



# LAWS OF THE JUNGLE

IN A LAND WHERE HUNTERS LIVE BY THEIR ARROWS, CHILDREN WIELD MACHETES, AND TRAVEL SYNCS WITH THE TIDES, THERE ARE TRIBESMEN WHO BELIEVE THEY'RE RECONNECTING TO THEIR JEWISH ROOTS. COULD THE GOGODALA, A TRIBE OF FORMER CANNIBALS, BE PART OF AN EMERGING THEORY THAT THE REMAINS OF ANCIENT ISRAELITE COMMUNITIES CAN BE FOUND ON THE MUDDY SHORES OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS?



**T**here is exotic, and then there is off the charts. When we heard about a tribe in Papua New Guinea (PNG) that claims descent from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and is now expressing interest in returning to Judaism, we knew we needed to plan a trip. But how do you contact tribesmen who live deep in the jungles of this remote Third World country, where phones are rare and Internet is nonexistent? And what would we do once we got there, in a locale where transportation is primitive at best, and roads don't exist? (Disclaimer: this had absolutely nothing to do with *Mishpacha's* current serial, *Normal Like Me*, whose protagonists come from PNG.)

Our plan was to visit Papua New Guinea, a country just north of Australia, consisting of dense jungles, tropical rain forests, large wetlands, and hundreds of offshore islands surrounded by vast coral reefs... and cannibals. We were told by a woman whose cousin is in the navy that Indonesian military maps mark PNG's cannibal regions in red. Shortly before we visited, we read about a British couple who had recently been captured and tortured there. Back in 1961, Michael Rockefeller, youngest son of former Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, is assumed to have been killed and eaten by cannibals in New Guinea. And although cannibalism was made ille-

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY  
**Ari Z. Zivotofsky and Ari Greenspan**



gal more than 50 years ago, every so often reports surface of these human feasts.

The cannibalism threat was pushed to the back of our minds, though, because we had so many other things to worry about. Our infectious disease expert warned us that there is an extremely high transmission rate of malaria year-round; risk of travelers’ diarrhea exists throughout the country, even in deluxe accommodations; tuberculosis is in the highest-risk category; the chikungunya virus risk is country-wide; and deadly Australian box jellyfish inhabit the coastal waters.

He didn’t tell us that Melioidosis, caused by a bacteria found in soil and water, has recently been found in the soil in Balimo, our exact destination. For good measure, he did let us know that violent crime is very common in the capital, Port Moresby. Despite being a small city by international standards, with only about 400,000 people, it’s considered among the ten most dangerous cities in the world. This was confirmed for us by a hotel owner in Daru, who had been carjacked more than once in Port Moresby. So why, we wondered, were we going?

Because members of the Gogodala tribe in that distant island believe that they are

descendants of exiled Jews from the First Temple period, and of course, we wanted to see for ourselves. So we packed our Shabbos supplies and took our shechitah knives just in case — and as usual, *siyata d’Shmaya* was on our side through what was probably our most astounding halachic adventure to date.

**Up the River** The mainland of Papua New Guinea is located on the eastern half of New Guinea, the world’s second-largest island — although even this “mainland” is filled with rivers, along which many villages are located. With over 850 known languages, it is probably the most culturally diverse place in the world; yet with so many languages, tribes living in hamlets 100 meters apart may not be able to communicate with each other. Because of this, and to our good fortune, English has been adopted as the governmental language and is mandatory in all schools, although many villagers do not continue their schooling past second or third grade.

Our destination was the Gogodala tribe, consisting of about 25,000 people spread over more than 30 villages, living mostly along rivers and swamps. Because of this, canoes feature prominently in their

economy, culture, and lore. Traditionally, they were hunter-gatherers and fishermen, and they still often live in traditional simple thatched-roof houses or lean-tos. The women cook and sometimes forage. There is no wheat in PNG, and so one of the primary jobs of the women is the preparation of sago, a staple of their diet and a bread equivalent, made by extracting the starchy spongy center, or pith, of various tropical palm stems, grinding it, kneading it in water to release the starch, and then baking it.

