

TRAILS OF INDOCHINA

*Artisans of bespoke journeys to
Southeast Asia & beyond*

Indonesia

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

(Updated Aug 2023)





The Republic of Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world comprising 18,000 large and small tropical islands fringed with white sandy beaches, many still uninhabited and a number even still unnamed. Indonesia straddles the equator and is situated between the continents of Asia and Australia and between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. It is as wide as the United States from San Francisco to New York, equalling the distance between London and Moscow. Indonesia has a total population of more than 282 million people from more than 200 ethnic groups. The national language is Bahasa Indonesia.

Among the most well-known islands are Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan (formerly Borneo), Sulawesi (formerly Celebes), the Maluku Islands (or better known as Moluccas, the original Spice Islands), Papua, and Nusa Tenggara: Flores, Gili, Komodo Island. Then, there is Bali “Island of The God” or “Paradise island” with its enchanting culture, beaches, dynamic dances and music. But Indonesia still has many unexplored islands with grand mountain views, green rainforests to trek through, rolling waves to surf and deep blue seas to dive in where one can swim with dugongs, dolphins and large manta rays.

History

The history of Java is as exceptional as its nature. Throughout the island, there are fossils of ancestors of modern man that date back long before human history. Over the last 2,000 years, one can see the influence and growth of the great Eastern and Western religions. By the end of the 16th century, Islam surpassed Hinduism and Buddhism as the dominant religion in Java. As a result of its colourful past traveling through Indonesia is like going through a history book. Indonesia’s first contact with the Dutch was in 1596 when four sailing ships landed in Jakarta. By the end of the 18th century the Dutch had extended their influence over the sultanates and Indonesia became a colony of the Netherlands. Independence was declared on August 17, 1945, two days after the Japanese Emperor’s surrender in the Pacific and today the Republic of Indonesia is a democracy with a thriving economy that grows by roughly 6% each year.

People

Living on more than 18,000 islands, the Indonesian nation today has a population of more than 281 million, comprised of more than 200 ethnic groups, and is the fourth most populous country in the world. The majority of Indonesia’s population embraces Islam, while in Bali the Hindu religion is predominant. Some of the country’s other islands’ populations practice Catholicism and Protestantism. As a whole, the Indonesian people are religious in nature and are true to the Pancasila, the five principles of nationhood. These principles include Belief in the One and Only God, a Just and Civilized Humanity, the Unity of Indonesia, Democracy through unanimous deliberations, and Social Justice for all. Indonesian societies are open and remain tolerant towards one another’s religion, customs and traditions, all the while faithfully adhering to their own.



Climate

Similar to other Southeast Asian destinations, Indonesia has a dry and rainy season. Dry usually occurs from June to September and the rest is rainy season. Sunshine is abundant except in rainy season when the sky tends to be cloudy. It is advisable to visit Indonesia during dry season.

The temperature changes little from season to season or from one region to the next, cooler temperatures prevail at higher elevations. Temperatures on land remain fairly constant, with the coastal plains averaging 28 °C (82 °F), the inland and mountain areas averaging 26 °C (79 °F), and the higher mountain regions, 23 °C (73 °F). The highest mountain ranges in Papua are permanently capped with snow.

Religion

The majority of Indonesian population practice Islam (85%). Other religious and spiritual beliefs include Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

Time zone

Indonesia operates on UTC/GMT +7 to + 9 hours depending on the city

Country dial code

Indonesia's country code is + 62 followed by city code

Mobile Phones & SIM Card

You can easily use an overseas mobile or cell phone in Indonesia on roaming but it is usually much cheaper to purchase a local SIM card. Ask your hotel or guide for details on where to purchase one. However, network problems are frequent, a common issue being that a caller will hear a ringback tone, yet the call is not reaching the receiver. Crossed lines are also a regular occurrence. As such, for reliable communication we recommend using SMS or Whatsapp.

