

**Malaysian climber avoids death on Mt Kinabalu by minutes**  
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**By Desmond Davidson**

It turns out that a lingering moment to take in the gorgeous views from the top of Mount Kinabalu saved Mohd Rahimi Hadzri's life on Friday, after an earthquake struck and sent boulders raining down the slopes of Sabah's famed mountain.

But as he lay on the cold, rocky ground while the mountain shook, all he could think of was, "Am I going die on this mountain?"

That was the first thought that came to Rahimi's mind as he lay shuddering in fear on the slopes at Km8 of Mount Kinabalu, waiting for help to arrive after the earthquake left him stranded high up the mountain.

"It was the worst experience of my life so far. A really bad experience.

"I had not bargained for that when I wanted to climb the mountain," the 28 year-old oil and gas worker told The Malaysian Insider via phone from his home in Miri.

"I thought I was going to die."

Rahimi was one of the 172 climbers who had survived the earthquake that shook Sabah last Friday.

The epicentre of the 5.9 magnitude quake, was near the fruit and vegetable market town of Ranau, a mere 17km away.

Rahimi was among the group of 103 climbers that 32 mountain guides brought down to safety after a gruelling 12-hour all night trek over rocks, which buried the well-beaten trekking path.

His ordeal began when his group of seven, who included his brother, cousins and a couple of friends, started the trek up the mountain Thursday afternoon.

They reached their first rest stop at a place called Laban Rata at around 3pm.

They started their climb for the summit at 2am on Friday in a near freezing temperature of 4°C and reached the summit at around 6.30am.

"I was so tired upon reaching the summit," Rahmini said.

"We were the first group to leave Laban Rata for the top and were the last to leave the summit," Rahmini said, a decision that probably saved him, his brother, cousins, friends and their two guides lives.

He said they stayed at the summit for only 15 minutes but the decision to leave last

meant they would not be at the spot called Sayat Sayat Hut, when the quake struck.

This area was levelled by a rockslide and most of the 13 climbers and guides who died were killed there.

"We had just passed Km8 and were a mere half a kilometre from Sayat Sayat Hut when the quake struck.

"The tremor knocked some of us off our feet while I threw myself on the ground because I couldn't balance myself on the shaking mountain."

Rahimi said as they were lying on the ground, their two guides then got up and shouted "lari, lari".

"They were yelling to us to run to Sayat Sayat Hut. I thought that was crazy," he said.

But after seeing what looked like white clouds cascading down from the summit behind them, Rahimi began to run.

But just before the group reached Sayat Sayat Hut, the guides who had gone ahead stopped them and told them to turn back – and climb back up to Km8 – the spot that had left minutes earlier.

"We were told there was no way through as the trail had been destroyed by a rockfall."

Rahimi said the seven of them were soon joined by other climbers at the spot waiting for help to arrive.

The wait, from 8am until 4pm, gave them plenty of time to reflect on what had happened.

With phone signals still available, some eventually found out about the earthquake on the Internet and from social media.

"I even had time to post a message on my Facebook to my family back home to say we are alright."

Rahimi said though he might be physically alright, he was an emotional wreck.

The ordeal was a roller coaster ride, buoyed one minute upon hearing news that a helicopter would soon lift them off the mountain, and deflated the next when told the aircraft could not land due to heavy fog shrouding the summit.

"I tried to lift my spirits and those around me with small jokes and banter. The funny thing is that we were all thinking of the movie San Andreas. We all had a good laugh about it," he said, referring to a recently-released movie about an earthquake that devastates California.

When no help was forthcoming, the guides told them they had to walk down as they could not stay on the mountain for fear of falling rocks.

They were running out of food and water, too.

As they walked past the destroyed Sayat Sayat Hut, Rahimi said he saw two bodies there, later identified as mountain guide Robbi Sappingi, 30, and a 12 year-old Singapore schoolgirl.

Rahimi said he had no words to say when he reflected on how things might have turned out for him and his group, had they left the summit a few minutes earlier.

When he returns to Kuala Lumpur next week, he will have a "kenduri", he says, as thanksgiving for still being alive. – June 7, 2015.

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