



# Struggle in paradise

A German-based foundation fights for the survival of sea turtles in Indonesia | By Christina Schott

The Derawan Archipelago east of Borneo is one of the most important breeding grounds for the green sea turtle. Its greatest natural enemy are humans.

At first, just a few grains of sand move. Then a small sinkhole forms and suddenly, dozens of tiny turtles scurry out. Instinctively these small reptiles – whose faces seem as old as time itself, and whose origins can be traced back 200 million years – know exactly where to find the ocean. They crawl as fast as they can across the sand to the water, where crabs and birds of prey await them as welcome delicacies. Just one in 1,000 of these young creatures will live long enough to return to the place of its birth after 20 years of roaming the world's oceans to reproduce.

"I am completely fascinated every time these small creatures hatch," said Roswitha Recker, a 55-year-old teacher. "They look like primeval beings from some bygone era. But they can survive only where the environment is still intact." She has been working for three years to protect the sea turtles on the Indonesian island of Sangalaki for the Turtle Foundation, based in the Bavarian town of Ammerland on Lake Starnberg.

A film team from Bavarian television founded the non-profit foundation in 2000 after shooting in Indonesia. The Derawan Archipelago off the east coast of

the island of Borneo, to which Sangalaki belongs, is one of the world's most important breeding grounds for the green sea turtle. It also provides feeding grounds for the leatherback, hawksbill and Olive Ridley sea turtles.

Fully-grown green turtles measure more than a meter long. They only need to fear sharks, their sole predators in nature. But almost all sea turtle species are endangered and the reason is humans. Turtle meat is considered a delicacy in many countries, their shells are used to make colorful souvenirs, and – primarily in Asia – sea turtle eggs are considered aphrodisiacs.

Although sea turtles are officially protected in Indonesia, illegal trafficking is flourishing. At the traditional market in the provincial capital Samarinda, it is easy to buy the ping-pong ball sized eggs for about 40 euro cents each. As long as the poachers share their profits with the right officials, they can ply their illicit trade undisturbed.

Diving tour operators enthusiastically describe the remote Derawan Islands as paradise. Sea turtles aren't the only creatures to be found in the crystal-clear ocean waters – iridescent reef fish and giant manta rays abound as well. Tiny Sangalaki Island is located about three hours away by boat from the district capital Tanjung Redeb. The sheltered location, pristine beaches and dense vegetation in the dunes offer ideal nesting conditions for sea turtles.

It also makes the perfect location for an observation and research

station. A dozen men who work here live in a wooden house on stilts that the Turtle Foundation built in collaboration with the local environmental protection agency, the World Wildlife Federation (WWF) and Kehati, an Indonesian non-governmental organization. Initial financial support came from the German Embassy in Jakarta. A generator running on solar energy supplies electricity, rainwater is used for washing and cooking. Anyone who works here must really love nature. Aside from the observation station, the only other thing on the island is a diving resort that is currently closed.

Every evening, dozens of sea turtle females, which can weigh up to 150 kilos, climb up the beach. Gasping and wheezing, they dig a hole in the sand 60 centimeters deep. They lay up to 100 eggs in the nest before burying it and heaving themselves back into the ocean. Three times a day, the rangers go

around the island, monitor the nests and count the hatched turtles' empty eggshells. If the mother has located her clutch too close to the ocean or it isn't deep enough in the sand, the eggs are moved to a fenced-in area.

Sangalaki was declared a natural reserve in 2002. These days, anyone diving or snorkeling in the waters around the island is almost sure to encounter a full-grown turtle. The coral reefs are slowly recovering from fishermen, who used to use dynamite or cyanide to catch their fish. Colorful fish and other reef denizens are slowly but surely returning. "Now many of the locals are working with us after initial resistance," said Mulyo Hutomo, the former director of the environmental protection agency in Tanjung Redeb. "Despite this, we still have a lot of educational work to do. We urgently need the assistance of international organizations for this."

Private donations to the Turtle Foundation cover the majority of the Sangalaki station's costs. The WWF pays the salaries of two employees. The Indonesian police and the environmental protection agency each provide one man, and their main job is to protect the rest of the rangers. The first turtle custodians on Sangalaki were forced to flee the island in the dead of night after being attacked by a group of armed poachers.

"We have problems with illegal fishing every now and again on Sangalaki," said Vany Ahang Moord, director of the observation station. "However, it's now relatively safe for the turtles. But all of our efforts will be in vain if we can't protect the entire area over the long term."