We would be visiting the Gogodala in the capital of Port Moresby, and in the more primitive villages of Daru, Kawito, and Balimo — they’d been preparing for our visit for months already. Balimo is the tribe’s main town, located in a remote area that made access our first challenge. The Balimo airstrip has been closed for three years and there are no roads leading to the area. The only way to access it is via a flight to the nearby village of Kawito, and then an hour’s trip up river in a dinghy. Due to Balimo’s small size and remoteness, the area is serviced by a small plane only twice weekly, on Wednesdays and Fridays. We wanted to visit and be out of the jungle by Shabbos, so we booked a



The Gogodala have several ancient customs that resemble Jewish traditions, and European explorers had even written about “a race of Jews in New Guinea suspected to be a remnant of the Ten Tribes of Israel.” Many of today’s Gogodala are convinced their roots are Jewish, and are reconnecting



We were all smiles as we began our 300-kilometer excursion through meandering waterways up the Fly River in order to catch a flight out of the island of Daru before Shabbos. We had no idea what we were in for

ticket for Wednesday, with plans to return to Port Moresby on Friday.

Our contact man in PNG is Tony Waisa of the Gogodala tribe. He is a quiet gentleman who lives in the capital, Port Moresby, where he works for the central bureau of statistics, and he serves as the governmental representative of the tribe. E-mail contact was difficult, as each time he left the city, we had to wait for his return to resume correspondence. He agreed to be our guide, though, as he is trying to spearhead religious reform in the tribe.

We left Israel on a Sunday evening and only arrived in PNG on Tuesday morning, after more than 24 hours and two nights in airplanes. Tony’s government position enabled him to arrange for an official to meet us even before passport control and arrange our visas and help us through customs, where the officials were bewildered by our supply of kosher food.

If the flight was exhausting, we were quickly rejuvenated — as we left the airport terminal, we were greeted by about 100 Gogodala tribesmen waving Israeli flags and singing “Heveinu Shalom Aleichem” and other Hebrew songs.

Many wore *kippot* and the women had homemade dresses adorned with Magen Davids and menorahs. Some of the men had strings, often with a blue thread, attached to their shirts or belt loops that were meant to be tzitzis. They requested blessings, some even grabbing at our feet. We were flabbergasted, although this scene, better than any red carpet, was to be repeated at each location where we stopped.

As planned, we flew inland to Kawito on a 12-seater “puddle jumper,” in which we were told precisely where to sit so as to balance the plane. The flight was more like a shuttle service, making stops along the way in Kerema, Sinebi, and Sasereme to pick up and drop off baby chicks, mail, and a few more passengers. These “airports” each had just a grass strip for a runway and a shack for the terminal that looked more like a bus stop.



Hundreds of Gogodala tribesmen joined in song as we walked down the rows to the main welcome ceremony in Balimo. They’d been preparing for our visit for months



We finally arrived in Kawito five hours after leaving Port Moresby, to be greeted again by men in talleisim blowing a huge shofar and people holding a large sign welcoming us — all accompanied by singing as we were crowned with wreaths.

The dinghy ride upriver to Balimo took us through large swaths of uninhabited lands on placid waters, with people paddling by us on dugout canoes. We were quite a procession — the men on our craft had talleisim and a shofar, while the women on a second canoe were draped in scarves with Magen Davids woven into the fabric.

When the water got shallow and the propeller clogged by the endless lush growth, they turned off our small engine and pushed on with paddles while pulling vegetation out of the propellers. Stunning water lilies lined the way while white long-necked birds lazily took flight. We meandered past small thatched-house villages — sometimes consisting of only three or four huts — as people smiled and waved from the shore.

