

climate conditions affect the flora and fauna, and in Borneo, everything seemed especially fecund and large. Hand-sized butterflies, finger-thick ants, huge spiders, and other creepy-crawlies teemed in the lush vegetation. Rainforest trees, palms, and ferns shone in a variety of green shades, while the cries and calls of animals entered Akela's open windows. The family often caught sight of monkeys, snakes, and lizards, even on the roads. Despite all of the beauty and seeming abundance, it was once again impossible to ignore the effects of deforestation and development on the land, which has led to the disappearance of Indigenous peoples and significant losses in animal biodiversity.

Island hopping on old car ferries was a budget-friendly way to travel between the many islands, even Borneo to Java. Java, the main island of the 17,000-island Indonesian archipelago, sits on a roiling ring of fire. The two most famous active volcanoes, Mount Bromo and Mount Ijen, are both located here. Ijen, the sulfur mountain, is known not only for its impressive blue crater lake, which shines like a sapphire amid the smoking caldera, but also for brutal labor conditions: every night, workers descend deep into the crater, mining sulfur by hand and carrying large loads of it out on their shoulders.

The journey continued to the majority-Hindu island of Bali, the "pearl" of the Indian Ocean, also known as a holiday destination for Australians and a pilgrimage site for hippies, yogis, and artists seeking self-discovery. Beneath the tourist trappings, the island's true face is also visible, in the form of countless waterfalls, beautifully terraced rice fields, and majestic temple complexes. The family was disturbed to find Bali, along with its neighboring islands Lombok and Sumbawa, struggling under huge amounts of plastic waste mostly generated by the increasing influx of tourists. Both land and sea bore the brunt, yet with patience and a discerning eye, pristine beaches could still be found. At these hidden

gems, the world seemed bursting with life, both above and below water. During a snorkeling trip off the small island of Nusa Penida, for example, the family encountered a squadron of manta rays with wingspans of up to 26 feet (8 meters), swimming within arm's reach.

On Lombok, aside from a few tourist hotspots, the island was relatively quiet and serene. The exception was during Ramadan, when the prayers of the muezzins called from every mosque loudspeaker until late into the night. Restful sleep was out of the question, at least until sunrise. The family also discovered that many shops and service providers kept their doors closed during the fasting month, in order to devote themselves more fully to the religious ritual.

On the island of Sumbawa, the adventurers immersed themselves one last time in the archipelago's gorgeous coral reefs. For now six-year-old Lennox, it was an especially moving snorkeling experience. Afterwards, he expressed his fear that if people continued to ignore the plight of the oceans, his own children would not get to experience their beauty, a sentiment which made his parents both proud and sad: proud that their young son showed such awareness and concern, and sad that someone so young should have to worry about these things.

Back on the main island of Java, they had to follow a rigorous, six-week cleaning process to prepare Akela for Australia's quarantine and entry regulations. Before delivering Akela at the port, they did some sightseeing around the city of Yogyakarta, including Borobudur Temple, the largest Buddhist temple in the world. Borobudur stands impressively on a hill surrounded by mountains and volcanoes, and its awe-inspiring stone architecture features nine stacked platforms, many stupas, and thousands of relief panels.

Finally, it was time to bid farewell to the truck, this time for five weeks. Once again, Akela set sail alone, this time bound for Melbourne, Australia.

