

This time, I mimicked my friend's expression of disappointment. The season for whale and dolphin sighting remains open from September to January, and the area also offers opportunity for scuba diving.

#### A BIT OF HISTORY

East Timor was a Portuguese colony since the 16th century, and as such, it was known as Portuguese Timor till 1975. On 28 November of the same year, Fretilin declared independence and the Revolutionary Front went all out for an independent East Timor. Just nine days later, Indonesia occupied the area declaring it as the country's 27th province, and only left after the United Nations entered the fray.

Consequently, it became an independent country in 2002, and the UN Peacekeepers finally left in 2012. East Timor was a neglected commercial centre. Coffee and sandalwood were the main exports, neglectfully and oppressively ruled by the



government built it, and Suharto inaugurated in 1996.

Upon reaching the Fatucama peninsula, we learnt that the way to Jesus's feet was over a thousand stairs. We resigned, and went to the beach again. As the daylight faded, the sky around Cristo Rei turned shades of red, and the entire area came alive with lights as darkness fell. The ambience of the lights, and the sound of the ocean make me feel as if listening to Jesus spreading a message of peace.

that, mint leaves, tamarind, corn, various vegetables and fruits are all commonly eaten.

There are places that serve Thai, Timorese, Philippine, Indonesian and Chinese cuisine on the beaches. There are also places which serve just fish of different kinds, quite delicious, and most of the shops are in buildings of wood, cane or bamboo. Bangladeshis own many large businesses in Timor, including furniture and electronics.

shop. Our group had developed a fondness for the brilliant aroma and taste of Timorese coffee over the past few days. We had never imagined coffee could have so many varieties.

#### TAIS MARKET

Our next stop was Tais Market, a hub for purely local wares including handwoven wraps, bangles, wares made of bamboo and cane, bags, masks, traditional crowns, crocodile and the like. Most sellers were female.

#### BIDDING ADIEU

After few blissful days, lots of random wandering and with a basket of sweet memories we came back with our hearts singing anew.

Portuguese.

Civil war began in 1974 after the colonisers left, and much of the fracas started after the discovery of oil under the sea bed surrounding the island. Along with petroleum, exports now include cardamom, cinnamon, and cocoa.

#### THE SUNSET

There are innumerable sea beaches in Timor, we bid adieu to the sun on a different one every day, with amazing views of the nature's colour palette in a resplendent display of the sea water — shades of blue, turquoise, sometimes white, and even greys. But the sudden change in the water's colour became noticeable just when the sun would dip towards the west, as it turned golden. The beach came alive with people hanging out, children playing, and vendors selling fried fish as street food, but without any chaos or pollution.

#### JESUS ATOP THE MOUNTAIN

Visible from Dili is Cristo Rei, a 44-foot statue of Jesus located atop a globe and overlooking the capital city. The Indonesian



#### CUISINE

The street food scene comes alive as evening fall, with vendors offering fish chops and kebabs, freshly fried fish, Calamari fry, roasted corn on the cob, and myriad fried stuff. Many fish are found in Timor, and the island nation has bountiful juicy fruits as well, including papaya, watermelon, banana, dragon-fruit, pineapple, and melons. Vendors sell coconut, both ripe and green, on every other street corner. Their staple is sticky rice and water spinach (*kolmi shaak*), locally known as kankun. Other than



#### POPE JOHN PAUL II AND UMA LULIKS

Our days of wandering about were gradually coming to an end, and the time for return nearing. So we went off to see the statue of Pope John Paul II's statue, by the winding road over a mountain where his likeness stands with a long cross-topped sceptre in his hand. On the way, we also visited the indigenous holy house called Uma Luliks in Tetum, which can be frequently seen along with the other architecture influenced by the Portuguese.

#### FAMOUS TIMORESE COFFEE

As we started off in the early morning, breakfast was had at a local Timorese coffee

Translated by Sania Aiman

## Knowing East Timor

The Timorese are very unassuming, simple and peace-loving, although they are not that well off monetarily. The most surprising thing is that the American Dollar is well accepted here, with the 10-dollar bill being the most common.

The island's population is 96.9 percent Roman Catholic. The rest 3 percent are followers of other faiths.

There are 15 languages spoken on the island, but Tetum is the official language, and Portuguese is also quite commonly spoken and taught at schools. About 30 percent can speak English. There are also American and Australian schools, and the National University of East Timor.

Although there are some 21 healthcare institutes, the quality of health services is not that good, and the worst bit is the high number of smokers here.

Football is a favoured sport, and motorbikes are popular. Violence against women is low, but many children are malnourished.