Internet

Wireless (Wi-Fi) Internet access is available in most hotels throughout Indonesia and free Wi-Fi is available in many restaurants, cafes, and public places. Be careful to not save your password or sensitive information on public computer terminals.

Electricity

Most of the electrical voltage in Indonesia is 230V/ 50Hz. Round two-plug pins are more common although some places use flat pins or three-pronged pins. Adaptors are sold in local markets and usually available from your hotel. Protect your sensitive electronic equipment like laptops from power fluctuations by using a surge-protector.



SUMATRA ISLAND

Lake Toba

Lake Toba is one of the most popular attractions in Sumatra. Designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark, Lake Toba is the largest crater lake in the world and attracts people worldwide for its scenic and diverse landscapes from pine forest to beaches and waterfalls offering visitors a wide range of nature activities. It is also home to the indigenous Batak people who have their own language and tribal culture. A visit to Samsosir Island which sits in the middle of Lake Toba, offers a glimpse into the Batak Toba tribal culture and where you can view the traditional Toba houses recognized by its distinctive saddle-back roof.

Getting here: The nearest airport to Lake Toba is the Kualanamu International Airport in Medan. From Medan it is a 5-6 hours drive (180km/111mi).

Bukit Lawang

Bukit Lawang, a small village in northern Sumatra, is the gateway to Gunung Leuser National Park, recognized as the largest wilderness area in Southeast Asia. Although the national park is home to hundreds of bird, plant, and mammal species, the main attraction here is the Sumatran Orangutan (*Pongo Abellii*), home to approximately five thousand orangutans. There are ample activities for the outdoor and adventure enthusiasts in the park from trekking to exploring wildlife and botany.

Getting here: It takes approximately 3hrs by car (135km/83mi) from Kualanamu International Airport in Medan.

Pulau Weh

The volcanic Weh Island is located in the Andaman Sea northwest of Sumatra, near the northern capital of Aceh. Due to its remote location with untouched natural beauty, Weh Island offers a 'castaway' holiday experience. Iboih Beach is one of the best beaches on the island with clear water and white powder sand. The area is also ideal for snorkeling with opportunities to view marine life such as sea turtles, manta rays, and variety of fish.

Getting here: It is a 45min by ferry and 30 mins by speedboat from mainland Aceh. 2, Banda Aceh city.



Lake Toba



Samosir island



Weh island



JAVA ISLAND

Jakarta

Located on the north coast of western Java, Jakarta is a sprawling megalopolis with a population of more than 10 million. As the capital of Indonesia, Jakarta is the largest city not only in the country, but in all of Southeast Asia. Jakarta is a melting pot of diverse peoples and cultures from all parts of Indonesia, contributing to the city's exciting culinary scene. The city is also one of extreme contrasts where you will witness both glitzy neighbourhoods and rundown slums, along with colonial buildings and modern high-rises.

Getting here: Soekarno-Hatta International Airport is the main hub for domestic and international flights. Flights from/to Singapore (1hr45min), Kuala Lumpur (2hr20min), Bangkok (3hr35min). There is also a well-established rail network which connects the major cities of Java. Schedules change often, so please contact Trails of Indochina for the latest travel options.

Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta is the cultural and intellectual centre of Java. Dating back to the Mataram Kingdom (8th-10th century), Yogyakarta was home to both Hindu and Buddhist religion and culture, as evidenced in the architectural legacies of Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist monument, and the Prambanan Hindu complex built during this period. Deeply influenced by its religious and royal history, Yogyakarta is considered the soul of Javanese culture where traditional handicrafts and textiles, along with Javanese dance, theatre, and shadow puppetry can be found.

Getting here: Yogyakarta International Airport is the main hub serving domestic and international flights. There is also a well-established rail network which connects the major cities of Java. Schedules change often, so please contact Trails of Indochina for the latest travel options. By road to Jakarta it takes 6hrs (560km/348mi) or 1h15min flight and to/from Bali it is a 1hr20min flight.





