

WARNING

This short article contains images and descriptions of the way animals are treated and consumed as part of the traditional life of some of indigenous people of Sulawesi.

Do not read if you think you might find this upsetting

Traditional Tomohon Market and the treatment of animals in Sulawesi

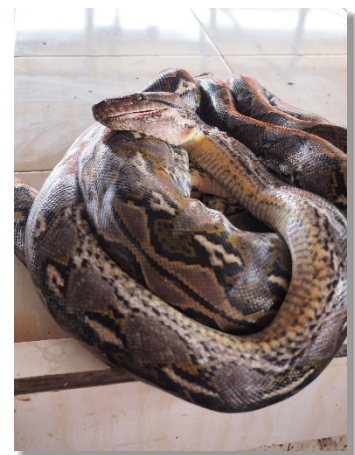
As we drove through the northern part of Sulawesi, our guide Edwin described some of the cultural beliefs and practices of the local people, many of them unchanged in centuries. He told us how they believed they were ancient descendants of people from the north, the Mongols, with paler skin and 'Chinese features' not found elsewhere in Indonesia.

Before our trip to the market in Tomohon, Edwin told us how locals eat bats, rats and snakes from the forest, and



The bats had their wings cut off to be sold separately as medicine

all the animals we are used to eating, cows, pigs and chicken. But they also eat dog. As a child, dog would be a Christmas treat (his family is Christian), as a whole dog costs the equivalent of US\$35. Of



course, the idea of eating 'man's best friend' is entirely alien to us, and we had to consider the dissonance between being omnivores, yet finding some animals acceptable to eat, while others not.

It is true that in France and elsewhere in Europe, horse is a regular part of a normal diet and some cultures/religions don't eat pigs. I was reminded of Michael Moore's film about rust bucket Flint where a woman sold rabbits as [pets or meat](#). It was the customer who decided if the creature went into a cute box, or onto the butchers slab.

Yet....

When all the contradictions are considered, there remains something about the relationship between people and dogs that is hard to ignore. Edwin described how, as teenage boys he and his friends rounded up some stray dogs, and fed them up with restaurant scraps with the intention of bringing them to market and making their fortune at Christmas. In the end the

relationship built up from feeding and caring for them daily meant that, one by one, they all declared themselves unable to go ahead with the final act.

As described elsewhere in the blog, the market at Tomohon was a display of the astounding variety of produce that comes from the rich volcanic soil of the region. The meat area though is something of a slaughterhouse. There seems no concept of humane killing, and live animals are caged next to their dead and dismembered counterparts. For us at least, it was distressing and we moved on quickly.





The reverence with which the Torajans treat buffalos is detailed elsewhere in



the blog, but when it comes to slaughter, even for ritual purposes, animals such as pigs and buffalos are simply stabbed repeatedly until they die. Their entrails are removed and blowtorches are used to burn off the hair. Trussed and immobile animals are nearby on the ground, awaiting their fate.

We learnt that Torajans also eat dogs, and Warungs that offer this dish display palm fronds outside. Here is one, with their pet dog asleep on the bench.



I don't think it is acceptable to believe that people the world over should subscribe to a set of (Western) values related to the treatment and consumption of animals, particularly when views there range from carnivore to vegan. I'm also conscious that, if we are omnivores, we mostly consume neatly packaged 'meat' and rarely need to consider the animal or associated welfare issues in our own backyard. In environments like this, it's all in your face. That said, I think it is an obligation on humans to respect other sentient creatures, take responsibility for their welfare and avoid cruelty. Doing so does not attack other values or impose cultural mores on others, it's part of what makes us universally human.