Encouraged by the increasing numbers of tortoises on Sangalaki, the Turtle Foundation opened two further observation stations on two other uninhabited islands in conjunction with the local environmental protection agency. The egg poachers have withdrawn to other islands for the time being, although they repeatedly attempt to dig up nests under the cover of night. As yet, there is only one police officer to guard the two islands. "Despite the personal risks we must rise to this challenge," Moord said. "It's the only way we can ensure that 30 years from now tortoises will continue to come to this area."

More information: [www.turtle-foundation.org](http://www.turtle-foundation.org)



Roswitha Recker with a little friend.

PICTURES: CHRISTINA SCHOTT

# Beyond the eurocentric view

The festival RE ASIA in the House of World Cultures in Berlin shows Asia as a creative place of art, film, dance and literature | By Ulrike Münter

What images come to mind when we hear "Asia"? No, the exhibition and the supporting multimedia program of the Berlin festival RE-IMAGINING ASIA (RE ASIA) don't reinforce them: the West's visions of vacations and terrorism. What is Asia? A woman whose face we can only envision, a book with an unknown title, floating in the water? It certainly is a landscape that changes us when we cross it.

The House of World Cultures in Berlin on a rainy day in March – after the hoopla of the opening and before the weekend onslaught appears deserted despite its recently finished renovation. From the outside, the postwar building is charged with history – built as America's contribution to the INTERBAU 1957 – and the narrow, gray-pink festival poster is a hesitant, welcoming gesture. But the visitor to the RE ASIA then gets an abrupt surge of adrenaline as he enters the rotund foyer. Parents should take their children by the hand, adults have to resist the knee-jerk urge to do what the kids want to do as well: to touch the displayed conglomeration of the installation "Waste not." For two weeks, the Beijing artist Song Dong and his mother Zhao Xiangyuan sorted box-by-box now-obsolete Chinese possessions like plastic bowls and bags, articles of clothing, toys, dishes

and so on and arranged them into a still life of the "everyday life of yesteryears." The scenario visualizes the most recent past of China, the Cultural Revolution, as a traumatizing experience of older Chinese people. "I remember that my mother used to bring scraps of fabric home to sew pieces of clothing out of them," said Song Dong. "Later, she started collecting the fabric and all sorts of other things out of fear of a possible new shortage of goods." When the family's traditional farmhouse fell victim to modernization, the accumulated things became a burden. To the son, the now-touring performance seems a dignified manner of dealing with the ideationally charged inheritance. The visitors reverently wind their way around islands of shoes, plates, flowerpots and mountains of prescription drugs. It does exist, the aura of things.

With RE ASIA, Shaheen Merali and Wu Hung have created a self-

ened and devoid of the exotic. The visitor is not lectured to, shocked or inundated with information. There are moments of encounters with art that are simply delightful. For example, the works from South Korea. Kibong Rhee's book that floats in an aquarium resembles a poetic gesture. A water pump assures that we can only read a few lines of the page that is flipped open for brief moments. "A Cloud of Philosophy Condensed into a Drop of Water" reads the title of a chapter – and the page already turns again. The title page remains hidden permanently. A few steps further, Kim Jongku invites the visitor to enter a landscape made of black steel powder on a white ground. A camera projects the silhouette of the visitor as an integrated part of

hills and Korean characters onto the wall of the White Cube. Here, the piece becomes an imaginary voyage.

RE ASIA raises the pulse with the Techno-beats of Japanese artist Ujino Muneteru. It shames with the sunken, dying elephant of Indian artist Bharti Kher. It irritates with the banal ping-pong game by the lotus blossom pool of Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco. It turns a Kuwaiti stock exchange into a photogenic surface imagined by Andreas Gursky of Germany, a torture scene into a flip book created by Parastou Forouhar of Iran and has the copy of a Buddha bust from Berlin's Ostasiatisches Museum (The Museum of Asian Art) projecting its own likeness, a work by Michael Joo of the U.S.

RE ASIA becomes political when we stand before Zhang Dali's newspaper photo from China's Cultural Revolution that has been outed as a forgery. It lets us shudder when faced with the militarily

dauntingly potent underworld of the Forbidden City – imagined by Shen Shaomin. And then there are the playful to tacky Manga girls of young Japanese artist Chiho Aoshima! What is Asia?