BALI ISLAND

Bali is Indonesia's most popular destination, evoking visions of an exotic, tropical paradise with emerald rice paddies and stunning beaches. Commonly referred to as the 'Island of the Gods', Bali is a deeply spiritual place where religious practices and ceremonial rites at elaborate Hindu temples take place daily. Despite being a small island, only 150km/93mi from west to east, Bali offers a wide range of travel interests from cultural to beach activities, and luxury resorts to village homestays – there is something for everyone.

Getting here: Ngurah Rai International Airport is located in Denpasar and is the hub for both domestic and international flights. Flights to/from Jakarta take 1hr50min, Singapore (2hr45min), Kuala Lumpur (3hr15min), and Bangkok (4hr20min).

EAST NUSA TENGGARA ISLAND

Lombok Island

The island of Lombok is a hidden jewel traditionally overshadowed by the fame of neighbouring Bali. With a total area of 4,725 square km, the island of Lombok is slightly smaller than Bali and has 4.3 million inhabitants. Unlike the Hindu Balinese, the majority population on Lombok practices the Muslim faith. The island's landscape is dominated by Mount Rinjani, which rises to 3,726 m (12,224 ft) and is the second highest volcano in Indonesia. The area surrounding the volcano and the caldera were declared a National Park in 1997. Along the west and south are serene beaches, long idyllic stretches of white sand and wind-bent whispering palms.

Gili Islands

Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno and Gili Air located nearby to the island of Lombok make up a chain referred to as the Gili Islands. World-renowned for their turquoise waters, white sand beaches, and amazing snorkeling and diving sites, the Gilis each have something unique to offer. Gili Trawangan, the largest of the three, is the most visited island. Home to many backpacker spots, the island still has several sides where high-end resorts feature secluded beaches. Gili Air, the closest island to Lombok has a well-developed local community, where Gili Meno is laid back and great for couples.

Getting here: Lombok International Airport is the main airport on the island servicing domestic and international flights. Due to its close proximity to Bali, many travelers take a 1.5hr by speedboat or 45min by flight to Lombok and from there another short ride to the Gili Islands.



Bali



Lombok



Gili Islands



WEST NUSA TENGGARA ISLAND

Flores

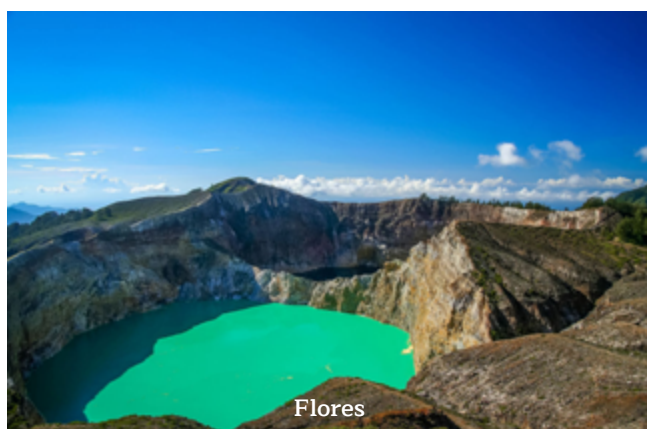
Flores, meaning 'flower' in Portuguese, lies in the Nusa Tenggara island group, between the Komodo and Rinca islands. Portuguese traders and missionaries colonised the island in the 16th century which explains the predominance of Roman Catholicism. The island's topography of volcanic mountains surrounded by terraced rice paddies along with unspoilt beaches overlooking the deep turquoise sea makes it an ideal secluded getaway. The port town of Labuanbajo is the main tourist centre and the transit hub to reach Komodo National Park and nearby offshore diving sites.

Getting here: The airport and harbour of Labuan Bajo (on the western tip of Flores) are the main entrance points to Flores and also the jumping off point for journeys to Komodo. This airport operates domestic flights only. It is a 2h25min flight from Jakarta or 1h15min flight from Bali.

