



Australian Institute  
of International Affairs  
*Victoria*



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# 2018 TIMOR-LESTE STUDY TOUR REPORT



WRITTEN BY TOM BARBER  
FOREWARD BY PETER MCMULLIN SC

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## About the AIIA

The Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) is an apolitical, not-for-profit organisation promoting interest in and understanding of international affairs in Australia. It consists of a number of independent branches, which are located in seven Australian states and territories, and a National Office in Canberra.

### **Providing a forum for debate**

The AIIA provides a forum for debate by arranging lectures, seminars and workshops for its members. These range from intimate discussions to large lectures. More than 150 events are held across the country each year.

### **Disseminating ideas**

Throughout its history, the AIIA has been involved in the key debates of international relations through its publications, conferences and speaker events. The AIIA currently publishes the *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, the *Australia in World Affairs* series and occasional papers.

### **Educating on International Issues**

The AIIA also works to educate the community on international issues. One of the key areas of focus is on youth, including school programs, careers fairs, internships and young professionals networks around the country.

### **Collaborating**

The AIIA seeks to collaborate with its sister institutes and other organisations in Australia and overseas. By maintaining close relationships, the AIIA can assure an international view on current affairs, expand its knowledge and project Australia's international image.

## About the Tour

The Victoria and New South Wales branches of the AIIA have conducted regular overseas study tours since 1996. These trips present a rare opportunity for AIIA members to visit fascinating areas of the globe, and to meet local dignitaries and representatives along the way.

AIIA Victoria has previously organised study tours to Timor-Leste in 2010 and 2014. With the recent signing of the Maritime Boundary Treaty with Australia, as well as Timor-Leste's recent snap parliamentary elections following months of political wrangling, 2018 represented an opportune time for the Institute to run a third study tour to the country. The aim of the trip was to garner a firsthand understanding of Timor-Leste's political, economic, cultural and natural landscapes.

Nine people participated in the study tour, including the study tour leader and study tour intern. Of those nine, five had been to Timor previously, and some members of the group had been involved with charity and not-for-profit organisations and projects in the country (see Appendix i for some of the participants post-trip reflections). The tour commenced and concluded in Dili, with the group visiting Baucau, Venilale, Loi Huno, Viqueque, Same, Maubisse, Aileu, Tibar, Balibo and Maliana over ten days (see Appendix ii for a detailed itinerary and map).



The Study Tour group at Australia House in Balibó

## Foreword from the Study Tour Leader

It was indeed a great pleasure to share my passion for Timor-Leste and its people with the participants on this tour. I think each member came away with a deepened understanding of the multiple issues facing this young nation.

I thank each and every member of the group for their interested participation, and their readiness to ask the tough questions and to listen to the answers. Tours like this make a remarkable contribution to developing countries like Timor-Leste, and I thank the Australian Institute of International Affairs Victoria, and particularly its President, for inviting me to lead this group and for its continuing interest in the people of Timor-Leste.

I have been travelling to Timor-Leste regularly since independence in 2002, and have watched this beautiful young country overcome challenges that would daunt others that are more established. It is a remarkable achievement to have created a functioning democracy much valued by the people in such a short period. I am encouraged by the progress being made and am confident of a bright future in the years ahead.

In closing, I would particularly like to thank our intern, Tom Barber, whose assistance was invaluable to me but also to all the group. I would also like to express my thanks to Shirley Carlos, from Timor Adventures, who put it all together.

Viva Timor-Leste!

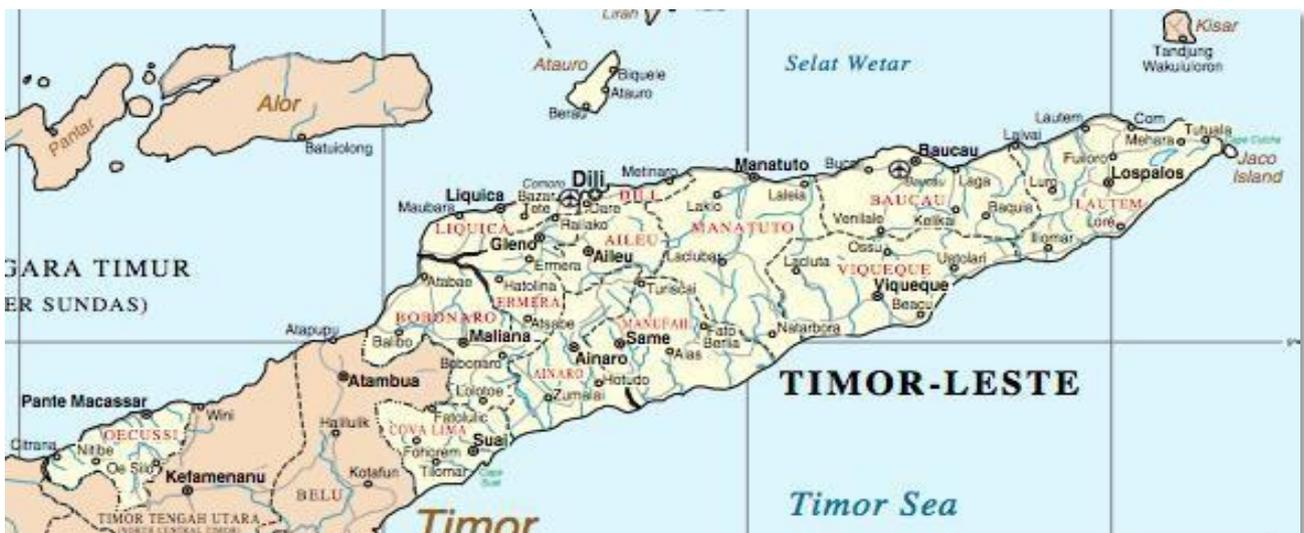
**Peter McMullin**

Timor-Leste Study Tour Leader

## Timor-Leste Overview

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (Repúblika Demokrátika Timor Lorosa'e in Tetum) is located 650 kilometres north of Australia in the Lesser Sunda Islands at the eastern end of the Indonesian archipelago. As its name suggests – timor means east in Malay and leste means east in Portuguese – the country comprises the eastern half of the island of Timor, as well as the enclave of Oecussi and the islands of Pulau Atauro and Pulau Jaco. Timor-Leste stretches approximately 600km from northeast to southwest, and ranges in width between 80 and 100km.

