

The Toba Caldera White Water World Festival 2017

By Sam Ricketts

Asahan River, Northern Sumatra, Indonesia





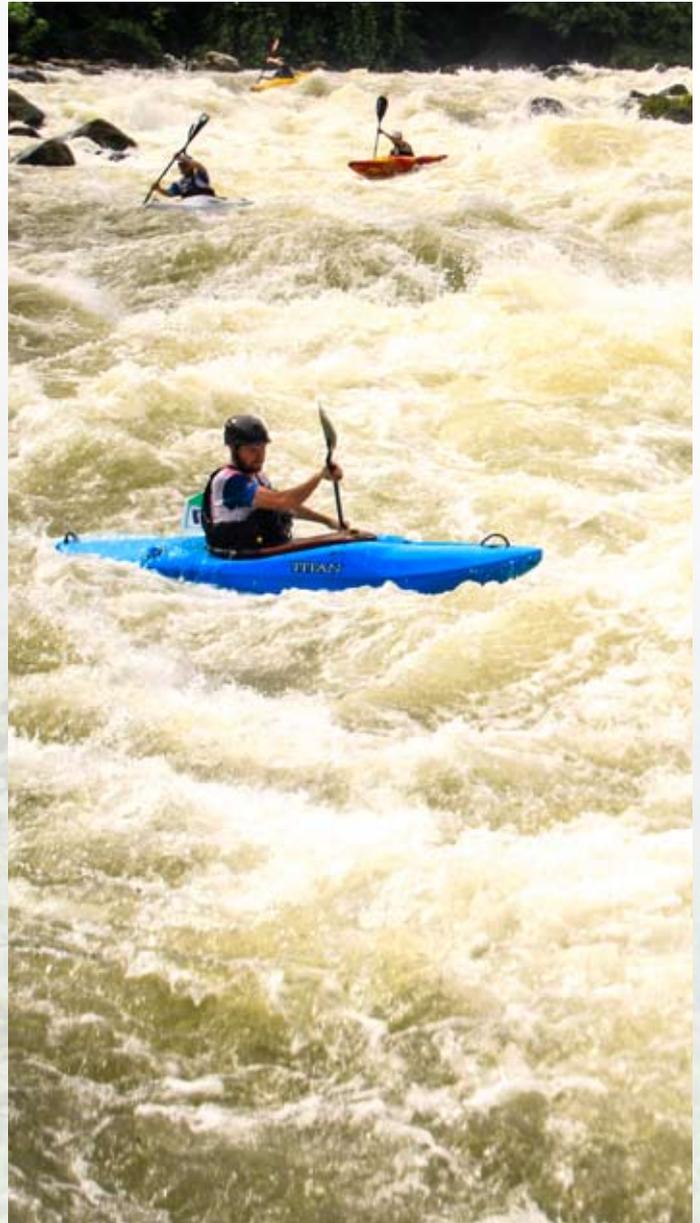
Nestled in the lush, dense and unforgiving Northern Sumatran rainforests is a white water treasure that has been lost in time, the Asahan Valley. Orangutan, pygmy elephant, Sumatran tiger and black panther are still roaming wild in this extensive wilderness.

Gibbon calls erupt from the forest every morning as they are waking up, as the smaller monkeys find their way down to the village to wreak havoc. Hornbills and many other exotic bird species can be found here in all shapes and sizes and a rainbow of colors. Northern Sumatra has one of the last wild rainforests on earth. Sadly, due to extensive deforestation, primarily as a result of growing demand for palm oil and rubber plantations, it is diminishing rapidly.

In the middle of all of this beautiful nature lies the Asahan River, starting its journey from the Toba Caldera, a massive volcanic lake. Gigantic Being, the last super volcano to erupt in human history (70,000 years ago), left the earth in a volcanic winter for over a decade and pushed the human race close to extinction. The river itself is rich in natural history, has constant swift flows, world class views from start to finish, spectacular basalt canyons, waterfalls that cascade down mountain walls meeting the water and on top of all this add some of the best white water on the planet. Jungling kayaking paradise.

On November 28th, 2017, 32 international kayakers made their way to Medan, Northern Indonesia to participate and compete in the most exciting Asahan River Festival the valley had ever seen. We had an array of talented white water athletes join us this year from France, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United States, Italy, Japan, Malaysia and Indonesia. After meeting everyone in the airport with their boats we all jumped on our own private party bus and drove overnight to arrive in the valley by sunrise, and ready to paddle.

From there we had an awesome schedule. Everyday dump trucks were on call to load the boats in and we paddled the 'Rabbit Hole' section before a wholesome breakfast of locally sourced produce, meat, noodles and curries. We then ran laps on other sections of this dynamic river, ranging from open Grade Three - Four, big water Grade Four - Five rapids, and



Grade Five gorges, to a super scenic Grade Three box canyon class. This river has something for absolutely everybody and is one of the most continuous and fun rivers I have ever paddled - to top it off it's hot enough for skins everyday.

The Toba Caldera White water World Festival was principally coordinated by Lachie Carracher and myself, with the tireless and invaluable assistance from Asahan River Rafting, OnesTha, Titan Kayaks, Immersion Research, Sea to Sky Whitewater, No Pasa Nada, BDP and the Northern Sumatran Government.

The festival began with four raft racing events and competition was tight. Three teams, Phoenix Rafting from Java, a Czech rafting team and a team of rouge international kayakers placed consistently across all events on big, unforgiving white water.

The main kayaking events followed, and over the next three days 32 kayakers battled for cash prizes over some amazing sections. The first of these competitions was the 'Extreme Downriver Enduro' where the competitors had to race down the 'Rabbit Hole' Grade Five water to the bridge in the village, a very long and busy section. This was the most anticipated race in the days leading up to the event, and one of the best race courses out! Charlie Nguyen (France) took out first place with a time of 10:43, closely followed by Mike Dawson (New Zealand) and in third place Michele Ramazza (Italy).

The next events were the Giant Slalom and Boater X, and to prepare for these OnesTha and the event team got together over the first week of the festival to build a very innovative, progressive ramp into the side of the river - it well exceeded expectations. Kayakers sat 12 metres above the water before launching down the steep ramp and off an authentic bamboo kicker, flying directly into the main flow of great Grade Four big water and five dynamic gates. Taking first place was Michele Ramazza, followed by Mike Dawson, then Dan Watkins (Australia).

In the last and most explosive event, Boater X finished off the festival in style. Four kayaker heats exploded off the ramp and fought down this wild section for the title. There were some tight battles and great racing with Mike Dawson taking first place, Tohru Kanaya taking out second and Michele Ramazza with third.

With the racing finished, everyone's spirits were super high and bodies were sore as we left the



amazing Asahan Valley. To finish off the event we took a ferry to Toba Island in the middle of the volcanic Lake Toba. There we spent the last day celebrating the many incredible experiences we had out on the water with some amazing characters.

The Toba Caldera White Water World Festival on the Asahan River will be an annual event and is up there as one of the best rivers and festivals on the white water planet. Much thanks to everyone who came and indulged in this very special time and congratulations to all our winners. We look forward to seeing everybody there again this year! For more information on this year's event visit www.tobacalderachampionships.com



