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The giant Scarborough Floating Production Unit is seen off the coast of Dili during a planned layover en route to Western Australia. (More details on Page 24)

Photo: Marcelino K. Castro Guterres

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Pilot Aged Care Training Builds Skills for Timorese Workers

A pilot aged care training course was recently held at the Palm Springs Hotel in Dili, organised by PALM (Pacific Australia Labour Mobility) programme-approved employers 360 Workforce Solution and Carers NT.

Funded by the two employers, the training brought together participants for a combination of classroom discussion and practical instruction aimed at strengthening skills in the aged care sector. The programme opened with an introduction to aged care, where specialists from Carers NT, including Vice Executive Director Mr Chris Hayward, spoke about the importance of delivering professional care aligned with international standards.

A practical demonstration followed in the hotel's disability-accessible room. Participants were shown best practices for setting up a care environment, applying safe care techniques, and supporting the safety and wellbeing of elderly clients.

The course also included a culinary training session focused on safe food handling, understanding the nutritional needs of older people, and preparing appropriate meals for elderly care.

The pilot training is intended to help build local capacity in aged care and to serve as a foundation for expanded training programmes in the future.



Credit: SEFOPE-Secretariat of State for Vocational Training and Employment



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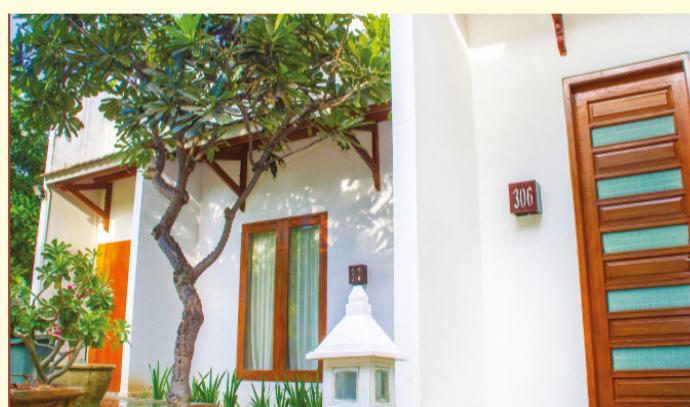


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Mission Timor in Space: First Timor-Leste Orbital Satellite

In a landmark moment for national technological advancement, President and Nobel Peace Laureate Dr. José Ramos-Horta has officially launched "Mission Timor in Space." This historic initiative aims to launch the first orbital satellite fully designed and built in Timor-Leste. It marks the nation's first step into the global space ecosystem.

The official launch took place at the China Hall of the Nicolau Lobato Presidential Palace. President Ramos-Horta, serving as the project's Patron, unveiled the vision alongside key stakeholders.

A Local Initiative with Global Support:

The project is led by Similie, a local social enterprise and technology startup, in partnership with Capricornio International and SpaceBase Co.. The collaboration also includes support from international organizations such as UNISEC Japan to help democratize access to space.

"This project symbolizes Timor-Leste's potential to lead in technological innovation, while inspiring the next generation of engineers and scientists. It is not just about going to space. It is about bringing space back to the people of Timor-Leste," said Mrs. Ana Paula da Costa Xavier, CEO of Similie.

Practical Solutions for National Challenges:

The "CubeSat" satellite aims to address critical national issues by providing real-time Earth observation data. Key applications include:

- Agriculture:** Improving weather prediction and irrigation, specifically for coffee plantations and climate-resilient farming.
- Civil Defense:** Strengthening early warning systems for floods and disaster management.
- Resource Management:** Monitoring coastal water quality, mapping geological structures, and detecting illegal fishing.

Inspiring the Next Generation:

A core objective of the mission is to spark curiosity and build capacity in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

"This project is more than a satellite. It is a message to our youth to study science and technology, to dream big, and to develop skills that will serve themselves and the nation. Our children deserve the opportunity to look at the sky and know they can reach it," said President Ramos-Horta.

To ensure long-term sustainability, Similie and UNISEC Japan plan to deliver specialized training and establish an Aerospace and Science Academy in Dili. This initiative will create new career pathways for Timorese people. It proves that local ingenuity combined with global partnerships can empower nations to access space-based solutions.

Similie now invites students to participate in a historic competition to propose a name for the satellite and design a symbolic logo representing Timor-Leste in orbit. The winning logo design and satellite name will be officially placed on the satellite prior to its launch in Japan. This is a unique opportunity for someone's artistic vision to become a part of the nation's space history.



Credits: Similie, Presidência da República Democrática de Timor-Leste, & Ministério da Educação



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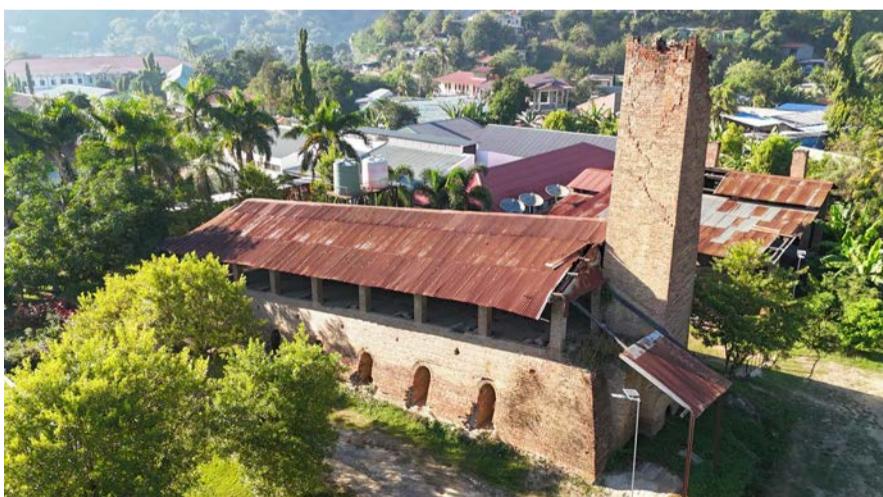
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Dili Sights of Interest by Jonty Crane

As you go about your daily routine in Dili, it's easy to overlook some of the city's most intriguing spots. Here's another couple of hidden gems worth a closer look.

Antiga Fábrica de Cerâmica

At the western end of the Fatumeta maternity hospital lie the remains of a Portuguese colonial era ceramics works, where bricks and tiles were made. The main structures are largely intact. When independence hero Xanana Gusmão visited Dili during the Indonesian occupation, he would hide at the factory. Microlet #5.



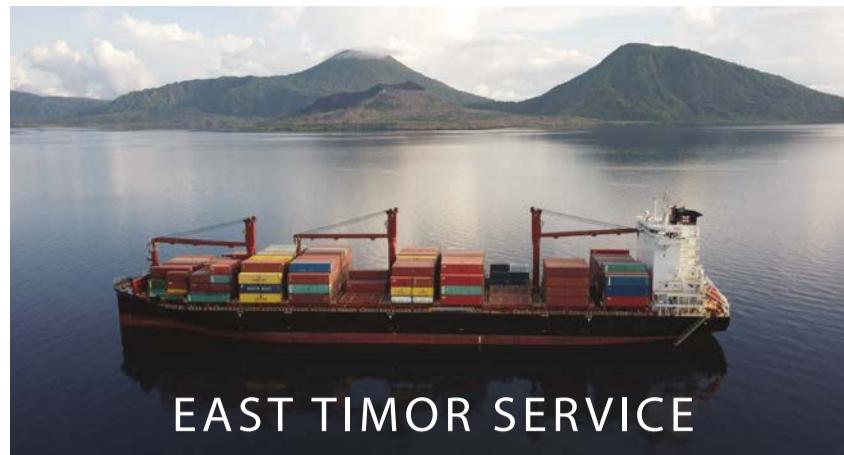
Saint John Paul II Church – Balibar

Visible for kilometres around, this is a landmark on the hills behind Dili. It was inaugurated in December 2021, and is only open for services. The church is not easily accessible without your own transport, unless you catch a bus to Aileu and get off early.



About the author:

Jonty has published a number of books on Timor-Leste, which can be bought in Dili or online from Amazon, has recorded an *Exploring Timor-Leste* podcast series, developed the website www.exploringtimor.com, and has many videos promoting Timor-Leste on YouTube (@ExploringTimorLeste), and TikTok (@exploringtimor).



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Australian Medical Team Delivers Life-Changing Paediatric Care in Dili



Earlier this month, the Australian Visiting Medical Team, led by specialist pediatric surgeon Professor Roy Kimble, returned to the National Hospital in Dili.

The team cared for more than 80 children and completed 30 surgical procedures – bringing world-class expertise to Timor-Leste without families needing to travel overseas.

One of the many grateful patients was Jimmy from Maliana, who is making great progress thanks to the team's support.

Beyond providing life-changing treatment, the team worked closely with Timorese specialists to share knowledge and strengthen local skills.

A heartfelt thank you to the Australian Visiting Medical Team for their dedication and for bringing hope and care to so many Timorese children!



Credit: Australian Embassy, Timor-Leste





What Happened Last December!

December at Timor Plaza is always something special—a season filled with lights, music, and joyful celebrations that bring warmth to every corner.

Relive the festive excitement through unforgettable moments: Santa Claus around Timor Plaza, the beautiful harmonies of the Christmas Choir, and the enchanting atmosphere of Magical Christmas, creating cherished memories for families and loved ones.



Upcoming Store



Bedford community unites for Timor-Leste Independence Day

Story by Alexander Quinn



Bedford Timor-Leste Community

The Independence Day celebration formed a flagship part of Queen's Park Community Organisation's (QPCO) *Back to Our Roots* programme (<https://qpcoco.org.uk/projects/back-to-our-roots/>) — an initiative dedicated to helping diaspora communities reconnect with, preserve and proudly share their cultural heritage with the wider Bedford population. True to the spirit of the programme, the celebration was free and open to everyone, inviting residents from all backgrounds to come together, learn from one another and celebrate the richness of Bedford's multicultural identity.