Much of the island's 14,874 square kilometres is rugged terrain with small narrow valleys, which contribute to cultural differences and challenges in communications. The highest mountain, Foho Tatamailau, is 2,963 metres above sea level. Timor is affected by dry south-east trade winds from May to October and a wet, humid north-west monsoon from November to April. During the wet season the roads can be difficult to navigate due to floods and landslides.



Map of Timor-Leste (source: United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste)

## History

There are no written records of Timor-Leste's history prior to the arrival of Europeans, but the archaeological record shows that humans first populated the island of Timor over 42,000 years ago. Over the centuries these people developed sophisticated systems of agriculture and became embedded within a regional trade network stretching to Java, and as far as China and India. When European traders and missionaries began to arrive in the sixteenth century, they found an island which was divided into several small states and ruled by two kingdoms – the Sorbian and the Belos.



A cannon at the Dutch Fort in Maubara

By the mid 1600s, Portuguese Dominican priests had established a presence in Timor with the aim of converting the local animists to Catholicism. Military expeditions into the interior



A Portuguese Church that was bombed by either the Australians or the Japanese during WWII, depending on who you ask

of the country soon followed, and in 1702 Portuguese Timor was officially declared a colony of Lisbon. For the next two centuries, East Timor was used predominantly by the Portuguese as a trading post for locally produced coffee and sandalwood, with minimal investment in infrastructure, education or health. Interestingly, in some ways Timor was to Portugal as Australia was to the British

Empire; insofar as political prisoners and criminals were exiled there in large numbers. In 1859, the Portuguese concluded a treaty with the Dutch, who controlled west Timor, that

established the border which now exists between Indonesia and Timor-Leste, as well as the enclave of Oecussi.

During the Second World War, allied troops occupied Portuguese Timor in an action of forward defence intended to hold off the advancing Japanese Imperial Army. For Australia in particular, Timor held value because of its geostrategic position at the south-eastern tip of the Indonesian archipelago. In February 1942, Japan invaded Timor, and would go on to occupy it until 1945. The Japanese planes that bombed Darwin took off from Baucau airfield.

During the Japanese occupation, a small force of Australian troops fought a guerrilla insurgency with the help of local Timorese, known affectionately as 'creados'. The creados "provided food and shelter, ponies for carrying heavy equipment, acted as porters and guides, and helped set up ambushes. Some took up arms themselves and fought alongside the Australians" (Australian War Memorial). Many were executed by the Japanese, and when the Australians were evacuated in 1943, many felt guilt over abandoning the Timorese who had helped them. At the conclusion of the War, Timor was returned as a Portuguese colony.

In 1974, the April Revolution restored democracy in Portugal, and 'consecrated the respect for the right to self-determination of the Portuguese colonies' (Government of Timor-Leste). Three political organisations emerged in Timor as a result, and they held very different visions for the future of the country:

'[T]he UDT (Timorese Democratic Union) called for 'Timor's integration in a Portuguese-speaking community'; the ASDT (Timorese Social-Democratic Association), which would later change its name to FRETILIN (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor), supported the right to independence; and the APODETI (Popular Democratic Association of Timor) suggested "integration with autonomy within the Indonesian community' (Government of Timor-Leste).

On November 28, 1975, FRETILIN and Prime Minister Xavier do Amaral unilaterally declared the independence of Timor-Leste; an action that would spark a civil war. Shortly thereafter, and with tacit support from the United States and Australia, Indonesia invaded Timor-Leste under the pretext of protecting its citizens and declared it the 27th province of Indonesia.



A Monument marks the beach in Betano where Indonesian marines landed in January 1976. Australian troops were evacuated from the same beach in 1943.

'About one third of the country's population, more than 250 thousand people, died during the war. The Portuguese language was forbidden, and the use of Tetum was discouraged by the pro-Indonesia government by strongly criticising the press. This same government also limited the access of international observers to the territory until the forced resignation of Suharto in 1998' (Government of Timor-Leste).

Suharto's successor, B.J. Habibie, announced that an independence referendum would be held in Timor soon after he secured the presidency. And on August 30, 1999, the East Timorese voted overwhelmingly for independence. But what should have been a celebrated moment for the country soon turned sour, as retreating pro-Indonesia militias rampaged across the country, murdering and destroying critical infrastructure. It took the arrival of the Australian-led International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) on 20 September 1999 to bring an end to the violence.

The administration of Timor-Leste was then taken over by the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, with parliamentary elections held in 2001 and a constitution drafted early the following year. On 20 May 2002, Timor-Leste ended over four centuries of foreign occupation and formally declared itself independent.

In 2006, fighting broke out between pro-government forces and disaffected members of FALINTIL, the armed wing of FRETILIN. Gangs clashed and there were riots on the streets of Dili. Tens of thousands of Timorese were internally displaced, and Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri resigned amidst accusations that he had lied about supplying weapons to civilians. In 2008, newly elected President Jose Ramos-Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão both survived assassination attempts, and Australia sent in additional troops to reinforce the United Nations mission in Timor. With this increased international presence the crisis eventually subsided, and the UN Security Council officially ended its peacekeeping mission in Timor-Leste in 2012.

