

# Jogja: Savoring the Sights (and Smell!) Of Jalan Malioboro

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Jalan Malioboro is the heartbeat and living soul of Jogjakarta that I've read so much about and could not wait to see. My first view of the great street came after dealing with a twelve-hour ordeal on the train from Jakarta the night before and arriving in Jogja's



*Stasiun Tugu* in the early hours of one particular Monday morning. I was pleased to learn that Jalan Malioboro was a mere 5 minutes away from the train station. I couldn't help but notice that life in Jogja felt more relaxed and

slower, not as hustling-and-bustling like in Jakarta where people seemed like they were always rushing to get somewhere. Perhaps it was the presence of a large community of students (who make up 10% of the total population of university-town Jogja) and *warga lansia* (*warga lanjut usia* or elderly folk) that helped contribute to this calm city atmosphere. Or perhaps because it was just still 8 o'clock in the morning...!

As my friends and I walked away from the train station and onto Jalan Malioboro, I remember seeing dozens of men slowly peddling their *becaks* near the station and street sellers just setting up their stalls along the sidewalks to start business for the day. Like myself, Jogja City was just opening its sleepy eyes...

## Checking into our Cheap Hotel

Despite being exhausted from our what-seemed-like-forever train ride, we were all perky and chatty, perhaps all that clean morning Jogja air in our lungs was getting to our heads...! Our next plan of action was to find an affordable hotel in which we plan to stay for the next 5 days. We started to head for the first hotel we saw on Jalan Sosrowijayan, a road just off of Jalan Malioboro and a few blocks away from the train station. Seedy-looking place it was but at this point even run-down hotels looked warm and welcoming! We just wanted to quickly get rooms where we could all shower, change, rest and shed all that 12-hour train ride experience.

Not wanting to be fussy, we checked into the hotel immediately. We agreed to the rate of Rp.50.000 (RM21 or USD\$6) a night in a non-air-conditioning room with occupancy for two; there were six of us so we swept up three rooms. One friend had to surrender her Ka-Te-Pe (the Indonesian IC or ID card) to the hotel authority upon checking in.



This was so-called insurance to the hotel in case we all decided to up and leave the hotel without paying; the KTP would at least give some clue to the hotel as to where to find us if we were stupid enough to pull such a stunt. *Dah lah murah, KTP pula diambil.* The KTP is returned upon successful payment, of course.

Anyway, the rooms were ok *lah*, bearable if you're planning to do lots of touring and only need the room to just sleep at night and shower. But don't expect room service if you're paying such a low daily rate!

I later found out that having air-conditioning in our hotel room was not necessary as the bathing water is extremely cool, being that Jogja is situated near the mountainside; the night air is pleasant as well. However, having said that, the sunrays in Jogja are more penetrating than they are in Jakarta (or so the locals tell me *lah*); a bit ironic considering that Jogja climate doesn't feel immediately hot. Jogja sun will slowly burn your skin and before you know it you're redder than a boiled lobster. Take caution if you burn easily and put some sun block on while walking around Jogja. In general however I enjoyed the climate atmosphere in Jogja.

### **Beware of the Horses...!**



Jalan Malioboro is basically a large one-way street divided into three smaller ones. If you're facing towards the flow of traffic, the two left lanes are

reserved for motored vehicles such as cars, motorcycles and buses. The remaining lane on the right is used by non-motored transportations such as *becaks* (trishaws or pedicabs, or just plain *beca* - without the 'k' - in Malaysia) and horse wagons called *andhongs* (in Jakarta, *andhong* is sometimes called *delman*). The *andhongs* explain the inevitable presence of mild horse dung odor lingering in the breezy air.

If you're a pedestrian, you have the choice of walking on the sidewalks of either sides of Jalan Malioboro where the admin offices, shops and stalls are located, or you can choose to walk on the *becak* and *andhong* road. Choosing the latter option can be somewhat cumbersome as you have to occasionally make way for oncoming *andhongs* and bear the accompanying horse waste smell.

I somewhat developed this fear of being trampled on by an *andhong* from the back every time I heard the *clinkety-clank* of the horse's hooves on the road and would scurry out of the horse's way before I became pedestrian pancake.

### ***Abang-abang Becak***

While madly driven orange *bajajs* zigzag through Jakartan streets, Jogjakarta has manually-peddled *becaks* slowly roaming the city carrying passengers. The constant callings of *abang-abang becak* (*becak* peddlers) who try and lure you into taking a ride in their trishaws by offering cheap rates also pose a challenge in your quest to walk down Jalan Malioboro peacefully. Assuming you're a girl, they'll call you

*Mbak* (sister in Javanese) or *Mas* if you're a guy (brother). Of course the whole calling convention changes if you don't look remotely Indonesian - broken English heavily-laced with Javanese accent, I would expect. This is how the typical *abang becak* would call out:



So, what's a *bakpia* or a *kraton* you ask?

