced over and saw Mercury and Venus relatively close. Saturn, Mars and a few brighter stars, such as Fomalhaut were also visible, as I understand, but I didn't try to see them as I wanted to focus mostly on the Sun. I noted that around 8:30 or 9:00 on the Sun’s face there was a red flare visible and, while watching this amazing sight that was supposed to last for two minutes and forty seconds, I noticed Bailey's Beads at around 1:00, much to my chagrin, then the Diamond Ring, and it was over. Third Contact was in the past and the partial phase leading to Fourth Contact was underway.

I watched as the sun regained its supremacy over the daytime sky, drowning out the planets and stars one by one, leaving, finally, just Venus visible for around twenty minutes. The vice president left and security was packed away, allowing the floodgates holding back the locals to open. We were completely unprepared for what came next.

Our guide started to organize our group by the flagpole for a group photo and as we all filed over toward the flagpole, locals would timidly approach, asking for a selfie with us. We all obliged, asking for a photo on our cameras/phones in return. Then, after about twenty of these requests, people became bolder, walking up and asking with no trepidation whatsoever, but never rudely, and always followed by thanks and a handshake. I speak for everyone in our group that this made us again feel like celebrities while draining us, both physically and mentally. Finally, as Fourth Contact approached, our guides started to herd us toward the bus and away from the adoring throngs. As we filed onto the buses, groups gathered around them taking more photos and trying to get one last selfie with someone getting on board. We didn't wait for the official end of the eclipse, the aforementioned Fourth Contact, to leave the area and head back to the hotel. Were it up to me, we would have, but it wasn't, and we didn't.

**Optional Tour of Palu, Sulawesi**

The optional post-lunch tour set up by the local government was to begin at the king's local meeting house, where, back when there were kings in Sulawesi, they would meet with local politicians and dignitaries to discuss the issues of the day. As with other stops in Sulawesi, crowds were gathered awaiting our arrival and some ritual dances with musical accompaniment were performed. Locals asked again for photos and posed for some, on their own and with members of the group. A line formed to enter the house, the living areas of which were on the second floor. We were required to remove our shoes and our feet were washed with water prior to entering. Only around twenty-five were allowed up at any one time due to the fragile nature of the construction.

After touring the house for a few minutes, we made our way back outside to go down steps on the opposite side of the ones on which we made our ascent. A worker had delivered and arranged all of our shoes at the bottom of the steps on this side. The steps down were oddly angled and spaced, and I'm surprised that no one fell since there were less-than-athletic individuals in our group, but no one did. I spotted my shoes and slid right into them from the stairs.

In the adjacent field there was a ritual dance and music being performed. We watched a couple of dances, and then went into the "gift shop" located underneath the house. Sue purchased a scarf, and I found a nice batik shirt for myself. The path on the way back to the buses was lined with locals taking photos and stopping many individuals for selfies. I'd love to be able to see the Indonesian social media with all of the photos of the tourists in Sulawesi.

Our next stop would be a bridge of which the city of Palu and the island of Sulawesi were very proud. Our buses stopped mid-bridge, which was closed to traffic for our visit that afternoon, and we all disembarked to take photos of the vista and of the bridge itself. A few locals were on the bridge and were snapping photos with those in our group. We then walked down toward the bottom of the bridge, stopping around halfway down for a group photo (which ended up in the paper the next day). Then we saw that there was a parade coming our way.

The parade was in our honor, amazingly, and consisted of music and dance, costumes and speeches. People individually and in pairs came before us to show off their costumes and decorations, bowed and moved on, to the enjoyment of everyone involved. After the parade, the participants lined the street that led to our buses for us to walk by them so that they could greet us and be thanked in turn for their parade performances. We were funneled into a small marketplace that was selling various foods, some woven items and some plastic flower arrangements.

In the evening, a celebration dinner was held and we were again greeted by ritual dance and music (one of the songs was one that we'd seen earlier in the day at the king's house). We were given a welcome drink and shown to the ballroom where our dinner was to take place. There was a house band that played some American-type lounge music as well as some popular songs, and there was a traditional drum and "flute" music ensemble with traditional dancers. The latter performed some traditional dances and songs, of course, but they also performed one song that was written for the occasion of the eclipse, which was excellent (as were the traditional dances). We then had some speeches from our tour guides and from the mayor of Palu, who apologized for any inconveniences that we may have suffered due to us being the first group of any kind to visit Palu and the fact that they weren't quite sure how to prepare for tourists. We all assured him that there was no problem at all, for which he seemed relieved and grateful. In fact, the few inconveniences that happened were very quickly addressed; we all thought that the people of Palu and of Sulawesi did a great job taking care of the demands of such a crowd.

After dinner, we made our way back to the hotel and straight up to bed; it had been a long, event-filled day and our travels the next day would bring us back to Bali.

Some people were checking baggage, so the government of Palu had arranged for transport of the luggage to the airport from the hotel for screening. The first vehicle to arrive was a green dump-truck-like vehicle with driver and worker; this was the luggage truck! The bed was filled with luggage and the truck took off, but there was still quite a large amount remaining for checking. A short time after the first truck left, a second, red, but otherwise identical, vehicle pulled in. The handlers loaded this truck up and waited there for any last-minute luggage. Meanwhile, our buses started lining up for us to bring us to the airport for our return trip.

**Back in Bali**

We once again arrived at the Conrad Bali, where we'd spend the evening. There was a welcome tray of fresh fruit inside of our room for us. We got changed and went down to the pool for some wine and to take a swim. Dinner was an ocean-side gala celebrating the 20th anniversary of TravelQuest, and to mark the end of the Eclipse portion of the tour. Some people opted to go on tour extensions, but Sue and I arranged for our own tour of portions of Bali not covered with TQ, spending about another week on that beautiful island.