

SINGAPORE TREASURES

unusual stories, extraordinary memories, special encounters, just another unique day in Singapore

Hunting for Crocodiles

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Packed from neck to toe in combat gear, and with large amounts of insect repellent in my backpack, I was ready to embark on my first hunting cum survival trip in Singapore. Yes, that's right: Singapore! Besides shopping malls, HDB's and condo's Singapore does in fact have quite some wildlife. And wild it is. I had been told that it was even possible to spot real crocodiles. A month earlier one was actually caught wandering around a public park. A sucker for excitement I had to go and see one for myself. So off I went, hunting for crocodiles.



And for one I was going to do this the right way; not taking it easy by hailing a taxi, no I would go by MRT, bus and on foot. Just like the explorers in the old days. (Well, almost). I hopped onto the North-South line and got off at Kranji Station. There I frantically tried not to board one of the many buses bound for JB, but take the no. 925 to Kranji Reservoir instead. After endless rows of depressing industrial real estate and army base camps, we left the urban sprawl and entered what seemed to be 'the nature zone'. Over enthusiastic I immediately got off at the next bus stop. A few too early, as it turned out ... Hence, instead of in the mangrove swamp my hunting trail started there on the tarmac.

Miles later the Sungei Buloh Wetlands entrance came insight. In heavy need of some fluids I sighed with relief and bought a bottle of water. Rehydrated I could finally start my mission. And boy did it start out good! First thing I saw on the wooden bridge leading into the park was a big triangular signboard warning me for, you've guessed it, crocodiles. "Yes! it is true, they do exist here", I thought.

Almost bursting from excitement and the sheer adrenaline rush, I ran across the wooden boardwalk into the mangrove swamp. With eyes in 'eagle vision-mode' I looked around so eagerly that after only 5 minutes my neck began to hurt. "Hey, not to worry", I thought, "thank god and the Haw Par brothers for tiger balm", which I had wisely put in my rucksack. (How can one survive any trail without it?). Up in arms again and smothered in tiger balm and insect repellent, the crocodile hunt continued.

An hour later and minus 3 litres of bodily fluids I was starting to be a bit disappointed. I mean surely, the wetlands are unique, the boardwalks and sandy walking trails are very well-appointed, and thanks to the continuous bleeping of my mobile phone "Welcome in Malaysia" (the park borders on the Strait of Johore, you can see JB on the other side) I really felt in a different world. However, apart from birds, squirrels, frogs and fish, I hadn't spotted anything large and scary yet. Then I suddenly heard something swishing in the water. A long, scaly tail moved slowly through the muddy water. My heart skipped a beat and I fell flat on my stomach onto the sandy floor besides the water-front, as not to disturb the wildlife unfolding before my eyes.

The tail now moved into my direction. "Shit! What if it really is a", I didn't get to finish my thought, because then a giant reptile emerged and set foot ashore. I nearly fainted. But alas, a quick second glance taught me that the scaly, green monster was in fact a very big monitor lizard. Impressive nonetheless, but not the ruthless predator I came for.

Urgent need for a 'sanitary department', made me quit my mission. (For that moment at least) However, when walking towards the exit of the park, I suddenly realised that I actually had encountered many aggressive, bloodthirsty predators: Mosquitos. Believe me; don't be fooled by the signboards. Of all the animals in Sungei Buloh it's the mosquitos that really are the most dangerous!

From head to toe covered in big, red lumps, I returned to civilization.