

Destination Indonesia

Adventure looms large in this vast and steamy archipelago, where the best of Southeast Asia's spicy melange simmers tantalisingly. Heady scents, vivid colours, dramatic vistas and diverse cultures spin and multiply to the point of exhaustion, their potent brew leaving your senses reeling.

Rippling across the equator for nearly 5000km, Indonesia encompasses more than 17,000 islands, two-thirds of which are inhabited and richly layered with character. The elaborate funeral ceremonies and timeless tradition of Sulawesi's Toraja are light years from the surfing culture of Lombok. But so too are the mighty saddle-backed Batak mansions and volcanic lakes of Sumatra's Danua Toba from the mummies and deeply etched gorges of Papua's Baliem Valley. Bali's resorts and restaurants pamper precocious style cats, while at the same moment threadbare backpackers are adopted by homestays in Kalimantan.

Indonesia's cities are in a constant state of urban evolution, where dense populations, technology and construction live in hectic symbiosis. But most of the archipelago's territory remains unexplored, concealing a wealth of cultures and a myriad of landscapes. Oceanic rice fields and ancient sultanates in Java are humbled by haunting volcanic cones. Maluku's alabaster beaches and desert islands remain pristine while the tourist trail heads elsewhere. The jungles of Sumatra, Kalimantan and Papua are zoological wonders, revealing impish monkeys, stoic sun bears, leopards, orang-utans and remarkable marsupials.

And then there are the micromoments, equally exquisite but entirely unexpected; impromptu English lessons with school children, instant friendships in crammed bemos, lending an ear to your becak rider... In Indonesia there is plenty of cause to pause, except when dodging hurtling traffic – but that's all part of the adventure.

THIS IMAGE
NOT AVAILABLE
IN PICK & MIX

Getting Started

Indonesia is big, cheap, rough and effortless. It's everything to everyone, a choose-your-own-adventure travel destination. With little more than a passport, sunscreen and a day's notice, urban-fatigue victims arrive dazed at Denpasar to recover in comfortable Balinese resorts. With a bit of planning and preparation, explorers can put packs to their backs and chart six-month rugged routes in which time, energy and a keen sense of adventure are the chief companions.

WHEN TO GO

Straddling the equator, Indonesia tends to have a fairly even climate year-round. Rather than four seasons, Indonesia has two – wet and dry – and there are no extremes of winter and summer.

In most parts of Indonesia, the wet season falls between October and April (low season), and the dry season between May and September (high season). Rain tends to come in sudden tropical downpours, but it can also rain nonstop for days. In some parts of the country, such as Kalimantan, the difference between the seasons is slight – the dry season just seems to be slightly hotter and slightly drier than the wet season. In other areas, such as Nusa Tenggara, the differences are very pronounced, with droughts in the dry season and floods in the wet.

Though travel in the wet season is not usually a major problem in most parts of Indonesia, mud-clogged back roads can be a deterrent. The best time to visit is in the dry season. The 'wet' starts to descend in October and varies in intensity across the archipelago. The December to February rains can make travel prohibitive in Nusa Tenggara, when rough seas either cancel (or sink) ferries, and roads on Flores are washed out. Parts of Papua are also inaccessible. The rains shift in Sumatra, peaking from October to January in the north, and from January to February in the south. But seasonal change makes little difference in Bali, and in Kalimantan higher water levels from December to February improve access to rivers and small tributaries.

In most cases, experiencing an Indonesian festival is reason enough to head to a destination. Some are so significant, however, that they can generate difficult conditions for travellers. Tana Toraja's funeral season boosts Rantepao's population, and hotel prices, substantially during July and August. In Java it's a good idea to avoid the final days of Idul Fitri (p856), when public transport is mayhem and some businesses close.

A tragic drop in tourist hordes (see p34) means that Indonesia's 'high season' no longer presents the same kind of bother it once did. The December–January Christmas holiday period and the school holidays still brings a wave of migratory Australians, and Europeans head to Bali, Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi in July and August. But climatic impediments aside, pretty much any time is a good time to head to Indonesia at the moment.

The main Indonesian holiday periods are the end of Ramadan (p855), when domestic tourists fill resorts and prices escalate; Christmas; and mid-June to mid-July, when graduating high-school students take off by the busload to various tourist attractions, mainly in Java and Bali.

COSTS & MONEY

Costs vary depending on where you go, but Indonesia remains one of the cheapest travel destinations in Asia. Hotels, food and transport are all inexpensive in US dollar terms.

Accommodation is usually the greatest expense of Indonesian travel, followed by 'luxury' foreign articles such as electronics. A stream of price hikes in petrol during 2005 increased the cost of bus travel, although it's still inexpensive by any standard. Three square warung (food stall) meals can cost you as little as US\$2 (less than 10,000Rp per meal), but even if you dine in decent local restaurants, you still won't be spending much more than US\$10 per day (around 30,000Rp per meal) on food.

If you confine yourself to Sumatra, Java and Nusa Tenggara, a shoe-string traveller can spend as little as US\$15 per day. A midrange budget starts at about US\$40 per day, which will get you an air-conditioned hotel room, an occasional tour and car hire. Midrange accommodation is more expensive in Balinese resorts, so budget for around US\$50 per day there. Top-end travellers will end up spending anything between US\$50 and US\$250 per day, although if you stick to the best of the luxury resorts, that figure can blow out to US\$2000 a day.