## Politics

More recently, Timor-Leste has again encountered political crises, though fortunately violence has thus far been avoided. In 2017, Mari Alkatiri won the parliamentary elections and became Prime Minister of a FRETILIN minority government. During the ensuing months, a united opposition coalition successfully blocked the government's program and budget, while the government survived by using administrative procedure to avoid constitutional triggers that would have dismissed it. Such a state of affairs was not sustainable, however, and voters again went to the polls in May 2018 after an election was called to break the deadlock. This time around FRETILIN lost, and the opposition coalition – the Alliance for Change and Progress (AMP) – emerged victorious with a parliamentary majority.

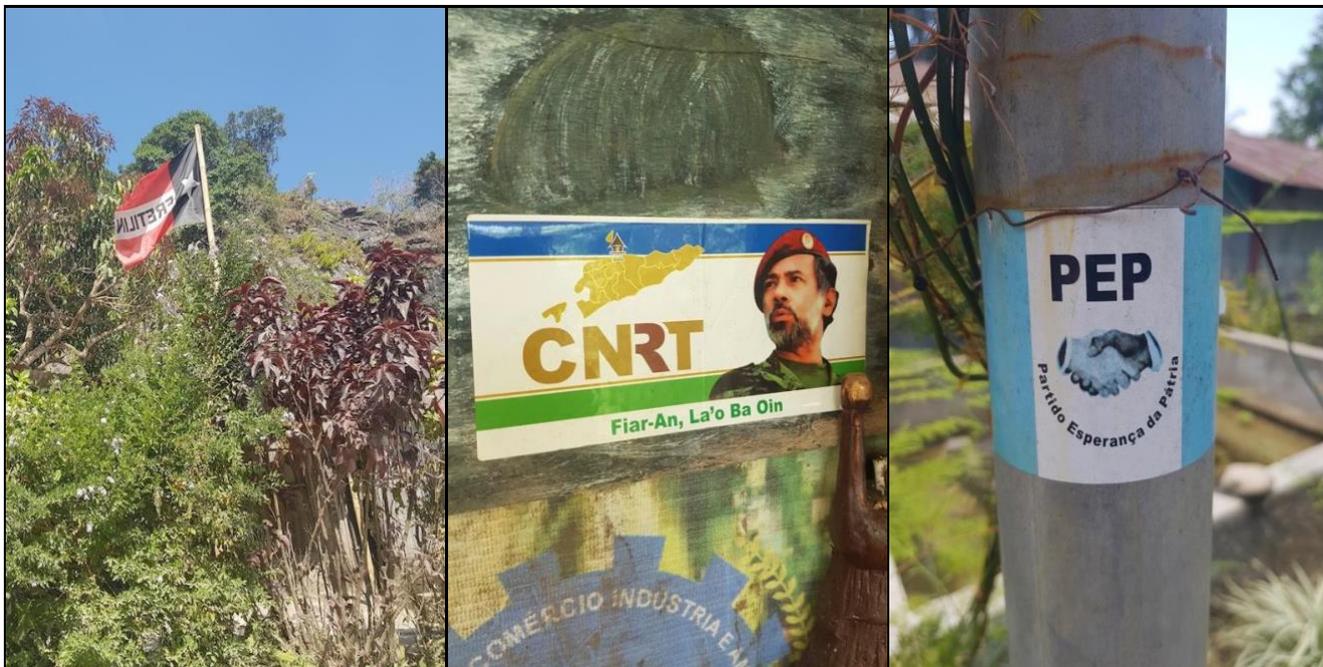


The Cristo Rei was a gift from Suharto to the people of East Timor

While the President's executive powers are limited in Timor-Leste's semi-presidential political system, they can still exercise a veto. The system had hitherto functioned as a power-sharing mechanism, with the president playing more the role of a statesman than politician. In the 2002, 2007 and 2012 presidential elections, the successful candidates were all nominally independent, and a convention was established whereby partisan politics were deemed as being beneath the office of the president.

With an AMP parliament and a senior FRETILIN leader in President Francisco Guterres (known as Lù-Olo) post the 2018 election, however, tensions of cohabitation soon became evident. For instance, at the time of writing, the President has thus far refused to swear in nine AMP ministerial appointments, citing corruption charges. This is despite an independent investigation advising that none of the nine have cases to answer to (Sainsbury & Belo, 2018).

During our trip, it was striking to see the extent to which politics permeates everyday life. Wherever we travelled across the country, stickers, flags and t-shirts with political parties' slogans and emblems on them were ubiquitous. Partisan passions evidently remain strong, but it is an encouraging mark of how far the country has come that the recent political impasse has not spilled into violence.



From left to right: A FRETILIN flag in Baucau district; A CNRT sticker in Same; and a PEP sticker in Same

## The Old Guard of Timorese Politics

Veterans of the independence struggle continue to dominate Timorese politics and the transition to the next generation of political leaders appears a way off yet. Below are three key figures in contemporary Timor-Leste politics:

- **HE Jose Maria de Vasconcelos**, better known as Taur Matan Ruak (Two Sharp Eyes) or TMR, was sworn in as Prime Minister on June 22, 2018. He was previously President between 2012 and 2017. Before becoming a politician, TMR was the commander-in-chief of FALINTIL during the struggle against the Indonesian occupation, and he became Timor-Leste's first Chief of the Armed Forces in 2002.
- **HE Francisco Guterres**, better known as Lú-Olo, became Timor-Leste's sixth President on May 20, 2017. He is a former guerrilla fighter who became president of FRETILIN in 2001. Lú-Olo was also the president of Timor-Leste's first national parliament from May 2002 to August 2007.
- **HE Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão** was a leading figure during the resistance against Indonesia and in the independence movement more broadly. He was Timor-Leste's first President from 2002 to 2007, and was Prime Minister between 2007 and 2015. Gusmão is currently Timor-Leste's chief negotiator for oil and gas and holds no other formal government position. But as he is the figurehead of the governing AMP coalition, not to mention his historical standing, Xanana Gusmão remains a powerful influence in East Timorese politics .