Komodo

Located some 500 km (310mi) east of Bali, Komodo Island is part of the Lesser Sunda chain of islands between Flores to the east and Sumbawa to the west. Komodo was designated by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve in 1977 and is renowned as home to the 'Komodo Dragons', the world's largest land lizard reaching up to 3m (9ft) in length and weighing up to 90kg (200lb). Additionally, Komodo is a popular diving destination and is famous for its 'pink' sand beach, only one of seven in the world.

Getting here: Most travellers will arrive to Labuan Bajo, Flores and then take a boat to visit Komod & Rinca Islands. Labuan Bajo receives domestic flights only. It is 2h25min flight from Jakarta or 1h15min flight from Bali.



Flores



Komodo



KALIMANTAN ISLAND

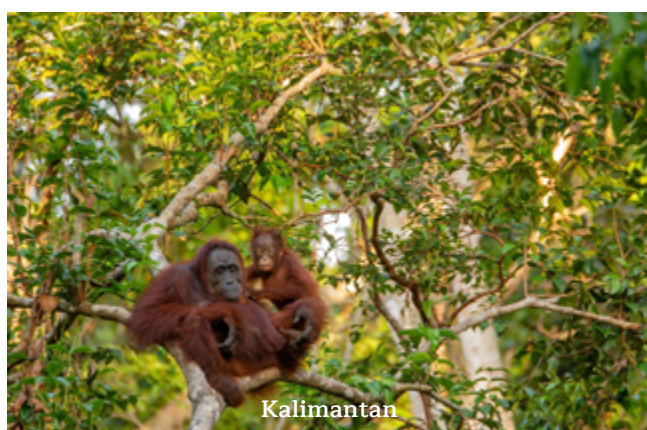
Kalimantan is the third largest island in the world located between of Sumatra and Sulawesi. Kalimantan Forest are natural habitats for Orangutan, Borneo elephant, Bornean rhino, and several endangered species. Kalimantan also has the famous river called Kapuas, the longest river in Indonesia which are ideal for overnight river excursions.

Getting here: The Aiport is Iskandar Airport. Traveller can take 1h30min flight to Iskandar Airport from Juanda Airport Surabaya, 2h15min from Soekarno-Hatta International Airport Jakarta, and 1h45min from Jenderal Ahmad Yani International Airport Semarang.

RAJA AMPAT ISLAND

Raja Ampat is considered the global center of tropical marine bio-diversity and is referred to as 'The Crown Jewel of the Bird's Head Seascape', which also includes Cenderawasih Bay and Triton Bay. The region contains more than 600 species of hard corals, equaling about 75 percent of known species globally, and more than 1,700 species of reef fish – including both shallow and mesophotic reefs and discorvering marine life.

Getting here: Private charter boats are the best way to explore the beautiful seascape and marine life of this area. Take a flight to Sorong airport, then drive to Sorong port to take 2hr by express boat to Raja Ampat island. It is a 4h15min flight from Jakarta, 2h25min flight from Makassa (Sulawesi island) or 1h30min flight from Manado (Sulawesi)





When it comes to Indonesian food, diversity is at its height. From spicy meat curries and deep fried banana to drinks of iced coconut and jelly, cuisine in Indonesia is remarkably varied. Visitors to Indonesia will find the food to be a blend of strong flavours always accompanied by nasi, means rice in Bahasa. There is a saying in Indonesia that a meal without nasi is not really a meal and this is a philosophy that Indonesians live by, eating nasi goreng for breakfast and more rice for lunch and dinner.



Nasi Goreng

Literally translating to fried rice, this is a common breakfast food in Indonesia and typically cooked with a sweet soy sauce, shallot, garlic, shrimp paste and tamarind with egg, chicken and prawns. It has an aromatic, earthy and smoky flavour. Its noodle counterpart is mie goreng, the same dish with fried noodles.