Arriving in Balimo, we were passed from the boat to a pickup truck like VIPs and were taken to meet the tribe, which was eagerly anticipating our visit. We walked the dirt path — lined with people and flower-adorned bamboo arches — to a large clearing where people were laughing, singing Hebrew songs, dancing, and waving flags. The many Jewish symbols on display didn’t stand alone though; the Gogodala use Christian symbols too.

We were ushered onto a festively decorated dais, and after some musical performances (including the singing of the PNG national anthem and “Hatikvah,” and the raising of both flags) and speeches, we were asked to address the crowd. Some people were ecstatic and had tears in their eyes when we talked about Torah and mitzvos — but something was amiss: we were still not yet clear about the self-identity of the Gogodala.

**Canoes from Jerusalem?** In previous articles, we’ve discussed the worldwide phenomenon of “shadow Jews,” independent groups of possibly millions of people whose traditions link them at some level to the Jewish People. Groups like the Ethiopian Jews and the Bnei Menashe were often persecuted because of their identification as Jews, while some other groups are Christians who began to question their faith and embraced Jewish practice en masse — such as the Abayudaya in Uganda and a Jewishly linked tribe in Madagascar. Then there are groups like the Gogodala and the Nigerian Igbo tribe, who have some customs that resemble Jewish traditions, and somehow they began to perceive themselves as Jews. Often, the Christian missionaries of the past three centuries, on the lookout for the Lost Tribes, were the ones who planted the Jewish idea if they came across a tribe where people worshipped on Saturday, or if they had “Jewish noses.”

In the 17th through early 20th centuries, European explorers thought they were finding Jews all over the Pacific islands. British explorer William Dampier (1652–1715) said “there was thought to exist a race of Jews in New Guinea suspected to be a remnant of the Ten Tribes of Israel.” And in 1904, Oliver Bainbridge discussed the “Black Jews” he had discovered in Central New Guinea.

For his part, Tony Waisa, who is now living in Port Moresby, is convinced the Gogodala’s roots are Jewish. He described how prayers were always on Saturdays until the missionaries came in the 1930s and converted the pagan tribes. The tribal tradition tells of two large, powerful canoes coming from the west with 35 women on one and 35 men on the other from a place they called “Yabi Saba” (literally, “the first place”), which they claim refers to Yerushalayim. There are even traditions that the Aron Kodesh and Staff of Aharon were in these canoes, which are



1. We were comforted that cannibalism was banned from these islands over 50 years ago, although we couldn’t resist trying on the traditional war masks

2. Ignoring the public warnings, everyone seemed to be chewing betel nut, despite the red stains it leaves on their teeth and the known risks of cancer of the mouth and esophagus

3. Our new friends made sure our travel accommodations were safe

4. They might be jungle folk, but that hasn’t stopped them from adopting traditional Jewish dress, including yarmulkes and tzitzis with techeiles





now buried in *gawa saba* — canoe place. Some members are anxious to find and raise the canoes to validate the legend, but no one is certain precisely where they are buried. A tradition tells of an eagle that would take them back to Yabi Saba.

It wasn’t until the Unevangelised Fields Mission, a nondenominational Christian society, established three missions among the Gogodala in 1934 that Christianity became a part of their life. According to Tony, the missionaries forbade Saturday prayers, but the elders would bang drums to disrupt the Sunday services. The missionaries of course won, and soon they were all observing Sunday as the Day of Rest.

Waisa claims they circumcise their children, and mentioned that before the arrival of the missionaries, there was a traveling “mohel” who went between the various villages. Another tradition says they are from the tribe of Benjamin, since “they are very good archers,” as were the members of Benjamin — and they also have a tradition of an ancestor who has a name similar to one of the clans in the tribe of Benjamin. They had some customs similar to *taharas hamishpachah* laws, but many other tribes also do. They use a shofar to gather the people together, place an object at their doorway for protection, and those who prepare a body for burial must purify themselves.