Travellers' centres with lots of competition, such as Danau Toba, Yogyakarta and Bali, can be superb value for accommodation and food. Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara are also good budget options.

Elsewhere, budget accommodation can be limited and prices are higher because competition is less fierce. Accommodation prices in Maluku and Papua can be twice as high as in tourist towns, and transport costs on Kalimantan are relatively high.

Transport expenses also increase once you get into the outer provinces. In Bali, Sumatra, Java and Nusa Tenggara there's very little need to take to the air, but in the interior of Papua you have no choice but to fly. Flying is much more expensive than other forms of transport, though still cheap in dollar terms.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Wrapping your head around Indonesian culture can be a daunting task, as the country's history, economics, politics and culture have been widely interpreted and documented by a host of writers. Literature

HOW MUCH?

Snorkel hire 20,000-50,000Rp
Bike hire 15,000-30,000Rp
Ikat (hand-dyed cloth) 500,000Rp, and up
Internet access per hr 6000Rp
Cup of fresh coffee 2000-5000Rp
See also Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover

See Climate Charts (p848) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- checking the visa situation (p862) – it's constantly changing and constantly frustrating
- an emergency stash of cash for remote or isolated areas
- a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen – the Indonesian sun is relentless
- sturdy boots and sandals (such as Reefs) or thongs
- locks for your luggage – it's better to be safe than sorry (p851)
- an empty bag to haul your shopping home
- a fantastic set of earplugs for the mosque and traffic wake-up calls
- a snorkel and mask
- dental floss, tampons and shaving cream – they're harder to come by than your average toiletries
- waterproof jacket – it's the tropics, it rains...a lot
- antimalarial tablets and DEET repellent (see p882)
- thick skin and a sense of humour
- a mental note to purchase a sarong once you're in Indonesia – it's a fashion statement, blanket, beach mat, top sheet, mattress cover, towel and shade from the pounding sun.

TOP TENS

Adventures

- Sampling the deserted islands, volcanoes and jungle of untouristed Maluku (p747).
- Taking in the mummies, markets and culture of Papua's Baliem Valley (p816).
- Snorkelling and diving the psychedelic reefs of the Banda Islands (p765).
- Braving the elements, sun bears and jungle in Kalimantan's Kayan Mentarang National Park (p660) or Apokayan Highlands (p659).
- Surfing the legendary Desert Point (p499) in southwest Lombok.
- Tramping through coffee plantations and waterfalls around Bali's Munduk (p364).
- Marvelling at the 6km-wide crater lake and summit views of Lombok's Gunung Rinjani (p519).
- Spotting orang-utans, gibbons, macaques and kingfishers in Tanjung Puting National Park (p631).
- Getting a bird's-eye view of Sumatra's smoking guns, Gunung Sinabung (p396) and Gunung Sibayak (p395).
- Discovering pristine wilderness and beaches in Java's remote Ujung Kulon National Park (p128).

Indonesian Experiences

- A beaming Indonesian smile – locals here are unfailingly happy and warm.
- Spontaneous guitar-strumming sessions on street corners, warung, Pelni boats...
- Dancing Poco Poco (Indonesian line dancing) at a Maluku village disco.
- Taking your becak (bicycle-rickshaw) driver for a ride instead of the other way around.
- Sharing your rambutans and rupiah during impromptu card games on overnight ferries.
- Catching a bus when school's out and responding to a dozen kids practising their five English questions.
- Starring in countless strangers' holiday pictures.
- Helmet-less *ojek* (motorcycle) trips.
- Coffee, cigarettes and conversations at 2am bus stops.
- Learning how to sleep through the morning call to prayer.

Festivals

- Nyale Fishing Festival, February or March (p525) – Hundreds flock to catch a glimpse of Lombok's first *nyale* (wormlike fish) at this huge fishing festival.
- Pasola, February or March (p603) – ritual warfare marks Nusa Tenggara's harvest festival.
- Waisak, May (p170) – Buddha's birth and enlightenment are celebrated by thousands of monks and pilgrims in Borobudur.
- Festival Teluk Kendari, April (p711) – partying and dragon-boat races in Sulawesi's Kendari Bay.
- Yogya arts festival, June to July (p177) – A month-long smorgasbord of shows and exhibitions in Java's cultural capital.
- Bali Arts Festival, June to July (p303) – A celebration of Bali's enigmatic dance, music and crafts.
- Tana Toraja funeral festival, July to September (p690) – Toraja from all over Indonesia return to Sulawesi to celebrate these annual funeral rituals.
- *Bidar* race, August (p473) – Dozens of vivid *bidar* (canoes) race on Sumatra's Sungai Musi.
- Baliem Festival, August (p826) – A rich celebration of the Baliem Valley's diverse indigenous cultures.
- Ubud Writers & Readers Festival, October (p315) – An internationally acclaimed writers' festival.

about Java and Bali is relatively common, but anything about the other islands can be hard to find. The following provide general scratch-beneath-the-surface accounts of some of the experiences Indonesia has to offer.

