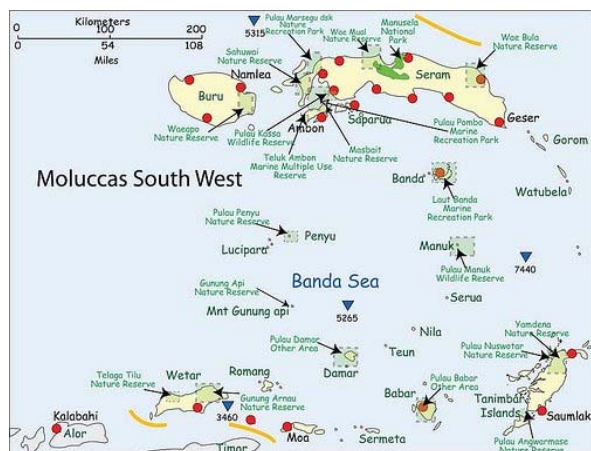


YF1AR/8 IOTA TOUR

Budi Santoso

This crazy idea was meant to be a tribute to my beloved motherland Indonesia. The chosen destination was The Mollucas (Maluku) Islands which is a haven for IOTAs. Specifically I chose Southwestern Mollucas because this area is relatively isolated with many most wanted IOTAs. The original idea was to activate all 10 IOTAs in Mollucas in four months. I activated 4 IOTAs during this first stage of my tour in two months. Seven islands saw first activation(*) and I visited five of the small outer most islands in Indonesia (#) bordering Timor Leste. The tour was interrupted partly because of family obligation, my second son's wedding, and also religious obligation, Umrah pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. In addition, my budget for the expedition has unexpectedly tripled due to high costs of just about everything in these remote places. From Jakarta via Surabaya I arrived in Ambon. I was met by YD8VNZ and stayed near the seaport. That evening we had a gathering with local amateurs and had a nice eyeball QSO with the President of Local ORARI YC8VLZ. After an overnight stay in Ambon, I boarded the light aircraft Aviastar to Kisar Island OC272 to begin my IOTA tour.



KISAR OC-272 15-20 October 2015

While in Ambon, I made an acquaintance with an anthropologist from Patimura University in Ambon who was in the same flight to Kisar. After one hour flying time, we arrived in Kisar and I was allowed to use his vehicle during my stay in Kisar. I immediately drove to the main port Nama which is located on the western part of the island and was the QTH for YF1AR/8 back in 2013 when I activated Kisar for the first time as OC-272. However, the area was being renovated and there was a lot of construction. I ended up QRV from the

ferry seaport which is next to the main port. After obtaining a permit to operate from the harbormaster, Mr Jemmy, I installed my vertical antenna on top of the water tower and my radio was set up in the waiting area for ferry passengers. I was only able to QRV for 20 hours a day since between 12 noon – 5pm local time there is no electricity. I used this time to rest. Cell signal was only available near the port only for voice and SMS but no data. I got the unreliable ferry schedule to Leti, Damar and Liran Islands. After consulting with local residents, I decided to go to Arwala on Wetar Island using wooden boat. I was informed ahead of time that electricity will be available for 24 hours using battery and solar cells.



Wetar*# Island OC-272 21-28 October 2015

The trip to Wetar took place in the middle of the night around 22 local time. I was wrongly informed that the trip would only take 2-3 hours. I turned out that the dangerous journey took 6 hours passing Strait of Kisar with high waves, and clearly the boat was substandard for safety reason. At one point the boat almost capsized from the high waves and we all screamed. I was the only one who yelled out Allahu Akbar, everyone else on the boat called out on Jesus (Editor's note: even though the majority of Indonesian is Muslim, this part of the country namely Southwest Mollucas, is mostly Christian). Arriving in Arwala which has no port, we had to take a dinghy (enough only for two) to land. I waited for my ride and witnessed a beautiful sunrise on a pristine beach with white sands. What an unforgettable sight. After I arrived at my host family, I found out that the battery and solar cell can only be used for two hours a day. I was utterly disappointed but what could I do, I was not about to swim back to Kisar and with no cell reception, I was cut off from the rest of the world.

I managed to find a location for my activity right by the beach. My host was very gracious and provided me with lodging, food, and generator. I made new friends with the local residents all of whom were very hospitable.

Liran*# Island OC-272 Oct 30- Nov 6, 2015

I continued on to Liran aboard Sabuk Nusantara 48 with final destination Kupang in Timor Island. Aboard the ship, I met the harbormaster at Liran, Mr. Iyus. During the 10 hour journey, we made a transit at Ilwaki the administrative center for Wetar. In Liran I stayed at the harbormaster's rental residence because he is a native of Ilwaki. I visited the lighthouse at Manoha to get cell signal from Timor Leste. There was no signal from Indonesian cell provider. I was able to fix the tuner and operated from Liran without much difficulty.