Bedford Timor-Leste Community

Held at Queen's Park Community Centre, the celebration brought together hundreds of people for a vibrant and emotional showcase of Timorese culture, history and community pride. Guests, volunteers, performers and supporters each played a part in creating an atmosphere filled with unity and joy. Through traditional music, dance, stories and shared food, the day demonstrated how cultural celebration can deepen relationships and strengthen a sense of belonging across the town.

Voices From the Timor-Leste Community

For many members of Bedford's Timorese community, the event represented more than a cultural festival. It was a moment of visibility, pride and intergenerational connection.

Azito Da Silva, one of Bedford's earliest Timorese residents and the lead community organiser for the celebration, reflected on the importance of the day:

"This celebration is an important opportunity for younger generations. Our culture is our memory, and even our children born here should know their roots. As we say: May your faith be your culture. This celebration is for all of Bedford to enjoy."



Bedford Timor-Leste Community

Azito added that seeing so many local families, neighbours and friends come together "felt like a bridge between the Bedford we live in and the Timor-Leste we carry in our hearts." His words echoed the sentiments of many Timorese attendees, who spoke of the pride of sharing their traditions openly, some for the very first time in the town.

Dignitaries in Attendance

Several dignitaries attended the event, reflecting the significance of the celebration for Bedford and the wider region. Among them were the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire Camilla King, the Timor-Leste Ambassador to the UK João Paulo da Costa Rangel, Deputy Lieutenant Hannan Ali, Mayor of Bedford Borough Tom Wootton, Bedfordshire Police & Crime Commissioner John Tizard, RevdBishop Richard of the Diocese of St Albans, former High Sheriff Eric Masih, and Bedford MP Mohammad Yasin. Their presence underscored a shared commitment to cultural inclusion, representation and community cohesion.



Dignitaries - Eric Masih, João Paulo da Costa Rangel, Camilla King, Hannan Ali (left to right)

High Sheriff's Praise

The High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, Camilla King, expressed her appreciation in a letter following the celebration. She wrote:

"Thank you so much for facilitating, empowering and encouraging those from Timor-Leste to have a wonderful celebration of their 50th anniversary since independence from Portugal. To learn about their country, see their traditions, taste their banquet and to realise their input into British life was truly wonderful."

"It was great to be a part of the Timorese cultural dancing... I know the ambassador was very impressed with all your support and friendship. To all your team, and to Ralley too for teaching the dancing, thank you all very much." — Camilla King, High Sheriff of Bedfordshire 2025–2026

Her remarks captured the spirit of joy, hospitality and cultural pride that defined the day.

Leadership Reflections

QPCO Director Marie-Ange praised the significance of the celebration for Bedford: "Hosting Bedford's first ever Timor-Leste Independence Day celebration was a proud and historic moment for the town. The Timorese community brings enormous cultural richness, resilience and joy to Bedford, and this event allowed their heritage to shine. Creating spaces where every community feels seen, valued and celebrated is essential. This celebration demonstrated the power of coming together."

Looking Ahead - Celebrating Heritage, Building Belonging

The Timorese community presented their culture with passion and authenticity, showcasing traditional weaving, clothing, artefacts, dance and music. Their performances and storytelling created lasting memories for attendees and deepened cross-cultural understanding within the town.

QPCO continues to champion the visibility and contributions of Bedford's diverse communities. Through projects like *Back to Our Roots*, the organisation provides platforms that honour heritage, foster community connections and ensure that cultural traditions are preserved and celebrated.

The success of this milestone event reflects the growing recognition of Bedford's cultural diversity and the important role community organisations play in promoting inclusion. QPCO has expressed gratitude to all who supported and attended the celebration and looks forward to future events that continue to bring communities together.

About Queen's Park Community Organisation (QPCO)

Queen's Park Community Organisation is a Bedford-based charity dedicated to strengthening community cohesion, celebrating cultural diversity, and supporting local residents through inclusive events, outreach, and partnership work. Visit their website at: www.qpcoco.org.uk

Source: <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/other/bedford-community-unites-for-timor-leste-independence-day/ar-AA1RVOsJ>

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If someone in Timor-Leste tells you a meeting starts at 9am, what they really mean is that 9am exists as a concept. It is an idea. A suggestion. A point of philosophical reference rather than a binding agreement.

This is not lateness. This is Timor Time — a system in which events begin when the conditions are correct, the right people have arrived, the coffee has been drunk, and everyone feels emotionally prepared to proceed.

Weddings are a perfect example. The invitation might say 10am. Guests arrive at 10. Some arrive at 11. The bride may arrive at noon. No one panics. Food is eaten. Stories are told. Someone adjusts a sound system that was definitely working five minutes ago. This is all part of the ceremony

Government offices operate on a similar principle. Doors may open at 8:30am, unless there was rain, traffic, a meeting about another meeting, or someone's cousin needed help. If you arrive early, you will wait. If you arrive late, you will also wait — but with company.

The genius of Timor Time becomes clear when you stop fighting it. You learn that showing up "on time" really means showing up available. Flexible. Ready to adapt. Slightly resigned.

Even buses understand this. They do not leave at a fixed hour; they leave when full, when ready, or when the driver feels the moment is right. Sometimes all three align. Sometimes destiny intervenes.

And yet — things do get done. Just not in a hurry. Timor Time values people over schedules, conversations over clocks, and patience over precision.

So if someone tells you, "We'll start soon," relax. Soon could be five minutes. Soon could be forty. Soon could be after lunch. But when it starts, it will be exactly the right time.

After all, the clock might tick — but Timor moves to its own rhythm.

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Funny Holidays in January

- 4th January – National Spaghetti Day - A perfectly acceptable excuse for carbs before the diet starts.
- 10th January – Peculiar People Day - Celebrate the weird, the wonderful, and probably yourself.
- 16th January – Appreciate a Dragon Day - No dragons in Timor-Leste (that we know of), but plenty of imagination.
- 18th January – Thesaurus Day - A great day to sound clever, articulate, eloquent... you get the idea.

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the January 2026 edition of Guide Post

We begin the new year with another edition packed full of stories with a strong local connection. From celebrations and personal reflections to successful project outcomes and the planned launch of Timor-Leste's first orbital satellite, there is something here for everyone.

As always, this issue brings together engaging features, practical advice, and puzzles to keep you thinking. Whether you are a long-time resident or new to Timor-Leste, we hope you will find content that informs, inspires, or simply provides a moment of enjoyment.

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Until next month.

Cheers!

Dan Conroy

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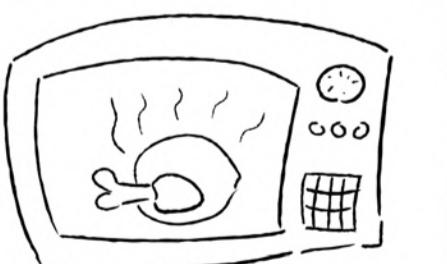
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From peacekeeping in Timor-Leste to PTSD in Afghanistan: The beauty and terror of being an official war artist

By Katherine Smyrk for *When the War is Over*



Wendy Sharpe was appointed Australian Official Artist attached to the Australian Army History Unit in 1999, at Dili in East Timor. (Supplied)

A double-hulled catamaran cuts a path through the rough waters of the Timor Sea.

Forging towards the tiny country of Timor-Leste or East Timor, it carries a clutch of peacekeeping army personnel from a mix of 22 different countries. A soldier vomits over the edge of the vessel, his first experience on the water a little rockier than expected.

Among the heavily armed people on board is a 39-year-old woman wearing khaki, and red lipstick. On her shoulder is a patch that reads "Australian Official Artist".

"I had no gun, obviously, no nothing. I was wearing lipstick to sort of say that I was with them, but not actually one of them," says Wendy Sharpe.

The Australian artist had been tapped on the shoulder by the Australian War Memorial (AWM) to travel to Darwin and then East Timor in December 1999, and capture Australia's peacekeeping efforts in her work.

She was excited, nervous and a little bamboozled to have even been asked.

"Becoming an official war artist is not something you can apply for; when I got the call, I didn't even know that there was such a thing," she explains.

"So, it was extraordinary to me... and I thought, 'well, obviously I've got to go'."



"You need to be someone who can put up with some discomfort, not terrible discomfort, but it's not luxury. It is real," Wendy Sharpe says of recruiting an official war artist. (Supplied: Wendy Sharpe)

Arriving on the shores of Dili

The Australian War Memorial's Official War Art Scheme began in World War I, and more than 50 local artists have since travelled all over the world, documenting the places Australia's soldiers have journeyed.

When Sharpe agreed to head to East Timor, she was the first woman to be appointed since World War II.

Just months before, the United Nations had conducted an independence referendum in the Indonesia-occupied area.

More than 78 per cent of citizens voted to separate, and this result was met with violent reprisals from pro-Indonesian militia. It's estimated 1,400 civilians died, and around 500,000 people were displaced as whole towns and neighbourhoods were destroyed.

When Sharpe's boat arrived in the capital of Dili in December of that year, she was first struck by the "idyllic" beauty of the palm trees and Portuguese architecture.

"But then as soon as you get ashore: absolutely devastated, shocking. I had no idea," she says.

She'd seen images on the news, but had thought they were showing patches where the fighting had been worst.

"I remember thinking of Pompeii, you know, destruction like that. Rubble and nothing."

