

Ride to Dare

It's only 6am but a balmy 23 degrees as we meet outside the Palacio de Governo on Dili's waterfront with the first light creeping over the horizon. Four cyclists clad in lycra ready (or not) for our weekly ride to Dare (da-ray). Dare is perched above Dili with an altitude of about 500 metres.

The first part of the ride is an easy climb, past churches already filling with worshippers, to the roundabout next to the old Lahane market. The paun (bread) sellers are there but the hustle and bustle of the early morning market is long gone. It is now a 7km ride up to the lookout.

The first stretch is a bit of a climb but we are fresh and we are soon up and going past the official residence of the President, painted pink (a favourite colour for houses in Timor) and which is reminiscent of a fairy tale castle perched on the hillside. We soon feel the temperature drop and the humidity fall away as we make our way up the winding hillside, enjoying magnificent panoramic views of Dili on the way.

The sides of the road are lined with houses displaying beautiful tropical plants, some for sale while others take their plants down to the market in Dili. There are also many small shops (kiosks) that are just a hole in a bamboo wall selling just a few common household items. Every shop seems to sell the same things. The early morning also sees women and children outside their houses selling freshly made Indonesian fried donut, a favourite breakfast.

The road which was built by the Indonesians fell into disrepair for many years but has more recently been upgraded, however it is now in need of further work due to the heavy rain and steep terrain. Halfway into the ride, we are wishing that we had a better level of fitness, but there is no relief to the uphill climb. By three quarters of the way we are feeling weary however the road flattens out a bit and we know that we are going to make it. We wheel into the small dusty carpark of the Museum for a much needed drink and to check our watches. Just under an hour, not bad for a bunch of older riders. No comparison to the younger Timorese riders who do it in 30 minutes.

There are two great things about Dare Memorial Museum, a cup of Timorese coffee, then to watch the excellent video documenting Timor-Leste's involvement in WWII including the Timorese who helped Australian troops before being left to face the repercussions from the Japanese once the Australians departed. There is also a rudimentary school built over an old swimming pool that was built by former army personnel to say thanks to the community for their help during the war. However at there is no one in sight at this time of the morning.

So after taking in the breath taking views of Dili and the coastal environment we turn and head down which is arguably the best part of the ride. We swoop down the winding road past the well-worn trucks and busses carrying people and produce down to the market in Dili. Past the motor bikes freewheeling down the hill to save on fuel. We are back at the roundabout in 15 minutes and memories of the steep climb have faded until next week when we will try and set a new record (for us). We cycle back to our respective homes a bit weary but exhilarated.

Chris Hollonds