Many of these customs ended with his father’s generation due to the missionaries — but one thing that’s remained in big measure is a love for the Jewish nation, a sense of kinship, and a great desire to support Israel. Waisa himself reinstituted Shabbos prayers (on Saturday) in 2005, and has so far been joined by a few hundred of the Gogodala tribesmen.

But they were thirsty for knowledge, and wanted to learn anything we could teach them. A gift of a Havdalah candle is a treasure to them, and a Jewish book or challah cover is like gold. But one of



Tony Waisa, our guide and protector, was happy to dig into the glatt kosher venison we shechted and kashered. Our plates were banana leaves, and our surprisingly sharp dinner knives were cut from a reed



Our 12-seater “puddle jumper” was more like a shuttle service between airports that were no more than grassy strips. We were told precisely where to sit so as to balance the plane



the main obstacles to these Judaized groups is kashrus. Some groups take a literal reading of the Torah and stay away from pork, but not so here; wild boars live in the jungle and pigs live in the villages. Waisa tells us about hunting in the jungle — “wild boar, birds, crocodiles, and deer.”

Well, at the least the deer is a kosher animal. We told him that if he could catch a live deer without shooting it, we would demonstrate a kosher slaughter. That set off a whirlwind of excitement, as the tribesmen found us a deer in the village. With hundreds of locals around us, we shechted the deer (it turned out to be glatt), and after arranging the fire and positioning the meat, we lightly salted and then roasted the forequarters on a freshly cut bamboo grill. Plates were banana leaves, and the knives were cut from a reed. Seeing that these could be made sharp enough to cut the cooked meat, we now understood the halachah that the knife for shechitah could be made out of *kru-mis shel kaneh* — reed (*Yoreh Deiah* 6:1).

**Soaked and Sore** We finished our venison and our meeting with the tribe in Balimo late Wednesday night, when we were given the unhappy news that the Friday flight back to civilization was canceled and rescheduled for Shabbos, leaving us “up the creek without a paddle.” We explained to Tony that we couldn’t fly on Shabbos, but the next flight out after that was only the following Wednesday — and we had no intention of spending a week in the bush. Also, all of our Shabbos food (bread, wine, salami, gefilte fish, etc.) was back in Port Moresby. Tony said he’d take care of it, so we went to sleep Wednesday night thinking that he’d arranged seats on a private plane.

By Thursday morning, though, that option had evaporated, and we needed to come up with a plan. It was decided that our best bet would be a Friday afternoon flight out of an island called Daru, about 120 kilometers away as the crow flies, but over 300 kilometers along the meandering waterways. The only way to get there was by dinghy down small tributaries, into the Fly River, the largest river in the country — and then, out into the open sea. But nobody explained that quite so clearly to us.

As we climbed into the dinghy (sort of like a large bathtub with a motor), we didn’t fully appreciate the dangers involved — but we should have suspected something when they handed us life jackets. The little boat was metal and had no seats, just a wooden pallet on part of the floor. All our luggage was wrapped in waterproof covers and was loaded in the center of the boat for stability. They apologized that there were no plastic seats, saying they were afraid the wind would blow them away, although to us it seemed unlikely, given the placid waters we had encountered along the local streams. Yet soon enough, our rosy picture of a pleasurable six-hour boat journey turned into perhaps the most

E&S  
TOURS  
PRESENTS

# JOURNEY WITH THE CHACHAM

TO SOUTHERN SPAIN, GIBRALTER & MOROCCO



RABBI ELI MANSOUR

## THANKSGIVING WEEKEND TOUR

NOVEMBER 21-27

Inspirational & Exciting Day Trips  
Gourmet Glatt Kosher Food • Luxurious Hotels • Live Music



CALL 732.523.7917 • EMAIL INFO@EANDSTOURS.COM



frightening 24-hour trek of our lives. And everything you’re about to read really happened.