Satay

Made up of seasoned, skewered grilled meat, satay may consist of chicken, goat, mutton, beef, pork or fish. Grilled over wood or charcoal and typically served with a peanut sauce, satay originated on the island of Java and has now become a national dish.



Rendang

A flavourful preserved meat dish, rendang is slowly cooked in a broth of coconut milk and a paste of rich mixed ground spices. The dish is simmered until almost all the liquid is gone and the meat absorbs the condiments. It is often served with steamed rice.



Gado Gado

A salad of various kinds of vegetables with hard boiled eggs, fried tofu, tempeh (fermented pressed soybeans), and lontong (compressed rice wrapped in a banana leaf), served with a peanut sauce dressing.



If shopping is your passion, then go no further than the major metropolitan cities of Indonesia. With high end labels from around the world, many of Indonesia's malls can rival Europe and American with their collections. The malls of Jakarta, Indonesia's bustling capital, vary from those with high end designers to the chaotic crowds of local markets where anyone can pick up a bargain. If fashion is not your style, try shopping at a traditional market where you can test your bahasa bartering on local produce, handicrafts or antiques. Sample the tropical fruit or take in the sights of traditional bamboo furniture for sale. For those who like to browse, it will be impossible to resist the temptation to wander the streets and look at all the traditional wares on offer, from beautiful batik materials to shiny pieces of hand crafted silver jewellery.

There is no fixed price when shopping in markets or from street vendors so you can choose to bargain or accept the offered price. Markups can range from 20-50%. Though some people may find haggling fun, the sellers' livelihood depends on these sales so be mindful of this when making a local purchase. If you are approach by a seller and do not wish to make a purchase, just politely say 'no'. If you continue to look interested, they will continue to bargain until a purchase is made.

If you choose to ship items home, we highly recommend that you buy shipping insurance and check the policy details. As shops are not responsible for damages incurred en route, it's better to be safe than sorry. Please ask your Tour Guide for assistance. Trails of Indochina and our guides are not responsible for any misrepresented or faulty goods. We do not take responsibility for following up on merchandise that you choose to ship home. Our guides only make suggestions, not guarantees.





Cars

Car across Indonesia is generally modern and very good in Java, Sumatra, Bali and Lombok. In Flores and Komodo, the quality of vehicles is slightly lower/older. Although car rental is available, we advise to hire a car with driver for safety reasons.



Train

In Indonesia, there are several train lines that are built for tourist destinations, such as the Gamplong tram line in Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, the Ancol mini train line in Jakarta and the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII) tourist mini train line in Jakarta.



Cruising

With so many islands to explore, taking a cruise is one of the best way for island-hopping and enjoying watersports at your leisure. Both chartered cruises and day cruises are available to explore Indonesia's many islands.



Flights

Indonesia is spread over 18,000 islands which means traveling by air is the most convenient and sometimes the only way to get from one destination to another. Domestic airlines and international airlines both operate across Indonesia and to international destinations.



Temple Touring

As home to diverse religious and spiritual practices it is no wonder that there are so many different types of temples and religious monuments in Indonesia. One of the most famous is the Borobudur Temple Complex, a UNESCO Heritage Site. Other sites worth visiting are Prambanan, Tirta Empul, Tanah Lot, Uluwatu Temple, Goa Gajah, Ulun Danu Beratan Temple and Besakih Temple.



Dining

Dining in Indonesia is an international affair. Both Indonesian fare and international cuisine can be found throughout the country. Local dishes include satay, gado gado, nasi, mie goreng, and more. International cuisine is also on offer, particularly in the larger cities like Jakarta and on the island of Bali.



Relaxation

With Bali known as the Island of the Gods, the whole of Indonesia provokes a spiritual getaway. Abundant with wellness retreats, yoga studios, secluded properties and beaches, there is no shortage of relaxation in Indonesia. Relaxation is not a question, but rather a choice of what type of relaxing experience you want to enjoy.