Well, the *Kraton* (the Javanese palace) and Water Castle (or *Taman Sari*) are just some of the nearby tourist attractions located on the end of Jalan Malioboro. These *abang becaks* often mentioned these places in their *becak* advertising announcements in hopes of attracting a customer.

*Bakpia Patok* is another commonly heard phrase these *mas-mas* would use in getting tourists to ride their *becaks*. *Bakpia* is this delicacy of Chinese origin; a type of cookie I guess would be the best way to describe it, with sweet green bean filling. Patok is the name of the district in which the best-tasting *bakpias* are sold. If you're interested in sampling the best *bakpia* in town, then to Patok you must go. Originally I thought these *abang-abang becak* were offering the *bakpia patoks* as sort of an "in-flight dessert" thing while you ride their *becak*!

No matter how many *becak* rides were offered to us, we refused to take up any because we were sure the price of the *becak* ride was going to cost more than what was vocally advertised. One of us even thought it was rather inhumane (*tidak manusiawi*) to let people peddle us around in a rickshaw, almost slave-like.

We instead decided to take a ride on an *andhong* to visit our friends' *Simbahs*, (Javanese for grandparents), who happen to live nearby. Somehow with animal transportation we didn't feel as bad. There is a reason why people say "as strong as a horse!"

## Souvenirs and *batik* items galore!

Do you like nonsensical, wearable odds and ends like bracelets, necklaces, rings, *batik*-motif clothes, imitation branded clothes, slippers and flip flops? Then Jalan Malioboro is your heaven! There were myriads of ornaments for sale too such as *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets), masks, colorful flags and wall hangings, and miniature music band sets (guitars, drum sets, etc). If

you're looking for back-issued Indonesian entertainment magazines, Jalan Malioboro is also the place to find them.

### Dude, I'm Dying for a *Dagadu*!



Buying a *Dagadu*-branded item in Jogja is almost compulsory since Jogja is the brand's birthplace. Most *Dagadu* stuff comes in the form of funny-phrased or creatively done t-shirts (though you can get other *Dagadu* items such as pencil cases, keychains and backpacks). The *Dagadu* brand is easily recognizable by its

simply drawn one eye logo and is considered the commercial pride of the province. Of course once a brand is successful in the market, imitations crop up like mushrooms after a rainy day.

Original *Dagadu* merchandise are said to be only available in Malioboro Mall. However if you're not particular about brand authenticity, the quality of the *Dagadu* imitations off the street is just as good as the real thing, the only difference is that imitations are cheaper by half in price. Most *Dagadu* (read: imitation) t-shirts cost around Rp.12.500 (in the malls the price is twice that) but we found a street stall that sold them at Rp.12.000 a piece, the cheapest price in town. *Apalagi*, I immediately bought four t-shirts.

### Let's *Lepak* at a *Lesehan*!

Dining experiences in Jogja would be incomplete if you've never tried eating *lesehan* style. At a *lesehan* eatery, you are expected to sit *bersila* (cross-legged) on a mat in front of a low table while eating, the traditional Javanese way. There are plenty of *lesehan* places in Jogja, and it's relaxing to just casually sit down and laze around while you wait for your food. Some of us took the opportunity to nap as well; the environment was that peaceful.



While Jalan Malioboro offers many places to have meals *lesehan*-style, they can be expensive by local standards since these places are targeted for tourists. If you don't mind getting out of Jalan Malioboro, there are just as many *lesehan* places for you to try. We *lepaked* (*nongkrong/lounged*) at one *lesehan* near *Simbah's* house; we had noodles in soup there. On another occasion, we ate at a *lesehan* that served, among other things, *burung puyuh* (a type of quail bird) carefully marinated in sweet *kicap* and spices and barbequed to perfection. Delicious!

During my eating endeavors in Jogja, I discover that my drinks are on the especially sweet side, like when I order tea. It's no wonder: the Javanese are notorious for their sweet tooth and almost anything that is supposed to be sweet will be twice as sweet (reminds me of Malaysian Kelantanese food!). *Manis buanget!* I

just stuck to mineral water or even *teh botol* rather than anything that has to be mixed by somebody.

### **Still more to discover in Jogja**

There is much to see and do on Jalan Malioboro (and in Jogjakarta as a whole), and what I have presented here is merely a scratch on the surface of a true Jogjakartan experience. I had a lot of fun discovering the bits and pieces of Jogja on Jalan Malioboro. I now understand why Jogja is almost every Indonesian's favorite city - it certainly is one of mine now!

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#### **Credits:**

Photos: Fairy, Epigo & Aan

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