

# Dili Days... Matt Crook samples the simple life in Timor's capital

The word going around town was that there was going to be a Mexican party somewhere. It's difficult to say whether we were invited to the party, as a friend of a friend had been told not to bring too many people.

The idea of a Mexican party in the middle of Dili was just too good to turn down. I had not even an inkling of what such a party would be like, but if it were anything like the ones I'd seen on television, I could have dug it.

As a city populated by a tight-knit community of expats – aid workers, NGO staff, peace-keeping troops – the Mexican party had a muddled, global feel.

The three of us arrived to a garden full of foreigners. A Timorese security guard opened the gate for us; there would be no unwelcome guests here.

A short man, who I presumed was a real Mexican, went around with a large bag of masks. On several occasions he rolled his head back and howled into the night.

He ambled over to a bell hanging by a rope and began roaring, always with one hand on the bell rope, which he rang to the delight of all.

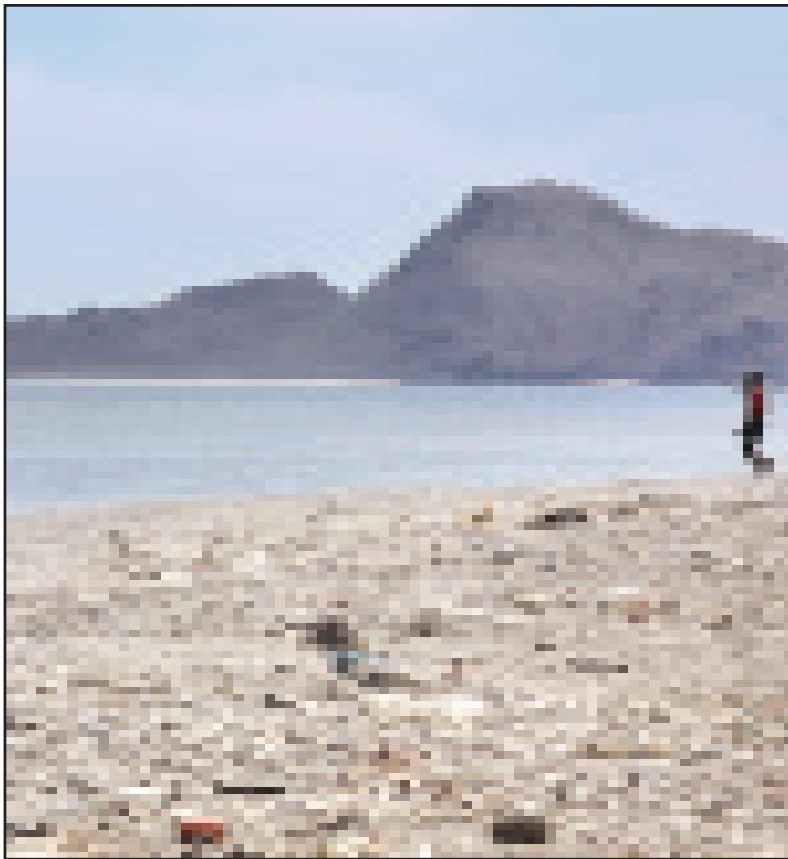
So this is Mexico, I thought to myself. On the dance floor was some sort of Timorese line dance going on to Macarena.

There weren't many Timorese people at the party. It's uncommon for expats to mingle with the locals in Timor-Leste much beyond work commitments.

There is an enormous social gap between the Timorese and everybody else, which is understandable given that it's only two years since violence erupted and up to 150,000 people fled their homes.

Many have still yet to return; the country is in a constant state of rebuilding.

But these Mexicans: what's the deal? My friend and I snuck



Modern conveniences are scarce and life is simple, but what you have is the chance to see a developing country and meet people who until very recently were forced to endure horrors the likes of which most people would not want to imagine.



out of the party. We left the Macarena and the man with the masks and sauntered along unlit roads back to the place we call home.

Dili is an eerie place by night. Attacks on foreigners are extremely rare, but when on my own I've been heckled and screamed at and even stalked on the streets.

We were halfway home when we came to the local pool hall: an open-air shack with a single table where bare-chested local youths play for kicks and bucks.

It was past midnight and before we knew it we were hanging out with six Timorese street punks. The stake was \$1.50 and the game was two-on-two, potting balls in ascending numerical order while playing cards were turned over, we didn't know what for.

Although confused at first, the pool kids were happy to have the company. Soon we all realized that none among us had any skill with a pool cue.

The game went on and on, the cards were turned and turned, and at the end of it all my friend and I had won. We were handed our buck-fifty back, and the stake of our opponents and there came the offer of more games and palm wine.

With an odor and appearance similar to raw eggs, palm wine, the preferred tippie of many Timorese, tastes so acidic and so bitter that your tongue retreats with astonishment with every mouthful. We declined the offer and left feeling content.

These two sides of the city – a Mexican party under lock and key and six kids hanging out just around the corner – is an indication of what travelers can experience

in Dili. Thanks to the incredible presence of the UN, there are dozens of hotels, restaurants, bars and clubs catering to Western tourists.

However, Dili quickly becomes boring if you choose to frequent only these places.

Dili can be expensive and it doesn't have much of a backpacker scene, and the list of "things to see and do in Dili" is short.

Modern conveniences are scarce and life is simple, but what you have is the chance to see a developing country and meet people who until very recently were forced to endure horrors the likes of which most people would not want to imagine.

When I interact with Timorese people, they are excited to see a new face that doesn't come with a logo or a uniform. The people in Dili are rebuilding

their lives. The buildings lie in ruins, families are torn apart, and yet every day I meet people with amazing stories who are open and inviting and hopeful for the future.

Life in Dili is inspiring and interesting. To be among and talk to people who have been through so much in such a short time is a somber experience, but it gives you an insight into what life has been like for the Timorese.

Dili is easy to get to, with international airlines flying in and out several times a week. While not an obvious place for a vacation, I would recommend Dili to anyone, even if only to see firsthand what the place is like.

The city needs an influx of people who aren't interested in Mexican parties, but who want to see the place for what it is.

Once you are in Dili and have experienced a slice of Timorese life, there is an entire world waiting to be discovered around Timor-Leste, where few travelers have made the journey. Each of Timor-Leste's 13 districts offers something new and exciting.

Dili is only the gateway and is a very separate entity to the rest of the country.

Many times I've heard travelers talk about how Thailand has changed over the past 20 years, and how too many people now visit Pai, Koh Pha-ngan, Chiang Mai and so on; and yet these very same travelers have an adventure calling out to them, and it's just a few hours away.

**THE GAMES**  
 XBOX 360 PC Mac Wii PLAYSTATION 3  
 BIG C SUPERCENTER  
 CENTRAL FESTIVAL PHUKET  
 HANTRAI BEACH RESORT PATONG  
 TESCO LOTUS MALL PHUKET  
 TEL: PHU 076 388 188 076 310 478  
 WWW.THEGAMESPHUKET.COM  
 EMAIL: INFO@THEGAMESPHUKET.COM



**The Games**  
 XBOX 360 PC Mac Wii PLAYSTATION 3  
 Big C Supercenter  
 Central Festival Phuket  
 Hantrai Beach Resort Patong  
 Tesco Lotus Mall Phuket  
 Tel: Phu 076 388 188 076 310 478  
 www.thegamesphuket.com  
 Email: info@thegamesphuket.com