Cultural Etiquette

- Even though hand shaking is deemed appropriate between men and women, bear in mind that a number of Muslim women prefer to introduce themselves to men by nodding their head, smiling, and clasping their hands without any physical contact. Traditionally, when you greet someone, both hands are used when shaking, without grasping.
- Shoes must be taken off before entering a house or place of worship like temples and mosques. When eating, receiving or giving something, always use your right hand. The right index finger should not be used to point at a place, items or people. Use the right hand thumb and fold the remaining fingers to be more polite.
- Taking photographs of houses of worships is allowed, however, permission should be asked first whenever possible, especially if you want to take pictures of the interior. Most Indonesian Muslims do not consume alcoholic drinks or pork.
- Dress sufficiently. If you are female, make sure you dress according to local customs. Skimpy or revealing clothing in public areas might warrant unwanted attention.

Safety

- While Indonesia is quite a safe country, petty theft is a problem in tourist centers, and violent crime against foreigners, while rare, does occur.
- When possible, secure your valuables in the hotel safe. Remember to record your credit card details and traveller's check numbers, just in case.
- Do not leave your wallet or mobile phone in the back pocket of your pants or anywhere else that's easily reached – like an outer zip-up compartment on a backpack. Be especially vigilant in markets and other crowded places like ports and train stations
- If you choose to ride a motorcycle or bike, it is always advisable to wear a helmet. It is not recommended for non-experienced drivers to drive a vehicle or ride a motorbike.



Before you visit, we recommend some wonderful reading and informative movies to understand and learn more about this enchanting country.

Books

- *A House In Bali*, Colin McPhee
Written by a Canadian writer/composer, this book captures McPhee's journey to Bali during the pre-WWII era and accounts the life he decided to build on the island, mainly through his understanding of Balinese music culture and all its complexities. McPhee was one of many artists that flocked to Bali for inspiration in the 1930s and settled in Ubud (when Bali's cultural centre was still a teeny-tiny village).
- *Under the Volcano: The Story of Bali*, Cameron Forbes
To say that Bali is an island that has been through a lot would be an understatement. Against the backdrop of paradise, Bali has suffered its fair share of bloodshed from the puputans, the mass-massacre of 1965-66, bombings in 2002 and 2005 and in more recent times, lives taken away because of involvement with drugs.
- *Man Tiger*, Lelaki Harimau (2004)
Which recently named a nominee for the prestigious Man Booker International Prize, this novel follows Margio, a youngster from a rural area in Indonesia, who decides to kill a man. This leaves the whole village confused as Margio doesn't seem like a person who could actually harm anyone. When asked why he did it, he answered, "It wasn't me. There's a tiger in me".

Film

- *Toute La Beaute du Monde* (2006)
A movie about a French woman who travels to Bali after her husband's death. During her stay, she finds love again in the blue of the ocean, the lively vibe of the city, and in the arms of a fine French gentleman. Watching this movie is a great way to discover how Bali's main attractions like Seminyak and Tanah Lot would look like without all the crowds.
- *Ring of Fire: An Indonesian Odyssey* (1999)
A five-part documentary that perfectly captures the Indonesian archipelago, including Bali and the surrounding islands. The creators, Lorne and Lawrence Blair, are two daring filmmakers who went to great lengths to immerse themselves in the lives of Indonesians. The brothers arrived in 1972 and traveled around the country for a full decade. The films grant us the sights and insight they accumulated over time.
- *Eat Pray Love* (2010)
After indulging in Italy's culinary scene and India's spiritual landscape, the main character flies to Bali to find love. The movie paints quite a picture of Bali's most amazing landscapes.

CONTACT US



If you have any questions or encounter any issues, please contact us at our Indonesia office so we can provide an immediate solution.

Trails of Indochina Indonesia

Jl. Nakula No.19 D, Legian, Kuta, Bali. 80361

Tel: +62 361 9348067

Emergency Number/ WhatsApp: +62 811 3889 9991 (English)

indonesia.care@trailsofindochina.com

www.trailsofindochina.com