## The Economy

Timor-Leste's economy continues to be heavily reliant upon exports. Cash crops like sandalwood and coffee were brought by the Portuguese and underpinned the economy during both colonial times and the Indonesian occupation. And while agriculture still accounts for just under ten percent of gross domestic product (GDP), oil and gas have, since 2002, been the mainstay of Timor-Leste's economy. Between 2002 and 2017, oil and gas generated US\$21.4 billion in state revenue (Scheiner, 2018: 3). To put this in context, total East Timorese GDP from 2000 to 2018 averaged just under US\$3 billion per year (Trading Economics, 2018).

Wary of the resource curse, the country's leaders prudently established a sovereign wealth fund soon after independence so as to 'manage oil and gas revenue sustainably and transparently' (Scheiner, 2018: 1). Thanks to high oil prices, production from the Bayu-Undan reserve injected an annual average of three billion US dollars into Timorese coffers at its peak, between 2011 and 2013. This revenue stream enabled the state to stay solvent, but successive governments have exceeded the sustainable withdrawal limit in funding their state budgets.

With the Bayu-Undan reserve nearing end of production, the need for Timor-Leste to diversify its economy is becoming more acute. According to a 2018 World Bank report, '[w]ithout serious attention, the government budget will remain deeply in deficit, financed by a liquidation of the Petroleum Fund assets raising the likelihood of a damaging fiscal cliff when [oil] resources are depleted' (World Bank, 2018: i).



The project camp of Chinese company Chongqing Road Engineering Group next to a road-building project near Tibar

This danger exists because Timor-Leste's economy is heavily skewed toward public spending, which is financed principally through oil and gas. Being a post-conflict society, the country has had to prioritise investment in public infrastructure and poverty reduction projects (Inder & Cornwell, 2016: 6). Efforts are being made to support the nascent private sector, which would provide an alternative revenue stream through taxation.

On that front, there are positive signs. On our trip we visited several local social enterprises that clearly supported local entrepreneurialism and taught valuable employability skills.



A waitress at the Agora Food Studio in Dili

Projeto Montanha in Aileu was one such example, as were the East Timor Development Agency (ETDA) Hospitality Training Centre in Dili and the National Centre of Employment and Professional Training (CNEFP) in Tibar. These organisations teach young Timorese people the skills they need to work in the private sector, whether in a trade or hospitality. It was great to see up-close the enthusiasm with which the pupils at these facilities went about their work, and it instilled optimism about the country's economic future.

In the face of poverty and unemployment, Timor-Leste's youth bulge could potentially foment social unrest and conflict – but with

smart policies and social initiatives, like those that we witnessed in action, this demographic dividend can instead be transformed into an important asset for the young nation that will help kickstart a virtuous economic cycle (Saikia *et al*, 2018: 21-23).

## Society and Culture

Tetum and Portuguese are the official languages in Timor-Leste, while English and Bahasa Indonesia are commonly used working languages. In addition, there are over 32 indigenous languages that are spoken throughout the country (CIA World Factbook, 2018). One of our tour guides, a Ugandan named Brian who had lived in Dili for over a decade, spoke Indonesian, two dialects of Tetum and Portuguese – that in addition to his mother tongues of English and Swahili. Aside from being an impressive feat, it illustrates the complexity of the country's linguistic configuration.

Catholicism is the overwhelming majority religion in East Timor (constituting around 98% of the population), but like much of maritime Southeast Asia, elements of indigenous animism have been retained. The mythology of the crocodile, for instance, which the Timorese hold sacred as the mythological origin of their country, remains culturally significant.

As a relatively new country that has had to fight bitterly for its independence, Timor-Leste is understandably proud of its unique culture. There are visual reminders everywhere of this, from the handwoven *tais* fabric to the traditional *kaibauk* headdress. On our drive from Maubisse to Dili, we were lucky enough to witness a religious procession that wound down the mountainous road with dozens of men kitted-out with *tais*, feathers and traditional swords followed by percussionists.



A woman weaves traditional *tais* fabric at the Alola



A woman spins cotton in Venilale

Music is very popular among the Timorese. When we visited Same, we were lucky enough to be invited to our guide Charles' family home where his relatives played music and sang for us. Despite the language barrier, the folk songs they played were quite moving, particularly one about the futility of violence and the need for people to respect one another that we had translated for us.

## Health and Education

Given the finite funding that the government can spend, Timor-Leste's infrastructure development needs have meant that health and education have been somewhat neglected. In the 2017 budget, for example, roads were allocated the same amount of money as education and health combined (fifteen percent, or just over US\$200 million) (Scheiner, 2018). Compared to Indonesia (20.5%) and Thailand (18.9%), Timor-Leste spends only 8% of its government budget on education (Inder & Cornwell, 2018). This was apparent when we visited a kindergarten in Viqueque which was quite run down, and where the teacher and her students were clearly appreciative of the English-Tetum dictionaries that we gave them. A lack of toilets in schools also discourages young girls from attending, and as a result there remains a gender disparity in Timorese education.



A school funded by Spend it Well (left) sits next to the building it replaced (right)

These challenges are being addressed, however. We visited multiple schooling and education facilities on our trip that demonstrated significant effort was being made to improve education standards and opportunities in Timor-Leste.