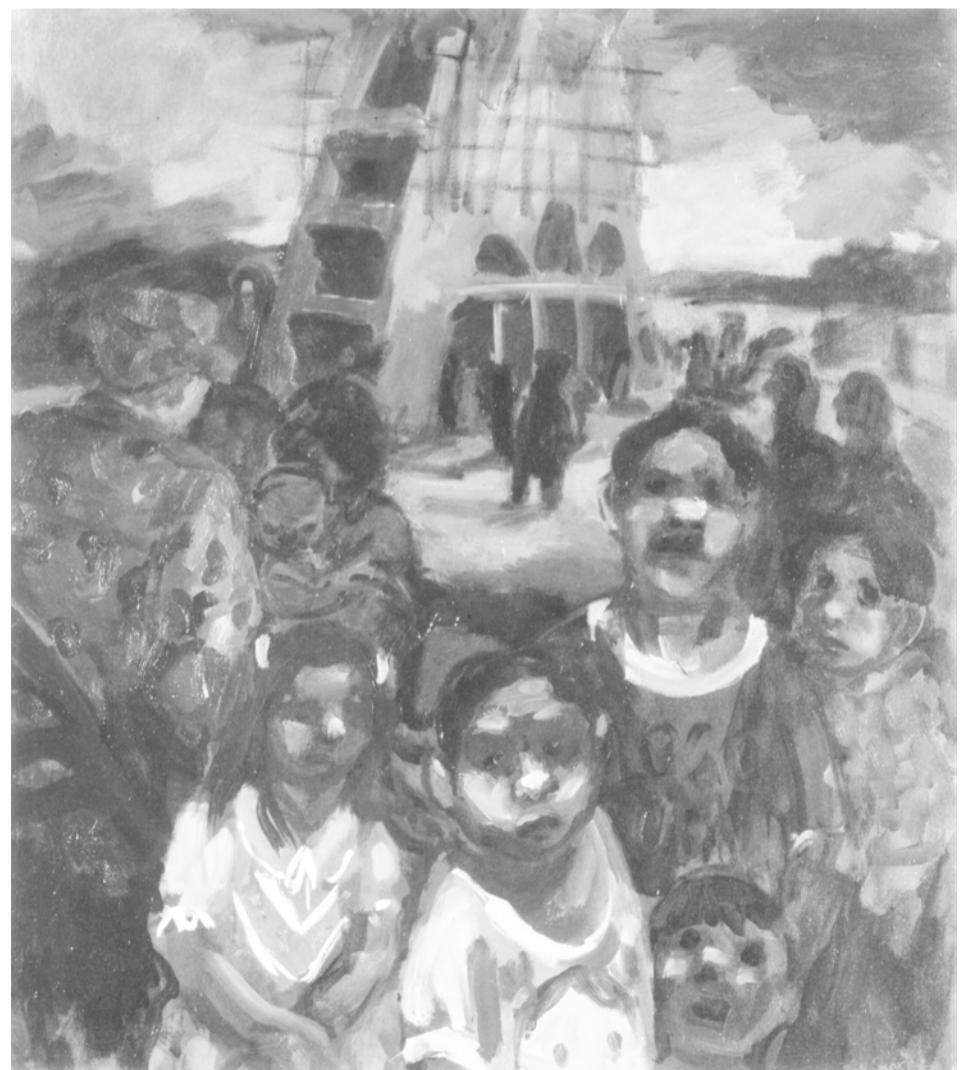
Sharpe had set off with lofty ideas of creating an enormous painting capturing the entire conflict, something in the style of Picasso's famous anti-war piece Guernica.

"And then when I was over there, I thought, 'I can't do that, I can't. I don't understand it well enough,'" she explains.

So, Sharpe started paying attention to every little detail around her.

"What I did was just draw, literally from morning to night. I was drawing people having breakfast, sitting around talking; I just drew. For me, it was all about the people."

And the East Timorese people readily, generously, exposed so much of their pain to her. In the southwest city of Suai, locals put on a performance at midnight mass that told the story of a horrific massacre at the church a few months earlier.



Wendy Sharpe created many artworks after the midnight mass in Suai, saying it really stayed with her. (Supplied: Wendy Sharpe)

"I'll never forget that, ever," she says. "It was a boiling hot night: deep, dark blue sky, silhouettes of palm trees and mountains, a moon," she says, "and I was standing next to a New Zealand padre who said, 'everyone here has lost people'."

Sharpe pulled out her charcoal and drew in the dark.

"Visually, it was amazing. But emotionally, it was extraordinary."



Maria and Dalila, sketched in East Timor by Wendy Sharpe. (Supplied: Wendy Sharpe)

Naïve artist to fierce advocate

Ben Quilty had a slightly different experience when he was sent as the Australian Official Artist to Afghanistan in 2011 — though he says he also "went in there pretty naïve".

"I was the only one not carrying a weapon, which is an unusual feeling," the artist tells Rachel Griffiths on *When the War is Over*.

"Every single emotion was extreme and heightened, partly because you're living under this constant anxiety that you can be killed. It was like nothing I'd ever seen, and nothing I want to see again."

Quilty had been awarded the Archibald Prize that same year for his painting of Margaret Olley, but he didn't take any paint to the Middle East. Instead, he took photographs and made countless sketches.

But Quilty says the soldiers were very suspicious of him.



Ben Quilty's Self Portrait after Afghanistan.

"They didn't know who I was, they didn't know why I was there," he says.

"They were very, very reticent to talk to me because it has been drilled into them, 'do not talk to the media'... [but] making a drawing of someone is very disarming because the person who is making the drawing has to opt out a bit of the dialogue."

One of his early encounters was with a soldier named Daniel Spain.

"He was so young I was astonished. I asked him awkwardly, 'does your mother know what's happening here?' And a huge tear welled in his eye," the artist says.

"That was a real turning point for me."



Ben Quilty took photos of some of the soldiers — like Daniel Spain, painted here — looking up at the sun as a way to help "capture the human inside the uniform". (Supplied: Ben Quilty)

After he returned to Australia, Quilty went to put his impressions on canvas, beginning with Daniel Spain.

"I felt aware that so many young men and women had this extra pressure ... not to speak about their service, not even to discuss how they felt," Quilty says.

The artist contacted the young man who had astonished him in Afghanistan, only to find the transition back into civilian life was not coming easily to Spain.

"I was very much down on my luck and feeling depressed. I was heading down a slippery slope," Spain says on *When the War is Over*.

"Ben reaching out couldn't have come at a better time. And that needed to happen to be where I am today."

Quilty went on to invite many of the troops he'd met in Afghanistan to his studio to sit for him, and to talk. By 2013, he'd painted 21 portraits of returned veterans, taken out of their "boxy, aggressive, masculine" uniforms, their skin and vulnerability laid bare.



Captain S chose this difficult position to pose in for Quilty. He explained that it was the position he was stuck in for hours during a battle while his friend died beside him. (Supplied: Ben Quilty)

It was through this process that he realised how many of them were struggling with physical pain, post-traumatic stress disorder and emotional wounds.

That pain comes through on Quilty's canvas, shown to the whole country in a touring exhibition called *After Afghanistan*. The artist found himself becoming a fierce advocate for better mental health support for returned service people.

"For me the biggest story was not the combat zone," Quilty says, "but more commonly the emotional wounds."

Why do we need war artists?

Official war artists say they're often grilled about whether they must show the Australian army in a positive light. But both Sharpe and Quilty agree there was no pressure whatsoever.

"The official war artists can be as political or as anti-war or as pro-war as they want, and that's a rare privilege, I think," says Quilty.

Sharpe says the AWM has an enormous collection of stridently anti-war art on display from over the years.

"They actually want a personal view. Obviously if you send a reporter for the ABC News, their job is to give an unbiased account of what they see and not put any emotion into it, and that's very important," she says.

"But you don't need an accurate drawing of an aircraft carrier; instead, you're encouraged to be subjective. It's about what it was like emotionally and artistically. It's about how it felt."

And by having art that captures those feelings, perhaps we can understand the world, and our place in it, a little better.

"It really made me aware of the extremes that human beings are capable of," says Sharpe.

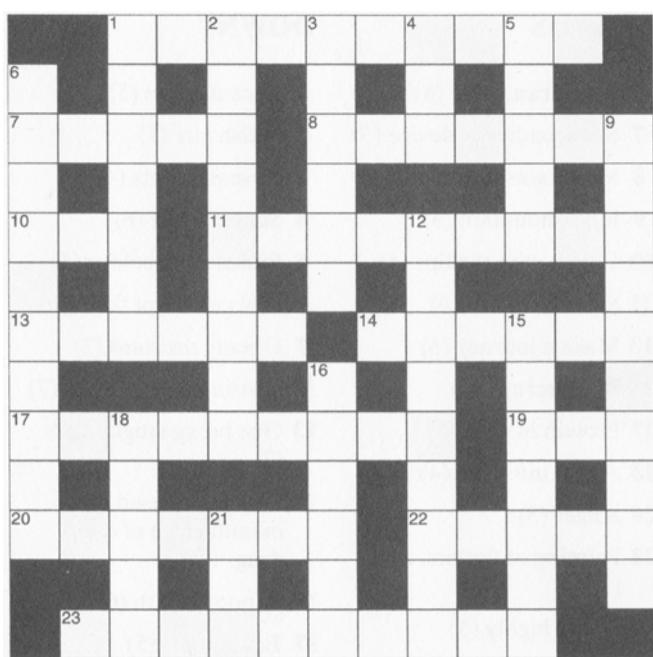
"Good and bad, incredible acts of kindness and heroism and incredible acts of depravity and evil. That's what humans are."

Watch *When the War is Over* on ABC TV and ABC iview.

Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-10/being-an-official-war-artist/106074572>

QUICK CROSSWORD

Solution on page 20



Across:

- Shakespeare play (10)
- Child minder (5)
- Eat in a restaurant (4,3)
- Zodiac sign (3)
- Handled glasses (9)
- Manly (6)
- Sports official (6)
- Parisian cathedral (5,4)
- Thick mist (3)
- A further (one) (7)
- Style of window (5)
- Shakespeare play (3,7)

Down:

- Line on map (7)
- Colour (5,4)
- Dung (6)
- Girl's name (3)
- German submarine (1-4)
- Chekhov play (5,5)
- Chekhov play (3,7)
- Foremost (6,3)
- Impose (pain on) (7)
- Hair perfume (3,3)
- Gearwheel cog (5)
- Small shelter (3)

QUICK CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

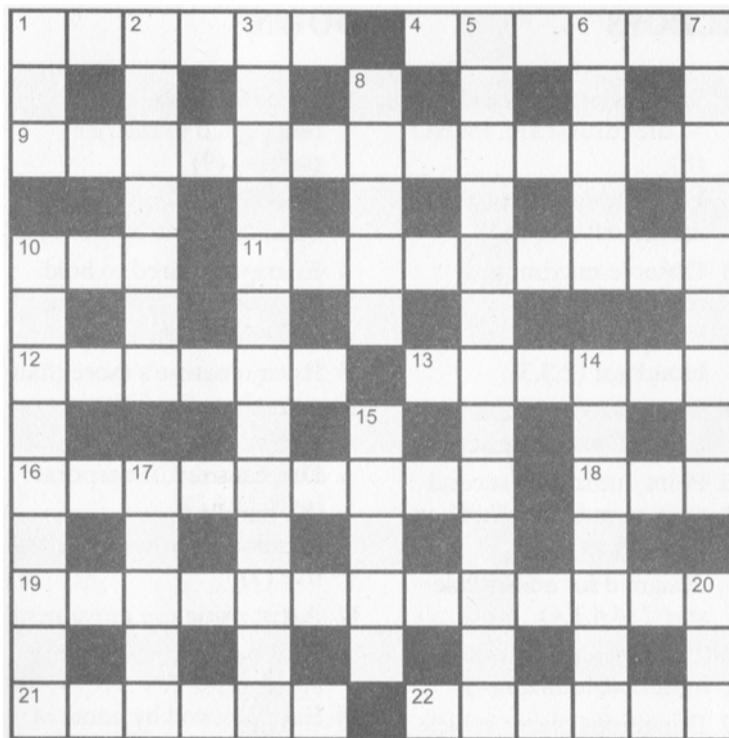
Solution on page 20

Across:

- Fool has trouble following attack (6)
- Eccentric map includes a federal area for Washington (6)
- Makes a loud noise with lorry being severely shaken (13)
- Send back rotten fish (3)
- Mixed school's PE displays a Greek character (9)
- Light in the sky — gold in atmosphere (6)
- Church celebration that is held during fast, strangely (6)
- Lab heater running to produce hot infusion (6,3)
- Supernatural creature nearly flew over (3)
- Polite woman working in restaurant trade — one serving the Queen (4-2-7)
- Some swarm that appears for summery weather (6)
- Take in with humorous effect that's pronounced (6)

Down:

- A small part is suitable (3)
- Move slowly and awkwardly following small sleep (7)
- Pakistan's river experiment is on time for manufacturer (13)
- Inflexible writer, Italian, having change of heart (13)
- Regret cutting first half of clue, causing distress (5)
- Old handle for blade of voracious fish workers (9)
- Have hallucinations with eastern food (5)
- Fatal buffet dished up old wheat, black inside (5,4)
- Moving set with needle is unproductive (7)
- Cooks sweets up half-heartedly (5)
- Surprise attacker has lost a horseman (5)
- Turning over towing vessel in a narrow strait (3)



Crossword Notes:

'THE TIMES' QUIZ

Solution on page 20

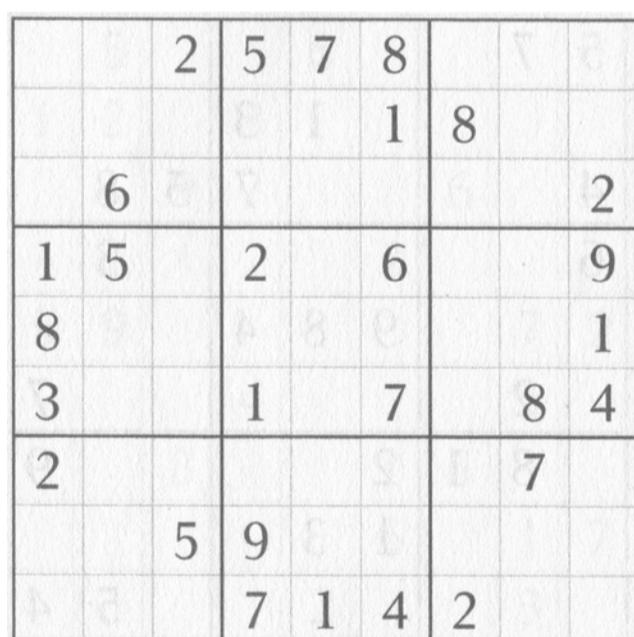
General Knowledge

- Which TV title character has a lazy manservant named Jud (played by Phil Davis)?
- Maris Peer, Estima, Charlotte and Marfona are common varieties of what?
- Catch a Fire* (1973) was which band's first album on Island Records?
- Amethyst and citrine are varieties of which mineral?
- Which English actor wrote the verse play *East* (1975) and the one-man show *Shakespeare's Villains* (1998)?
- Using Ukrainian folk melodies, which composer's Symphony no. 2 is nicknamed the *Little Russian*?
- The German painter Franz Marc was killed at which 1916 battle?
- The Martin-Schultz scale is used to establish the colour of what?
- Which appetisers are the Basque equivalent of Spanish tapas?
- Which comic book detectives are known in French as *Dupont et Dupond*?
- Held in Park City, Utah, what is the largest independent cinema festival in the US?
- Which scientist published her classic *Treatise on Radioactivity* in 1910?
- Which US President first proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), aka "Star Wars"?
- The piano virtuoso Claudio Arrau (1903-91) was born in which country?
- Which "Glamour Cat" sings the ballad *Memory* in the musical *Cats*?
- In 1917, who wrote *The Times* obituary for Ian Fleming's MP father Valentine?
- Which Andy Warhol artwork repeats an image from the 1960 film *Flaming Star* three times?
- Ring announcer Michael Buffer famously uses which trademarked phrase?
- In 1934, what became the only horse to win both the Cheltenham Gold Cup and Grand National in the same year?
- Which bridge over the River Tarn is pictured?



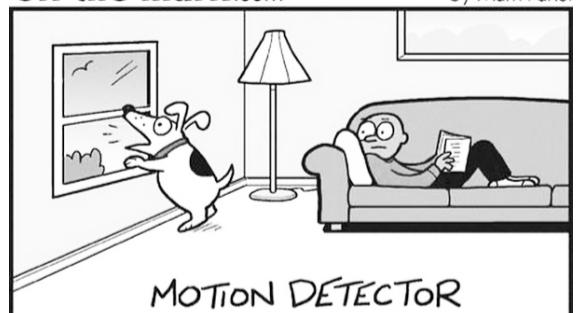
THE TIMES SUDOKU

Solution on page 20

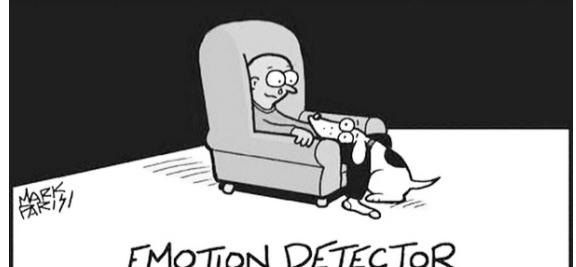


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by Mark Parisi



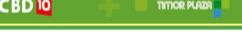
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EMPLOYMENT MATTERS!

Edition #63 - Social Security

These are **Employment Matters**, which matter to all of us!

Let's start the year with understanding Social Security in Timor-Leste. Social security is more than just a payroll deduction, it is a fundamental human right, a constitutional guarantee, and a cornerstone of national social protection in Timor-Leste.

Social Security ensures that individuals and families are safeguarded when income is lost due to old age, disability, maternity, or the death of a breadwinner. The system combines mandatory contributions from both workers and employers with state-funded social pensions to provide basic income security for all citizens.



A Human and Constitutional Right

As stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 22), *“Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.”*

In Timor-Leste, Article 56 of the Constitution preserves the right to social security for all citizens, with the State committed to organising a system that fits the country's national capacities. The system's development, though gradual, now provides a robust and functional framework to protect all citizens.

How the System Works

The contributory social security scheme in Timor-Leste involves three key parties:

- **Employers:** Contribute 6% of the employee's contributory salary.
- **Employees:** Contribute 4%, which is deducted directly from wages.
- **Social Security Reserve Fund:** Manages contributions to ensure benefits for current and future generations.

Since 1 January 2018, participation has been mandatory for all formal employers and workers in Timor-Leste.

What Social Security Covers

The social security system in Timor-Leste provides protection against a variety of life events, including:

1. Maternity benefits
2. Paternity benefits
3. Adoption
4. Clinical risk benefit during pregnancy
5. Pregnancy interruption benefits
6. Death grant
7. Survivor pension
8. Partial disability pension
9. Full impairment/disability pension
10. Old age pension
11. Work injury benefits

Additionally, the non-contributory “citizenship” regime provides social pensions for elderly citizens and people with disabilities who have insufficient or no contribution history.

Responsibilities of Employees and Employers

- **Employees:** Ensure they are properly registered, keep personal information updated, and verify that their 4% contribution is deducted from wages. Employees are also responsible for maintaining correct civil documentation, including birth certificates and marriage certificates.
- **Employers:** Must register employees, withhold the 4% employee contribution, contribute 6% themselves, and submit monthly declarations. Employers play an essential role in facilitating contributions, but do not control benefit approvals or payments.

Why It Matters

A strong social security system:

- Helps prevent poverty and provides support during life-changing events
- Stabilises the economy and promotes inclusive growth
- Aligns Timor-Leste with global human rights and development standards

In essence, the social security system benefits every worker, employer, and household, providing protection at every stage of life.

For any questions, please email us at info@konnekto.com with any questions. Your inquiries inspire us to create fresh and informative content!



Timor-Leste remembers Indonesian invasion 50 years after military assault

By Timor-Leste reporter Vonia Vieira and Doug Dingwall



Indonesia's invasion of Timor-Leste began a brutal 24-year occupation. (Supplied: CNC Archive)

As Indonesian warplanes flew overhead, they dropped something many in Timor-Leste had never seen.

But Jose Bareto de Jesus recognised the rounded objects floating to the ground and sounded the alarm to his friends that day on December 7, 1975.

"I was shouting that the plane dropped a parachute," he told the ABC.



Indonesian warplanes dropped paratroopers into Timor-Leste. (Supplied: CNC Archive)

When Indonesian paratroopers landed in Dili, it became clear what was happening, and people fled the Timorese capital.

"It was abandoned ... 90 per cent of Dili was empty," Mr de Jesus said.



Jose Bareto de Jesus suffered heavy personal losses during the invasion. (ABC News: Vonia Vieira)

Survivors still have clear memories of the invasion by Indonesia, as Timor-Leste this week commemorates the events that marked the beginning of a brutal 24-year occupation.

The invasion came only days after Timor-Leste, then known as East Timor, declared independence following the departure of its longtime colonial master Portugal.

