



# Corruption

Several years ago, my daughter took a year out, and went back-packing in Australia. She cuddled the odd koala bear, went scuba-diving off the Great Barrier Reef, spent nights sleeping upright on a bus, but mostly she spent her time working as a temp and paying tax. When her visa was about to expire, she decided to return home via Bali. On the way out, she had turned down the chance to go to Bali, since she had heard that it was no better than Blackpool, except that the beaches were cleaner.

By the time her plane landed in Bali, her Australian visa was only valid for a few more weeks. An Indonesian immigration official seized on the expiring visa and led her off to a side-room. Now, I can confirm that she is not fluent in Bahasa (or in any other of the 300 Indonesian languages), and the immigration official was not fluent in English. A senior officer was called in. His English was little better, but he did have a revolver in his holster. My daughter explained that she had no intention of returning to Australia, but would get a flight from Bali to the UK. He indicated that he would require some incentive to allow her to enter Indonesia, passed her UK passport across the desk, and suggested that she might pass it back with banknotes inside. My daughter has followed her father's influence, in that she carries the minimum of cash and tries to pay for everything by credit card. As a result, she was refused admittance, and arrived back at Gatwick a fortnight early.

Several years further on, now at work and not relying on loans from her father, she decided to go to Bali for her summer holiday. This was just after the UN had organised a vote on the future of East Timor, when militia were roaming the streets of Dilli, when Australian landing craft were revving up, but before the Muslims were killing the Christians on Lombok (and vice versa). I consulted the Foreign & Commonwealth web site

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([www.fco.gov.uk/travel](http://www.fco.gov.uk/travel)) the weekend before she left. The travel advice did not seem particularly alarming, being not much more than (1) not to visit East Timor, (2) to avoid crowds in the streets, and (3) not to visit the island of Krakatoa, since there was always the danger of a volcanic eruption. With my skills in risk management, I reckoned that Indonesia sounded safer than Chechnya, but less safe than, say, Magaluf. When she returned, she claimed that the holiday was enjoyable, but to me it sounded alarming. She and her friend had been persuaded to look over the edge of a bubbling volcano, they had to run away from a Balinese beggar who had exposed himself to them, her friend had suffered from Bali belly throughout, they thought that they had been swindled by everyone, and she complained that everywhere there was the smell of corruption in the air. Ah, I explained, that is the Third World for you.

I can remember seeing in *The Economist* a table that listed countries according to their tendency towards corruption. Germany headed the list as the least corrupt, with the UK seventh. Indonesia was the third most corrupt, beaten only by Nigeria and Cameroon.

As an early retired, I am no expert on corruption. What of my time in business? I can lay my hand on my heart and swear that I have never bribed anyone. Did anyone bribe me? Well, we get into the semantic argument about what is a reward for past business (perfectly acceptable) and what is an encouragement to do future business (ugh, how slimy). Back in those days, Widgets UK had a foreign exchange desk – me and my helpers, and a sterling desk (not me), where they used to borrow eye-wateringly large sums on the money market every day. We two siblings used to eye each other jealously as we watched what goodies were being handed out. Obviously, both desks got *Economist* diaries, and modest bottles at Christmas. The sterling desk received an invite to the Chelsea Flower Show. I sulked, but was asked to a private viewing of an art exhibition. The art was pretty indifferent and the catering was municipal ('municipal' in the sense that it was provided by the City's Dry Sausage Roll Department). I still sulked.

The sterling desk got a helicopter ride to the Grand Prix at Silverstone, but I got an invitation to an American football match at Wembley. The sibling rivalry abated a little. The sterling desk were taken to the Derby, and were given betting money. The same bank invited me to the Derby, but did not hand out betting money. It looks as though I finished up slightly behind, but I did get taken to Henley year after year. I suppose that we ended up more or less even. I can honestly say that I was never offered a bribe at the Rumbley.

It doesn't amount to much, certainly nothing to suggest why we were ranked only seventh least corrupt nation. Perhaps I am missing something.

Perhaps all around me people are offering bribes to jump the queue for library book reservations. But nothing, I bet, to compare with Indonesia. ■