Lyall Watson's *Gifts of Unknown Things* observes the symbiotic relationship of a community and its environment on unnamed Indonesian island. The value of the natural world features highly in the book, and fans describe it as life affirming.

Hard Bargaining in Sumatra: Western Travelers and Toba Bataks in the Marketplace of Souvenirs, by Andrew Causey, describes the narrator's sabbatical with the Toba Bataks of northern Sumatra, and humbly captures the sensual and physical landscape of the region.

Tim Flannery's *Throvin Way Leg* is a must for Papuan inspiration. The author recounts his scientific expeditions to the province, where he discovered new species in Indiana Jones-style adventures. And it's all true!

Indonesian history is detailed in Simon Winchester's *Krakatoa – The Day the World Exploded*, which melds history, geology and politics, all centred on the 1888 eruption of Krakatoa – the world's biggest bang.

In Search of Moby Dick, by Tim Severin, is an engagingly written search for the globe's last whale-hunters that includes an extended stay in the whaling village of Lamalera, Nusa Tenggara.

Couched in an academic title, Adrian Vickers' *A History of Modern Indonesia* is based around the writings of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and summons the culture, turbulence and emotion of everyday Indonesian life.

Bali enthusiasts will love *Dancing Out of Bali* by John Coast, which invokes the people, life, music, and dance of Bali, told through the eyes of a young Englishman and his Javanese wife.

If you think travel's rugged now, delve into Helen and Frank Schreider's *Drums of Tonkin*, which documents their 1963 journey from Sumatra to Timor in an amphibious jeep: landslides, gun-toting soldiers and sea voyages galore.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The internet is a rich resource for all types of travellers – before you jump on a plane jump online to get accurate and current information.

Some interesting sites:

Antara (www.antara.co.id/en) This is the site for the official Indonesian news agency; it has a searchable database.

Bali Discovery (www.balidiscovery.com) Although run by a tour company, this excellent site is the best source for Bali news and features.

Central Java Tourism (www.central-java-tourism.com) Tourism website for Central Java.

EastJava.com (www.eastjava.com) Excellent site for tourism and business in East Java, with information on everything from hospitals to moneychangers.

Indahnesia.com (<http://indahnesia.com>) Good site for news, features, online forums, events and other links.

Indonesia: Society & Culture (coombs.anu.edu.au/WWWVLPages/IndonPages/WWWVLI-Indonesia.html) Australian National University's links site, this is the 'granddaddy' of links to everything Indonesian.

Indonesian Homepage (<http://indonesia.elga.net.id/>) A good general introduction to Indonesia, with a range of links.

Indonesia Tourism (www.indonesia-tourism.com) Useful site for general information about tourism and holiday destinations in Indonesia.

Jakarta Post (www.thejakartapost.com) The extensive website of Indonesia's English-language daily.

Living in Indonesia: A Site for Expatriates (www.expat.or.id) Information, advice and links aimed at the expatriate community, but useful for all visitors.

'If you think travel's rugged now, delve into Helen and Frank Schreider's *Drums of Tonkin*'

Lombok Network (www.lombok-network.com) A very comprehensive site bringing together huge amounts of current information on Lombok.

Lombok Times (www.lomboktimes.com) Useful website on all things touristy on Lombok – restaurants, features, accommodation and more.

LonelyPlanet.com (www.lonelyplanet.com) Share knowledge and experiences with other travellers about islands that have been Lonely Planet favourites from the start.

Tempo Interactive (www.tempointeractive.com) One of Indonesia's most respected magazines, offering good news articles in Indonesian and English.

Thorn Tree (<http://thornree.lonelyplanet.com>) Lonely Planet's bulletin board, with travel news, updates, forums and links to useful travel resources.

Tourism Indonesia (www.tourismindonesia.com) The website for Indonesia's national tourist organisation is general but informative.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

BEACHES, BARS, BODIES & BLISS

Three Weeks/Bali to the Gilis

Start in Bali, where you can acclimatise in the resorts, clubs and shops of Kuta (p276). Dose up on sun at the beach, then feast on fabulous food and sling back cocktails in Seminyak's (p287) trendy haunts.

Head north to immerse yourself in the 'other' Bali – the culture, temples and rich history of Ubud (p307). Visit Goa Gajah (p325) and the nearby craft villages. Take a cooking course or learn batik, woodcarving or silver-smithing. Once you've exhausted your yen for culture, escape civilisation altogether – in a volcanic crater. Take yourself to Gunung Agung (p333) and Gunung Batur (p358).

Next on the agenda is Lombok; make a beeline for Padangbai (p334) and jump on a ferry to Lembar (p499), the island's launching pad. Potter through the rice fields and Hindu temples around Mataram (p497), then head to Senggigi (p500) for indulgent resorts, fine beaches and uninterrupted R&R.

From Senggigi take a ferry to the deservedly celebrated Gili Islands (p504), where seamless beaches, translucent water and vivid reefs beg for snorkel-clad swimmers.

Bali and Lombok are the heart of Indonesia's tourist industry. This well-trodden 160km-long path starts in Kuta, snakes north through Bali to Ubud and skips over to Lombok before ending in the Gili Islands.