It is estimated more than 100,000 Timorese died in the next few years as conflict and famine gripped their land.

More died in the two decades that followed, but Mr de Jesus said he was never afraid.

"My only principle is that you have to fight against the invaders. I didn't think about anything else," he said.

"I lost wealth, lost people, lost family."

'There must be justice'

Marta Ribeiro dos Santos was 33 when Indonesian aircraft filled the skies of Timor-Leste.

"I saw dead people around my house," she said.

"More and more planes were flying around ... the Indonesian warplanes were coming.

"We were afraid and wondering where we could go. We wanted to run and hide in the clinic near the house."



Marta Ribeiro dos Santos remembers the violence that followed Indonesia's invasion of her country. (ABC News: Vonia Vieira)

Indonesia had launched the invasion during a period of political turmoil and instability in the region after Portugal's withdrawal in 1975.

In the days following the onslaught, observers working outside Timor-Leste tried to piece together what was happening.

An Indonesian government radio station broadcast propaganda from across the border advising Timorese that its forces would kill them if they resisted, according to news reports at the time.

"Indonesia's overriding aim is now the swift integration of Portuguese Timor into Indonesia," one ABC report said.

"The message from Jakarta is clear, even if the outcome of military intervention is a costly guerrilla war and the cooling of relations with Australia, then that's the price Indonesia is willing to pay."

The pro-independence Fretilin forces withdrew to the jungle hills and took radio transmitters with them so they could communicate with the outside world.

Soon after the invasion, Jose Ramos-Horta, then-spokesperson for Fretilin and a future leader of independent Timor-Leste, made a plea to the United Nations for help in the face of Indonesia's advance.

The UN condemned the invasion and demanded Indonesia's withdrawal.

Back in Timor-Leste, the suffering had only begun for Ribero dos Santos.

"Children had difficulty finding food, and there was no water to drink. Life was very difficult," she said.

Now 83 years old, Ms dos Santos said Indonesia must acknowledge the atrocities its soldiers committed if the wounds of the invasion were to heal.

"I want to tell the Indonesian government that there must be justice," she said.

"The places where they killed many people must be identified so that we can recover their remains and bury them properly."

Indonesia has never issued an apology over the invasion.

'Struggle, learn, produce'

Timorese activist Amandina Helena da Silva said women paid a heavy price from the Indonesian occupation.

"A lot of women faced severe and systematic structural violence. Not only the physical violence, but also emotional violence, and also sexual violence," she said.

"Right now, [the survivors] are getting old. And some of them have already passed away."

Ms da Silva was not born when Indonesian forces took control of Timor-Leste.

Like many of her generation, she is grateful to those who persevered through the occupation and fought for independence.

"I describe this as a sacrifice," she said.



Amandina Helena da Silva says the trauma is ongoing for women who suffered during the occupation. (ABC News: Vonia Vieira)

Today, those in Timor-Leste's Gen Z, born after 2002, have only known an independent nation.

But for Timorese young people, the signs of the conflict remain obvious.

Fernando Ximenes, a researcher on Timor-Leste's history and economy, said trauma was still prevalent.



Fernando Ximenes says Timor-Leste needs to keep the heroic spirit of its independence struggle. (ABC News: Vonia Vieira)

He said some institutions were yet to escape the generational impacts of violent occupation.

But 50 years after Timor-Leste first declared its independence, Mr Ximenes said the struggle that followed carried a message for the nation's younger generations.

He summed up the meaning of the milestone with a popular Timorese motto from 1975: "Struggle, learn, produce."

"Timorese people are a very heroic people. We need to keep that spirit," Mr Ximenes said.

"We are people coming from a brave historic struggle."

Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-12-10/timor-leste-invasion-indonesia-anniversary/106118850>

Ken's Two Centavos

Ken calls himself a citizen of the world, and with good reason. Now in his seventies, he's lived a life that has carried him from Denmark to Europe, the United States and Thailand, before choosing Atauro Island as the perfect place to retire.

Each month, he shares his thoughts on everyday life — the insights, quirks and small moments that show Timor-Leste to be both familiar and unexpected. These are Ken's Two Centavos...

Chicken eggs in TL are worrisome. Granted, eggs can keep their freshness, somewhat, for a few days if not refrigerated. Better quality grocery stores display eggs for sale, refrigerated. Ordinary mom & pop stores don't.

A Timorese family I'm close with has, in recent weeks, had skin blisters erupt. Skin eruptions affected me when I rented a cabin on their property, and shared meals accordingly. I continued to eat chicken eggs, after moving to a rented parcel, a Km away, ...and my skin issues flared up. When I quit eating eggs, the skin issues lessened, but persisted. For a while, I thought I had skin cancer, because the symptoms matched what I saw and read online. More recently, I dropped the idea of cancer, and instead reverted to my earlier (pre-cancer diagnosis) idea that the skin issues were related to a blood infection. I had kept some white anti-biotic tablets left-over from an infection from 2 months prior, so I took them. I hate ingesting antibiotics because they make me feel like a half-person or a person with no soul. It's a light dose of chemotherapy. Usually, I take antibiotics and quit after 2 days, which is too soon. This time, for my skin issue, I stayed on the antibiotics for four days. Voila: Skin problem cleared up. Gonzoed.

However, the good family down the street is having skin eruptions. I feel partially responsible, because I gave them a tray of chicken eggs, three weeks ago. I advised them to boil the eggs rather than fry them, because boiling is a more likely way to kill pathogens that the eggs may harbor. I don't think they took my advice. It's sad to see each one of the 8 member family, ages 2 months to 50 years, with skin eruptions. Next time I go visit, I'll implore them to go to the local clinic to get antibiotic pills, and be careful about chicken eggs.

I wanted to write this missive - in hopes it may shed some light on an important issue.

Ken Albertsen
kenalberts214@gmail.com

Timor-Leste launches portal to combat misinformation on social media



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FACT CHECKING ABOUT US PRINCIPLES PARTNER CONTACT US

FACT CHECKING Fabricated Satire & Parody False Context Impostor Manipulated Misleading Inappropriate

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New Fact-Checking Website - <https://verifikafaktus.tl/>

DILI, December, 2025 (TATOLI) – The Press Council, the State Secretariat for Social Communication, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and the Fact-Checking Alliance Team in Timor-Leste have launched a new website aimed at combating false information circulating on social media.

According to the President of the Press Council, António Cesar Mali, the launch of the website <https://verifikafaktus.tl/> aims to combat disinformation and the spread of fake news in Timor-Leste. "We live in a digital age where information spreads rapidly, making it easier to access messages, opinions, and news. But we know that not everything is true; often false and manipulated information circulates," said the director.

António Cesar Mali explained that the Fact-Checking Alliance Team in Timor-Leste involves journalists, civil society, youth organisations, university students, and also all individuals who wish to fight against disinformation.

The leader reported that, in cooperation with UNESCO in Jakarta, fact-checking training was extended to journalists, members of associations, civil society, youth organisations, and academics from eight universities, with approximately 400 people completing the course, demonstrating a collective commitment to the integrity of information.

In turn, the Secretary of State for Social Communication, Expedito Dias Ximenes, stated that, in an era where information circulates faster than it can be verified, Artificial Intelligence (AI) can accelerate the production and distribution of content. However, he noted that AI also brings risks: "Disinformation spreads more rapidly. Deepfake videos, falsified audios and photographs, and automated texts can influence public opinion, destroy reputations, affect the democratic process, and threaten social stability," he said.

The official stated that the fact-checking team has the following functions: to ensure the accuracy of information and guarantee that the public receives verified content from reliable sources; to promote digital literacy, raising citizens' awareness to distinguish true news from false news and to become critical users; and to reinforce trust, as well as guarantee the credibility of social media and the legitimacy of institutions.

Journalist: Ivonia da Silva

Publisher: Isaura Lemos de Deus

Get more Timor-Leste news in English from TATOLI at <https://en.tatoli.tl/>

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SOLUTIONS TO PUZZLE ON PAGE 12

QUICK CROSSWORD



QUICK CRYPTIC CROSSWORD



'THE TIMES' QUIZ

Answers:

1. Ross Poldark — played by Aidan Turner in *Poldark*
2. Potato
3. Bob Marley and the Wailers
4. Quartz
5. Steven Berkoff
6. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
7. Battle of Verdun
8. A person's eye colour
9. Pintxos
10. The *Tintin* characters Thomson and Thompson
11. Sundance Film Festival
12. Marie Curie
13. Ronald Reagan
14. Chile
15. Grizabella
16. Winston Churchill
17. *Triple Elvis (Ferus Type)*
18. "Let's get ready to rumble!"
19. Golden Miller
20. Millau Viaduct

THE TIMES SUDOKU

4	1	2	5	7	8	3	9	6
5	3	9	6	2	1	8	4	7
7	6	8	3	4	9	1	5	2
1	5	4	2	8	6	7	3	9
8	9	7	4	5	3	6	2	1
3	2	6	1	9	7	5	8	4
2	4	1	8	6	5	9	7	3
6	7	5	9	3	2	4	1	8
9	8	3	7	1	4	2	6	5

"It's a Fact"

Before the 1980s, many airports used to make a lot of their money from full-service restaurants that were built inside them to attract locals (not travellers).

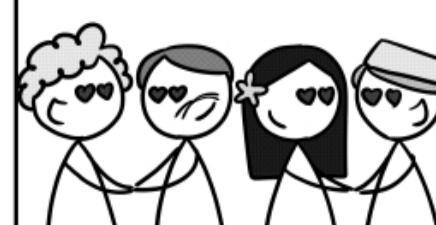
"Dad Joke"

There's a fine line between a numerator and a denominator. Only a fraction of people will get this joke.

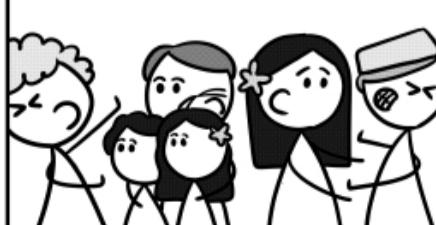
"3 Panels Plays"

SOUTH PACIFIC (in 3 Panels)

NELLIE FALLS IN LOVE WITH EMILE, AND LT. CABLE FALLS IN LOVE WITH LIAT.



