

October 14, 2014

After many pictures, it was time for our picnic lunch. We drove to a secure guest house, surrounded by aluminum fence covered in barbed wire. Along the way we also passed some trucks with their windows covered in what looked like a cage. Thomas said that was for protection from people throwing rocks. So I guess it is not safe at times everywhere here.

After lunch we went to learn about wig making. Being a wig-maker is also passed down from father to son. Young, pure men (i.e., virgins) enter the wig making school for 18 months. They pay 300 kina for this privilege and are not allowed to visit their families during this period. And they grow their hair.

But it won't grow on its own. It needs the special, powerful spell from the teacher. The teacher determines what they can eat as well. The hair is never combed but rather they use a pick. It is never washed, but rather, three times a day, they take special leaves, crouch before a stream, dip the leaves into the stream while they chant a special song, and then they sprinkle the water over their hair. They also drink and spit out water that has been given the special spell, similar to the newlyweds.



After 18 months, the hair is ready to be cut. While they used to do it with bones, the westerners taught them about razors. There is a separate specialist who cuts the hair off into a wig. First he sews a bamboo frame around the air, then he cuts it and then he sews a frame for inside the wig. The first wig can be worn every day; it is a daily wig and looks sort of like a large mushroom. And the boy who grew the hair gets to keep it. He then graduates, wears his wig all decorated with BOP feathers, paints his face and goes back to this village. The

boys can also opt to stay for a second 18 months and grow another wig. When the wigs are sold, the teacher gets 100 kina while the boy gets 600 kina. I say boy and we were told that they can be as young as 14, but the four “boys” at this school looked more like they were in the 20s or 30s. When I asked how old they were, Thomas said most of them were born in the villages and have no idea how old they are.

Two of the daily wigs are put together to make the ceremonial wig. This is a much larger wig that is more oblong, looking like a toreador's hat. When sold this brings in twice as much, with 200 kina for the teacher and 1200K for the boy growing the hair. If you don't own a wig, you can rent one for special ceremonies. One of the “boys” there had been there 7x18 months (ie, was making his 7th wig) and decided it was time to go back to the village and get married. He will be a rich man.



You might wonder how these boys sleep so as not to squish their hair. They sleep on wooden pillows. When I heard that, I immediately told Thomas I wanted to buy one. But then they demonstrated. It is a long wooden plank that stands about a foot above the ground and they lean their necks on it. So the same idea as in Japan for the geishas, but different implementation.



You might also be wondering whether all these performances and demonstrations were just put on for us tourists. But we saw men on the street in their costumes, with their BOP feathers and their wigs, and straw through their noses. It is not just for the tourists. What is actually sad is that there are not more men wearing their traditional clothes but rather wearing jeans and t-shirts.



On the way back to the lodge, we asked Thomas to stop and buy some sweet potatoes to be cooked for us for dinner. We stopped at the market in his village. It cost 2 kina for enough potatoes for 6 people. The potatoes were very white when cooked, not like our sweet potatoes, and they were only mildly sweet. So I end today with photos from the market.





Notice how this beautiful older woman is covering her mouth. Everyone chews betel nuts and all their teeth are red. In fact, on the airplane, in hotels etc they announce no smoking and no betel nuts.