THE JAVA JAUNT

Three Weeks to Three Months/Jakarta to Bromo-Tengger-Semeru National Park

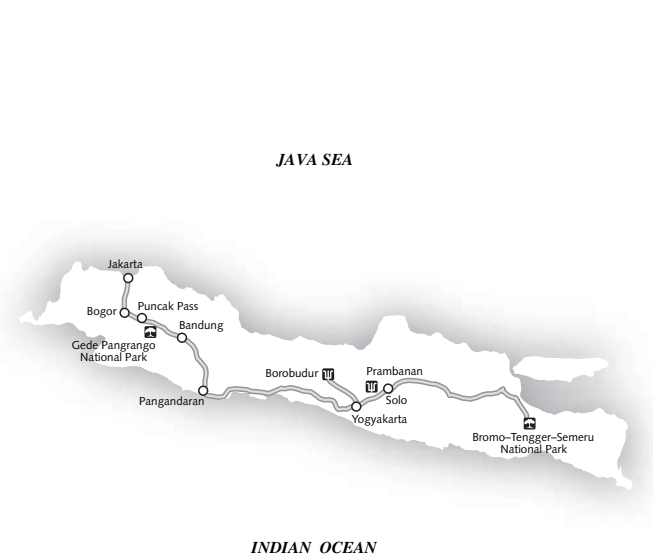
Start your journey in **Jakarta** (p99) and wrap your senses around the dizzying smells, sounds, sights and people of Indonesia's teeming capital. Linger long enough to binge on Bintang beer and shopping, then head to **Bogor** (p129) to lose yourself in the sublime Kebun Raya Botanic Gardens.

From Bogor set a course east through Java's centre, traversing the tea plantations, waterfalls and dramatic scenery of the **Puncak Pass** area (p136). Visit **Gede Pangrango National Park** (p138) and take a day to reach the summit of **Gunung Gede** for jaw-dropping views. Continue your journey for a stint in the urban jungle of **Bandung** (p138). Sate yearnings for the modern world in this city's hotels and restaurants, then make a quick exit from the chaos.

It's time to hit the coast, ditch the boots for a while and camp out in some well-earned calm – and that's where **Pangandaran** (p151), Java's premier beach resort, comes in. The national park, wide shorelines and a coastal party buzz dominate the visual and social landscapes here, and the accommodation is kind to all budgets.

After you've worshipped the sun for a week or so, pack the bags and head to **Yogyakarta** (p171), Java's cultural capital. Dabble in batik, amble through the *kraton* (walled city palace) and part with your rupiah at the vibrant markets. A day trip to majestic **Borobudur** (p167) is a must. From Yogyakarta make your way to the laid-back city of **Solo** (p194), via the enigmatic temples of **Prambanan** (p190). Finish your Java expedition with a visit to the awesome **Bromo-Tengger-Semeru National Park** (p244), spending your last night on the lip of Tengger crater.

Positively churning with life, Java has the lion's share of Indonesia's population, and a wealth of culture and landscapes to match. This 800km route takes in the highlights, beginning in the teeming capital Jakarta and ending in the awe-inspiring peaks of Bromo-Tengger-Semeru National Park.



SULTRY SUMATRA

One Month/Medan to Padang

Dominated by wild and chaotic jungle peppered with urban centres, Sumatra has its own beaten path to accommodate the inquisitive traveller.

All roads lead to **Medan** (p382), which is the perfect point to stock up on necessities and creature comforts. Satisfy your craving for Dutch pottery, dazzle the taste buds with a Malay or Indian curry and down a Bintang at sunset.

But you didn't come for the air-con, so hit the road and make your way north to **Bukit Lawang** (p389), home to Sumatra's most adored natural attraction – the orang-utan. Feeding sessions for semideprived primates offers unparalleled viewing of these graceful creatures. If you fancy roughing it, you can test your survivor skills on a two-day trek through the park, with the potential reward of seeing orang-utans in the wild.

From Bukit Lawang, bus your way down south to **Danau Toba** (p399) for Batak culture, a gorgeous volcanic lake and a languid ambience. Trekking is the traditional lure to this area, but there are rambling markets, handicraft villages and gargantuan orchids to behold as well.

The route then takes a dive south to **Bukittinggi** (p441), a busy market town dwarfed by more volcanic peaks. The town itself is a pleasant spot to amble about for a few days but the attractions lie just outside in the handicraft village of **Koto Gadang** (p445), the terraced rice fields, and the nearby **Batang Palupah Nature Reserve** (p446) and **Lembah Anai Nature Reserve** (p446).

Your journey ends in **Padang** (p431), one of Sumatra's busiest cities. Keep yourself occupied with museums and festivals, or use the city as a launching pad to escape to the **Mentawai Islands** (p437).



This 900km journey takes in the cities of Medan and Padang, orang-utans in Bukit Lawang and the majestic volcanic lake of Danau Toba. There are markets, handicraft villages and nature reserves on the schedule, and a laze on the gorgeous Mentawai Islands.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

This 3000km off-the-radar adventure takes in the picturesque islands around Papua's Kota Biak before heading to the sublime Danau Sentani and the beguiling Baliem Valley. Maluku's Pulau Ambon and Banda Island provide a change of scene before the route heads south to West Timor and Flores.

