



The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I have just returned from a tour of the Sultanate of Brunei, which is located on a small piece of West Borneo . It measures just two thousand, two hundred and twenty six square miles and has a population of only three hundred and sixty five thousand, two hundred and fifty one human souls, according to the latest Brunei Government figures. The demographics of the Sultanate are that about sixty four percent of the population are Malays, twenty percent are classified as being Chinese, and sixteen percent are classified, according to this Government, as being 'others' or 'none'. (Really, that is that which the Brunei Government tells tourists) The religion of Brunei is sixty seven percent Muslim, which is the official religion, fourteen percent Buddhist, ten percent Christian, and nine percent is classified as being 'indigenous beliefs and other'. I saw the Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque, the Royal Regalia Centre, the Kampung Ayer (the water village in which thirty thousand people live, that number of human souls, representing about eight percent of the entire population of the territory), The Empire Hotel, the best hotel in Brunei, which is owned by the Sultan of Brunei, Muda Hassanal Bolkiah, and to which all tourists are 'recommended' to eat their meals, the Brunei Museum, Istana Nural Iman, the Royal Palace, and a number of shopping malls. It took the best part of eight hours for the tour in a private Nissan minivan, which was the smallest and most uncomfortable vehicle in which I have ever had the misfortune to ride.

These are some of my observations of Brunei , which is ruled by the gun of the richest man in the world: Sultan of Brunei Muda Hassanal Bolkiah:

First: *According to my private guide, a Chinese man, there is no poverty in Brunei , no mosquitoes, no prostitution, and everybody is very happy in their relaxed lifestyle. The population is being watched over and taken care of by Sultan Muda Hassanal Bolkiah, the richest man in the world. Education and medical expenses are paid by the Government and the majority of the population work for the Government. Those people, who do not work for the Government, do not get free land and do not get help in building their houses. These people, also, do not receive preferential interest rates from local banks, which are all owned by The Sultan, also, known, according to my private Chinese guide, as 'our kind king';*

Second: *There is no alcohol sold in the Sultanate and anybody, found with alcohol on his possession, may be fined twenty thousand Brunei dollars (about thirteen thousand, three hundred and thirty three American dollars) and jailed for fifteen years;*

Third: *The Sultan likes to do business with everybody who wants to come to the Sultanate. He owns some of the biggest hotels, directly or indirectly, the national airline, the biggest shopping mall, The Yayasan Shopping Complex, and, of course, all of the land. If a Hongkong person wants to set up a business in Brunei , he must invest a certain, large sum of money (subject to negotiation) and then find a Brunei partner for the new enterprise. Most of the joint-venture partners are members of the Sultan's Royal Family. By taking such a partner, it is unlikely that the business will fail. Conversely, to use an established Chinese partner in the Sultanate is likely to result in the enterprise just struggling along ... and, then, fail. There is no direct taxation of profits in the territory, but there are import taxes on this and that. Foreign people may not build*

houses on freehold land. They may only lease a piece of land from the Government and, during the time that a foreigner leases the land/house, he may not sell it.

Fourth: The Muslim girls are extreme good at producing hand-made cloth on weaving machines, operated by their little hands. This has been proscribed in the China for many years because it ruins little girls' eyesights. This type of occupation requires deft hands and keen eyesight and the result is the most beautiful of hand-embroidered material. China has determined that this is the forbidden stitch because a young girl, in the course of time, can go blind from this occupation. The cost of a bolt of cloth, measuring about two yards, created by these Muslim girls, is about eight hundred Brunei dollars (about five hundred and thirty three American dollars).

Now, my impressions of this territory:

Point Number One: The Sultan should be described as a dictator, smelling of perfume and wearing the forbidden stitch. He gives away 'pennies' while he banks tens of billions of dollars for himself by selling the territory's oil and gas. Find the most-successful enterprises in Brunei and there you will find the hand of little dictator Sultan Muda Hassanah Bolkiah. If the Sultan determines that an enterprise is too small for him, well, he has brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, and an 'army' of in-laws to which such enterprises may be passed.

Point Number Two: The population of Brunei is told to love and to respect their Sultan, to revere his name, and that of his many family members, and to be grateful for their lifestyle. The Sultan has only two wives, at this time, but about ten children of whom he can speak. Every person in Brunei is a university graduate, and even in the water village, a squalor of a place, there are said to be four universities and sixteen primary schools, serving thirty thousand of among the poorest people of the territory.

Point Number Three: Nearly all of the Mercedes, BMWs, Jaguars and Bentleys are owned by either members of the Sultan's family or his Ministers. The Sultan is the Finance Minister, the Defense Minister, the Head of the Government, the Admiral of the Brunei Navy, General of the Brunei Army and Air Force, and Commandant of Police (spelled Polis). The Sultan travels a great deal of the time and looks around for new investments for himself/his country, owning hotels in New York, London, England, and in many of the capitals of Europe.

Now, comparing Hongkong with Brunei, please note, My Dear Grandchild, the many differences:

1. The Chief Executive of Hongkong is only permitted to have one wife, officially;
2. The Chief Executive of Hongkong is not the richest man in the world, although he would like to be;
3. The Chief Executive Hongkong does not demand that foreigners have to do business with him or companies that his family controls;
4. The Chief Executive Hongkong does not travel to foreign lands without the permission of Beijing;
5. The Chief Executive Hongkong cannot provide or build private housing for his staff;
6. The Chief Executive of Hongkong does not wear the uniform of anything and he does allow the forbidden stitch in the territory, but, since there is no child labour in Hongkong, he does not have to worry about the forbidden stitch;
7. The Chief Executive of Hongkong has to answer to Beijing whereas the Sultan of Brunei need not answer to anybody because he has carte blanche;
8. Anybody may drink alcohol in Hongkong;
9. Trade unions are permitted in the territory, unlike Brunei where trade unions are non-existent; and,
10. Hongkong does have malaria, but it is unlawful in Brunei for mosquitoes to carry the malaria virus.

So you can see, My Dear Grandchild, Hongkong is better than Brunei. I told Grandpa: 'Do not be the Chief Executive of Hongkong!' I, then, added: 'However, if you can be the Sultan of Hongkong, why not?! If you want to be something, be the best.'

With these thoughts, I leave you. God bless Brunei and all who live there!

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