

East Timor Trip in July 2005

by *Louise Morgan*

It was great to arrive in Dili with Chris Nobel and be met by both my daughters, Kathryn and Julia. Julia seemed to have settled very quickly into Kathryn's life style there and had made many friends of her own. The abundance of small children and babies in East Timor (currently the highest birth rate in the world) was wonderful for Julia who constantly attracted a mob of giggling, wriggling children who loved the attention she lavished upon them.

Our time at the 'Uma Turismo' in Remexio was a very happy time, from dawn to dusk we were visited by dozens of children eager to hang out, play and dance with Julia. Wherever we went in the village this little band of laughing, singing, rowdy friends followed us.

The people of Remexio seemed happy to see us, greeting us with beautiful Timorese coffee and news of the community in general, who has married, who has had another baby...or three, who has moved to another village etc. The best news was that two Remexio students had been selected, after examinations, to study Medicine in Cuba for the next 6-7 years. Even better news is that one of them is a girl! The teachers are particularly thrilled about this achievement as it reflects well on their schooling in Remexio.

On my previous visits I noted many small productive kitchen gardens, now there are expansive highly organized market gardens with many people working together. Remexio has good soil, a cooler climate and plenty of water, though its distribution is tediously slow and labour intensive. Whilst visiting Father Orlando at the Don Bosco College near Dili, I was shown around his permaculture garden. Despite the hot, dry location Father Orlando was growing an amazing variety of fruit and vegetables, was composting, and producing methane gas from his fat pigs, which was piped across the garden to the outdoor kitchen and used on a gas ring burner. As I nibbled my way around the garden on grapes, strawberries, apples, figs, citrus and the usual tropical fruits, we discussed the virtues of Remexio and it's near perfect growing conditions for many fruit and vegetables not yet grown there. I arranged another visit to Father Orlando bringing Father Armindo and Carlitto from Remexio to see these wonders for themselves.

Father Orlando is a teacher and a sustainability enthusiast and never tires of demonstrating what he strongly believes will benefit all communities in East Timor. He has an enormous collection of DVDs and websites, some of which he has created himself. He has produced many books and pamphlets promoting good nutrition, health, herbal remedies from available plants, and sustainable agricultural practices. The Remexio visitors were astounded at the variety of plants in the garden and at the inventiveness of Father Orlando.

Agriculturalists are attempting to promote the growing of a more varied selection of fruit and vegetables. The fabulous, lush gardens of Remexio are really only growing a limited variety of vegetables. Pumpkins, onions and garlic, bok choy, the frilly edged lettuce, cabbage, a spicy Asian green vegetable, and a spinach like vegetable. It is reassuring that the people are eating these vegetables as well as selling them in local markets and in Dili, they certainly look healthier and happier in 2005.

I am hoping the visit to Father Orlando's garden will lead to the introduction of new plantings. Citrus fruits have been mentioned as a possible orchard product and Father Orlando can assist with advice and techniques for grafting and pruning, and planting patterns.

Development of any kind is slow in East Timor, mostly I think this is due to lack of money and difficulty with communications. Chris and I are hoping that some of the connections we facilitated will lead to some positive developments for the people of Remexio. I sure would love to feast on figs next time I'm in Remexio!