THE TRAIL THAT TIME FORGOT

Two Months/Papua to Flores
Papua is the launching pad for this route, starting at Kota Biak (p808). A relaxed and pleasant town, Biak is most useful as a base for trips to the beauty beyond. Pack a tent and make for the exquisite reefs and beaches of the Padaido Islands (p813) and the unspoilt, ethereal Pulau Numfor (p813).

Next on the itinerary is a quick plane ride from Kota Biak to Jayapura (p828). But you'll only be stopping long enough to charter a boat to visit the magnificent Danau Sentani (p835), a 96.5-sq-km lake with 19 islands.

Back on dry land the route heads inland to the beautiful Baliem Valley (p816), rich in culture and dramatic mountain scenery. From here the truly intrepid (and wealthy) can embark on an expedition into the pristine but seemingly impenetrable Asmat region (p837).

Heading further afield requires a flight to Fak-Fak (p803) before another flight or a ferry to Kota Ambon on Maluku's Pulau Ambon (p752). Dose up on urban comfort and culture, then take a ferry or plane to the crystalline seas, multicoloured reefs and empty beaches of the Banda Islands (p765).

After indulging in sun and isolation, pack your gear up and board a Peln ferry for Kupang (p580) in West Timor. Visit villages in the surrounding areas, then jump over to Rote (p588) for relaxed coastal vibes. For a perfect ending, make your way to Flores (p543), a rugged volcanic island with fishing villages, thriving culture and dramatic terrain.



THE CULTURAL QUEST

Six to Eight Weeks/Kalimantan to Sulawesi
Unassuming Pangkalan Bun (p628) is the entry point to this excursion – it's the launching pad for trips into glorious Tanjung Puting National Park (p631), one of Indonesia's best orang-utan haunts. Scan the canopy for their amber bodies from the top of a houseboat as it ambles down the beautiful Sungai Kumai, then fly back to reality in colourful Banjarmasin (p635). Dabble in the best of Kalimantan's urban culture – brave a 5am call for the animated floating markets, then cruise the canals and meet the locals at dusk.

From Banjarmasin travel overland to Samarinda (p649) and make an expedition along Sungai Mahakam (p654). Several days upstream will land you in the river's western reaches, which are peppered with semitraditional Dayak villages and preserved forests.

From Samarinda catch the weekly Peln ferry to Makassar (p671) to marvel at colonial Dutch architecture and gorge on some of Indonesia's best seafood. Chart a course due north for vast and mesmerising Tana Toraja (p687), home to Sulawesi's most fascinating indigenous culture. Take part in the elaborate funeral ceremonies, hop through remote villages, raft the Sungai Sa'dan's rapids, and scale spectacular summits.

Continue north and settle in Central Sulawesi for hiking around Indonesia's third largest lake, Danau Poso (p716). From here escape the 'mainland' and plant yourself on the blissful Togean Islands (p725), which are laden in marine life and culture. After snorkelling and diving the vivid reefs head into Northern Sulawesi and the laid-back port of Gorontalo (p731), where you can get busy with the camera on some of the finest Dutch architecture in the country.

One for the wildlife and culture junkies, this 2700-odd-kilometre route takes in the orang-utans of magical Tanjung Puting National Park and the Dayaks of Kalimantan's interior, before skipping over to Sulawesi for Toraja funeral ceremonies, river rapids, mountain treks and marine life.



TAILORED TRIPS

BEGUILING BEASTIES

Indonesia's natural world is so vast and diverse that scientists seem to discover new species at the drop of a hat.

High on the list of must-sees are the enigmatic orang-utans, best viewed at Sumatra's Bukit Lawang (p389) and Kalimantan's Kutai National Park (p652) and Tanjung Puting National Park (p631). This last conservation area is also populated by gibbons, macaques, proboscis monkeys, sun bears, clouded leopards and a whole host more. In East Kalimantan the wetlands of Danau Jempang (p657) are home to over 90 species of bird and the tiny Irrawaddy dolphin.

Papua is flavour of the zoologist month: a 2006 expedition into the remote Foja Mountains (see p797) uncovered a teeming community of unknown frogs, birds and even a kangaroo. You can catch a glimpse of Australianesque fauna in Wasur National Park (p837), or you can try spotting the rare *cenderawasih* (bird of paradise) in the islands around Pulau Biak (p808).

In Nusa Tenggara the gargantuan Komodo dragon dwells in the depths of Komodo (p540).

For butterflies bigger than your hand and exquisite birdlife, head to Sulawesi's Lore Lindu National Park (p718). The island is also home to Morowali Nature Reserve (p723), which is equally rich in birdlife and other fauna.



SURF'S UP

With a dizzying array of coastlines and beaches, Indonesia is a surfing mecca. The most obvious and easiest place to catch a wave is Bali, where Ulu Watu (p298) on the west coast serves up three left-handers. Nearby, Dreamland (p298) is the next best thing, and Nusa Lembongan (p346) has reached legendary status on the circuit. Kuta and Legian (p276) lured avid surfers long before the beaches were discovered by the crowds, and the waves remain a constant.

