

# In search of the bigger picture

*Bjorn Vaughn talks about Borneo Productions International (BPI), the film production company which has been set up in Kalimantan by Bjorn, his brother Pierce, Immanuel Bryson-Haynes and Hamid da Silva...*

My brother Pierce and I had talked about working together one day. We've always shared similar interests in things like music, graphics and film. I'd spent several years travelling, working as a photographer and writing for photography magazines. Pierce had been working in television in Berlin, learning about film production, editing and camera.

One summer morning, walking along the seafront in Brighton in the south of the UK, I called my brother Pierce and said that we ought to start working together soon; that this was our time; now or never – probably the last thing he wanted to hear at five in the morning.

A couple of months later we flew to Bangkok, slowly making our way to the Subud congress in Christchurch, New Zealand. We travelled around Asia with our new camera and soon responded to an invitation to come to Central Kalimantan, where Gaye Thavisin and Lorna Dowson-Collins were running a riverboat project for which they were looking to make a promotional film. We discovered they were not the only ones wanting our film services.

Within three weeks, we had enough footage to make a film for the riverboat, the Rungan Sari Meeting Centre & Resort and the BCU School in Rungan Sari. Pierce edited the footage in time for the congress in Christchurch. We created a buzz around our films, appealing, in particular, to Hamid da Silva who owns the resort in Rungan Sari.

Pierce and I had no plans for after congress. All we knew was that we enjoyed working together. We had a few meetings with Hamid in which we talked about

creating a film production company in Indonesia. We invited Immanuel Bryson-Haynes to be part of our team. Immanuel had already spent the past year volunteering in Central Kalimantan and was experienced in setting up businesses in different parts of the world.

The three of us returned to Jakarta where we started the process of setting up a company. We received a lot of help from Hamid and his team at Altar. Kohar Sillem

provided us with a home away from home. Pak Mansur and Ibu Utami Geiger took us in like family. People were very kind, supportive and patient with us.

In these early days we made a promotional video for Roderick des Tombe's Tiger Island, an eco resort located in the Thousand Islands only an hour and a half by speed boat from Jakarta. Relaxing in these tropical waters, snorkelling with sting rays, eating good food and watching beautiful sunsets from our bungalows, I really understood why I was in Indonesia.



*Borneo International Productions team. Bjorn Vaughn, Pierce Vaughn and Immanuel Bryson-Haynes on Komodo Island*

## Moving to Kalimantan

Once we had completed some of the more crucial paperwork in Jakarta, we moved with our equipment to Kalimantan, basing our offices within the Rungan Sari Resort. We continued to update the resort film and eventually started documenting Hamid's activities in oil exploration – an opportunity to get a first-hand impression of this very complex issue.

*Probably the last thing he wanted to hear at five in the morning*

We did a project for Care International, accompanying two young academics from Holland who had

come to Central Kalimantan to learn about the circumstances of people faced with poverty, erratic weather patterns and natural disasters, such as the forest fires which break out in Kalimantan.

What impressed me about the Care project was the very sensitive and respectful way these people went about their work. They seemed good at listening to the communities they were dealing with. That was encouraging to see.

We went on to document the work of YUM – a foundation which co-ordinates Subud welfare projects throughout Indonesia – in the area around Rungan ▶

Sari, which also took us into the lives of local communities.

Every project is for a different client and takes you into an entirely different world of people, values and beliefs.

Every client shows you a unique world. This is something I really enjoy about our work.

### The Music Video

It was right here in the backyards of Rungan Sari that we made the music video for a song by Henrih Horthy about the pollution caused by plastic bags. We spent three intense days shooting Henrih and his Band, Ozone, backed by students of the BCU school who contributed as actors, extras and assistants. This involved a lot of coordination work and was, logistically speaking, our biggest production to date.

When we showed the film during Monday morning assembly at the Bina Cita Utama school, the kids laughed, cheered, clapped, screamed in disbelief... they were so happy to see what they had contributed towards – to be able to say to their friends, “Look! I’m in a music video on YouTube!”... it was very satisfying to see.

There was something very complete about this project. Having worked as a team, involving the artists, students, parents, teachers, and of course ourselves as filmmakers, it felt as though we had done something the right way. Everyone had performed to the best of their ability. The students were rewarded with small allowances, T-shirts and the pride of having been involved in something great. I was rewarded with this sense of “mission accomplished” – a tingling sensation which I felt throughout my body.

