

# Dillydallying in Dili

Vol 1, No 2

I find myself back just south of the equator in truly tropical territory. I'm in Dili, the capital of East Timor, the world's newest nation. I arrived on 23 February and will remain here until 23 March.

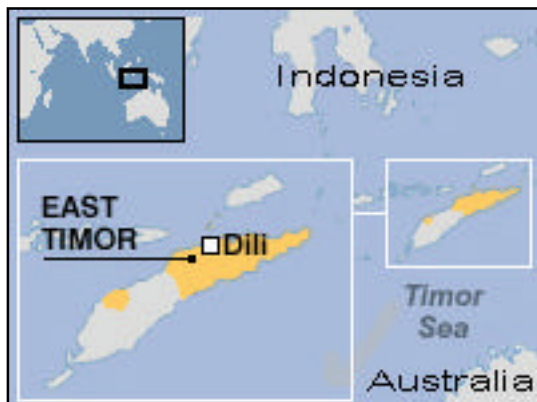
I'm working with Family Health International (FHI) in finalising and hopefully beginning to apply the communication strategy I drafted last November to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS among high-risk groups. As mentioned in the last issue of *Dillydallying in Dili*, HIV/AIDS is not a huge problem here — there are only 24 identified cases — but the approach everyone is taking is to nip it in the bud. Donors are spending several million US dollars per year in fighting HIV/AIDS. This in a country of only 800,000!

Most of our efforts will target two high-risk groups; sex workers (estimated to number slightly over 130 in Dili) and MSM — men who have sex with men (both gay and straight; bi-sexuality is not uncommon in East Timor) of which there are several hundred in Dili. So far we've worked with SW and MSM in identifying knowledge, behaviour and information needs, drafting appropriate messages and beginning the design of several materials for use in peer education.

Our strategy calls for working closely with a number of local NGOs. Peer education will be the primary method to get information out to high-risk groups. As our work is funded by USAID we have to push the "ABCs of Safe Sex" approach — A = abstinence, B = faithfulness (as in to one partner), and C = condoms...if you can't stick with "A" and "B".

## The Democratic Republic of East Timor

The Democratic Republic of East Timor or *Timor-Leste* is an island nation in Southeast Asia, consisting of the eastern half of



the island of Timor, the nearby islands of Atauro and Jaco, and Oecussi-Ambeno, a political exclave of East Timor situated on the western side of the island, surrounded by West Timor.

A Portuguese colony for 450 years, East Timor was occupied by Indonesia from 1975 until 1999. On August 30, 1999, in a United Nations-supervised popular referendum, the East Timorese voted for full independence from Indonesia, but violent clashes, instigated primarily by anti-independence militias (aided by elements of the Indonesian military), broke out soon afterwards. UN peacekeepers led by (see *Timor page 2*)



Dili harbour

### East Timor Demographics

Population: 800,000  
Population growth rate: 7.26%  
Birth rate: 28.07 births/1,000 population  
Life expectancy:  
  male: 62.64 years  
  female: 67.17 years  
Ethnic groups:  
  Austronesian, (Malayo-Polynesian)  
  Papuan  
Religions:  
  Roman Catholic 90%, Muslim 4%,  
  Protestant 3%, Hindu 0.5%, Buddhist,  
  Animist  
Languages: Tetun & Portuguese (official)  
  Bahasa Indonesia, English  
Literacy total population: 48%

**Timor:** Australia were brought in to restore order. By the time the Aussies arrived about 70% of the economic infrastructure of East Timor was laid waste by Indonesian troops and anti-independence militias. Many ransacked and burned out government buildings and buildings owned by pro-Indonesian Timorese still stand in Dili (right).

The massive international aid programme that followed has led to substantial reconstruction in both urban and rural areas. East Timor finally achieved independence on 20 May 2002.

The East Timorese population consists of a number of ethnic groups, most of which are of Malayo-Polynesian descent and some of older Papuan stock. The population is predominantly Roman Catholic (90%), with Muslim (5%) and Protestant (3%) minorities. Hindu, Buddhist and animist minorities make up the remainder.



*Buildings destroyed during clashes between Timorese nationals and anti-independence militias still stand in Dili.*

East Timor's two official languages are Tetun, a local Austronesian language, and Portuguese. Indonesian is still widely spoken and English is fast becoming the preferred language of commerce.

East Timor faces great challenges in continuing the rebuilding of infrastructure and the strengthening of the infant civil administration. The country can be expected to be reliant on outside help for many years since its poor infrastructure has been destroyed and it is drought-prone. One promising long-term project is the joint development with Australia of oil and natural gas resources in the southeastern waters off Timor, a location known as the Timor gap. Many hope tourism will help to bring in hard cash. The country abounds in pristine beaches (left) and a beautiful but rugged interior which many hope will attract the more adventurous traveller.



*East Timor is truly a stunning country. I've only seen a small slice of it, but what I've seen is beautiful. Magnificent, secluded beaches, with white sands and warm crystal clear waters such as this one pictured above can be found just a short drive out of Dili.*

## Getting Physical

One nice thing about life here in Dili is that it's an environment very conducive to getting back in shape (or staying in shape if you're already in shape). With little traffic it's a "jogging-friendly" town. I've been managing to drag myself out of bed most mornings and join the throng of predominantly UN joggers. But better than that, surrounding Dili are "big hills-small mountains" which offer excellent, challenging terrain for hiking. This past weekend I went out with the FHI East Timor Country Director, Jim Rock, and his family for a two hour session of hiking mixed with a bit of "low-level of difficulty" rock climbing. The views from up high are amazing. In addition to such terra-firma pursuits, East Timor boasts some of the best scuba diving in the world (or so I'm told). Several Aussies have set up diving companies catering to Japanese, Singaporean, Taiwanese and Aussie divers.



*Jim, wife Sabine and son Tim on our over-hill-over-dale hiking adventure.*