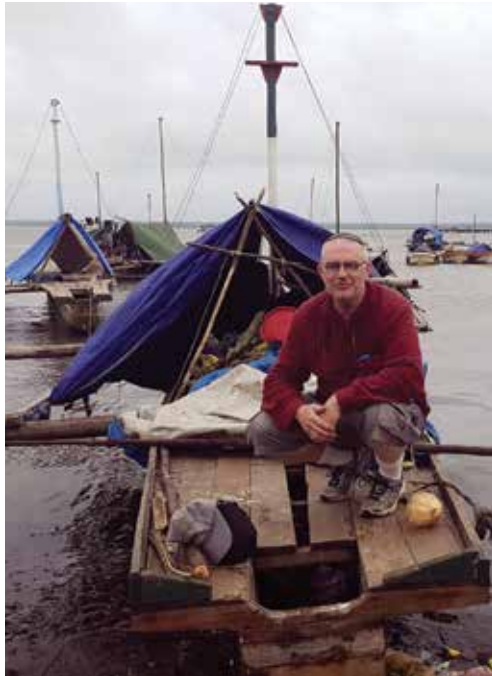
As we climbed into the dinghy to a chorus of “Am Yisrael Chai,” the community heaped many brachos upon us and looked on somewhat worriedly. We started to understand that our journey wouldn’t be so simple when the Chinese owner of the motel told us that he had made the trip once — and with a terrified look on his face said he would never do it again.

Most of the early part of the ride was smooth, with an occasional rough section, but they warned that it would only get worse. After six hours of being cramped in the boat, night fell and we sensed our captain was a bit unsure of the direction. It was pitch-black — there was no artificial light, and the moon was clouded over, and to top that off, the crew began telling us of a dangerous channel we would need to traverse to get to the Fly River. After losing our way a bit, we approached near where the passage began. We saw a few electric lightbulbs up ahead on a spit of mud. Our sailors decided to stop and take a rest for the night.

It was a fishing cooperative, where the business part of the operation was run out of two rough wood shacks on stilts. We asked a group of tough-looking guys permission to stop for the night. The big boss was consulted and said that after the women finished the filleting of the fish in the adjacent building, they would give us a room. By the time we were told to go to our quarters, the tide had come in and risen two meters, leaving water streaming between and under the houses, so we used a boat as a bridge to walk the five feet from one building to the other. The room was planked with unfinished wooden slats, and they gave us some mattresses to sleep on. They were friendly, but remember that this was a fish processing center in the middle of a large river in the jungle. There was no bathroom and



The Gogodala welcome sign (top) surprised us by referring to their land as “Eretz Beulah,” a phrase taken from one of the Haftaros of Consolation (Yeshayahu 62) referring to Eretz Yisrael at the time of Redemption; one of the locals begs Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, our companion on the journey, for a blessing; while Ari G. ponders our next move, as we figure out how to get back to civilization



no cell phone reception and the aroma was nothing to write home about.

We were anxious to get started early in order to get to Daru and catch our flight before Shabbos, while the local fishermen began to talk about the perils of rough seas in the small boat. The first channel we needed to traverse was full of mud, so we waited a few more hours for the tide to rise. Only then were we told how lucky we had been the previous day, because sometimes as the tide comes in, a meter-high tidal wave rushes up the river and can flip a boat.

In order to help us make the flight before Shabbos, our sailors switched to a dinghy with a larger engine, with a horsepower of 65 instead of 35, which was supposed to reduce the trip to four hours. We headed down the tributary the Chinese packing plant owner told us about, and then, with thick clouds in the sky and a drizzle starting, we were at the mouth of the river — entering the ocean. The pilot stopped the boat, and one of the other sailors looked out at the waves and said, “We’re in for a rough ride.” He wasn’t kidding. The waves crested high and we tossed and turned, spray in our faces and rain drenching us.

Thankfully we had an experienced sailor at the helm and he would ride into the trough and then cross the crest. But after every crest our bodies pounded down to the bottom, leaving us bruised and in pain. We kept our eye on the clock and after hours of this, we entered a passage (called Parsha Passage, which we found amusing) that would finally bring us to Daru, but we first stopped at a tiny village to refuel the engine from the barrels we had brought on board.