The hardy test their mettle at Lombok's Desert Point (p499) and then skip over to Sumbawa to catch the feisty tubes near Maluk (p531). If you're looking to escape the crowds, south-central Sumba offers good waves at Tarimbang (p598). The surf capital of Sumba, however, is Baing (p597).

Sumatra also has a few treats up its coastal sleeves, the most famous of which is Pulau Nias (p407). Also on Sumatra, the sublime Mentawai Islands (p440) are gaining popularity for their year-round swells, and a number of surf charters are beginning to sail here.

Then there's Java, with the world-class G-Land (p262) inside Alas Purwo National Park, and superlative reef breaks near Pelabuhan Ratu (p134). Beginners can find their balance on the friendly surf at Batu Karas (p156).



UNDERWATER ODYSSEYS

With more than 17,500 islands under its archipelago belt, Indonesia boggles the minds of divers and snorkellers with a feast of underwater adventures.

Maluku's Banda Islands (p765) are encircled by dense coral gardens, cascading drop-offs and superb marine life. Best of all, they're so remote you may score this underwater vista all to yourself.

Oversized fish, sleepy sea fans and gaping canyons lounge beneath the ocean's surface near Sumatra's Pulau Weh (p422). The pick of the destinations here are the 20 dive sites around Long Angen (p424), the stomping ground for majestic manta rays, lion fish and morays.

Sulawesi's spectacular Pulau Bunaken (p739) simmers with more than 300 species of fish and coral types. Countless drop-offs, caves and valleys provide ample viewing for days of diving, and turtles, rays, sharks and dolphins are common visitors. Then there's the renowned Lembeh Strait (p743), an underwater universe of otherworldly and utterly photogenic marine life.

Off Kalimantan's northeast corner, Pulau Derawan (p663) is the best base for the Sangalaki Archipelago, as indicated by the turtles who nest here regularly and the schools of tuna who shimmy offshore.

In Nusa Tenggara, a diverse range of marine life simmers underwater in the Gili Islands (p511), and around Komodo and Labuanbajo (see p546).



GUNUNG BAGGING

Indonesia's undulating landscapes encompass enough peaks and troughs to keep even marathon trekkers happy.

There's good tramping to be found around Sumatra's Gunung Sinabung (p396) and Gunung Sibayak (p395), but serious explorers can brave the jungle beasts in the interior of Gunung Leuser National Park (p427).

Java's Unesco World Heritage-listed Ujung Kulon National Park (p128) is a remote outpost of untouched wilderness, and a three-day hike through the park reveals pristine forest and diverse wildlife. At the island's south-east tip, the Ijen Plateau (p249) is peppered with volcanic cones and offers a spectacular day trek to a sulphur lake.

The cascading rice fields around Sulawesi's Tana Toraja (p687) give way to excellent highland trekking, with soaring summits and cool-water swimming pools. Treks last anywhere from several hours to several days – highlights include the 2150m-high Gunung Sesean (p704). You can also mingle with the wildlife on organised treks in Lore Lindu National Park (p718).

Intrepid hikers should head to Papua's sublime Baliem Valley (p816) or test their mettle amid the mighty rivers and mangroves of the undeveloped Asmat region (p837).

Kalimantan's interior also provides excellent opportunities for hikers with time and experience, particularly around Loksado (p642) in Pegunungan Meratus (Meratus Mountains) and in the Apokayan Highlands (p659).



Snapshot

Indonesia has held top billing in the international press in recent years, but sadly for all the wrong reasons. The Jakarta and Bali bombings of 2002–05, coupled with high-profile media coverage of Islamic radicals, have exacted their malevolent toll and the locals are suffering as a consequence. Indonesians are terrified that the world has abandoned them out of security concerns and Islamophobia; fast joining 'Hello Mister' in the mod-Indo vocab is a mournful 'Where are the tourists?'. Islamic devotion is incredibly varied in this massive archipelago (see p62 to get the full picture) and Muslims from Medan to Kupang go to great pains to express sorrow and despair that their faith has been hijacked and misconstrued. They are also eager to swap religious, cultural and ethnic similarities with foreigners. In fact it's difficult to find a local of any background who *won't* readily engage you in personal and complex discussion...and that's just at the bus stop. See the boxed text on p65 for valuable conversation tips.

Adding to the tainted picture is the aftermath of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. Apocalyptic visions pummelled the globe's TV screens and the collective audience watched whole cities and holiday Edens disappear in a matter of hours. In Indonesia, Sumatra bore the brunt, and the tide of human and economic aid that followed gave the ocean a run for its money (see p420 for more information). But the image of destruction applied itself thickly to Indonesia as a whole, and tour operators far from the tsunami's reach find themselves suffering by proxy.

The recently introduced one-month visa rule adds yet another snag for both locals and foreigners. Restricting exploratory travels for long haulers, it amplifies the frustration and anguish of an industry battling to survive. The wheels of bureaucracy churn in Jakarta, and meanwhile hotels, restaurants and everyone else in the service industry are suffering from a 40% plummet in visitor numbers. Island-hopping routes that were destined to become the next big trail remain untrodden and the first sign of foreign activity is received with such gratitude and warmth you'd think it was the Second Coming.