NELLIE AND CABLE REALIZE THEY ARE PRODUCTS OF A RACIST, ANTI-MISCEGENATION SOCIETY, AND BREAK UP WITH EMILE AND LIAT.



LT. CABLE IS TRAGICALLY KILLED IN ACTION, AND NELLIE TRIES TO FIGURE OUT HOW NOT TO BE RACIST.



A Festive Celebration to Remember at Singapore International School Dili

The joyful spirit of the festive season came alive at Singapore International School (SIS) Dili during its Christmas Carnival held on 13 December 2025. The school campus was transformed into a vibrant hub of laughter, music, and family-friendly excitement, welcoming students, parents, and members of the wider community for a day filled with celebration and fun.

One of the main highlights of the carnival was the Christmas Karaoke Competition, which saw enthusiastic participation from children and delighted audiences throughout the day. The competition featured special appearances by Marvi, Mana Ika from Staccato Music School, and Filipino Creative Director Kuya Edgar, who brought energy, encouragement, and festive cheer to the stage. Young performers confidently showcased their talents by singing classic Christmas songs, creating memorable moments for families and spectators alike.

Beyond the stage, the Kids' Corner emerged as a major attraction and a favourite among younger visitors. The area buzzed with activity, offering a playground, kids' arcade games, and a variety of interactive activities that kept children engaged and entertained throughout the event. The lively atmosphere reflected SIS Dili's commitment to providing a joyful, safe, and enriching environment where children can learn, play, and grow.



The success of the Christmas Carnival was driven by the unwavering dedication, commitment, and teamwork of the teachers and staff of SIS Dili, along with the strong support and involvement of parents. Their collective efforts, cooperation, and enthusiasm played a vital role in planning and delivering a well-organised and memorable event for the entire school community.

The school also gratefully acknowledges the support of INDOMILK, which sponsored prizes for game and quiz winners and added to the excitement of the celebrations.

More than just a festive gathering, the Christmas Carnival also provided an opportunity for families to learn more about SIS Dili's educational offerings. Admissions are now open for children aged 3 to 12 years, and parents are encouraged to explore the school's international curriculum, nurturing learning environment, and holistic approach to education.

As the festive season comes to a close, the Christmas Carnival stands as a joyful reminder that SIS Dili is not only a place of academic excellence, but also a vibrant community where learning is enriched through creativity, celebration, and shared experiences. Families interested in joining the SIS Dili community are warmly invited to visit the school and be part of an exciting educational journey.

Credit: SIS Dili

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Unregulated tourism risks disrupting Timor-Leste's whale migration

By Robin Hicks



A diver swimming close to a female sperm whale pod.

- 2025 has been a big whale tourism season in Timor-Leste; operators were fully booked during the peak season of September to December.
- But increasingly aggressive practices fueled by competition between tour operators could mean “another Sri Lanka,” where whales already stressed by climate-induced food scarcity are disappearing from the area.
- East Timorese are mostly excluded from the sector, which is controlled by expats and foreign tour operators raking in thousands from “bucket listers” and social media influencers.
- Whale tourism in Timor-Leste needs regulation, enforcement and legal compliance to ensure sustainable, inclusive growth, experts say.

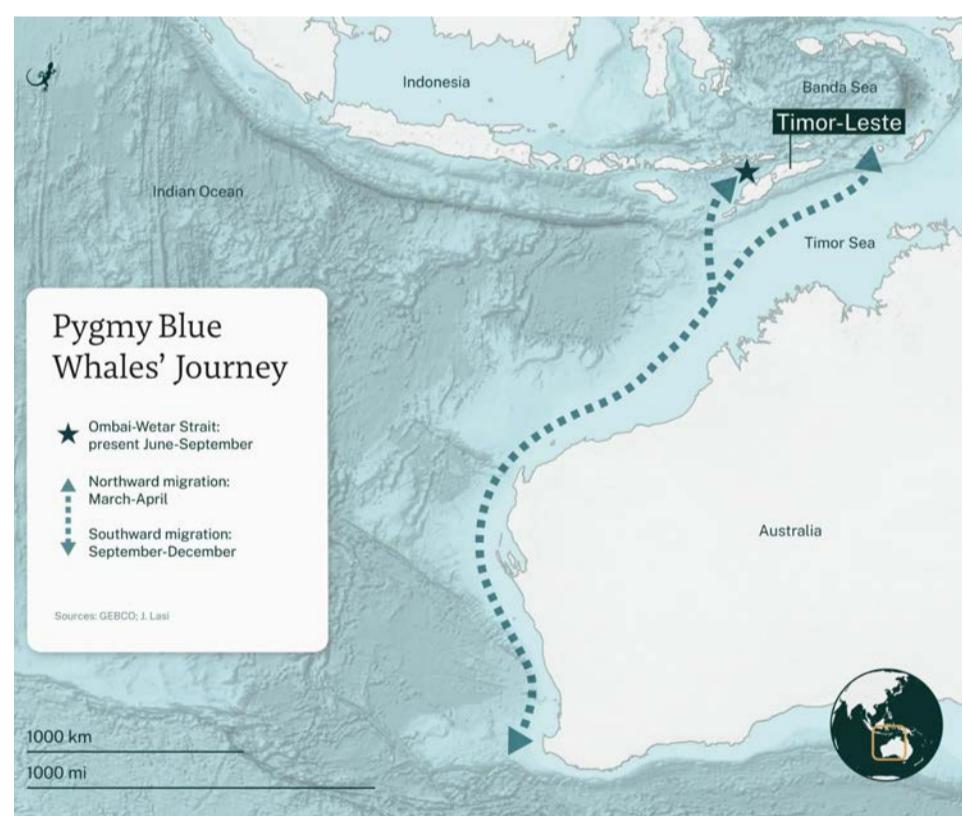
DILI, Timor-Leste — Whale tourism in Timor-Leste is booming. Tour operators report a healthy number of sightings and full bookings in the peak season of September to December, when hundreds of pygmy blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus brevicauda*) make the journey through the Ombai-Wetar Strait on their way south to western Australia.

Customers splurge \$5,000 for a week of swimming with the life version of the world’s largest animal in a country that has unmatched potential for whale watching, because of its deep, nutrient-rich waters close to the shore and relatively undisturbed marine environment.

“For me, the whales represent the health of the ecosystem — they’re the most visible sign of something much bigger happening below the surface,” local conservationist and photographer Jafet Potenzo Lopes tells Mongabay in an interview. “When a blue whale or sperm whale passes along the coast, it’s not just a sighting; it’s a reminder that this coastline is still functioning in a way that many places have lost.”

Timor-Leste’s marine mammal “superhighway,” traversed by migrating blue and sperm whales and resident pods of pilot whales, orcas and dolphins, attracts tourists from around the world. Operators are already fully booked for 2026 and 2027. “Even though [whale] encounters are never guaranteed, tourists will always try their luck,” says Rechelle Trasmonte, a Philippine national and dive organizer at Compass Diving, one of Timor-Leste’s six major whale tour operators.

This season, however, serious concerns about malpractice have emerged. In an open letter shared with Mongabay in November, British underwater photographer Ollie Clarke described what he witnessed while working alongside multiple operators — and said all were breaking well-established rules for responsible whale watching.



For instance, too many swimmers crowding the whale, too many boats chasing the same pod, swimmers repeatedly dropping in on top of the whale every time it surfaced to breathe, and no checking if a whale was traveling with a calf.

Clarke, based near Western Australia’s Ningaloo Reef — a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for strict, certified ecotours with whale sharks and humpback whales — says this kind of conduct stems largely from poor communication among increasingly competitive tour operators. Boats have been “aggressively converging” on the same whales, he says, even when drone footage from other operators could have shown other whales nearby and reduced pressure on the one pod.

Once one operator breaks the rules, others will follow — it's a race to the bottom, Clarke tells Mongabay. "This is a message to the operators — take some time before the season to train your skippers and start caring about this special wildlife which is making you money. And before you all start pointing fingers — everyone is doing it badly," he wrote in the letter.

The whale-watching industry in Timor-Leste is still young — less than 10 years old — and the country could be the best place in the world to encounter these animals ethically, Clarke says. But he warns the situation could get worse before it gets better, as more international tour operators set up shop to cash in on the tourism boom.

"Bad practice is driven by customer pressure for the perfect Instagram video," says Laura McGuire, a British scuba and free-diving instructor based on Atauro, the island that hosts a number of tour operators. Many guests — which include "bucket listers," underwater photographers, and "influencers" sometimes dressed in mermaid costumes and thong bikinis — feel entitled to see the whales after spending thousands of dollars, which puts pressure on operators to deliver, she says.

The impact of abusive whale watching

Australian national Robert Crean is the owner of Compass Diving, which has operated tours since 2019. He says his boats carry no more than six swimmers, but he has noticed other boats with up to 12. His boat skippers are highly experienced, and if they don't obey the rules, "I will send them home," he says. Crean acknowledges the need for better staff training, not only on whale-swimming protocol but on whale biology, conservation, and the likely impact of human intervention on migration patterns.

"If we do not police the rules then there will be no whale migration — and nothing to swim with," he tells Mongabay in an email.

That fear is shared by marine ecologist Karen Edyvane, a professor at Charles Darwin University in Australia, who has monitored whales in Timor-Leste waters since 2016. With each busier season, she says, the risk grows that Timor-Leste could follow Sri Lanka, where blue whale sightings have crashed off the southwest coast, partly due to unmanaged tourism pressure.