According to the World Bank's Global Partnership for Education (2018), the past five years have seen Timor-Leste's net enrolment rate rise from 67% to 83% and the gender disparity decrease. And while a lot of the institutions we visited were supported by international charities, religious organisations or not-for-profits, many of them expressed their commitment to eventually hand over the operation and ownership of the facilities to locals.



A kindergarten teacher and her students in Viqueque

While the Timorese government should continue to dedicate resources to improve the country's education system, it is important to acknowledge the baseline from which Timor-Leste has come. Prior to independence, the majority of trained teachers were Portuguese and Indonesian. During the violence in 1999, most foreigners – including these teachers – left the country, leaving few adequately trained educators behind. As a result, well-meaning locals took it upon themselves to fill the shortage and teach the students themselves, but they lacked any formal teacher training. Thus, while comparisons between Timor-Leste and other states education systems are valuable in an aspirational sense, the reality is that the country has done well with the average hand that it was dealt (Dos Santos, 2013).

Today, Timor's teachers increasingly have bachelor's degrees obtained from teacher training colleges, such as the Baucau Marist Brothers college, which has a partnership with the Australian Catholic University, and the Jesuit teachers training college in Kasait. Of course, challenges remain – such as the lack of opportunities for new teachers as older teachers put off retirement due to concerns over pensions – but from a big-picture

perspective there is indeed reason for optimism.



Students at the Kasait Teacher Training College sing for us

Health is a similarly critical issue for Timor-Leste's 1.3 million inhabitants, particularly those living in rural areas, who constitute 70% of the population. Malnutrition is one significant challenge, with Timor having one of the highest rates globally. The country confronts a 'double burden of disease', with communicable diseases, like tuberculosis, malaria, and dengue, and non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, all prevalent (World Health Organization, 2016: x-xi). This is reflected in Timor's Human Development Index ranking of 132 (from 189), and the fact that a significant proportion of Timorese still live below the poverty line.

Nevertheless, as with education, Timor-Leste's health system started at a low baseline – by some accounts were only 70 doctors remained in the country after the Indonesians left in 1999 – and there are positive stories to be told (Hodal, 2012). By 'reconstructing health facilities, expanding community-based health services ... and integrating a considerable number of national medical graduates who have joined the health workforce', the Timorese have made steady progress. Programs to combat malnutrition, infant mortality and malaria are all having a positive impact, while leprosy and neonatal tetanus have been eliminated. Health staff to population ratios have similarly been steadily improving over the past decade (WHO, 2016: 9-12).

In addition to government programs, NGO and foreign assistance has also proven beneficial. One curious example is that of Cuba, who have a medical brigade of over 160 doctors stationed throughout Timor-Leste, and who provide scholarships to train Timorese doctors in Cuba (Hodal, 2012). Many international NGOs in Timor-Leste focus on specific health issues, such as the East Timor Hearts Fund. When we visited Balibó, founding Chair of the Balibo House Trust, Rob Hudson, showed us the dental clinic that had been set up in



Plastic containers are commonly used in rural areas to collect and store water.

Australia House. There are few dentists in Timor-Leste, and the shortage is particularly acute outside of Dili. The Balibó clinic was established to service the local community and is staffed by volunteer dentists from Australia. Initiatives such as these are important because they provide vital health services to rural Timorese while allowing the government time to build the capacity to confront multiple health challenges.



Dentists treat patients at the Australia House dental clinic in Balibó

## Australia-Timor Relations

The bilateral relationship between Australia and Timor-Leste has been an interesting one, to say the least. A genuine rapport was built between Australian servicemen and local Timorese during the Japanese occupation in the Second World War; yet Australia tacitly approved of Indonesia's invasion in the mid-1970s. The now infamous photo of Former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans and his Indonesian counterpart, Ali Alatas, celebrating the Timor Gap Treaty while clinking glasses in a jet, captures the essential Australian approach to Timor during Indonesian occupation. It was one that prioritised the relationship with Indonesia above the Timorese people's right to self-determination, with a decent amount of commercial oil and gas interest thrown in for good measure (see McGrath, 2017).

There was a vocal civilian network in Australia that supported the Timorese, but politically, bipartisan apathy toward the Timor independence movement remained up until the mid- to late-nineties. Once Suharto resigned, however, and an independence referendum was scheduled, the Howard government by necessity changed tack toward a policy that was

more supportive of Timorese independence. When the departing Indonesian's began ransacking the country, Australia led the INTERFET UN peacekeeping mission, and from that point forward the existence of a stable, prosperous and independent East Timor was an objective shared by both countries.

Australia has been Timor-Leste's largest development partner since 2002, and in 2017-18 the federal government provided AUD\$95 million in official development assistance to the country (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018). The Victorian Government also has a Timor-Leste portfolio, and on our trip we were lucky enough to attend the official



opening of a water tank and conference centre at the fabulous Balibo Fort Hotel. The work that Australia-affiliated organisations such as the Balibo House Trust do in Timor illustrates that a strong civil relationship does exist, despite vicissitudes in the official relationship.

In March 2018, following a year-and-a-half of negotiations under the auspices of the UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea) conciliation process, both governments concluded the Maritime Boundary Treaty. While it left some specifics to be determined at a later date, the treaty settled a long-running dispute over maritime jurisdiction and allows for the joint development of the Greater Sunrise gas field. Given that the issue of the maritime boundary and offshore oil had long been an issue of contention, both sides have hailed this development as marking a new era in bilateral relations (Australian National University, 2018)

## Appendixes

### i) Participants

#### **Mr Brendan O'Brien**

Brendan is the Executive Chairman of the O'Brien Group in Melbourne. He has been involved with several philanthropic projects in Timor-Leste, particularly in the field of education. This was his first time visiting the country.

#### **Ms Susan Kimpton**

Sue is a retired artist from Melbourne, and had never previously been to Timor. She is a regular at AIIA events at Dyason House; one of which about Timor-Leste stoked her interest in joining the study tour.