The political hot topics of the moment are peace deals and disputed provinces. After 29 years of guerrilla war, it took a devastating sleight of nature to catalyse cohesion in Aceh. The 2004 tsunami wreaked unheralded destruction in the isolated region, but its one positive legacy has been the resulting peace deal between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM – Gerakan Aceh Merdeka) and the Indonesian military. More than 12 months on and the deal is sticking; locals are optimistic and this is one area where travellers are beginning to turn up.

Another province once plagued by internal conflict, Maluku is also experiencing a sanguine renaissance thanks to a massive injection of recovery money and feverish development. Ambon and Ternate in particular seem to be aiming for the gold-medal podium in the global construction stakes, with a bevy of buildings on the make.

On the other hand, bombs in Palu and Tentena on Sulawesi and the gruesome beheading of schoolgirls around Poso are tragic proof that central Sulawesi remains volatile. And in Papua, separatist violence is flaring loudly. Many protests are ostensibly about the foreign exploitation, but the underlying tensions are rooted in Papua's lack of autonomy, the oppressive Indonesian military presence, and human rights violations

against native Papuans. The US-owned Freeport Mine has become a target of violence, and the death of five Indonesian policemen in riots in March 2006 highlighted the extent of local frustrations. Alleged reprisal deaths and arrests at the hands of the Indonesian military followed. In the same month, the Australian government granted asylum to 42 Papuan refugees. The move infuriated Jakarta and fragile relations between the two countries dominated headlines and conversations in both countries. Diplomatic tensions were soon abated, but the conflict in Papua continues; see the boxed text on p54 for a greater insight into the issue.

Far less polarising than politics, but just as fervently discussed, is the state of the economy. Shattered tourist industry aside, for most Indonesians things were looking up following the October 2004 elections. Folk were happy with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's reform rhetoric, and his move to furnish provincial governments with greater autonomy promised greater political and economic equality. But the hope and confidence are waning with the sneaking realisation that anticorruption efforts are either futile or empty. An even greater blow to national morale arrived in the form of consecutive hikes in fuel prices during 2005, amounting to a whopping 126%. The fallout has touched every corner of the archipelago and bitter laments can be heard in warung, bemo, buses, street corners and restaurants throughout. Some pockets of Java even wax lyrical about the good old Soeharto days; when 'tummies were full, crime was nonexistent and the country was stable' (give or take the odd violent protest and dire social disintegration in his latter years). Fear of future price hikes easily surpasses those of an avian flu epidemic, which registers only slightly higher than the fear of a banana shortage in most places. See p51 for greater details about Indonesia's political climate.

Overriding all the complexities of life in Indonesia is the resilient national optimism. Middle-class school kids and businessmen in Jakarta gleefully parade the latest mobile technology; traditional Balinese dancers bewitch abridged audiences and karaoke is still king on Java. Despite economic and environmental hardships, little has changed on Sumatra in the past 15 to 20 years. They do know about Kurt Cobain though, and are equally enthusiastic about discussing him as any other topic under the sun.

'Overriding all the complexities of life in Indonesia is the resilient national optimism'

FAST FACTS

Population: 245.5 million

Median age: 26.8 years

GDP per capita: US\$3,700

Inflation: 10.4%

Unemployment: 10.9%

Number of islands:
17,508

Number of mobile phones
in use: 30 million

Number of airports: 668

Number of airports with
paved runways: 161

The Authors



JUSTINE VAISUTIS

Coordinating Author, Kalimantan

A desperate yen for the tropics landed Justine in deepest, darkest Borneo for this guide, where she trekked, bused, ferried, cycled, flew, canoed and marvelled her way around Kalimantan. Once there she developed a crush on the local population and invented new and creative forms of sign language. Justine has selflessly donned the travel-writer's hat in the Queensland, Southern African and Fijian tropics, and this is her eighth title for Lonely Planet. She lives in Melbourne, where a distinct lack of wild beasts and tropical weather keeps her feet well and truly itchy. Justine also wrote *Destination Indonesia*, *Getting Started*, *Itineraries*, *Snapshot*, *Directory*, *Transport* and the *Glossary*.

My Favourite Trip

In this dizzying archipelago my favourite trip would last about a year, but if pressed I'd start with Bali's hypnotic sunshine, dosing up on culture in Ubud (p307). The humbling architecture of Borobudur (p167) would be high on my list of things to do, but I'd soon make it back to the beach in Sumatra's Mentawai Islands (p437).

I'd skip over to Kalimantan and marvel at the orang-utans in Tanjung Puting National Park (p631). Next I'd hightail it to Sulawesi for more wildlife in Lore Lindu National Park (p718) and a good week of diving in the Bunaken Manado Tua Marine National Park (p739), before finishing up on a remote beach in Maluku's Banda Islands (p765).