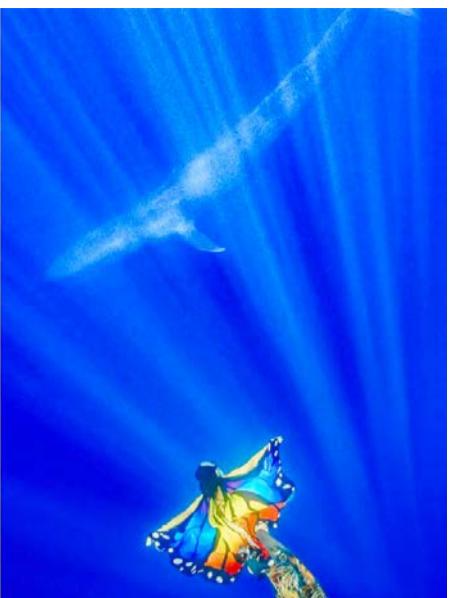
Edyvane has documented boats striking whales, and also regularly observed defensive behavior, particularly among sperm whales; a small population of fewer than 100 individuals annually migrates through Timor-Leste's waters. Excessive human interactions with boats and swimmers, she says, could not only disrupt mating, calving and nursing behavior but deprive mothers of vital rest between feeding their young.

For pygmy blue whales, the danger is losing energy from having to avoid boats and swimmers. These whales migrate 5,000 kilometers (3,100 miles) south from Indonesia's Banda Sea and are constantly on the move. In recent years, Edyvane has observed that many passing Timor-Leste's coast are emaciated — a likely consequence of ocean warming disrupting the cold-water upwellings that supply their food.

"You shouldn't be stopping any animal from feeding, mating or nursing, particularly when they are already struggling with the impacts of climate change," Edyvane tells Mongabay in an interview in Dili, the Timor-Leste capital.

No scientific studies yet exist on tourism impacts on Timor-Leste's migrating whales, largely due to a lack of funding. But Edyvane warns that whale tourism done badly risks damaging the resource it depends on, and also ongoing, land-based pygmy blue whale monitoring and research efforts. "Increasingly, we are seeing tour boats intruding into our research areas, where we are trying to record rarely observed, important natural behaviors, like courtship, mating, calving and nursing, without human disturbance," Edyvane says.

The least impactful whale-watching and whale research in Timor-Leste, she argues, is really best done from shore — and Timor-Leste, with its steep coastline, has some of the best land-based whale watching in the world.



Left: Underwater model and influencer Mouton Yangyang posing with a pod of sperm whales. Right: Influencer "Miss CoCo" dressed in a butterfly costume while freediving with a pygmy blue whale in Timor-Leste. Images from Instagram (Fair use).

The regulation gap

Timor-Leste's whale tourism industry direly needs regulation, experts say. A policy was drafted in 2018 but shelved after a change of government. A blue economy unit was created in 2023, and a national blue economy master plan released in September includes whale-watching rules, but these have yet to be enacted.

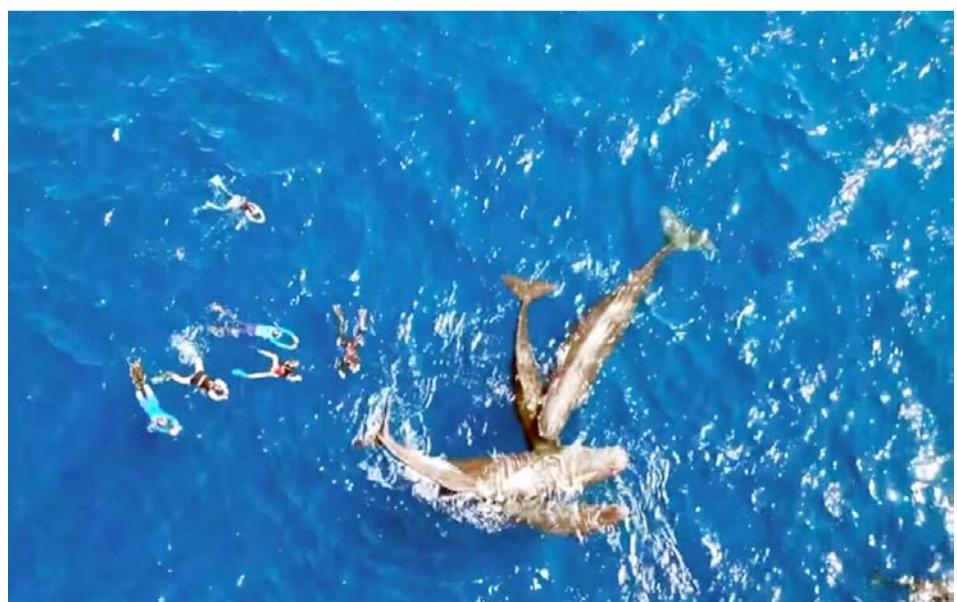
Fizzy Moslim, a Malaysian national and former whale tour guide turned consultant who has advised the government, says implementation has been slow because responsibility for whale tourism cuts across several ministries — environment, fisheries, transport and tourism — making coordination "complicated."

She notes that in a country still rebuilding after years of Indonesian occupation, whale tourism competes for attention with issues like illegal fishing and coastal erosion. She adds that heavy criticism from foreign "parachute know-it-alls," who leave in outrage after the season, has not made progress on regulation any easier.

But progress in rolling out regulations has also been hindered by a lack of technical expertise in government and its advisors, says Edyvane. "Implementing whale-watching reform is not just about talking with whale tour operators, underwater photographers and filmmakers — it needs advice from independent authorities and experts who understand implementing complex government regulations, licensing, accreditation and enforcement. Crucially, it needs advice from whale biologists."

She suggests the Timorese government should take up an offer of technical guidance offered by the International Whaling Commission and Australian experts, using whale-watching rules deployed in Western Australia's Ningaloo Reef as an example of best practice.

Operators themselves are pushing for reform. Several have jointly drafted a letter to the prime minister urging regulation. "There is still a lot we can do better," Sapharahn Juma, manager at Atauro Dive Resort, tells Mongabay in an email. "Every year we learn something new. A lot of training is needed, and penalties need to be in place for those who break the guidelines."



Swimmers get too close to a pod of sperm whales, which respond defensively by clumping together, a posture known as the marguerite formation. Image by Dive Aquatica.

'Extractive, neocolonial' ecotourism

Many Timorese say they feel alienated from the whale tourism industry: none of the major operators are locally owned, and the workforce is largely limited to boat skippers and scuba tank carriers.

McGuire describes the industry as having an "extractive, neocolonial" quality — a foreign-run business operating in Timorese waters with limited investment in local people.

Edyvane agrees, pointing to recurring issues with visa and tax compliance, an issue raised last year in a post by Timorese democracy nonprofit Fundasaun Mahein. Some foreign tour guides operate on tourist visas without work permits, and provide paid services in the country while being compensated overseas — income that's not declared or taxed locally.

"The consequence is significant economic leakage," says Lopes, who runs expeditions to see saltwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*).

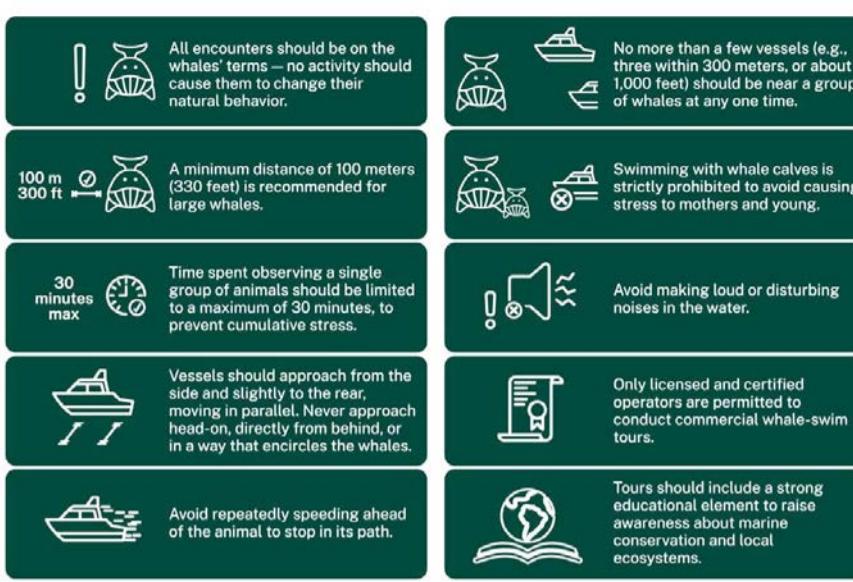
"For a developing country trying to build its sustainable tourism sector, this is harmful not only to the whales but to Timor-Leste's economy and its capacity to regulate the sector properly," Lopes says.

The combination of a regulation vacuum, pressure to deliver guaranteed in-water encounters, and the exclusion of Timorese has created an industry that is "operating far outside what most people would consider responsible or ethical whale tourism," he says.

Improving the sector will require more than tweaking guidelines. "If Timor-Leste wants sustainable whale tourism, then regulation, enforcement and legal compliance need to come before expansion," Lopes says. "Only after these foundations are in place can operators realistically claim to be offering ethical whale swimming experiences."

Source: <https://news.mongabay.com/2025/12/unregulated-tourism-risks-disrupting-timor-lestes-whale-migration/>

Guidelines for responsible whale watching



Robin Hicks



About:

Robin Hicks has 20 years' experience in journalism, writing about media, government, technology and sustainability. He has a particular interest in plastic pollution, palm oil, deep-sea mining and Southeast Asia's energy transition. Robin has a degree in zoology and spends his weekends rescuing snakes, birds, monkeys and lizards as a volunteer for Singapore animal welfare charity ACRES.

Read more by Robin at: <https://news.mongabay.com/by/robin-hicks/>

Giant Floating Production Unit visits Dili on its way from China to Australia

Did you spot it? Last month, the giant Scarborough Energy Project Floating Production Unit (FPU) could be seen just off the coast of Dili, drawing widespread attention due to its sheer size and unusual appearance.

The Scarborough Energy Project is a major offshore natural gas development operated by Woodside Energy, located off the north-west coast of Western Australia. The project involves the development of the Scarborough gas field, the installation of a large semi-submersible Floating Production Unit in deep water, and a subsea pipeline transporting gas to shore for processing.

The FPU is travelling by sea from China, where it was constructed, and made a planned layover in Dili on its way to Australian waters. During the FPU layover, there was a crew change, and the unit was replenished with supplies for its onward journey to Australia. While off Dili, the FPU was accompanied by a Boskalis offshore support vessel, responsible for towing, positioning and logistical support during long-distance ocean movements.