Leti*# Island OC-246 Nov 8-Nov 12, 2015

The next destination was to Leti Island aboard Sabuk Nusantara 49 via Kisar and Damar islands. The 12 hour trip was uneventful and I immediately visited the harbormaster office in Tomra and met Mr. Boy. I installed the antenna on top of the lighthouse at approximately 20 meter above ground. My operating position was right on the beach with 12 hour of electricity between 1800- 0600 local time. I had good cell signal with SMS but no internet from Leti. I paid a visit to the village head in Tomra.



Sermata# Island OC-246 Nov 14-Nov18, 2015

I left for another 12 hour trip this time to Sermata Island with transit on Moa and Lakor Islands. My host in Sermata was the former village head Mr. Ais and my operating position again is right on the beach. I met some legislative member from South West Moluccas MR. Astunai who is a native of Sermata Island and gave his full support of my activity. He donated fuel for the generator. Electricity was available using generator from 1700-0100 local time. Due to the limited supply of fuel and the high price locally, my operation was somewhat

sporadic. During my off air time, I built a two wheeled wooden car. No cell signal for voice or SMS, let alone internet.

Luang* Island OC-246 Nov 19-Nov 24, 2015

I missed the scheduled ferry to Luang due to misinformation. The ferry had left at dawn and there I was waiting for the ferry at noon. I ended up taking a charter boat that took 3 hours. The first night I stayed at the multipurpose building near the beach. The following night I moved to the house of the village head, further inland. Due to limited electricity 1700-0500 local time, my radio activity was sparse. No cell reception for voice, SMS or internet here. My host was very kind and had prepared my room for my radio activity.

Babar OC-271 Nov 25-Nov 28, 2015

The journey to Babar Island aboard Sabuk Nusantara 49 took 12 hours. En route to the ship I met Mr. Raymon again and I was offered to stay with his grandmother in Babar Island. The house was in the middle of the town. I visited the village head and also reported my activity to the local police. The village head and the local police chief stopped by and observed my radio activity. My plan to go to Wetang Island was cancelled due to lack of information regarding ferry schedule. Electricity was available between 1700 – 0600 local time. Cell signal was adequate for voice and SMS and there was limited internet availability.

Masela*# Island OC-271 Dec 1- Dec 3, 2015

I arrived in Masela after a 12 hour voyage aboard KM Masela. On the ship I met Mr. Musa the local village head at Dawelor and School Principal Mr. Agus. Upon arrival, Mr. Agus took me to the village head in Uiwily who hosted my stay. My radio was set up in the living room. I spent some time at the beach and watched local children enjoyed the waves. Electricity was available with generator between 1700-0100 and again 0700-0900.



Banda Besar* Island OC-157 Dec 8-Dec 10, 2015

From Babar I continued my journey to Yamdena Island aboard a cargo ship which took 14 hours. While in Saumlaki I spend two days three nights on the cargo ship while waiting for the next ship going to Banda Neira. The long trip was uneventful and I arrived in Banda Neira safely. Since this island has been activated before, I decided to go to Banda Besar a new island for Nusantara Award. The trip took 30 minutes and I met the village head. My host was Mr. Jaman and the operating position was again...you guessed it...right at the beach. Electricity was available between 1700-0800. A strong earthquake hit the area while I was there. Good cell reception for voice, SMS, and internet. I went sightseeing to Fort Belgica, a 17th century Dutch fort in the southwestern part of Banda Neira.



Banda Api* Island OC-157 Dec 10 2015

Another new island for Nusantara Award, this island is only 15 minutes away from Banda Neira using a small boat. My host was Mr. Amir and I spent only one night here and operated for only about 10 hours because the next day at dawn I had to leave for Ambon. I arrived in Ambon in the wee hours and rode a bus to the airport. I took the first flight out to Jakarta at 0700 local time and arrived in the afternoon safely. My lovely wife and grandchildren waited for me anxiously Soekarno-Hatta Airport. At last, home sweet home.

(*) New islands for Nusantara Award (Work All Indonesian Islands)

(#) Small outermost islands bordering Timor Leste (4W)

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I want to thank GDXF, Cliperton DX, and personal donors. Thank you to Steve W2FB my editor and Bob N200 my QSL manager. This trip was one of the longest IOTA expedition and certainly is the longest so far in Indonesia. Thank you for support and for calling me.



Postscript:

This IOTA tour has changed me in many ways but most of all it has transformed me to become more appreciative of my life in Java. I learned much wisdom during this long and costly trip. These life lessons are priceless. I travelled many kilometers, with its ebb and flow. I was away from my family; propagation was not that great, limited electricity, and unfamiliar surroundings. I ate turtle meat, fish, and instant noodles. I cried silently one night, I missed my family. I witnessed an earthquake while in Banda, a small scale tsunami but nevertheless quite scary. I was also interrogated while in Luang Island. Being an outsider and of a different faith, they thought I belonged to ISIS and was communicating to them via CW. There were moments of solitude but the radio was always there. The calming ocean waves greeted me every morning and treated me to countless beautiful sunrises. Damn, I love YB land, my home land, the largest archipelago in the world.