#### **Hon. Jean McLean**

Jean is the Special Advisor on Timor-Leste to the Vice Chancellor at Victoria University, Melbourne. She was a tireless supporter of the independence movement and continues to be involved in Timorese politics – receiving the Order of Timor-Leste in 2016.

#### **Mr Peter Clements**

Peter is an architect in Melbourne and is involved with rotary. He is interested in construction and development in Timor-Leste and has been to the country previously to help with community projects.

#### **Padmini Sebastian, OAM**

Padmini is the Director of Civic and Community Engagement at Melbourne University. She received the Order of Australia for her services to cultural diplomacy and diverse community relations. This was her first trip to Timor-Leste.

#### **Dr Siew Fang Law**

Siew Fang is a Senior Lecturer at Victoria University in Melbourne. She is particularly interested in international community development and conflict resolution. Through VU's affiliation with Timor, she has been to the country several times and is involved with Timorese students in Melbourne.

#### **Peter McMullin SC (Tour Leader)**

Peter is a Melbourne businessman and philanthropist, as well as the Honorary Consul for Georgia in Melbourne. He has been heavily involved in Timorese politics for over two decades and has visited the country over thirty times. Peter was previously an advisor to the Timorese Foreign Minister, and he continues to be involved in funding several development projects throughout the country.

#### **Tom Barber (Tour Intern)**

Tom recently graduated from Sydney University with a Masters in International Security. He works as a Research Assistant at Deakin University and La Trobe University in Melbourne. This was his first trip to Timor-Leste.

## ii) Participant Reflections

### ***Brendan O'Brien***

Whilst I have taken an active interest in Timor-Leste's history and have been dealing with NGOs operating there for several years, this was my first visit. It was an exceptionally educational trip and I am most grateful to Peter McMullin, the AIIA, Tom Barber and the Timor Adventures team. Peter was an exceptional tour leader, comprehensively informed and connected and great company as were all of our touring party.

My principal take-away from our ten days of travelling, meetings and site visits is confidence. Confidence that Timor-Leste will succeed as a long-term stable democracy with an improving quality of life for its people. Of course, I am not really in a position to make such forecasts after a single short visit. However, I have for many years been involved in detail with other emerging nations by virtue of a family foundation I manage, and it is in this context that I have great confidence in Timor-Leste's future.

What Timor-Leste has achieved in less than two decades of independence is extraordinary. That is testament to both its leaders and its people. Whilst it has experienced recent government stability challenges and malnutrition remains a most serious problem, its economy is the biggest threat. With only about five years of royalties remaining from existing gas deposits so much depends on the final Greater Sunrise outcomes. There appears to be a firm commitment to negotiating the establishment of onshore processing and port facilities with the other equity partners (Woodside, Shell and Osaka Gas) – presuming Timor-Leste's purchase of the ConocoPhillips 30% equity is finalised. This prima facie would appear to be a very high-risk bet (I have witnessed firsthand the resource wealth induced problems experienced in PNG and several other countries) but by virtue of what I have learnt and seen on our trip I believe Timor-Leste could well succeed with this strategy. A massive number of unknowns and years of uncertainty if it is to be implemented, but whereas before this trip I thought it would be reckless, having seen what has already been achieved since independence I believe it could be achievable. One obvious risk is the potential need for Timor-Leste to take on

debt or equity from China as its current sovereign wealth fund is not likely to be a sufficient given the country's ongoing dependence on this fund. The involvement of China alarms many in the West but Australia has become massively dependent on China (our principal export market) and I believe the East Timorese people could also be capable of managing such a relationship.

Beyond Greater Sunrise there is clearly an urgent need for Timor-Leste to develop other parts of its economy. Agriculture (for import replacement/subsistence plus export) is absolutely the top priority and given the country's great natural beauty, tourism is another well identified opportunity. Whilst progress can be painfully slow in establishing a whole new industry such as tourism, from what we witnessed I believe this market will be a long-term successful foreign currency earner for Timor-Leste. With a personal business background in tourism and hospitality I do believe the primary target market at this stage should be the young low budget traveller given the current state of infrastructure and the lack of and sheer cost of developing quality properties. Infrastructure, most particularly roads, water and power, is a key need and clearly much investment is currently being undertaken in this regard. This will provide a great foundation for all sorts of potential businesses.

Our tour visited several NGO operations and the country has clearly benefited from a broad range of support from such organisations. Naturally some initiatives will be more effective than others, but I believe this is a key ingredient to the ongoing successful development of Timor-Leste. Along with these endeavours there are the bigger projects which have been initiated by the government and others that are being funded by international government aid programmes. The collective outcome from these many endeavours is easily witnessed with so many green shoots of growth and potential visible throughout the country. I really am confident for the country's future and sincerely hope that this is a well-founded view as the East Timorese people themselves are so welcoming and of generous spirit. This is despite their very difficult history in which they've been betrayed by foreign powers on multiple occasions.

### ***Padmini Sebastian***

Travelling for the first time through Timor-Leste was a lesson in history and its deep impact on people and cultures. Experiencing different parts of the country and gaining an understanding of the effects of colonisation over more than 520 years was insightful and made me reflect on the possibilities and hope for this independent nation if it is allowed to thrive and flourish.

Knowing and understanding what the people of Timor-Leste have endured for centuries and in particular during the bloody invasion by Indonesia was important. It is a

significant part of the history of the region and the world to be remembered and learnt from. I was also reminded that there are so many people who still don't know about Timor-Leste or of its existence as a nation in Asia. This trip opened my eyes, head and heart as I reflected on the importance of valuing each other for who we are and being respectful of the wonderful diversity we all bring to this world.