The FPU's appearance near Timor-Leste is not connected to any local offshore development and is not related to the recently announced Woodside Energy agreement with the Timor-Leste petroleum ministry to work together towards a potential LNG project in the country.

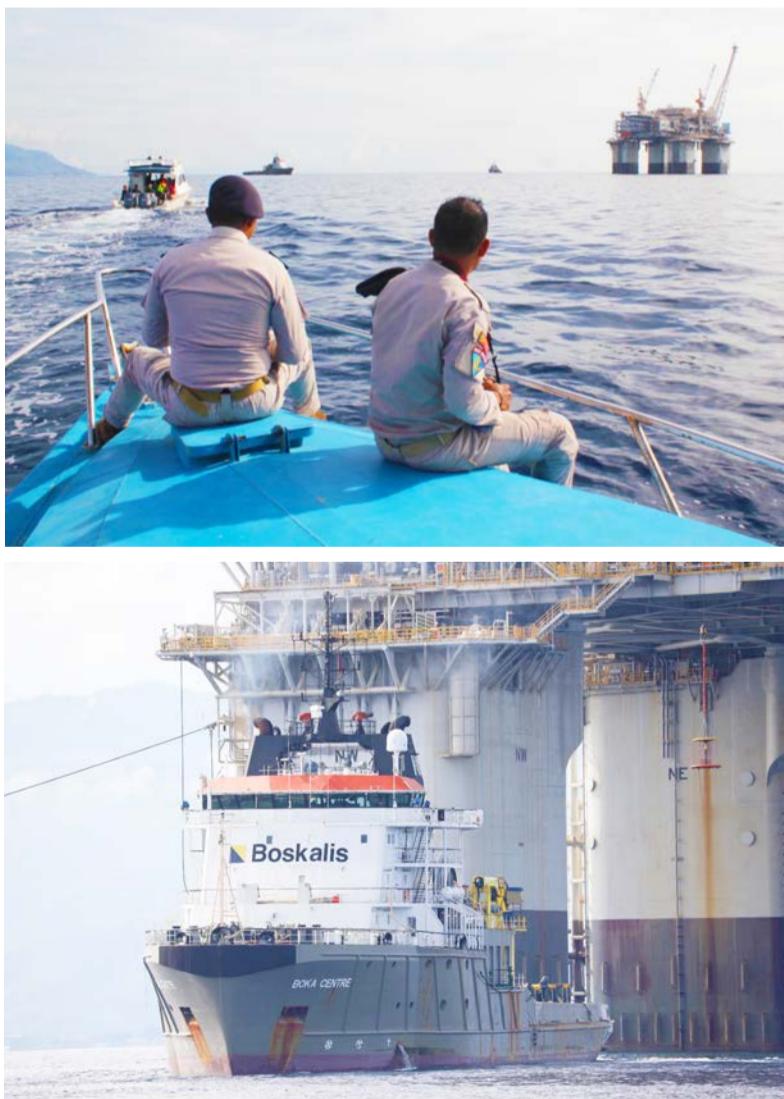


Photo Credit: PNTL

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Japanese Language Speech Contest

A Japanese language speech contest was recently held at Hotel Ramelau, organised by JICA volunteers teaching Japanese in Timor-Leste. 24 students participated.

The event provided an opportunity for local learners to speak Japanese in public, celebrate their progress, and strengthen ties with Japan.

The contest was made possible through cooperation with JICA, and Japanese language centres in Dili and other municipalities.

The Participants deliver short speeches in Japanese on themes such as culture, daily life, future aspirations, or Japan-Timor-Leste friendship. They were evaluated on pronunciation, grammar, content, and expressiveness.

After the evaluation, the judges announced the winners of the Japanese Language Speech Contest as follows.

Advanced Category: Ms. Olimpia Cruz Costa (Tsuneishi Shipbuilding Company)

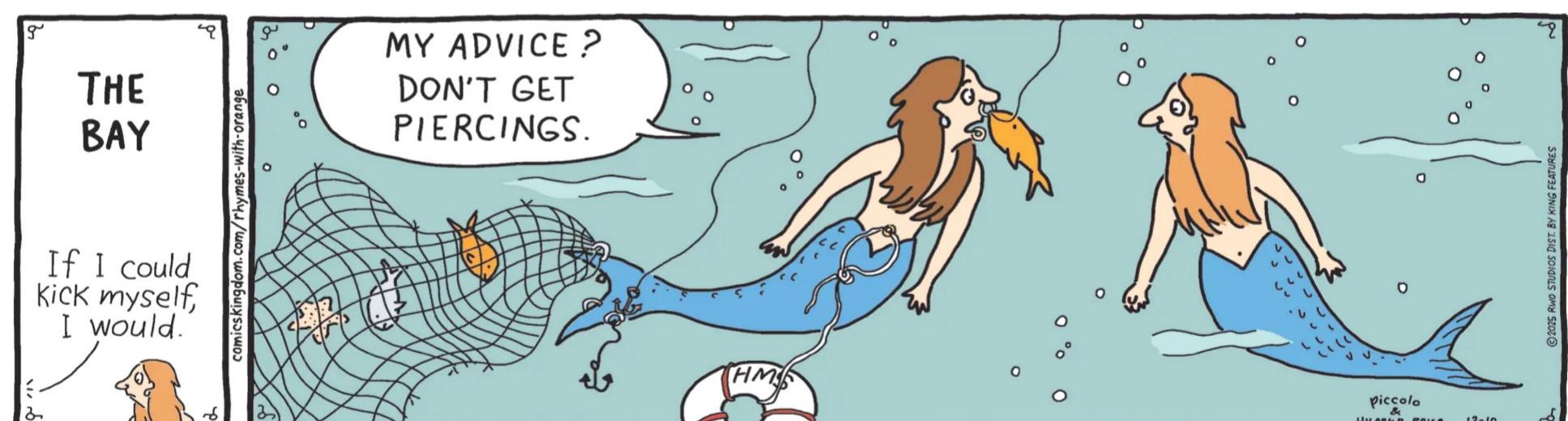
Beginner Category: Mr. Jaozinho Porto de Barros (the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Centre.

All participants received certificates or prizes in recognition of their efforts.

This experience may support their future opportunities, such as scholarships or employment. Additionally, the contest fosters mutual understanding, as many speeches reflect Timorese perspectives on Japan and hopes for continued cooperation.



Source: JICA Timor-Leste



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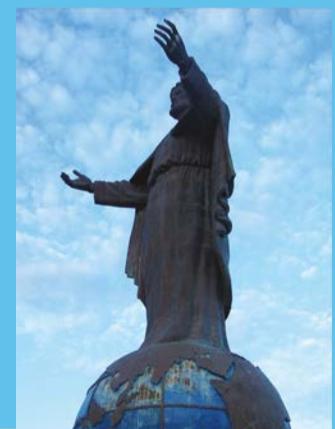


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From farm to classroom: Feeding children and supporting farmers in Timor-Leste

By Miklos Gaspar

It's a win-win recipe: schoolchildren eat a free, nutritious meal every day and local farmers gain reliable access to local markets.

In the mountainous municipality of Manufahi, in southern Timor-Leste, where healthy food is often beyond the budget of most households, the United Nations is helping to make sure the benefits of development are broad.

"Our students were not starving, but they were not getting a nutritious diet," said Domingos de Jesus, principal of the Cossamar primary school in the town of Same, where 500 students get a meal each school day. "Now they get more protein and vegetables and proportionally less carbohydrates."

On a full stomach, students are more alert and pay attention in class, said Caetano Marcelo, principal of the Betano Primary School on the country's southern coast. "This is very important for their learning," he added.



© WFP/Isabel Pereira Two girls eat a hot meal prepared at school in Timor-Leste.



© WFP/Isabel Pereira A school cook in Timor-Leste prepares food using local ingredients.

The Government has made school feeding a national priority, decentralising its management and funding to municipalities.

While this approach promotes local ownership and the inclusion of home-grown produce, challenges remain in diversifying diets and guaranteeing consistent access to locally grown foods.

To bridge these gaps, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) are working alongside national and local authorities to strengthen menus and supply chains, improve kitchen infrastructure, and train school staff on nutrition and hygiene, in support of the government's vision of linking nutrition, education and local economic development for long-term sustainability.

Stew and beans

On a recent Monday, the menu at the Same school consisted of deer stew, vegetables and brown rice, all served on stainless steel trays provided by the Ministry of Education with support from WFP.

WFP also advised authorities on creating balanced meal plans using local ingredients and is helping to build a modern kitchen on the school grounds.

In Betano, where the children on the same Monday enjoyed chicken satay skewers with spinach, accompanied by rice and beans, FAO provided kitchen equipment. WFP provided training on budget management, school menu preparation, and kitchen hygiene.

"The students eat everything, and that is great to see," said Imana Imaculada Fernandes, the head cook at the Same school. "The meal plans – developed on the advice of the government and WFP – include 75 per cent local produce."

Ms Fernandes and her team can spend 35 US cents per day per child and an additional 7 cents for other costs, such as fuel and labour. "That is 70 per cent more than we had before – and that translates into more nutritious food and improved hygiene".

Eat what you grow

The initiative also brings steady income to local farmers. Andre Pereira de Sousa and his neighbours on the outskirts of Betano have seen stable demand for their tomatoes, watermelon, sweet potatoes and bananas.

"The biggest advantage is that we no longer spend time and use fuel going to the market," he said. "We can use that time to improve our farms and spend more time with our families." Stable demand has also reduced food waste and encouraged farmers to increase production.

The Betano farmers supplying the schools were among the 9,000 households who have benefitted from an FAO programme on conservation agriculture.

As a result, they have diversified into higher value crops and now use compost rather than fertilizer, reducing costs and the environmental impact of their farms. The farmers' group also received small mills to produce flour and prepare snacks for sale, along with a trailer to transport their produce.

A united approach

The coordinated work of FAO and WFP exemplifies an approach increasingly adopted by the United Nations, where agencies work in complementary ways to support the government.

"This is a great example when one plus one equals more than two, re-enforcing benefits for greater sustainability of projects," said Funmi Balogun Alexander, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Timor-Leste. "The new Cooperation Framework between Timor-Leste and the UN is built around such joint approaches."

Source: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/1166577>

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