How can one think differently of Asian art production beyond a Eurocentric view of it. This question was what guided the curators on this exhibition. For the opening, they invited renowned guests, where, among others, the cultural theorist and philologist Homi K. Bhabha spoke. With his concept of hybridity, Bhabha makes a key contribution to post-colonial theory. In April, a film program started that presents the Asian cultural landscape on an equally high level. Inspired by the Indian Epos "Ramayana" and employing German and Indian artists, the director and choreographer Joachim Schlömer develops the multi-media dance performance "The Abduction of Sita." And then there is still the literary festival lead by the writer Ilija Trojanow. It is hardly possible to sum up the concentrated charge of Asian creativity better than in the sub-heading of Trojanow and Ranjit Hoskote's recently published book, "Kampfabsage" (Rejection of conflict): "Cultures don't fight one another – they flow into each other." RE ASIA makes it possible to experience that this does not necessarily lead to a loss of a national profile but can be a process that is stimulating and can sharpen the perception of what is specific to a culture.

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You can never have too many rice bowls: Song Dong's installation "Waste not."

NADINE DINTER

## Goethe Medal goes to Afghan scholar

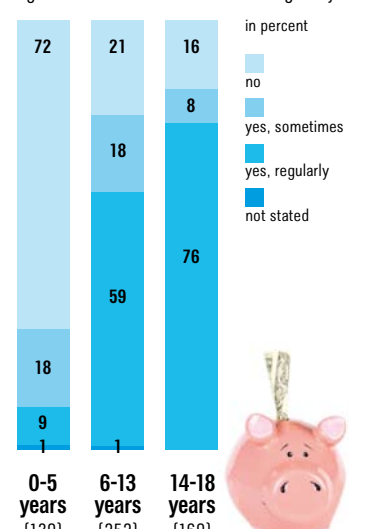
Gholam Dastgir Behbud, director of the University of Kabul's German Institute, has been awarded the 2008 Goethe Medal for outstanding services in promoting international dialog. At the March 26 award ceremony in Weimar, Behbud was lauded for expanding Afghanistan's network of qualified German teachers and translators while helping rebuild academic life at Kabul University. This year's other Goethe Medal winners were French playwright Bernard Sobel, who writes in German, and U.S. translator John E. Woods. The Goethe Institut, Germany's international cultural agency, awards the medal annually.

## Money for kids

While Germans' average real net income fell between 1996 and 2006, children are doing okay financially, thanks to their parents. Two-thirds of couples pay their offspring a regular allowance, according to a study by the German Savings Bank Association. The amounts range from €3 a month for children under five to €36 for 13-18 year-olds. A regular allowance is less common in eastern Germany. Regardless of age, the study found that children in about 60 percent of households play an important role in purchasing decisions.

### Regular pocket money

Almost one in three children under the age of six receives an allowance regularly

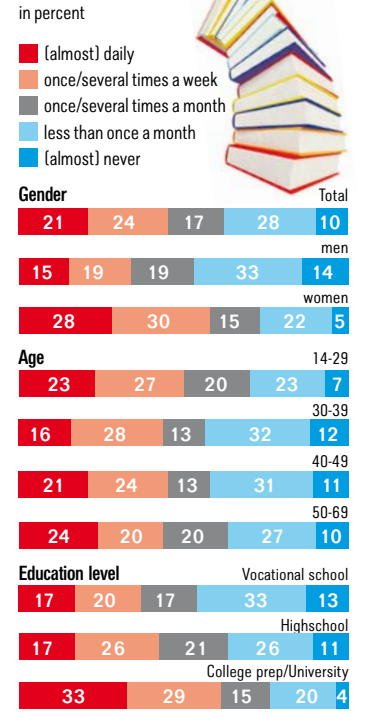


Based on questions posed to 436 couples with children up to 18 years of age. Source: Sparkasse Finance Group, Picture: Martti/fotolia.de

## In: Books

German booksellers are feeling more optimistic after several difficult years, according to the German Publishers and Booksellers Association. After the close of the Leipzig Book Fair on March 16, the group reported that book sales increased 3.9 percent in 2007. Books for children and teenagers sold especially well, largely thanks to the latest "Harry Potter" installment by J.K. Rowling and "Tintendod" (Inkdeath) by Cornelia Funke. Sales of fiction in general, however, fell slightly. Around 130,000 people visited the four-day book fair.

### Reading rates for books in Germany, 2007



Source: forsa omninet, Picture: utemov/fotolia.de