As we navigate a globally mobile and interconnected world where education opens up possibilities, Timor-Leste also reminded me that the value of family, culture, traditions and connections to land are just as important. The warm spirit of the people whose values and way of life sustains and nourishes them was wonderful to experience. The generosity and heartfelt smiles of so many people we encountered and met lit up every day of the trip.

The AIIA group of caring, knowledgeable and passionate people enriched the experience as we shared our thoughts and experiences and explored how we can make a positive contribution to a very dear neighbour whose people have cared for and supported Australia on many occasions. I was deeply moved by each and every one on the tour who wanted to make a difference in their own way.

Peter McMullin's remarkable knowledge and extraordinary commitment to Timor-Leste contributed to an enriching experience. Shirley and her team at Timor Adventures ensured that the experience was authentic, ethical and a lot of fun.

For me this is the start of a connection and relationship with Timor-Leste and I look forward to returning soon.

### ***Siew Fang Law***

It was both wonderful and humbling experience for me to have completed the two-week AIIAV Timor-Leste Study Tour led by Peter McMullin in October 2018. I thought it was one of the best ways to see beyond Dili, as I had only seen Dili prior this trip.

I particularly enjoyed the various conversations I had with the other travellers and local guides during the trip. Learning from different perspectives was both enriching and inspiring – I have gained deep insights ranging from architecture, permaculture, businesses, tourism, arts, culture, language, community development, politics and Australia-Timor relations and more.

The trip was also thought provoking and emotional for me. As a Southeast Asian who are currently practicing in Australia, being in this young country always evokes childhood memories. Growing up in a small suburb Seberang Jaya in Malaysia, I resonate with many observations, including families on motorbikes, school buildings and furniture.

As an academic in the field of peace psychology and community development, I couldn't help but reflect on the effectiveness of foreign aid and development in the

country; gender roles and cultural appropriation. I deeply felt that my privilege come with immense responsibility. I was mindful of my being and doing in Timor Leste could leave footprints - whether these were 'good' or 'bad', appropriate or inappropriate, acceptable or unacceptable (and to who) – I have pondered on these ideas since returning Melbourne.

The trip to Timor Leste has opened my eyes, minds and hearts. All the Timorese people we've met in the trip have been incredibly generous and kind. I want to do something in my own capacity to build our friendships and give back. Many thanks to Peter, Tom and Shirley for organizing this fun, educational and memorable trip.

### ***Susan Kimpton***

We learnt so much from our three drivers, who, apart from moving us safely around Timor-Leste, were very informative about the culture and history of the country, and also about their own and their families' lives. One of the really special experiences of the study tour was a morning spent in Charles' village, firstly visiting the home and wonderful garden of a family friend where we were treated to some music played by various members of the family. We then walked to Charles' own family home and met his extended family who kindly provided us with morning coffee and some more music. In addition to raising her own eight children, Charles's mother, a teacher, runs a school for blind girls and two of them, whom she has adopted, sang for us. Charles' remarkable mother, such a warm and generous woman, has provided all these girls with opportunities and a safe environment that might otherwise have been denied to them.

Flying into Timor-Leste, the countryside seemed surprisingly dry and very denuded, not at all covered in the jungle one might expect to find in the tropics. On leaving Dili to drive along the east coast to Baucau and then down towards the south coast it became apparent that the villagers' subsistence level farming, as in other parts of the world, is totally dependent on chopping down trees for firewood, however the rate of deforestation is much of the country is unsustainable and it has resulted in serious problems with erosion. (Perhaps there is an opportunity here for overseas government aid to help fund reforestation programmes, and also provide advice from existing Australian organisations such as Greening Australia and Landcare.)

Once our tour group headed north towards Maubisse and the mountains, the vegetation became less sparse, and even large swathes of forest could be seen by the time Balibo and the border with Indonesian West Timor was reached. Several plant species very familiar to us were found all over the country – casuarinas and the ubiquitous eucalyptus, masses of intensely fragrant frangipani and bright red, pink, orange and white bougainvillea around buildings. We were told that newly married couples are given a white and a red bougainvillea to plant and they entwine them outside the entrance to their

houses, producing a stunning effect. And at Balibó we saw what must be one of the world's most enormous banyan trees.

### iii) Study Tour Itinerary with Map

Day	Place Accommodation	Meals	Activities	
Day 1. Wed 10th	<b>Dili</b> <i>Hotel Timor</i>	<b>B:</b> Na <b>L:</b> Agora Food Studio <b>*D:</b> Beachside at Areia Branca	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ 10.40 am Arrive in Dili &amp; Check into hotel. Welcome and tour briefing over Morning tea at Hotel Timor if time</li> <li>➢ 12.00 Learn about Timorese cuisine over lunch, Helen Hill to join us</li> </ul>
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ 2.00 pm visit some of Dili' important sites Motael church, Santa cruz, Resistance museum Alola weaving workshop &amp; Taibessi market, Xanana Gusmao Reading Room</li> <li>➢ 4.30 pm Meeting with Mr. Francisco Monteiro, President &amp; CEO Timor Gap 3<sup>rd</sup> floor Timor Plaza</li> <li>➢ 5.30 – 8 pm Christo Rei and Arei Branca beach for sunset drinks and dinner</li> </ul>
Day 2. Thurs 11 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Dili</b> <i>Hotel Timor</i>	<b>B:</b> hotel <b>L:</b> EDTA hospitality training centre <b>*D:</b> Dilicious Timor	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ 9.40 Arrive at Embassy for briefing at 10.00 am</li> <li>➢ 11.30 Visit Chega</li> <li>➢ 1.00 pm Learn about the work of EDTA over lunch visit</li> </ul>
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ 2.30 pm Meeting at Trade Invest</li> <li>➢ 4.00 pm Meeting at G7+</li> <li>➢ 7.00 pm Dinner</li> </ul>
Day 3. Fri 12th	<b>Baucau</b> <i>Pousada Baucau</i>	<b>B:</b> hotel <b>L:</b> Amalia's local restaurant <b>*D:</b> Pousada	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ 8.30 am Travel along the coast road short stop at Manatuto town &amp; Laleia to visit the old Portuguese church built in 1933</li> <li>➢ 1.30 pm arrive in Baucau for a late lunch on the Balcony at Amalia restaurant, check into Pousada after lunch</li> </ul>

