

Mother Nature

By Sheila Johnson

Although I am not a good swimmer, I really enjoy boat and canoe rides. While on one of my most memorable and adventurous travel excursions, I found myself sitting in a long, narrow canoe along with five other people, including two very personable Malaysian guides. The female guide, Alya, sat at the hull of the boat holding a woven basket containing several bottles of drinking water, while our male guide, Akmal, confidently stood at the helm gingerly giving us instructions on the proper way to sit in the boat as we journeyed through the beautiful rain forest where the enormous root systems of the banyan and ficus trees lined the inlet. Akmal pointed out where the life jackets were located in the canoe and how to safely put them on in case of an emergency. He also gently advised us to put on the bright yellow raincoats that could be found in the small cabinets underneath our seats. After only two of us obliged, our friendly guide changed his words from mild advice to a solid directive. Insisting that it was too hot and humid for a raincoat, two of my friends ignored his plea. Besides, even though I followed Akmal's advice, the bright, buttery sun propped up against the clear, blue Asian sky, informed me that rain was the last thing any of us had to worry about.

My euphoria began the moment our guides began to gently paddle us down the river. The water moved with exceptional rhythm, the greens were so dark they appeared to be navy blue, the sound of the handbills trying to seduce their prey was musical, and Alya's soft humming was soothing.

Akmal was an excellent guide; he explained the various trees that comprised the root system, the many sounds of the forest, the importance of the river to the Malaysian people, the many different fruit trees that we saw along the way, and the SNAKES that we would soon see hanging from the trees as the boat veered to the right and entered into a very dark lagoon.

Within moments heavy black clouds darkened the sky, the sweet sounds of the rain forest ceased (including Alya's), spindles of skinny, green and black striped snakes dangled from the low hanging branches, and a deluge of water gave us each the shower of a life-time! It seemed as though the rain fell forever. The canoe began to fill up with water, our hearts began to beat faster and faster, and you could hear my breath above the thunder! For what seemed like a lifetime, we endured a very intense storm that was typical for that time of the day and year. As Alya pulled a stopper that quickly emptied our vessel of the rising water, she gently assured us that we were safe and snakes don't eat people—they simply wanted to take advantage of the warm shower! Within ten minutes, Akmal and Alya had calmly rowed us back to the dock where we began our adventure! Some dry; others wet; all relieved. That day, Mother Nature gave us a new understanding of "taking a long, hot shower"!