It gave us a chance to see another one of these villages where no one feels the urgency to bring in modern modalities. They told us they had a school, but the building fell apart and was never repaired (similar to the fishing station where their cell phone tower no longer worked, or the Balimo airstrip, which was still closed after three years, pending repairs). But no one here is in a hurry: There is never much need for shelter, so the houses are simple; it never gets cold, so the clothing is very basic; and food is always plentiful — they either catch some fish for the day, or enter the forest with their bows and arrows and bring back some deer or cassowary. Their carbohydrates are supplied by the sago they bake, and there are some naturally growing fruits. Like with the *mahn* Bnei Yisrael ate in the desert, they don’t have the ability or the need to save food for the next day. Children of all ages walk around with huge machetes, and they excitedly demonstrated for us how far they could shoot an arrow.

When after six grueling hours, we finally saw the island of Daru in the distance, the sense of relief was palpable. Our backs, necks, and rear were in agony, but with much thanks to G-d, we had survived. The town is small and backwards, but thanks to the fact that we had a package to deliver to the Daru

The Path to Compassion and Responsibility

TORAH TRAILS

RIDING ACADEMY

Determination...

Responsibility...

Kindness...

Reconnecting

Jewish Values...

Self Confidence...

Through professional horseback riding sessions and equine activities, our mission is to transform the lives of youth at risk and give them the opportunity to return to society, get jobs, and attend mainstream yeshivas.

Rabbi Ruvain Chait, Director

845.270.8944 • info@torahtrails.com

www.torahtrails.com

MKnk.com

hotel from the Balimo hotel, the hotel’s pickup truck drove us over the potholed roads to the airport to catch our 3 p.m. flight to the big city in time for Shabbos. At four o’clock, they told us it was canceled. We now had less than two hours to prepare for Shabbos with no provisions except for some canned fish. Our bread, wine, and everything else was in Port Moresby.

**Shabbos Island** We got rooms in the one hotel in town, and found a market that thankfully had imported canned goods from Australia, some with hashgachah, and chocolate from England. We bought a few fruits and Shabbos candles, and found a bakery that baked simple bread made out of flour, water, yeast, and salt. We had brought a small pot and boiled two dozen eggs. Ari G.’s pants were ruined, both from the river and from the deer blood from our shechitah session two nights earlier, so we found a store that had shorts. We were ready for an interesting Shabbos.

It’s hard to imagine a Shabbos without davening in shul and the aroma of a good chicken soup, yet after our frenetic preparations and a welcome albeit quick and cold shower, we lit Shabbos candles and immediately felt the Shabbos calm envelop us. We davened overlooking the thick muddy bank where the tide had gone out, and after discussing the halachos and making our own Kiddush over bread, grateful for our holy day no matter where a Jew finds himself, as we watched as people on the beached tiny dugout boats lit their fires and began cooking their dinners.

Our friend Tony Waisa, who had been our protector and helper the entire time (he came with us on the dinghy and spent

Shabbos with us), was amazed that we wouldn’t travel on Shabbos even if it meant great discomfort and inconvenience. He said it would be a true *kiddush Hashem* when he described to the tribe the seriousness of Shabbos. He also told us that just as he and other tribe members were now living in Port Moresby, so too there was a branch of his tribe on the island, and they belonged to the “Saturday believers.” We were invited to their Shabbos afternoon get-together in a house in Daru, and we walked in to find an Israeli flag, a *shtender* with a Magen David, and a poster with the Shema. Some of the men were even wearing yarmulkes. Imagine all this at the end of the world — only then did we really begin to contemplate how many more groups like this must be out there in the most remote locations.

Although we’re always game for new adventures, we were definitely looking forward to our flight back to Port Moresby on Sunday. In the morning we had a bit of time before the flight, so we went out into the market. People were selling small bits of vegetables, nuts, and sago. By far the most popular item was the areca nut, commonly known as the betel nut, which everyone seemed to be chewing, despite the red stains it left on their teeth and the known risks of cancers of the mouth and esophagus.

