

Day 6, Oct 17, Friday

We made our way back (up a long, long stairway) to have lunch and then all met at 2:00 for a nature walk provided by the lodge. We were a bit confused as that is the wrong time to go birding. Joseph, our naturalist, led the way and we began a walking trip around the grounds of the hotel. We walked through the rain forest and of course there were very few birds since it was too early in the afternoon. But the vegetation was beautiful.



Joseph wanted us to see the mating or display area of the Bower bird. So we climbed and climbed through the forest and Joseph kept saying not far, not far. Suddenly the path was covered with running water, like a little waterfall and we had to backtrack a bit and take a different route. But that route ended at a steep drop, like a small canyon with water running through it and we had no way to cross.





So Joseph jumped across and took apart a log bridge that was not far and built a new bridge for us to cross. It was actually quite funny as he carried one log over after another. He literally took apart one bridge and built another, and then helped us across the crevice.



He kept one log out and carried it further up the mountain so we could cross the next gulf.





We continued making our way up the mountain and finally reached the Bower display area. And it was worth it. We actually had no idea what Joseph had been talking about until we got there.



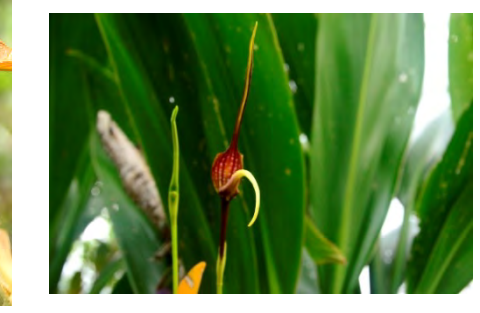
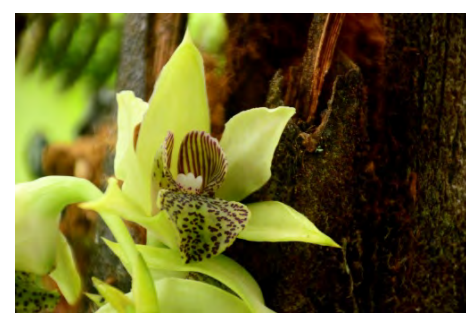
The Bower birds are known for their unique courtship behavior, where males build a structure (which looks sort of like a Christmas tree out of leafless branches, called a Bower – thus the name) and decorates it with sticks and brightly colored objects. Every morning he then performs a dance around it in an attempt to attract a mate. The tree has a wall, sort of like a moat, around it which the bird very carefully builds with moss. We did not get to see the bird or the dance (the pictures of the Bower birds below are from the internet), but just seeing how elaborate the display area was, reminded us how incredibly brilliant nature is. And then when I had internet again, I looked it up on You-Tube. You should too. Amazing to see.



We came down a different route and passed the most incredible, modern, large (VERY large) stone and glass private home. This belongs to the general manager of PNG tours. It is hard to imagine what the natives think of this type of home. An entire village could fit in this house.



Joseph then took us to see the orchid garden at the hotel. He himself planted all the orchids. There were some I had never seen before and all of them were very beautiful.





It was then 5:00 and time to go back to the room, shower (GREAT shower here), rest a bit and then come back up all those stairs to dinner. The sun began to set over the mountains and Mt. Hagen leading to a beautiful sunset.



Tonight is Shabbat and we do miss being home. But we are also having an amazing experience.

Speaking about Shabbat, there is a tribe here that believes they are Jewish. We tried to get to them, to visit them, to learn more about them. but they are so isolated and off the path that our tour company said they just could not arrange it. They are called the Gogodala and this is their story:

*The ancestors came by canoe from the Holy Land of Yabisaba. We know it as Jerusalem. There were two boats, long and sturdy, hand carved from ancient trees. The red one carried the Segala clan and the yellow, the Paiya clan. The travelers spoke the language of Israel. They paddled in search of the far-off islands of Papua New Guinea, guided by the wisdom of an oracle called the Fire Source. The islands themselves, seven in all, had floated nearly 8,000 miles from the Middle East, destined to become home to the tribe those clans formed, God's chosen people, the Gogodala. A Lost Tribe of Israel in the lush wilderness of a South Pacific Eden. This is the story the Gogodala tell of their origins and this is the story that animates their vision of the future. Now, they believe God is calling them home. Home to Israel.*

The Gogodala live primarily in Balimo, a village in the remote Western Province that is so isolated it can only be reached by plane or boat. It sits on the ridge of the Fly River floodplain. A lagoon provides the Gogodala's bounty and its recreation, as well as the setting of its sacred story. There's spotty electricity, and no televisions, no Internet and no phones except for the occasional cellular seen in the hands of a Gogodala visiting from the

capital. The appearance of technology is recent, and the people remain largely separated from the rest of the world. The Gogodala were formerly cannibals who now believe they are one the Lost Tribes.

*“The bedrock of the religious identity of the Gogodala remains in some respects, their traditional belief system, upon which has been grafted Christianity, which was introduced to the tribe in the 1950s by missionaries,” Parfitt said. “On top of that has been grafted a kind of Judaism. More and more of the Gogodala wear yarmulkes and prayer shawls. They’ve started celebrating Jewish holidays and they are using more Hebrew.”*

A decade ago, Tudor Parfitt conducted DNA tests at the Gogodala’s request. They had wanted him to prove they are Jewish. The results were completely neutral, at the most, inconclusive. He’d expected the tribal elders to be angry. However, they seemed undeterred. Inconclusive, after all, is not a “No.”

Some of you may remember Tudor Parfitt. He was one the guests at the Beth El Distinguished Speaker Series when Andy and I chaired it, many moons ago. Tudor had studied and written about the Lemba people in Zimbabwe, where he did DNA tests and found that as they claimed, many of the men carried the gene of the Kohanim. Now he is studying the Gogodala.

So, it would have been fascinating to visit them, but it was not meant to be.

An aside about the food here. Andy got it right. He said that the food must all come prepackaged. Each portion was exactly the same, and arranged exactly the same on the plates. We were eating food here the entire time that was not particularly indigenous. So they must fly it in for the tourists. It was always very tasty, but not local.



Tomorrow Linda and Charlie leave and we will miss them. They are new friends and have quickly become a part of our travel family.