

# Tales from the Big Durian

An extraordinary journey discovering life,  
inside one of East Asia's largest and little known Cities.



by

**Markus Taylor**

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*Fultus™ Books*



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## Tales from the Big Durian

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*This book is dedicated to the resilient people of Jakarta,  
in a far off land called Indonesia.  
A City simply nicknamed the "Big Durian."*

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# The Durian

Widely known and revered in South East Asia, as the "King of Fruits". The hard outer husk is covered with sharp, prickly thorns, whilst the edible flesh within emits a distinctive odor, which is regarded as either fragrant or overpowering and offensive.

Even when the husk of the fruit is still intact, the odor of the ripe fruit is very strong and penetrating. This unusual odor has prompted many people to formulate evocative descriptions, with views ranging from those of deep appreciation to intense disgust.

**Source:** *<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durian>*

# Introduction

I am a living Camera, a camera that just records through my minds eyes and ears what are often only common occurrences in this City.

My words are the scenes I film and the tales in this book are the chapters of each journey taken on an often average Jakarta day.

Chapters that may amuse, shock or even disgust a reader, but I hope will bring you the world I and over Fifteen million others could see and experience everyday.

A living Camera, hoping to bring you closer to another World, not an imaginary World but a World that exists today in a city called Jakarta, in a Country called Indonesia.

## A very Spicy Melting Pot

Jakarta is a melting pot, mixing continuously as people migrate here from the differing Islands that make up Indonesia. One reason it is considered a cosmopolitan and sometimes volatile City.

In every corner of this vast City, you hear the sound of local languages, often mixing in with Bahasa Indonesian, and you can smell the mixture of spices blending in, as locals cook 'ethnic' dishes for their families. Each smell is very different, with each area of the City with its own different flavor.

So it surprises people when they move around the City, when they find many 'ethnic' areas. West and North Jakarta are known for there predominately Chinese/Indonesian communities; East Jakarta is a poorer melting pot of different groups, and South Jakarta, predominately Javanese.

Then there are the ethnic groups that 'mix' freely, usually second generation migrants who have become Citizens of the 'Big Durian'. Often with a more modern outlook, then the first generation who came from traditionally, conservative backgrounds.

Mixing in with this curious blend of ethnic Indonesian groups are expatriates. Most prefer to live in their own areas, wealthier Expatriates live in Kemang in South Jakarta. There are also some Japanese and Korean areas, dotted around the City, but not as leafy and expensive as Kemang.

When I briefly returned back to Europe, to visit my family. I was cynical about the way sometimes Jakarta, has an invisible line between people. But nothing shocked me more, when an

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area known as a European 'melting pot' was much more divided than Jakarta.

The locals had their own area, a German, a Dutch, a Finnish and an English area. Most areas had their own closed in housing complexes, national restaurants, clubs, businesses and even schools. There was no real mixing between groups, and businesses often promoted an area to a particular Nationality.

So leaving a City that often has some lightly drawn 'ethnic' lines, I entered a Country that had thickly marked national lines. Lines after Indonesia, you would freely cross, but were many people would never feel the need to cross. It was a very strange and sobering experience, realizing that a lot of Europeans prefer not to mix.

Indonesia, especially Jakarta can have ethnic problems, but people are encouraged to mix, and you find in the City, Clubs, Malls and Restaurants are not racially and ethnically divided. The invisible line is not even noticeable, except if you live in a closed in community.

Yet Indonesia does have a history of volatile, often violent ethnic clashes when the economy collapses. This happened in 1966 and more recently in 1998. Some groups have more economic power than others, and in a high stakes economy, when the economic volcano erupts, trouble can start.

Living in West Jakarta, I live in a predominately mixed Chinese/Indonesian area, which suffered badly in the 1998 riots. Although the area is wealthy, and has a vast array of luxury Malls, Housing complexes and Apartments, there are still abandoned buildings dotted around, a grim testament of the riots a decade ago.

Soon it is Chinese New Year, and the community here will celebrate it, with Dragon dances, special foods and bright lanterns lining the streets. National Television Stations will

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celebrate the event, as they do with Christmas and the end of *Ramadhan*. Something that has recently occurred after Indonesia became South East Asia's biggest Democracy.

Indonesians are encouraged to live with each other, and share the common values of living in one national state. They are encouraged to learn about each others cultures, share each others food and appreciate each others cultural heritage.

Yet a thin invisible line still remains, which grows thinner, as a new generation of Indonesians have grown up, who are learning to live together and respect each others differences.

No one knows what this City, will feel like after the next generation of Indonesians grow up. But after Europe, I much prefer thinning lines than thickening lines, and wonder if the new Europe will eventually face the same growing pains, Indonesia has experienced.



Nicknamed the "Big Durian," the City of Jakarta is a simmering melting pot with a mixture that assaults your senses, and confronts your values.

Inside this book you find a collection of tales from the big Durian that may amuse, amaze, anger or simply just confuse you.

Stories of real people and events, creating an extraordinary journey into a World you never thought existed.



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