

## Where The Pandemic Has Taken Me

It was a normal Friday afternoon, when our High school principal opened the door to our classroom and announced that school will be closing a week before originally scheduled. As some of my classmates gasped, others asked questions, but mostly, everyone felt shocked.

It was so sudden that my brain couldn't even process anything said to me for a minute. I thought that Timor-Leste wouldn't have to deal with the pandemic, that they would have it under control, but boy was I wrong.

After a lot of tearful goodbyes, as each and every student was taken back home, the last of us that were still waiting for our parents to pick us up, sat on the ground and just thought about everything that had happened that day.

I mostly thought about how we might not see most of our friends for about two years depending if the pandemic ever got worse. Everything that happened that day just went by so fast that it still took me a while to understand what happened.

I was confused and frustrated for not being prepared for such a predictable outcome. That the worst thing possible that day could just all of a sudden happen without further question.

In the first 3 months of Quarantine in Dili there was barely anything to do; we just had to stay inside all day. You would either eat, sleep or watch youtube and none of those options were good, so that's when my dad decided to take Micky, our grandfather ( who had come to Timor to visit but got stuck when they closed the borders), and I to Atauro Island so we could get away from the city, and take our minds off things while our mom worked at her bakery to keep the money rolling in.

We arrived at Atauro at 11am on a Saturday. I was so happy that we could finally do stuff other than watching youtube all day. When we got back to our eco-lodge home, and said hello to all the staff we decided that we would take that day off and relax while we unpacked.

Since the Coronavirus stopped people from travelling, there was no one else at the lodge except the staff, our Grandpa, Micky, dad and me. Our grandfather decided that he would go help dad with the garden since he always likes helping out. Micky and I didn't feel like going to the beach so we chatted with our friends on our ipads and had afternoon tea.

Even though there was a very low chance of Coronavirus spreading to Atauro I was still cautious of avoiding contact with people so I always had some sanitizer on our living room desk just in case .Since school holidays were coming up in 6 weeks, the Timorese government was starting to lift restrictions and we started getting some bookings for our lodge. Most of them were our friends and their families from school.

It turns out not everyone went back to their home country so we were really excited for a reunion. I was very relieved to know I would get to see most of my friends. It made it much easier to be calm and relaxed when I knew I would see my friends every once in a while.

Four weeks earlier, Monty (our family dog) gave birth to five adorable little puppies. There were 2 male pups and 3 females. The two males pups we called Edilio and Sandy. The female puppies we called Cathy, Sally and Dekka. All these puppies fueled our happiness for 2 whole months until we gave them away.

Once holidays arrived, so did a lot of fun and laughter. 14 of our best friends came over for a week, and every single thing we did made me think that it was getting safer and safer every day. For the whole week we all went swimming, joked around, played with the puppies, told stories and caught up with everything that was going on at school. It was the most fun I've had since the pandemic started.

I also just want to say that I feel very sorry for the people that have just been stuck in their homes for half the year doing nothing, possibly even going insane while the year goes by. I hope everyone can get through this and reflect on their life experience during quarantine and overall just see if they have improved or can improve as a person or not. So keep fighting till this disaster ends. Peace comes from within.

Mardy Hinton  
Atauro Island  
Timor-Leste