But our own adventures were not yet over. We had brought a drone with us to help film our trip, and decided to launch it in the market on the beach. Hundreds of people gathered around to see it fly, when suddenly an army officer drove up in a pickup truck and screamed at us how it was against the law to fly a drone, as we were in a sensitive region near two international borders. (Actually, hundreds of miles from Indonesia and across the open

sea from Australia, but who’s measuring?) He arrested us and loaded us into his pickup truck to take us to the base for interrogation. His aggressive and unpleasant behavior was worrying — we had just three hours left until our long-awaited flight.

We convinced him to come to our hotel for some coffee and he calmed down and made a joke about us being Mossad agents. Ari G. asked to speak with him privately and apologized for any unwitting offense. He offered him a \$100 “present” for his unit. The officer slipped it in his pocket and we were suddenly best friends. He even offered to take us to the airport in his military vehicle and asked us for a blessing.

**Back to Land** The flight came and we returned to Port Moresby for a final event with the Gogodala that evening. About 75 tribesmen who live in Port Moresby attended, who were for the most part Evangelical Christians, very pro-Israel and pro-Torah, but with a heavy dose of belief in Christianity. They asked us to speak, gave us gifts and blessings, and asked for blessings in return, all proclaiming that the entire town saw angels as our flight landed.

By this point it was clear to us that within the tribe, although there were some who wanted to return to more Old Testament rules, they really were not clear on what it means to be Jewish. Tony, a real mensch and leader who is at the forefront of the process of his tribes exploring Judaism, says that many are anticipating a day in the near future when they will make aliyah and rejoin the Jewish People. Such an event doesn’t seem so near to us, but we will continue to follow developments to see which way the tides take the Gogodala. ●



haps the most frightening 24-hour trek of our lives. And everything you're about to read really happened.

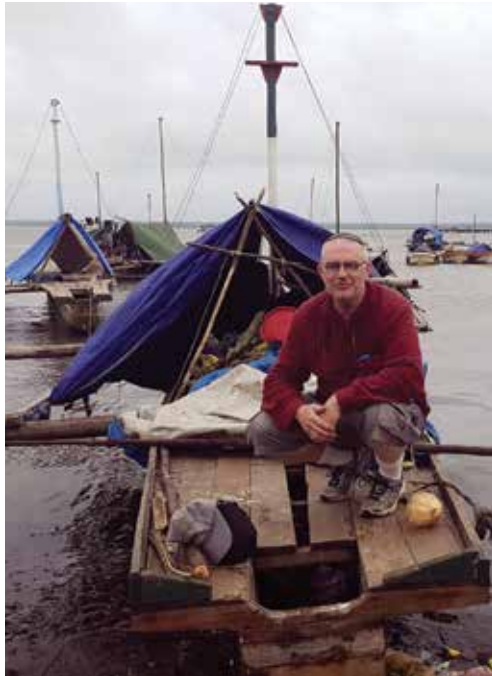
As we climbed into the dinghy to a chorus of “Am Yisrael Chai,” the community heaped many brachos upon us and looked on somewhat worriedly. We started to understand that our journey wouldn't be so simple when the Chinese owner of the motel told us that he had made the trip once — and with a terrified look on his face said he would never do it again.

Most of the early part of the ride was smooth, with an occasional rough section, but they warned that it would only get worse. After six hours of being cramped in the boat, night fell and we sensed our captain was a bit unsure of the direction. It was pitch-black — there was no artificial light, and the moon was clouded over, and to top that off, the crew began telling us of a dangerous channel we would need to traverse to get to the Fly River. After losing our way a bit, we approached near where the passage began. We saw a few electric lightbulbs up ahead on a spit of mud. Our sailors decided to stop and take a rest for the night.