Day	Place Accommodation	Meals	Activities	
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 3.00 pm visit the Jesuit Teacher training college</li> <li>&gt; 5.30 pm Sunset drinks on patio at Pousada followed by dinner</li> <li>&gt; 8.00 pm cultural night at Cassonsian training centre.</li> </ul>
Day 4. Sat 13 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Loihuno</b> <i>Wailakurini Timor Village</i> Basic local guesthouse with ensuite bathroom, cold showers	<b>B:</b> hotel <b>L:</b> picnic OR prepared by women's group <b>D:</b> guesthouse	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 9.00 am depart for Venilale for walking tour &amp; meet women's group</li> <li>&gt; 12.00 Lunch provided by women's group</li> </ul>
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 1.30 pm Continue onto Loi Huno arriving midafternoon to relax at General Falur's Guest house, deep in resistance country</li> <li>Opportunity to swim in the in the Loi huno river/swimming pool depending on the weather condition or relax at the guesthouse</li> <li>And Visit WW2 &amp; resistance times Memorials</li> <li>Traditional Toker for dinner</li> </ul>
Day 5. Sun 14 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Same</b> <i>Uma Liurai hotel</i> Comfortable rooms with AC and ensuite bathrooms with hot showers	<b>B:</b> Wailakurini guesthouse <b>L:</b> Picnic <b>D:</b> guesthouse or Charles family	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 8.30 depart, visit the community centre at Viqueque town &amp; market for provisions</li> <li>&gt; Pass the Indonesian massacre site at Craras village &amp; the hot spring.</li> <li>&gt; Travel down to the South Coast to Natabora and onto Betano, site of Voyager wreck and evacuation of the 2/2 commandos</li> <li>&gt; Visit Dom Boa Ventura statue, the king who started a revolution against the Portuguese more than 100 years ago.</li> </ul>
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Arrive in Same in the afternoon</li> <li>&gt; Meet with Charles family &amp; Fuan Nebilan for a musical presentation</li> </ul>
Day 6. Mon 15 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Maubisse</b> <i>Pousada</i>	<b>B:</b> guesthouse <b>L:</b> guesthouse or picnic at Lekitehi <b>D:</b> Pousada	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Visit sites of Same town, one of the few remaining Portuguese Posto' (Portuguese administration station) as well as old Portuguese church which got bomb during WWII and the fantastic views of Mt Kablake that rises high above Same</li> </ul>
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Visit the traditional village of Lekitehi for short hike to sacred houses</li> <li>&gt; Arrive in Maubisse in time for sunset drinks and panoramic views</li> </ul>
Day 7. Tues 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Dili</b> <i>Hotel Timor</i>	<b>B:</b> Pousada <b>L:</b> Pojecto Montano <b>*D:</b> Hotel Timor	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 9.00 am Visit Leublora green school</li> <li>&gt; 12.00Travel onto Alieu &amp; Pojecto Montano for lunch</li> <li>&gt; Visit Dare WW2 memorial on way back to Dili</li> </ul>

Day	Place Accommodation	Meals	Activities	
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Return to Dili by mid afternoon and time to relax at hotel before dinner</li> </ul>
Day 8. Wed 17 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Tibar</b>	<b>B:</b> Hotel <b>L:</b> CNEFP training centre <b>*D:</b> Tibar resort	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 9.30 am Visit teacher training college and school in Kasait</li> <li>&gt; 11.30 lunch and tour of the CNEFP technical training Centre</li> </ul>
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 2.30 Afternoon visit CCT Timor farm in Railaco</li> <li>&gt; 5.00 Arrive at Tibar in time for sunset drinks &amp; dinner</li> </ul>
Day 9. Thurs 18 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Maliana</b> <i>Priest guesthouse</i> Comfortable rooms with AC, hot water and shower and ensuite bathroom	<b>B:</b> Tibar resort <b>L:</b> Balibo Fort hotel <b>D:</b> pousada de Maliana	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Depart by 7 am to arrive in Balibo in time for 9.30 am water project inauguration ceremony</li> <li>&gt; Lunch with the Victorian delegation</li> </ul>
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Afternoon visit dental clinic/flag house and school at Belola on route to Maliana</li> <li>&gt; Relax at the priest's guesthouse, short walk up to the Pousada Maliana to see the sunset over the mountains and Dinner</li> </ul>
Day 10. Fri 19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Balibo</b> <i>Balibo Fort Hotel</i>	<b>B:</b> priest guesthouse <b>L:</b> picnic <b>D:</b> Balibo Fort	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 9.30 am meet with the women's group OHM Moris to learn about their agricultural and economic development programs</li> <li>&gt; Travel up into the mountains and optional trip down to the Marobo hot springs precinct.</li> </ul>
			Afternoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Return to Balibo in time for sunset and pre-dinner drinks at the fort.</li> </ul>
Day 11. Sat 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>NA</b>	<b>B:</b> Priest guesthouse <b>L:</b> Lunch at Lauhata beach <b>D:</b> NA	Morning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Return to Dili stopping at Maubara fort and Liquica town</li> <li>&gt; 12.00 Lunch at Lauhata beach</li> <li>&gt; Arrive at airport by 3pm for flight to Darwin</li> </ul>



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