### The Corporate World

Next, we did a small project for a Singapore-based marketing company representing Blackberry in Jakarta. Here, in the corporate world, we found that people were just as helpful, decent and fun to work with as in the other projects I have been describing.

Our most recent work (January 2011) took us to Flores

*The kids laughed, cheered, clapped, screamed in disbelief*

and Komodo where we made a promotional film for The Jayakarta Suites Flores-Komodo, which is part of a chain of sixteen hotels and dive resorts around Indonesia. Immanuel had secured this deal at a tourism conference in Singapore.

Once again we were going into a corporate environment, so different in many ways from Care or YUM, but it turned out these people could not have been more hospitable, helpful and fun to work with – from the general manager right through to the people who helped carry our equipment. You just had to think of something and they’d be right there. I called them the Jedi hotel staff.

Flores and Komodo are part of the Lesser Sunda Islands in the southern Maritime Southeast Asia. The moment I got off the plane I felt like I was in a land before time. Sitting in a speed boat watching the island scenery pass by, your mind begins to wander and it’s almost like you



*Caci Warrior Dance on the island of Flores*



*Komodo dragon*

wouldn’t be surprised to see a Brachiosaurus stick his head over the tree line, or a T-Rex chasing down the hillside.

There is a phenomenon called “gigantism” here. Many species grow to a large size because there are no natural predators. Most famous is the Komodo Dragon, of course, but Flores also has the largest rat – the size of a small dog maybe?

Komodo National Park has some of the best diving in the world. The sea is full of fish and coral, there are magnificent creatures like sharks, sea turtles and manta rays. I loved diving with the manta rays. They would appear out of the blue, sometimes swimming straight ▶

*You're faced with a three billion year old predator that has a bite known to kill buffalo*

at the camera and then drift away and disappear off into the abyss. There's nothing quite like it.

### **The Dragons**

And then there's nothing quite like the Komodo Dragons, either. We arrived on Komodo Island and the ranger explained he would not be able to guarantee a Komodo Dragon due to the rainy season. About a hundred meters into the trek, however, the ranger alerted us to a 3 meter long Komodo blocking the path ahead.

Almost immediately the dragon began to charge. The ranger instructed us to move back slowly. Almost the entire crew (we were about a dozen in total) ran back screaming. The ranger attempted to contain the situation

because we got a second chance only 15 minutes later – involving the same angry Komodo, who had managed to track us down, and his slightly mellower twin brother.

Needless to say it was an exciting experience. We got the footage we were looking for and also experimented with our small camera crane, which, thanks to our porters, who were so kind as to lug it around Komodo Island for us, resulted in some beautiful landscape imagery.

### **The Future**

We're back in Kalimantan now and have just completed editing the promotional video for the Jayakarta Suites Komodo-Flores, involving the hotel facilities, underwater footage, the dragons and also the vigorous dances and battles of Flores's Caci people.

In the future I would like to film more out in nature. There's nothing quite like rising before dawn, wading through swampy forests infested with mosquitoes, snakes and hairy caterpillars, in search of gibbons and orang-utans. To hear the hooting gibbons in the middle of the jungle at 4 am, watching their silhouettes swing from tree to tree with the moon in the backdrop. One time I held my lens within a few meters of a wild male orang-utan ripping apart an old branch in which he had found a nest of termites – a true "Gorillas in the Mist" moment.

Our productions are getting bigger, we need more equipment, we need more staff. What I am learning, however, is how bigger projects don't have to mean bigger

headaches. It all boils down to working with the right people, good communication and a little patience.

with a stick and was pushed flat onto his arse. That's when I knew I wasn't going to film it.

I mean, you're faced with a three billion year old predator that has a bite known to kill buffalo and even humans occasionally. It's hard to say what went through my mind in that moment. A total reality check. And of course, I totally regret not getting this footage.

Fortunately, the girls shrieking was what alerted the other rangers back at camp to come help. All of them with sticks. The whole thing felt like the movie set to "Willow".

There must have been something in the air that day

Where are we going with all this? Well, we are kind of making it up as we go along. I dare say we have diverged a little from our original business concept. But that's what happens when you learn from experience. So far we have been practicing "listening to the market", providing services for those in need of film. However, this year we hope to do more of our own creative work inspired by the rich culture and wilderness of Borneo.

What's the bigger picture, you ask? Three syllables: *Ka-li-wood.*



*Manta ray in the sea off Flores*