It was a fishing cooperative, where the business part of the operation was run out of two rough wood shacks on stilts. We asked a group of tough-looking guys permission to stop for the night. The big boss was consulted and said that after the women finished the filleting of the fish in the adjacent building, they would give us a room. By the time we were told to go to our quarters, the tide had come in and risen two meters, leaving water streaming between and under the houses, so we used a boat as a bridge to walk the five feet from one building to the other. The room was planked with unfinished wooden slats, and they gave us some mattresses to sleep on. They were friendly, but remember that this was a fish processing center in the middle of a large river in the jungle. There was no bathroom and no



The Gogodala welcome sign (top) surprised us by referring to their land as “Eretz Beulah,” a phrase taken from one of the Haftaros of Consolation (Yeshayahu 62) referring to Eretz Yisrael at the time of Redemption; one of the locals begs Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, our companion on the journey, for a blessing; while Ari G. ponders our next move, as we figure out how to get back to civilization



no cell phone reception and the aroma was nothing to write home about.

We were anxious to get started early in order to get to Daru and catch our flight before Shabbos, while the local fishermen began to talk about the perils of rough seas in the small boat. The first channel we needed to traverse was full of mud, so we waited a few more hours for the tide to rise. Only then were we told how lucky we had been the previous day, because sometimes as the tide comes in, a meter-high tidal wave rushes up the river and can flip a boat.

In order to help us make the flight before Shabbos, our sailors switched to a dinghy with a larger engine, with a horsepower of 65 instead of 35, which was supposed to reduce the trip to four hours. We headed down the tributary the Chinese packing plant owner told us about, and then, with thick clouds in the sky and a drizzle starting, we were at the mouth of the river — entering the ocean. The pilot stopped the boat, and one of the other sailors looked

out at the waves and said, “We're in for a rough ride.” He wasn't kidding. The waves crested high and we tossed and turned, spray in our faces and rain drenching us.

Thankfully we had an experienced sailor at the helm and he would ride into the trough and then cross the crest. But after every crest our bodies pounded down to the bottom, leaving us bruised and in pain. We kept our eye on the clock and after hours of this, we entered a passage (called Parsha Passage, which we found amusing) that would finally bring us to Daru, but we first stopped at a tiny village to refuel the engine from the barrels we had brought on board.

It gave us a chance to see another one of these villages where no one feels the urgency to bring in modern modalities. They told us they had a school, but the building fell apart and was never repaired (similar to the fishing station where their cell phone tower no longer worked, or the Balimo airstrip, which was still closed af-

ter three years, pending repairs). But no one here is in a hurry: There is never much need for shelter, so the houses are simple; it never gets cold, so the clothing is very basic; and food is always plentiful — they either catch some fish for the day, or enter the forest with their bows and arrows and bring back some deer or cassowary. Their carbohydrates are supplied by the sago they bake, and there are some naturally growing fruits. Like with the *mahn* Bnei Yisrael ate in the desert, they don't have the ability or the need to save food for the next day. Children of all ages walk around with huge machetes, and they excitedly demonstrated for us how far they could shoot an arrow.

When after six grueling hours, we finally saw the island of Daru in the distance, the sense of relief was palpable. Our backs, necks, and rear were in agony, but with much thanks to G-d, we had survived. The town is small and backwards, but thanks to the fact that we had a package to deliver to the Daru

## HIGH END DENTAL IMPLANTS AT AFFORDABLE PRICING

- Same Day Dental Implants Using the Top Level Picasso Laser
- One of the Top Implant Practices in Israel
- Offering the Highest Level of Patient Comfort and Quality
- Hundreds of Satisfied Clients from all over the US, UK, France, and Israel
- VIP Car Service for our Dental Tourists





ד"ר דניאל פיינר  
שתלים ושיקום פה

Dr. Daniel Feiner, DMD  
Implant and General Dentistry

Call today for a free consultation:  
**02-992-7897**  
feinerdentistry@gmail.com  
www.feinerdentistry.com