NEAL BEDFORD

Java

Neal put Indonesia on his authoring wish list, thinking it was a staggeringly exotic place of jungle and beaches, Asian culture and temples. Little did he know that by accepting the Java gig on *Indonesia 8* he'd get all this and more, including bursting cities, manic streets, thick bus smoke, crazy becak (bicycle-rickshaw) drivers, even crazier bus drivers, fiery volcanoes and enough rice for, well, Indonesia. Before he knew it he was thriving in the magic of Java and wondering why so few people ever visit the place. As soon as he gets the time, he'll be back to take another bite of the durian and explore the rest of this life-changing country.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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MARK ELLIOTT

Maluku

Since his first trip in 1987, Mark has visited virtually every corner of Indonesia, with trips ranging from relaxing holidays in blissful Bali to leech-infested upriver treks with Kalimantan Dayaks. He's jammed on the harmonica in end-of-Ramadan festivities aboard a Pelni liner, survived an appallingly storm-battered sea crossing in a Bugis fishing boat and escaped from a Solo hotel shortly before it was burnt down by anti-Soeharto rioters. Mark remains fascinated by Indonesia's smorgasbord of cultures and considers the Maluku spice islands to be among the greatest undiscovered travel gems in Asia.



NICK RAY

Sulawesi

A Londoner of sorts, Nick comes from Watford, the sort of town that makes you want to travel. Soon after completing a degree in history and politics, he began roaming around Indonesia, boarding bad, bad buses for more than two days at a time to travel between places like Padang and Jakarta. Needless to say, he applauds the arrival of budget airlines in the country. In this edition he covered the irregular contours of Sulawesi, a place he fell for when working in Tana Toraja on the BBC series *Around the World in 80 Treasures*. He currently lives in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and has contributed to more than 20 Lonely Planet titles.



IAIN STEWART

Nusa Tenggara

Iain first visited Indonesia and the glorious islands of Nusa Tenggara in 1992, when he travelled between Sumatra and Timor. He's returned several times to different parts of the archipelago: diving the reefs of Pulau Bunaken off Sulawesi, hiking volcanoes and clubbing in Bali. Iain has been writing guidebooks for a decade, and for *Indonesia* he racked up the kilometres on rusty boats, dodgy prop planes and bemos (minibuses), fuelled by a fortifying combination of lethal *sambal* (chilli sauce) and almost cool Bintang.



RYAN VER BERKMOES

Bali

Ryan first visited Bali in 1993. On his visits since he has explored almost every corner of the island – along with side trips to Nusa Lembongan, Nusa Penida and Lombok. Just when he thinks Bali holds no more surprises, he rounds a corner and is struck, for example, by the fabulous vistas from Munduk. A frequent visitor, he's at times amazed that his social calendar is even fuller on island than off it. Most of the time he lives in Portland, Oregon, where it rains as often as it does on Bali's tropical peaks but rarely gets as hot.



CHINA WILLIAMS

Sumatra

Ever since her first cup of Sumatra Mandheling coffee, China had dreamed of the cool highlands and hibernating volcanoes of this exotic island, but the country's bad luck leading up to the turn of the millennium spooked her enough to reroute an Indonesian trip through mainland Southeast Asia. Just shy of a decade later, China entered the Sumatran spin cycle, which carved out a few extra travel wrinkles with long bus rides that turned muscle tone to veal and thunderstorms that soaked notes and short-circuited electronics. She is now recuperating, with her husband Matt, amid the toothy mountains and long vistas of Montana.



PATRICK WITTON

History, The Culture, Indonesian Crafts, Environment and Food & Drink

Patrick Witton first visited Indonesia at the age of 13. He has returned numerous times – for study, for work and for the sheer thrill. He has worked on numerous Indonesia-focused titles for Lonely Planet, including as co-ordinating author for the previous edition of this guide, as author of the *Indonesian Phrasebook* and as author of *World Food Indonesia*. For this edition he trawled through books, papers and reports, harangued academics, and hassled locals and other people obsessed with this startling and spectacular archipelago. He lives large in Victoria.



WENDY YANAGIHARA

Papua

Wendy grew up in bucolic coastal California, raised on white rice and wanderlust. Childhood trips led to study abroad and then onto a brief expat life. Occupational stints have included psychology-and-art student, farmer's marketer, espresso puller, jewellery pusher, graphic designer and, more recently, Lonely Planet author on titles including *Southeast Asia on a Shoestring*. Papua altered her mind with its elections and riots, rock stars and penis gourds, and the amazing diversity of wordless landscape and raw humanity. When not roaming such locations, she circulates around the San Francisco Bay Area.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

John Martinkus first began working as a freelance reporter in East Timor in the mid-'90s. He was based in Dili from mid-'98 until 2000, working for AAP, AP, the *Bulletin* and Fairfax. He wrote an account of the period in *A Dirty Little War* (2001). He has extensively covered the conflicts in Aceh and West Papua, resulting in the publication of *Quarterly Essay 7: Paradise Betrayed, West Papua's struggle for independence* (2002) and the book *Indonesia's Secret War in Aceh* (2004). He has since worked for SBS Dateline in Iraq, Aceh, the Philippines, Timor, Afghanistan and on the Thailand–Burma border. John wrote the Indonesia's Separatist Conflicts boxed text (p54).

Dr Trish Batchelor is a general practitioner and travel medicine specialist who works at the CIWEC Clinic in Kathmandu, Nepal. She is also a medical advisor to the Travel Doctor New Zealand clinics. Trish teaches travel medicine through the University of Otago, and is interested in underwater and high-altitude medicine, and in the impact of tourism on host countries. She has travelled extensively through Southeast Asia. Trish wrote the Health chapter (p879).

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